

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

What I Most Want
My Family And Friends To Know

RODERICK A. GRACIANO

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***Let us rejoice ...
for the marriage of the Lamb has come
and his Bride has made herself ready.***

Revelation 19.7

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I dedicate this book
to my wife Kaaren,
to our three daughters, Rachel, Leslie and Elise,
to our three sons-in-law, Mikhael, Ted and Ronnie,
to our eight grandchildren,
Alexandria, Annalise, Gabriel, Lilliana, Maximus, Micah, Noah and Violet
and also
to all my fellow students of the Word “who have loved His appearing”
(2 Timothy 4.8).

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Abbreviations: General

ASV	<i>American Standard Version</i>
cf.	Compare with
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
NKJV	<i>New King James Version</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
NAU	<i>New American Standard Version</i> of 1995
NIVO	<i>New International Version</i> of 1984
NLT	<i>New Living Translation</i>
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
trans.	Translation

Abbreviations: Biblical & Apocryphal Books

1Ch	1 Chronicles	Isa	Isaiah
1Co	1 Corinthians	Jam	James
1Jo	1 John	Jdg	Judges
1Ki	1 Kings	Jdt	Judith
1Ma	1 Maccabees	Jer	Jeremiah
1Pe	1 Peter	Job	Job
1Sa	1 Samuel	Joe	Joel
1Th	1 Thessalonians	Joh	John
1Ti	1 Timothy	Jon	Jonah
2Ch	2 Chronicles	Jos	Joshua
2Co	2 Corinthians	Jude	Jude
2Jo	2 John	Lam	Lamentations
2Ki	2 Kings	Lev	Leviticus
2Ma	2 Maccabees	Luk	Luke
2Pe	2 Peter	Mal	Malachi
2Sa	2 Samuel	Mar	Mark
2Th	2 Thessalonians	Mat	Matthew
2Ti	2 Timothy	Mic	Micah
3Jo	3 John	Nah	Nahum
3Ma	3 Maccabees	Neh	Nehemiah
4Ma	4 Maccabees	Num	Numbers
Act	Acts	Oba	Obadiah
Amos	Amos	Phil	Philippians
Col	Colossians	Phm	Philemon
Dan	Daniel	Pro	Proverbs
Deut	Deuteronomy	Psa	Psalms
Ecc	Ecclesiastes	Rev	Revelation
Eph	Ephesians	Rom	Romans
Est	Esther	Rut	Ruth
Ex	Exodus	Sir	Sirach or Wisdom of Ben Sira
Eze	Ezekiel	Song	The Song of Solomon
Ezr	Ezra	Tit	Titus
Gal	Galatians	Tob	Tobit
Gen	Genesis	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Hab	Habakkuk	Zec	Zechariah
Hag	Haggai	Zep	Zephaniah
Heb	Hebrews		
Hos	Hosea		

Introduction: The Bible's Final Gem

I read the New Testament for the first time in the spring of 1971. As I read, God graciously convicted me of my sinful state, and then gave me repentance and a new life of trust in His Son Jesus Christ. Over the last fifty years, I've continued to read and study the Bible, sharing its wonderful treasures with others. Its final gem, the book of Revelation, glitters ever more brightly. If a person knows anything about the Bible, they've at least heard of the book of Revelation. Ironically, many people fear and avoid this book. For my wife Kaaren and me, though, the book of Revelation provides great encouragement and joy.

The book of Revelation recounts the apostle John's vision of Jesus shining like the sun, decades after the crucifixion and resurrection. It includes letters dictated by Jesus to first-century churches, and also describes visions of heaven and of coming judgments and triumphs. Over the nineteen centuries since the apostle John received the Revelation from Jesus, people have written countless books offering interpretations of its visions. Many of those books have taken the form of *a commentary*, that is, an orderly collection of exegetical comments on verses or passages in the Revelation. By AD 300, Victorinus of Petovium had written a Latin commentary on the Revelation (which is still available!), and Hippolytus is said to have written a commentary on the Revelation even earlier. Today, hundreds of commentaries on the Revelation are available for the English reader. In this work, however, I do not present you with another commentary (though I will comment on a few of the Revelation's passages). Instead, in the following pages I share the fourteen truths that are most vital to have in mind as you read the Revelation, whether you're reading it for the first time or continuing a years-long study. I desire with all my heart that an understanding of these fourteen truths will help make the book of Revelation as encouraging to you as it has long been for me.

Because of the Revelation's great value for God's people, the spiritual arch-enemy of mankind has made many attempts to suppress it and undermine its teaching. Too often, the attacks upon the book have come through professing Christians, sometimes well-meaning believers, sometimes thinly disguised skeptics. In the early centuries, some churches of the eastern Mediterranean world rejected the book of Revelation entirely, in spite of the overwhelming evidence for its apostolic authorship and its early

acceptance by the larger Christian community. The eastern churches eventually included the book of Revelation in their biblical canon, but to this day Eastern Orthodox churches do not include it in their lectionaries.¹ In our own time, some of the members of the so-called Jesus Seminar have followed the example of early doubters, and suggested eliminating the book of Revelation from the Bible.² The most damaging attacks against the book, however, have not come from those rejecting it altogether, but from those Christian authors who promote either (1) the idea that the prophecies of the book were all fulfilled in the first century, and that the Revelation tells us nothing about things still future, or (2) the idea that the Revelation is *only* about the End Time and had no relevance for first-century believers. Contrary to these two extremes, the book of Revelation provided great hope for believers of the first century, has continued to encourage believers throughout two millennia, and still speaks of things yet to come as it describes events pertaining to the second coming of Jesus and the dawn of the Day of the LORD. It is with this presupposition of the ages-long and yet still-future relevance of the book of Revelation that I share the following.

1. The Revelation promises a blessing to those who read it and heed it.

The third verse of the book of Revelation tells us,

Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

We must not miss the part of this blessing that says, “those ... who keep what is written in it” Jesus once told a parable about a wise man who built his house upon the rock and a foolish man who built his house on the sand (Mat 7.24-27). Jesus explained that, “Everyone ... who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock,” whose house does not fall down in the storm. On the other hand, “everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them” is like the foolish man who built his house on the sand, a house that collapses in the storm. Therefore, if

¹ Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, Vol. 2, p. 125.

² Lee Martin McDonald, *The Formation of the Biblical Canon*, Vol. 1, p. 27.

any imperatives in the Revelation have application for us, we must obey them as we would any of Jesus' commandments.

When we check the text of the Revelation for its imperative verbs, we find the following list of commands that may have direct or indirect application for us:

1. Stop being fearful (1.17).
2. Repent and return to your first [kind of] love (2.5).
3. Hear (=obey) what the Spirit says to the churches (2.7).
4. Be faithful unto death (2.10).
5. Repent of idolatry and immorality (2.16).
6. Hold fast to love, faith, service and endurance (2.19,25).
7. Wake up and revive dying faith (3.2)
8. Remember the foundational [apostolic] teaching and obey it (3.3).
9. Hold fast to Christ's word, faithfulness to His name, and endurance (3.9-11).
10. Buy true gold, white garments and healing salve (3.18).
11. Be zealous rather than lukewarm, and repent (3.19).
12. Count the number of the Beast (13.8).
13. Fear God (14.7).
14. Come out of spiritual Babylon (18.4).
15. Praise God (19.5).
16. Worship God not an angel! (22.9).
17. Don't seal up the prophecy of this Revelation (22.10).
18. Continue in righteousness and holiness (22.11).
19. Say "Come!" (= evangelize!) (22.17).
20. Let the thirsty come and take the free gift (22.17).³

While some of these commands, like number 10 or 12, will require some thoughtful interpretation, and some like number 16 may seem superfluous for our time and culture, most of them speak as relevantly to Christian believers today as they did to the seven churches of Asia who read them in the first century. This continuing relevance of the

³ This is a third-person imperative, like the Hebrew jussive commands. It is a command to us but about someone else. In other words, it gives us the responsibility to make it possible for the thirsty to come.

Revelation's commands reminds us that we must not study the book *only* for its predictions of the future; we must also take to heart its imperatives for the present.

2. The testimony of Jesus is “the spirit” of The Book of Revelation.

The Vital Principle

In Revelation 19.10, an angel states a vital principle: “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” Since the spirit is what gives life to the body (Jam 2.26), we realize that “the testimony of Jesus” is what gives life and meaning to Bible prophecy. But what is “the testimony of Jesus”? Other passages in the Revelation clarify that “the testimony of Jesus” is simply the proclamation about Jesus and His redeeming work. Therefore, we can substitute terms and say that “what is declared about Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” This means that we have missed the whole point of the book of Revelation (and of biblical eschatology in general) if we fail to study it for what it discloses about Jesus Christ. As American Christians we have probably broken this rule of interpreting Bible prophecy more than any other. We tend to study Bible prophecy in an attempt to satisfy our curiosity about the future, or simply for the entertainment value of contemplating a sensational spin on world events.

Symptomatic of this oversight regarding the purpose of the Revelation is our tendency to refer to it as The Book of Revelations (plural). This book is not a collection of disparate visions, however. It is *The Revelation* (singular) of Jesus Christ. The title of the book comes from the beginning of verse 1, “The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ.” The Greek word *apocalypse* means *an unveiling* (= a revelation).⁴ The final book of the Bible, according to its own title, draws back the veil from the full glory of Jesus Christ.⁵

⁴ The term apocalypse has of course taken on more sensational connotations because of its association with end-time catastrophes. Also, as the adjective, *apocalyptic*, it identifies a whole style or genre of literature, both biblical and apocryphal, that focuses upon the final judgment and its associated upheavals.

⁵ The veil was the masking quality of Christ's inhabiting mortal flesh, and it was drawn back briefly once before on the Mount of Transfiguration.

As an unveiling of Jesus, the Revelation answered one of the Apostle Paul's prayers. Around AD 61, Paul had prayed for the Christians in Ephesus, saying "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better" (Eph 1.17, NIVO). A glorious answer to that prayer came nearly 40 years later, when the Apostle John sent the Revelation from the island of Patmos to the church in Ephesus. At that time, the Ephesian Christians struggled to maintain a proper spiritual focus in spite of their hard work for the gospel and steadfast witness. Paul's prayer, that they would experience a deeper glimpse of Christ through the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, was answered at a crucial time in their history. The answer came via a book that revealed more about Jesus than the church at large had theretofore understood.

The Revelation testifies to the divine nature of Jesus.

Besides unveiling new details about the future coming of Jesus and His role as Redeemer, the Revelation also confirmed, in manifold ways, a truth already affirmed in the gospels and epistles of the New Testament: Jesus is God! To sum it up as, "Jesus is God," however, is to oversimplify. Jesus does have all the divine attributes, but at the same time, He is only one of three persons in the mysterious Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Furthermore, while Jesus has always been the divine Son within the Godhead of the Trinity, He has not always been human. This complexity of Jesus' divine and human nature should help us understand why we don't read the sentence "Jesus is God" in the New Testament.⁶ Jesus *is* God, but He is not *just* God, and He is not all of the Persons of the Trinity. This can baffle the mind, I know, but for now we only need to note this: The Book of Revelation affirms that Jesus, while having come as the human Messiah who atoned for sin, is also the eternal God.

John, in his gospel, had already removed all doubt about the divine nature of Jesus by identifying Him as the eternal Word, through Whom all things were created. John also removed all doubt about Jesus' humanity by describing Him as the One Who finally "became flesh and dwelt among us" (Joh 1.1-4,14). With the same logical style that

⁶ The statement, "Jesus is Lord" is sometimes tantamount to "Jesus is God" (2Co 4.5; Phil 2.11; 2Pe 1.11; 3.18; Jud 1.4; Rev 22.21; etc.)

John used in his gospel prologue, he introduced Jesus in the prologue of the Revelation in such a way as to again affirm Jesus' deity. We see this in Rev 1.5-8. In verse 8, Jesus Christ (rather than John) speaks of Himself,⁷ and says,

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

Let's take a closer look, using my own translation and parallel arrangement below. Rev 1.8 affirms various aspects of Christ's character and nature, and does so with a synonymous couplet. Its parallelism becomes clear when we arrange the verse as two lines with four components each:

Ἐγώ εἰμι	τὸ Ἄλφα	καὶ τὸ Ὠ,	λέγει κύριος, ὁ θεός,
I AM	the Alpha	and the Omega,	says the Lord God,
ὁ ὢν	καὶ ὁ ἦν	καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος,	ὁ παντοκράτωρ. ⁸
who is	and who was	and who comes,	the Almighty.

Note that the I AM is the one *who is*, the Alpha is the one *who was*, the Omega is the one *who comes*, and the Lord God is *the Almighty*. The second line expands upon the first, expressing in different words the four truths of the first line. But there's more to this pronouncement!

The Christological Merism

When two components of the first line, "the Alpha" and "the Omega," are stated together, they form a merism,⁹ a figure of speech which refers to the whole of something by reference to its extremities (Gen 1.1; 1Sa 3.12), or to its key parts (e.g., "lock, stock and

⁷ That Jesus is the speaker in this verse is evident from the preceding verse, "He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him." The switch from the third person to first-person pronouns between verses 7 and 8 is no more problematic than the switch from first person to third person pronouns in Zec 12.10. That the speaker in verse 8 is Jesus is also evident from Rev 22.12-16, in which the speaker, who is undeniably Jesus Christ, speaks of Himself as "the Alpha and Omega," using the same words as in this prologue verse.

⁸ Apocalipsis 1.8, Michael W. Holmes, *The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition* (Lexham Press, 2010).

⁹ See Ronald Trail, *An Exegetical Summary of Revelation 1–11*, 2nd ed., (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2008), p. 26.

barrel”).¹⁰ In other words, the self-characterization, “I AM the Alpha and the Omega,” means that Jesus is the whole of something. The whole of what?

Consider what Yahweh says of Himself in Isaiah 44.6 and 43.10 (I use God’s personal name here, henceforth spelled YHVH). In these verses, YHVH tells us that He is the whole set of those who are in the category of deity: “I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me.”¹¹

In Isa 41.4, YHVH says, “I, the Lord, am the first, and with the last I AM he.”¹²

In Isa 48.12, YHVH says, “I am the first, I am also the last.”¹³

Now, compare with what Jesus says in the book of Revelation.

In Rev 1.8, Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega.”

In Rev 1.17, Jesus says, “I am the first and the last.”

In Rev 2.8, Jesus says, “These things says the first and the last.”¹⁴

In Rev 21.6, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.”

Finally, in Rev 22.13, Jesus says, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” This threefold characterization, with synonymous merisms echoing those in Isaiah, leaves no doubt: Jesus is the God of the beginning, the God of the ending, and the only God there is in between. *In His essential being*, He is the whole set of that which is deity.

Other related merisms appear in Scripture, like the one in Heb 1.3,

God’s Son is “the radiance of His glory and the character of His essence.”¹⁵

In other words, Jesus displays all aspects of deity, inward and outward, visible and invisible. Also, Jesus is “the Apostle and High Priest” relating to our confession of faith (Heb 3.1). In other words, Jesus is the total intermediary, representing God to us

¹⁰ A merism uses a conjunction rather than the more appropriate prepositions: “God created the heavens and the earth,” means, “God created from the heavens to the earth.” Cf. “all that I have spoken ... from beginning to end,” 1Sa 3.12; “the acts of King David, from first to last,” (1Ch 29.29); “the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end,” (Ecc 3.11), etc.

¹¹ NAU. Cf., “the worshipping of idols ... is the beginning, the cause, and the end of all evil,” (Wis 14.27).

¹² NAU.

¹³ NAU.

¹⁴ NKJV.

¹⁵ My translation.

(Apostle) and representing us to God (atoning High Priest). Only the God-Man could do this (1Ti 2.5).

Jesus is the “author and perfecter” (ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν) of our faith (Heb 12.2, NAU). See the relationship between the phrase “author and perfecter” (ἀρχηγὸν καὶ τελειωτὴν), and the phrase “the beginning and the end” (ἡ ἀρχὴ καὶ τὸ τέλος) of Rev 21.6. Jesus is the beginner and the finisher, the originator and completer, of our faith, i.e., He is the total source of our faith, from its inception all the way to its conversion into sight. Faith comes to us from God (Eph 2.8), and that gift is given and brought to maturity by Jesus.

Jesus is “Author and Savior” (my trans. of ἀρχηγὸν καὶ σωτῆρα, Act 5.31) in that He initiates repentance, and then forgives sins. In other words, He is the One who completely accomplishes our salvation (Heb 2.10).

James 4.12 says that there is only one “lawgiver and judge.” The nearest antecedent subject is “the Lord” (Jam 4.10), but Paul declared in Athens that the man *whom God raised from the dead* will judge the world (Act 17.31). Furthermore, the theophanies at Sinai, during the giving of the law, were undoubtedly appearances of the Logos Asarkos, the pre-incarnate Word (whom we now know as Jesus). We have good reason, therefore, to ascribe James’ title, “lawgiver and judge,” to Jesus, making Jesus the One to whom mankind is wholly accountable. Jesus gave the Law and He will judge our compliance to it; He is the beginning and the end of our accountability to the Law.

Jesus is also “the One who is able to save and to destroy” (Jam 4.12, NAU). He is the complete sovereign over our total destiny. Every human being will either be saved or destroyed and Jesus will decide. No other saint or god exists to whom we can appeal for a different outcome. Jesus is the beginning and the end of our eternal options (Act 4.12).

The Coming One

YHVH characterizes Himself as the Coming One in Zec 2.10. By this characterization, He identifies Himself with Daniel’s Messiah, the “one like a Son of Man,” whom the earlier prophet had seen *coming* “with the clouds of heaven” (Dan 7.13). Indeed, the glorified Christ is the One “coming with the clouds” (Rev 1.5-7). But He not only comes in the eschatological sense, He is the *constantly* Coming One (as implied by the present participle in the Greek text of Rev 1.8). He constantly comes in the sense that He remains

intimately involved with the affairs of mankind, and always responds to the needs of His people (whether for encouragement or reproof). To His disciples, Jesus said, using the present tense, “I will not leave you as orphans, I come to you,” (Joh 14.18, my trans.). To the churches of Asia, Jesus warned, “repent ... or else I come (present tense) to you” (Rev 2.5,16).¹⁶

We should glory in the truth that, among all the supposed deities of the world’s religions, the God of Christianity, Jesus Christ, is *the only one who shows up*, the only one who comes to His people, personally, up close, and undeniably real. The human yearning that the Coming One fulfills provides us with a metric for evaluating the worlds competing religions. We need only ask, “Which religion posits a God who does something about the yearnings of the human heart, a God who addresses our alienation and guilt?” A thorough comparison of world religions reveals that only one faith presents us with a Redeemer who comes from heaven to minister to us directly.

The truths about Jesus shared in this section represent just a sampling of what the book of Revelation tells us about Him. So, now that we understand the Revelation’s purpose to unveil Jesus, we won’t want to squander our access to this book. We must neither ignore the Revelation nor fail to see its Christocentricity. However, as I said in the introduction, the book of Revelation does speak of things yet to come; we need not think that close attention to what it says about Christ will somehow limit or obscure what it discloses to us about future events. On the contrary, since the future of the world is Christ-centered, we should expect Bible prophecy to teach us about the future *as it reveals Christ*.

¹⁶ These passages require a translation choice for the Greek present-tenses verbs. Some present verbs convey a clearly *future* idea, as in Joh 21.22, “... until I come” These present tense Greek verbs may mirror the Hebrew consecutive perfect verbs, which we can translate, “will have come.” Thus, “I will not leave you as orphans, I will have come to you [in your time of need].”

3. The Book of Revelation speaks to us through its narrative and its imagery.

Why does the book of Revelation talk about monsters? Why does its text paint so many frightening images? Why does John even describe Jesus in a disturbing way, depicting Him with burning eyes and a sword coming out of His mouth?

Well, to be fair, not all the images in the book of Revelation are frightening or disturbing; some are beautiful and joyous. All the Revelation's images are striking, though, and intentionally so. You probably know that the book of Revelation belongs to the genre of literature that we call "apocalyptic" (the other book of the Bible that fits in this category of literature is the book of Daniel). One of the special characteristics of apocalyptic literature is that it communicates with both words *and verbal images*. In other words, the things the author *saw* convey part of the message. If the authors had written out the entire message in narrative, the books of Daniel and Revelation would be at least twice as long, or contain only half the information. In antiquity, when writing materials were expensive, and scribes had to painstakingly reproduce all documents by hand, the invention of a literary style that packed a great amount of information into succinctly described visual images was an inspiration!

Of course, for the reader, interpreting the visual images of apocalyptic literature requires more thought than following a narrative does. Still, we can thank God that if John had to keep the Revelation to roughly 9,900 words in length (perhaps due to the size of his available parchment),¹⁷ he nevertheless packed the book with twice the amount of information it would contain if he had written out every bit of the content in regular narrative. Understanding this should make us excited, rather than hesitant, to study the visual images of the Revelation and draw from them all the information and insight we possibly can.

What, for example, does the Revelation communicate by showing us Jesus in Rev 1.16 with a "sharp two-edged sword" coming out of his mouth? Let us understand first that all the bizarre images of apocalyptic literature appear in visions, and thus describe

¹⁷ In the Nestle-Aland 28th Revised Edition of the Greek NT, the book of Revelation numbers 9,851 words.

character qualities and inherent realities, rather than the normal outward appearance of things. Therefore, when we see Jesus face-to-face in our next life, we should not expect to see Him with a physical sword sticking out of his mouth. On the contrary, that the sword in the vision *proceeds from the mouth* of Jesus identifies the sword as a visual symbol of the words of Jesus. John could have simply written, “words came from His mouth,” but such a statement would not have conveyed *the power* of Jesus’ words.¹⁸ The image of the sword coming from the mouth of Jesus reminds us of what both Eph 6.17 and Heb 4.12 tell us about the word of God. In this way, the image of the sword coming from Jesus’ mouth tells us that the words of Jesus *are* the words of the Holy Spirit, the very words of God, and as such, they have divine power both for surgical healing and the destruction of evil. This is a sobering truth, certainly, but for us who love Jesus, it should comfort us to know that His words have the power both to correct us when we need it, and to protect us from our enemies.

Did you see what I just did there? In the second half of the previous paragraph, I used about 220 words to convey some of the meaning packed into what John communicated with just eight words, “from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword.” The visual images of the Revelation are a treasury of truths, so let us imitate the scribe trained for God’s kingdom (Mat 13.52), and bring out of this treasury “what is new and what is old.”

As one more example of striking visual images, let’s look at one of the kinds of monsters. In Revelation, chapter 9, John recorded a vision of locust monsters swarming into the land of Israel.¹⁹ John saw these monsters as having tail stingers, and the power to inflict people with pain as from a scorpion sting. In the vision, John saw these locust monsters looking like armored horses with human faces, long hair, lion-like teeth, and iron-like breastplates. Some people who forget that the description of these locust monsters describes a visionary image, try to interpret the monsters as if John had described their physical appearance rather than their character qualities and spiritual

¹⁸ The words of Jesus have power, both for correction in the church (Rev 2.12,14-16) and for judgment upon God’s enemies (Rev 19.15,19-21); when Jesus comes, He will not have to swing a physical sword to kill the soldiers who attack Jerusalem, He will only speak the word and those wicked men will perish where they stand (cf. Zec 14.12).

¹⁹ See section 12 below for a partial explanation as to why Rev 9.3 refers to the holy land, rather than to the earth in general.

powers. For this reason, some have tried to interpret this vision of the locust monsters as describing futuristic military aircraft, perhaps like an evolution of the attack helicopters of our time. However, three facts reveal the absurdity of this interpretation: first, these monsters don't have the power to kill anyone (Rev 9.5), second, they are sentient, as indicated by their human-like faces and their ability to take orders (Rev 9.4), and third, a demonic angel of destruction reigns as their king (Rev 9.11). No, instead of the visionary image describing the external, physical appearance of these monsters, it describes the inherent character of (probably) invisible demonic monsters that will swarm upon the Middle East in the End Time.

This does not make the vision any less terrible, but it tells us a great deal about the character of these demonic monsters:

- They will arrive en masse, like the locusts in the plague upon Egypt (Rev 9.3,9b; Ex 10.13-14), but as in all the plagues of Egypt they will not harm God's people (Rev 9.4).
- Unlike the locusts of the plague upon Egypt, they will not harm vegetation, but will only torment wicked people (Rev 9.4-5).
- People will feel severe pain from the stings of these monsters, but the stings will probably strike people's consciences rather than their bodies (John does not describe welts or sores on victim's bodies; Rev 9.5-6).
- As already noted, the locust monsters will be sentient, and take orders from a demon king (Rev 9.4-5, 7-9,11).
- Their armor and their teeth imply that they will act militantly and viciously against their victims and be (temporarily) indestructible (Rev 9.7-9); their crowns signify their authority to wreak their havoc (Rev 9.7).
- The great sound they make in the vision (Rev 9.9b) may imply an audible sound in the material world, or storm-like conditions accompanying their invisible arrival, or may simply indicate the greatness of their number.

We see that the vision images of the Revelation communicate much information, and often do so by alluding to real things and events recorded in other passages of Scripture. This passage about the locust monsters, for example, makes an important allusion to the biblical history of the Exodus. This is a vital connection for us to notice because, as I

explain below in [section 11](#), the book of Revelation tells the story of the ultimate exodus still to come. (The Revelation's use of allusion demands that we familiarize ourselves with the rest of the Bible if we wish to understand the Revelation's visions; I explain this further in [section 5](#) below.)

I realize that with all the assurances and explanations I might offer, the various apocalyptic images of the Revelation will still disturb some readers. We should not regret this, though. Some of the images of the Revelation disturb the reader *intentionally*, so as to prompt self-examination and thought about one's relationship to Christ. In fact, I can testify that, as a young teenager, before I had a relationship with Jesus, it was hearing a sermon about some of the "monsters" and catastrophic events in the book of Revelation that first started me thinking about my relationship to God and about my eternal destiny.

For this reason and many others, I consider the book of Revelation a great blessing in my life, and believe it can greatly bless yours. With that hope in mind, let me share some additional truths that will help us understand this great book.

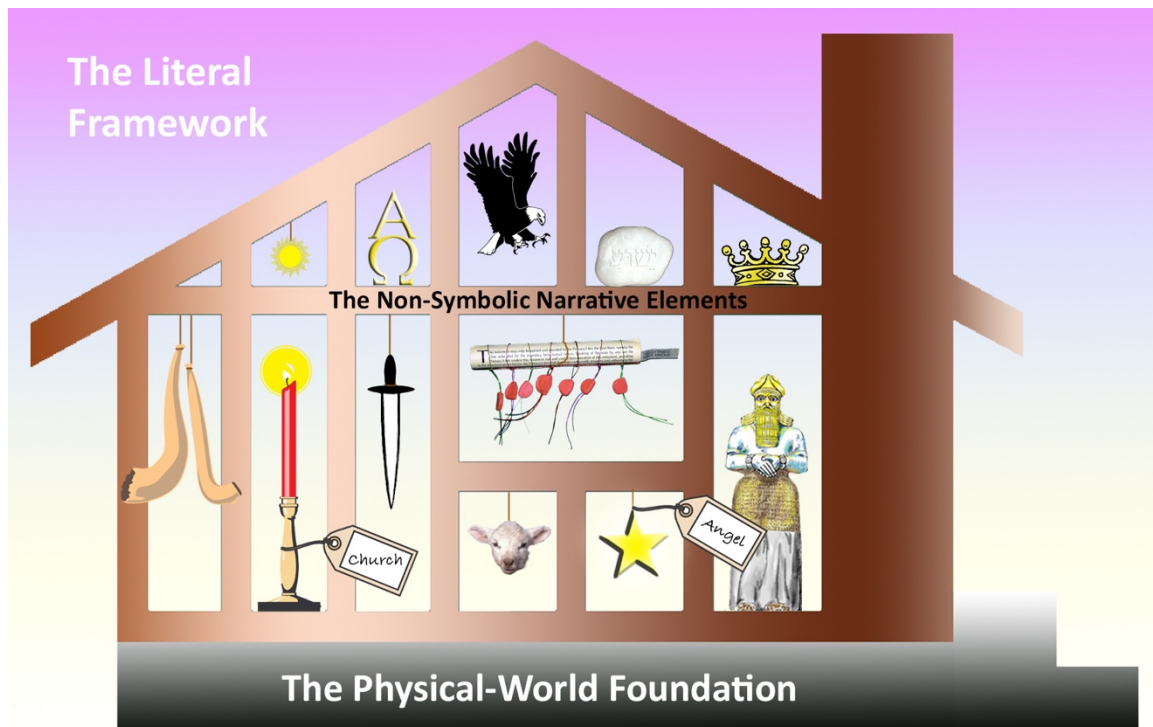
4. The text of the Revelation bounces between the earthly and heavenly setting, between the physical and spiritual realms, and between the literal and the symbolic.

The multiple perspectives inherent in the Revelation present one of the greatest challenges to interpreting the different sections of the book. The fact that the text can bounce from one perspective to another *without warning* augments the interpretive challenge. However, knowing that the Revelation's narrative bounces between different realms and settings, and between the literal and symbolic sense, will keep us alert, and help us watch for changes of scene, setting, and sense.

In the preceding section, we have already touched on the relationship between *visual image* and *inherent character*. Another way of looking at these two ideas, in the case of the locust monsters, is to think of *visual physical images* as describing realities of the *invisible spiritual realm*. The book of Revelation does this often, describing invisible entities of the spiritual realm, along with their inherent traits, as if they were

visible things in the physical realm. It is vital that we understand this phenomenon so as not to think, for example, that two hundred million *physical* lion-headed, serpent-tailed horse monsters will come galloping from the Euphrates (Rev 9.14-19). This is another case of the Revelation using *physical images* to describe (probably) invisible demonic entities from the *spiritual realm* — not that this makes the vision any less horrible!

Though we stay alert, it will require careful discernment to correctly interpret when the Revelation describes things in the familiar physical realm of our daily experience, and when it describes things in the spiritual realm that are normally invisible to us. After all, the Revelation begins with John describing his situation in a known physical setting, saying, “I, John, ... was on the island called Patmos ...” (Rev 1.9), then suddenly he was “in the Spirit” and his great vision began (Rev 1.10). Does John ever fully return to the physical world of his own time before he writes the final verse of Rev 22.21? Seemingly not. However, the vision does not refer *only* to non-physical spiritual realities. It famously includes letters to seven physical-world churches of John’s time. The extended vision of the Revelation never cuts loose from its anchor in physical-world reality. Instead, it maintains a narrative framework of non-symbolic elements in order to give meaning to its many symbolic and spiritual entities.



In any apocalyptic passage, the author may well describe a mixture of his own physical-world setting, together with both symbolic and non-symbolic entities from his dream or vision. The physical-world setting provides the foundation, and the non-symbolic, literal, narrative elements provide the framework that gives structure and meaning to the symbolic entities. See in the illustration above how the non-symbolic, literal, narrative elements (the framework of the building) support all the symbolic things.

Consider this section of Revelation, chapter 11, about the two witnesses:

... the nations will tread under foot **the holy city** for forty-two months.

“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and **they will prophesy** for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.” ... And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way. These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.

When they have finished **their testimony**, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them. And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, **where also their Lord was crucified**. Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb. And those who dwell on **the earth** will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these **two prophets** tormented those who dwell on the earth.

But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them. And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.²⁰

Notice that this excerpt begins with a reference to “the holy city.” This “holy city” is not a symbolic entity, but a literal reference to the real city, Jerusalem, as confirmed by a second reference a few verses later to the city where “their Lord was crucified.” These two references together provide the literal, physical-world setting for the events described in the passage.

²⁰ Rev 11.2-12 in the NAU, emphasis added.

Do any other terms in the passage refer literally to physical-world things, or are the mentions of witnesses, their prophesying, their miracles, their enemies, the beast, the witnesses' deaths and resurrections all *symbolic* references to something other? This is the kind of question we have to answer carefully as we work our way through the book of Revelation. In this passage, we know that the beast who "comes up out of the abyss" is a *visionary element*. Literal beasts do not make war against prophets. Therefore, we discern that the beast in this passage is a symbolic depiction of a sentient being, whether demonic or human or both, capable of making war and killing. What about the two witnesses, though? Should we understand them as literal witnesses, or as symbols for something else? Well, upon reflection we realize that witnessing and prophesying are physical-world activities, as is the performance of miracles, and we note that the latter part of the text refers to the two witnesses as prophets, not as "angels" or something else. Therefore, with all the physical-world references (which I've put in bold font) in this passage, we should take it as describing physical entities and physical-world events, *while at the same time* noting the inclusion of at least one symbolic entity (the beast) in the non-symbolic framework of this passage, and a probable metaphor ("fire flows out of their mouths") for the witnesses' ability to decree the demise of enemies with a word (cf. Act 5.9-10).

The reason I emphasize the physical-world foundation and the literal framework for the symbolic and metaphorical elements in the Revelation (and other apocalyptic Scriptures) is to assure you that not everything in the text is symbolic. If it were, we would have no literal reference points by which to interpret the symbols, and the entire text would remain an indecipherable enigma. Once we understand, though, that the text of the Revelation mixes symbols with a literal, physical-world narrative framework, we must take care to discern between the symbolic and the literal. Furthermore, we must take the same care to discern when the narrative switches perspectives between the earthly and heavenly settings.

This perspective switch in the Revelation, between the earthly and heavenly settings, can catch us off guard if we don't watch for it. Once we understand it though, we realize that God has given us a great gift in occasionally allowing us to glimpse the connection between occurrences in the heavens and the events they set in motion upon the earth. In effect, Scripture allows us to view some events on a split screen: in the top

window we see an event or situation in the heavenly-spiritual realm, and in the bottom window we see its effect in the earthly-material realm. In 2 Kings 6.15-18, for example, we glimpse the fiery chariots of God in the heavens (top window) and the blinding of the Aramean army on earth (bottom window). The soldiers of Aram had no idea how the blindness had come upon them; perhaps they suspected a disease, or something in the water. Thanks to Elisha's prayer for his servant, however, we get the split-screen view and see the connection between the heavenly army and the earthly blindness.

Remember, though: the biblical text does not always warn us when a change of setting occurs. The reader must discern whether a passage describes a top-screen or bottom-screen phenomenon. One of the most dramatic split-screen views in the Bible is in the book of Job, chapters 1 and 2, the passage that best illustrates the interpretive problem. The book of Job begins by introducing "a man in the land of Uz whose name was Job," describing his children and his extensive livestock holdings, and mentioning the festivities that occurred in the houses of his sons, and the sacrifices that Job would offer (Job 1.1-5). The land of Uz (in present-day Syria or Jordan) is the setting for all this. Then Job 1.6 describes the angelic "sons of God" presenting themselves before the Lord. Does this also occur in the land of Uz? Some unsophisticated interpreters of the past seem to have assumed so. Novelist Roark Bradford preserved some folk retellings of Bible stories, and in these retellings it was assumed that the events occurred in "the time when the Lord walked the earth like a natural man." The retelling of Job's story imagines the Lord and Job both living in the same farming community.²¹ We can forgive a person for making such an assumption if they are new to biblical literature, because the text of Job 1 and 2 gives no explicit indication of a change of setting between its descriptions of Job's actions and its descriptions of the spiritual beings coming to present themselves before the Lord. Furthermore, other biblical texts seem to emphasize the convergence or nearness of the earthly and heavenly realms. Only further study of the Scriptures assures us that a boundary does exist between the heavenly and earthly settings, and between the spiritual and physical realms, even if the differing realms and settings do intersect (Job 22.12; Psalms 102.19; 115.16; Ecclesiastes 5.2; Hebrews 12.25).

²¹ Roark Bradford, *Ol' Man Adam An' His Chillun*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1928).

We see, then, that the Bible reader and interpreter must carefully learn to discern when the text bounces between the literal and symbolic sense, and also when a biblical narratives changes scenes, settings or realms. Never is this discernment more vital than when reading the book of Revelation. Sometimes, the Revelation's narrative explicitly states the setting of events (either heaven or earth, as in Rev 6.15; 11.10,19; 12.1,7; 13.3,8; 14.1; 15.1; 19.1; 20.9), and at some points it clearly signals a change of setting, as in Rev 4.1-2. However, other passages, like the one about the locust monsters in Rev 9, describe interactions between heaven and earth, along with entities that act on the earth but are spiritual in character! The text tells us explicitly that the setting is earthly (Rev 9.3), but does not tells us explicitly that John is describing entities from the spiritual realm. We must carefully discern this in order to see that the locust monsters are demonic, spiritual creatures rather than material, military hardware.

5. The Book of Revelation brings the story of the Bible to its happy ending.

Concluding The Epic

The overarching story of the Bible is a comedy. Today the word *comedy* connotes humor, jokes and even satire, but in earlier times it denoted that kind of drama that contrasts with tragedy. The difference between the two kinds of drama has to do with their respective endings. A tragedy has an unhappy ending, often describing the downfall of the main character. A comedy, on the other hand, ends happily, often telling how the characters triumph over their enemies or adverse circumstances. The epic story that the Bible tells, from Genesis to Revelation, has sprinklings of humor and certainly has tragic passages, but ends with the Hero conquering His enemies, receiving His bride, and living happily with her forever in a golden city.

To bring this epic to its conclusion the book of Revelation alludes to earlier parts of the story, including background passages about mankind's predicament, and also passages that contain biblical types and prophecies. Let's define these two passage elements I just named. A **biblical type** (τύπος) is a historical character, event, thing or institution in the biblical narrative that foreshadows something similar but greater in

the biblical redemptive story. We speak of the thing foreshadowed by a type as the thing *typified*. The thing typified *fulfills* the type, and has greater importance than the type which foreshadowed it.²² A **biblical prophecy** is a message from God, spoken or written by a prophet, and given to call people back into alignment with God's laws and character.²³ God's prophetic call to repent and return to righteous living generally includes warnings and encouragements. Those warnings and encouragements include predictions of future judgments or blessings.

The Revelation describes the coming fulfilment of some ancient biblical types. It also reiterates and collates many of the Bible's antecedent "last days" and "end time" prophecies, and supplements them with new details and chronological perspective. To accomplish all this, the book of Revelation must allude to a great many passages from the Old Testament. Thus, as G. K. Beale and Sean M. McDonough put it,

No other book of the NT is as permeated by the OT as is Revelation. Although its author seldom quotes the OT directly, allusions and echoes are found in almost every verse of the book.²⁴

So, if we wish to benefit from these allusions and echoes in the Revelation, and if we truly want to understand the Revelation's eschatological teaching, we must first know something about the Old Testament. We must particularly familiarize ourselves with these books:

Genesis
Exodus
Numbers
Joshua
Isaiah
Jeremiah
Ezekiel
Daniel
Zechariah

²² We call the phenomenon of biblical types, as well as the study and analysis of them, *typology*.

²³ Consider the vision of the plumb line in Amo 7.7-8.

²⁴ Beale, G. K., and Sean M. McDonough. "Revelation." In *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 1081–1158. Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007, p. 1081.

Parallels With Old Testament Stories

Consider, for example, the symmetry between the book of Revelation and the book of Genesis:

Genesis	Revelation
God creates the heavens and the earth, 1.1	John sees a new heaven and a new earth, 21.1
Night established, 1.5	No night there, 22.5
Seas created	No more sea, 21.1
Sun created, 1.16	No need of sun, 21.23
River nourishes Eden and flows to the nations, 2.10	River from throne, tree leaves heal nations, 22.1,2
Origin of marriage, 2.22-24	Wedding of the lamb, 19.7
Serpent causes the fall of man, 3.14	Ancient serpent finally bound, 20.2.
Curse announced, 3.14-17	No more curse, 22.3
Origin of pain and sorrow, 3.17	No more tears or pain, 21.4
Origin of death, 3.19	No more death, 21.4
Man barred from the tree of life, 3.22,24	Access to tree of life regained, 2.7; 22.14
Israel envisioned as sun, moon and stars, 37.9,10	Israel depicted with sun, moon and stars, 12.1
Judah prophetically portrayed as lion, 49.8-10	Triumph of the Lion of the tribe of Judah, 5.5
Messiah's robes washed in the blood of grapes, 49.11	Robe dipped in winepress of wrath, 19.13,15

These parallels help us realize that the book of Revelation tells about the restoration of an Edenic world, in which man and God can again enjoy intimate fellowship.

Echoing Old Testament Types

As an example of how the book of Revelation echoes OT types, consider the story of Joshua. As Warren Gage has traced out in detail,²⁵ Joshua typified the Messiah who would share his name, *Yah Is Salvation* (*Yeshua* = *Jesus*). Let us remember, however, that Joshua typified the warrior aspect of Messiah's character. As Moses sang, "YHVH is a man of war, YHVH is His name!" (Exo 15.3). Joshua personified that spirit (as would King David at a later time). We see the typological connections between the story of Joshua and the Revelation narrative when we read that Joshua entered the promised land for a while and then had to depart from it for a long time (Num 13.1-16; 14.6-8, 30-

²⁵ Gage, Warren Austin, *Gospel Typology in Joshua and Revelation*, (Fort Lauderdale, FL: St. Andrews House, 2013).

34), finally returning to conquer God's enemies and lead God's people into their inheritance. The decisive battle for Joshua involved the blowing of seven trumpets, and the destruction by fire of a sinful city (Jos 6.24). This city, Jericho, was connected by trade and by spirit to ancient Babylon (Jos 7.21, Hebrew, *Shinar*), and contained much silver, gold, bronze and iron (Jos 6.19). Joshua's destruction of this city foreshadowed the apocalyptic overthrow of Mystery Babylon the Great, an event described in Rev 17.16 to 18.13.

Building On Earlier Prophecies

As to how the Revelation reiterates and supplements earlier eschatological prophecies, we must note that none of the Revelation's major predictions were completely new to first-century Jewish readers. When we review the book, we find that the Revelation's main prophecies about the future have to do with the following subjects:

1. The Lamb of God, i.e., the Messiah, as heir of the world.
2. Coming tribulations.
3. The Israelite remnant.
4. The final redemption of people from every nation.
5. The great tribulation.
6. Satanic persecutions.
7. The Antichrist and the culmination of human rebellion against God's rule.
8. Wrath upon God's enemies.
9. The fall of Mystery Babylon the Great.
10. The end of the age and the gathering of the saints.
11. The triumphant return of Jesus Christ.
12. The marriage of the Messiah.
13. Satan's doom.
14. The Day of the Lord.
15. The invasion of Gog and Magog.
16. The resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous.
17. The final tribunals when all people will face judgment.
18. The new heaven and the new earth.

The prophets of the OT, as well as Jesus and the apostles had previously addressed all of these topics. Consequently, one might ask, “Why, then, do we need the book of Revelation?” Consider this fourfold answer:

1. As stated above, the Revelation collates the Bible’s antecedent “last days” and “end time” prophecies, and supplements them with new details and chronological perspective.
2. In a way that earlier books of the Bible could not, the Revelation reiterates earlier prophecies in the light of Jesus’ role in fulfilling them.
3. The Revelation includes letters expressing Christ’s love and concern for specific Christian congregations.
4. The Revelation brings other biblical teachings to their conclusions.

We’ll touch on that last point in the following sections, but before going on, let us consider some examples of how the Revelation provides additional detail in connection with events already predicted by other biblical prophets. One example has to do with prophecy about the city of Babylon. Before the book of Revelation, all the believers knew (thanks to the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah) that the Mesopotamian city of Babylon, whose citizens had persecuted God’s people, would be finally and decisively destroyed in the End Time. However, until the Revelation, probably no one understood that the prophecies about the End-Time demise of Babylon in the East had application also to Mystery Babylon in the West, i.e., the city of Rome (Rev 16.19 to 19.4). For another example, before the Revelation, God’s people knew that Israel’s final deliverance would occur after a time of severe distress (Jer 30.7; Dan 12.1), but until the Revelation, we could not have known many of the details about the Antichrist’s role in that final great tribulation, including his demand that all his subjects receive a mark on their hand or forehead in order to buy or sell (Rev 13.16-17).

6. The Revelation adds final details to the Bible's teaching about the Day of the Lord.

This Is Your Day!

Another example of the Revelation adding detail and bringing to completion earlier eschatological predictions has to do with the Day of the LORD, a major theme in both OT and NT prophecy. What is the Day of the LORD? Because the Scriptures so often speak of the Day of the LORD in connection with dire warnings of cataclysmic judgment (Mal 4.1), some have defined it as the time (or times) when God blasts the wicked and unbelieving. However, this is not the essence of the Day of the LORD. For the LORD, His day is essentially like our day when someone tells us, “this is your day!” When do people say that to us? When it’s our birthday, our wedding day, or perhaps a day when we are being recognized and awarded some great honor. Our day is a day that is “all about us,” a day when we are celebrated by those who love us. The Day of the Lord is all about Him (Zec 14.9), the day when everyone on planet Earth will finally celebrate Him as He deserves. Yes, His exaltation in His day will involve the destruction of His enemies, but for us who love Him, He will appear at the moment of the world’s deepest darkness, rising like a sun of righteousness bringing healing, and we will skip and dance in celebration (Mal 4.2)!

Now, a day dedicated especially to a person, whether a birthday or some other day of honor or celebration, is usually a single calendar day. However, we also use the phrase *the day* to speak of an epoch, as in “the day of Martin Luther.” Indeed, since ancient times, God’s people knew that the Day of the LORD was coming, and that it would encompass so many strategic events in the world that it would be a unique day (cf. Zec 14.7), not a normal 24-hour period, but a lengthy epoch instead. Not until the Revelation, though, did any of God’s people know that the Day of the LORD would last for a thousand years, a chronological detail repeated six times in Revelation 20.

Day-Of-The-LORD Prophecies Fulfilled In Revelation 20

Consider the teachings of the prophets that come to fulfillment in Revelation 20:

The LORD will punish the serpent “in that day,” Isaiah 27.1.	The serpent bound for a thousand years, Revelation 20.2.
False prophets no longer deceive “in that day,” Zechariah 13.4	Satan no longer deceives the nations, Revelation 20.2-3.
Many nations will join themselves to the LORD “in that day,” Zechariah 2.11	Nations no longer deceived, Revelation 20.3
“In that day,” God’s people raised to live before Him, Isaiah 26.1,19; cf. Hosea 6.2.	God’s people come to life, Revelation 20.4.
The LORD is king over all the earth “in that day,” Zechariah 14.9.	Christ reigns during the thousand years, Revelation 20.4.
Sitting in judgment in “the day of the LORD,” Joel 3.1-14; cf. Micah 4.3-8.	Thrones for judgment, Revelation 20.4.
“In that day,” the Lord will judge through the remnant of His people, Isaiah 28.5-6.	Judgment given to God’s people, including the martyrs, Revelation 20.4.
“In that day,” dominion restored to outcasts, Micah 4.6-8.	Those martyred under the Beast now reign, Revelation 20.4.
In “the day of vengeance,” God’s people will be called “priests of the LORD,” Isaiah 61.2-6.	Those of the “first resurrection ... will be priests of God and of Christ,” Revelation 20.6.
“In that day,” Gog and Magog decide to invade the holy land, Ezekiel 38.10-12.	Gog and Magog decide to invade the “camp of the saints and the beloved city,” Revelation 20.8-9.
“In that day,” God judges Gog and Magog with rain of fire, Ezekiel 38.22; 39.6.	Fire from heaven upon the Gog and Magog rebellion, Revelation 20.8-9.

We see that the events of Revelation 19.11-21, which immediately precede and signal the beginning of the thousand years, along with the events of the thousand years described in Revelation 20, have the same eschatological character as do the events previously described by the prophets as occurring in the day of the LORD. Furthermore, the Revelation points the reader forward to the arrival of the day of the LORD when it describes the opening of the 6th seal in Revelation 6.12-17, and then again when it

describes the pouring out of the 6th bowl in Revelation 16.12-16. The references to the “day of [God and the Lamb’s] wrath” (Revelation 6.16-17), and to the gathering of the kings of the nations “for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty” (Revelation 16.14) can have their culmination in nothing other than the events of Revelation 19.11 to 20.10. Therefore, the glorious coming of the King of Kings and the final casting of the devil into the lake of fire provide bookend events for the Day of the LORD, and the thousand years is the span between those two termini. We have no reason to doubt that the six references to the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 give us the time span for what the prophets called the Day of the LORD.

The Thousand Years Not Symbolic

Therefore, exegetes should not deny a thousand-year reign of Christ simply on the basis that “the round number, ‘one thousand,’ in Revelation 20 sounds symbolic.” Remember that not every word of the Revelation is symbolic; the text hangs verbal symbols on the framework of a literal narrative throughout its chapters. We must carefully distinguish between what words and phrases are symbolic or metaphorical, and what parts of the narrative constitute the literal framework. In this case, the text mentions the “thousand years” an emphatic six times in a passage in which mentions nothing — aside from one mention of “the beast” — which we can unequivocally identify as symbolic or metaphorical! Unless we dismiss angels, Satan, the abyss, nations, thrones, judgment, Christ, resurrection, serving as priests, reigning, the beloved city, and the lake of fire as on the whole *symbolic*, we cannot in good conscience dismiss the six mentions of the thousand years woven throughout the passage as “merely symbolic.”

The Real Debate

So, rather than debate whether or not a thousand-year reign will occur, commentators and exegetes should instead discuss whether or not the Day of the LORD will have a literal fulfillment upon the earth. Did the prophets of the Old Testament and New use the phrase *Day of the LORD* in reference to Messiah ruling from a throne in Jerusalem, Israel, or instead to designate the Church reigning *spiritually* on the earth (or from heaven), or alternatively to symbolically designate the eternal state of the redeemed with God in heaven? We probably will not see this question addressed, however, because while we

only have one passage (Revelation 20) which speaks explicitly of the thousand years, the biblical prophets have spoken at great length about the Day of the LORD, and in their many prophecies about this epoch, it is impossible to symbolize or allegorize the descriptions of this day as predicting anything apart from *earthly* phenomena brought about by the coming of the LORD to earth. In short, skeptics can much more easily spiritualize the thousand years of Revelation 20 than they can spiritualize the countless details pertaining to the Day of the LORD in scores of other passages.

Must You Believe It?

Belief in a literal thousand-year reign with Christ on the earth is not a cardinal tenet of our faith. We must never withhold fellowship from our brothers and sisters who subscribe to so called A-Millennialism or Post-Millennialism, nor from those who hold no opinions about such things. Nevertheless, we must all examine our eschatological beliefs, including our beliefs about the return of Christ and what happens afterward. We must have clarity about what it means to remain alert and ready with regard to the Lord's coming (Matthew 24.42-44), what it means to remain faithful and sensible while the master is away (Matthew 24.45-51), what it means to keep our lamps burning for the bridegroom (Matthew 25.1-13), *and* what it means for the redeemed to reign upon the earth (Revelation 5.9-10).

Those of us who teach or preach must ask: *does our eschatological teaching help God's people to serve Him well now, as well as prepare them for the marriage of the Lamb* (Rev 19.7-8)? If our eschatological teaching has lulled people to sleep with regard to God's purposes for the ages, if it has failed to stir their interest in the upcoming marriage of the Lamb, if it has encouraged their hedonism in the belief that there is nothing to look forward to in the next life, then we must seriously examine ourselves and our teaching (1Ti 4.16). We must ask ourselves whether we are truly nourishing God's people with the sound doctrine (1Ti 4.6) that conforms to godliness (1Ti 6.3), and whether we are serving as faithful "friends of the Bridegroom" who help the bride make herself ready for her destiny in the coming age (Rev 19.7-8).

In the following sections, I will say more about the destiny for which our eschatological teaching should prepare us.

7. The Book of Revelation brings to culmination the Bible's theology of the heavens and the earth.

For our present purposes, let me define the term “theology” as *a body of information and insight into the character and agenda of God*. Thus, the Bible’s “theology of the heavens and the earth and their creation” is that body of insight about God revealed in what the Bible tells us about the heavens and the earth. A theology, in this sense, differs from a “doctrine,” as this latter term is traditionally understood. A theology tells us about God (and has implications for faith and practice), whereas a doctrine tells us what we should do or believe (according to the Bible, or our denomination’s interpretation of it). So, the doctrine of baptism, for example, tells us that if we wish to follow Christ we should be baptized, while a theology of baptism might explain why God instituted baptism and what the ordinance tells us about God’s character and agenda. Instead of delving into the doctrine and theology of baptism, though, let’s return to the important topic of the heavens and the earth and their creation.

Why Is There Something Rather Than Nothing?

Philosophers and physicists have long pondered the question: Why is there something rather than nothing?²⁶ This question has particularly bewildered materialist scientists because human experience knows only two kinds of causes: material and volitional. To differentiate these two kinds of causes, imagine a beautiful explosion of light in the night sky during a fireworks display. What caused that momentary appearance of multicolor stars in the sky? Well, the immediate cause was a chemical reaction, involving material

²⁶ Like many others before him, Victor J. Stenger wrestled with the question, “Why is there something rather than nothing.” In his book, *The Comprehensible Cosmos*, he quotes philosopher Bede Rundle’s conclusion that “[T]here has to be something” (p. 171). Indeed, as we’ve known since before it was articulated by Greek and Roman philosophers, οὐδὲν ἐξ οὐδενός or *ex nihilo nihil fit*, “out of nothing nothing comes.” In light of this, some of the ancients concluded that the material universe is eternal. Today, under the pressure of scientific evidence that the universe had a beginning, authors like Stenger, and physicists like Lawrence Krauss, Stephen Hawking, and Michio Kaku, choose to define “nothing” or “the void” as an unstable phase of nothing, which means that it is something after all. Thus, all can agree that either the universe is in some sense eternal (possibly fluctuating through different phases), or it was supernaturally created.

ingredients and heat. However, if we trace the chain of causation backwards we will discover that the initial cause was a person who chose to light the fuse of the skyrocket. Of course, we can trace the chain of causation further back to the material and volitional causes behind the manufacture, transport, and sale of the skyrocket, or even further back to the production of the paper and gunpowder, etc., until we go all the way back to the beginning of the universe! That's where the problem arises. Since science has verified that the material universe had a beginning, before which nothing existed, that fact begs the question: what caused the universe to come into existence? No matter nor energy existed before the universe, so we must rule out a material cause for the universe appearing. Since it is logically incoherent for something to cause itself (because something can't exist before it exists), the only alternative explanation for the origin of our universe is a volitional cause: Someone *chose* to create it, and that Someone is something other than matter. The materialist scientist or philosopher cannot accept this conclusion, we realize, because he rejects the existence of any "thing" besides matter and energy and their associated forces (like gravitation). However, for the person willing to receive it, the book of Revelation provides the answer to the question of why there is something rather than nothing.

In Rev 4.11, the twenty-four elders in heaven worship God, saying,

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created."

Notice the phrase, *by your will*. These words tell us explicitly that there was a volitional cause behind the creation of the universe, namely, the will of God. Something (i.e., matter and energy) exists because God willed that it should exist.

Of course, these words of the heavenly elders confirm what the book of Genesis had revealed long before: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." The volitional dimension of the Genesis 1 creation story is revealed in the Hebrew jussive verbs. A jussive verb often expresses *a directive about something* to someone, in contrast to an imperative verb which expresses *a command directly to someone*. A drill sergeant would use an imperative verb to say, "Private, **march** to my office," but a jussive verb to say (to an individual or group), "**Let the marching begin!**" The point

is that when God said, “Let there be light,” (Gen 1.3), He was expressing His will, to a second Person, that light should come into existence. All the “Let there be” phrases of Gen 1 employ jussive verbs, and describe God expressing His will that specific things come into existence. If our hypothetical drill sergeant were to say, “**Let’s all march,**” he would use a cohortative verb, which is what God used in Gen 1.26-27 when He said, “Let us make man in our image” A cohortative verb still expresses the will (volition) of the speaker; but it includes the speaker himself in the directive.

A Purposeful Cause

Besides the volitional aspect of the Genesis 1 creation story, we find that it has a teleological aspect as well. By this I mean that the story has a strong implication of divine purpose in the creation. This comes out in the story at the end of each day when God surveys what He has made, and “saw that it was good.” At the end of the story, “God saw all that He had made, and ... it was very good” (Gen 1.31). Since the idea of *good* relates to a standard, we have to wonder what God’s standard of goodness was at the time. According to the story, no other worlds existed, no other animals, no other humans, with which to compare the ones that God made. So, on what basis did He assess His newly made planets and stars, plants and animals as good? The best answer is that God saw each item as good relative to His purposes for it. God may have assessed each entity as good relative to a blueprint which He had in heaven or in His mind, but to posit this is another way of saying that God had a definite purpose and design. This makes us curious because the Genesis story does not specify God’s purpose for creating, but only strongly implies that His creating was purposeful.

The Causal Agent

Nor does the Genesis story tell us who that second Person was through whom God created. The jussive verbs of Gen 1 certainly pique our curiosity about the person to whom God spoke as He directed the creation of all things. It delights us, therefore, to discover in the book of Revelation that Jesus, now resurrected and glorified, identifies Himself as the originator of the things that were created. In Rev 3.14, the letter to the church in Laodicea opens with the words of Jesus,

“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write: ‘The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation.’”

Since the word *beginning* in this verse has the sense of *originator*, we have the declaration, directly from the mouth of Jesus Christ, that He Himself was the One who fulfilled the “Let there be ...” directives of Gen 1.

Once again, the words of the Revelation confirm what earlier Scriptures had stated. The prologue of John’s gospel (Joh 1.1-18) speaks of the person we now know as Jesus, and identifies Him as the eternal Word of God who became flesh and dwelt among us. The prologue says regarding this eternal Word that “all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.”²⁷ So we understand from John’s gospel and from the book of Revelation that Jesus Christ, the eternal Word who became human and lived with us, is the Person to whom God spoke in Genesis 1, and through whom God created all things.

The Implications Of Divine Creation

We see then, that the book of Revelation tells us that there is something rather than nothing because God willed that the universe be, and also tells us that the pre-incarnate Word (whom we know as Jesus)²⁸ was the immediate agent who then brought the universe into existence.²⁹ The Revelation has still more to say about creation, though. We have already seen above, in the citation of Rev 4.11, that the heavenly elders declare God worthy of worship precisely because He created all things. Since our secular society has suppressed the truth³⁰ about God as our Creator, it has forgotten that God deserves our worship by virtue of creation alone, even if we do not like His agenda for our lives. As Creator He has complete rights over all that He has made, and deserves honor from us accordingly. An angel underscores this fact in Rev 14.7, when he says, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.” Though so much of the world does

²⁷ ESV.

²⁸ The earliest Christian theologians referred to the pre-incarnate Son of God as the *Logos Asarkos* and the Son incarnate as the *Logos Ensarkos*.

²⁹ The early church father, Origen, distinguished God the Father as the primary Creator, and the Word, the Son of God, as the immediate Creator (*Against Celsus* 6.60).

³⁰ Cf. Rom 1.18-20.

not honor our Creator today, the apostle John heard something that assures us of a coming moment when every created thing capable of expressing worship will give God the glory that He deserves. In Rev 5.13, John wrote,

And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea,
and all that is in them, saying,
“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”

An Enduring Purpose For The Heavens And The Earth

The three facts that, (1) God is the volitional cause behind the existence of the universe, (2) that the pre-incarnate Jesus was the Person who brought all things into existence, and (3) that God deserves our worship by right of creation, still begs the question of *why*? Why did God will that the universe should come into existence? As we ponder this question of teleology (of end purpose), it may surprise us to read in the Revelation that the present earth and heaven will disappear!

In Rev 20.11, we read that John saw “a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them.” In this verse, the phrase *earth and sky* can just as well be translated *earth and heaven*. In all of his writings, John only used the plural word *heavens* in Rev 12.12. Everywhere else he used the singular word *heaven*, whether he referred to the spiritual realm, the “canopy” of stars and planets, or only to the earth’s atmosphere. So, when he wrote that “earth and heaven/sky fled away,” there is some ambiguity as to whether he meant the planet earth and its atmosphere, or the planet earth and all the rest of the material universe.³¹ However, since the great white throne of the eternal Judge remains in the picture, we can rest assured that Heaven, the abode of God and angels, is not included in the heaven that will disappear. Nor are all the souls about to face judgment included in the total of the things that will “flee away.” Nevertheless, something radical is about

³¹ Let us bear in mind that God only cursed the ground of planet earth, without indicating that the curse extended to other planets (Gen 3.17). On the other hand, Paul wrote that *the creation* was subjected to futility, and the *whole creation* groans (Rom 8.20-22). Whether Paul alluded to the curse of Gen 3.17 is unclear. Dan 8.10, Mat 24.29, and Rev 6.13 speak of the stars falling, but these descriptions seem to be figurative or given in phenomenological language, especially Rev 6.13 which speaks of the stars falling “to the earth.”

to happen to the part of creation most dear to mankind; the earth and its immediate atmosphere will disappear!

Since we're pondering the question of *why* God willed the universe and our world into existence, the prophecy that the earth will disappear might prompt us to ask, "Was God's purpose for creating the earth temporary? Will the moment come when there is no more use for planet earth?" Thankfully, in the next chapter of the Revelation, John wrote, "I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.'" Wow! The book of Revelation confirms the prophecy in Isa 65.17 and 66.22 that a moment will come when a "new heavens and a new earth" will replace the heavens and earth of our present experience. Does this mean that the present heaven and earth will be (1) completely annihilated and entirely replaced or (2) only be cleansed by fire and renewed? The exegetical debate continues regarding this question because some biblical passages seem to imply one alternative, and other passages seem to imply the other. Either way, though, the biblical destiny described for mankind will involve a "new heavens and a new earth" so wonderful, and so enduring, that the time will come when the present heavens and earth won't even come to mind.

Therefore, while God will radically change our present earth, perhaps even replace it, the book of Revelation assures us that our physical world and the material heavens have an enduring purpose in God's plan. **We will explore the nature of that purpose in the following sections of this book**, but before we leave behind the theology of the heavens and the earth and their creation, we must recognize the implication of this theology for how we should live. As we have already noted, the fact that God created the heavens and the earth which we inhabit, demands that we acknowledge Him as our ultimate Landlord. The biblical theology of the heavens and the earth and their creation tells us plainly that we must live worshipful lives. Also, if we recognize that God has a glorious and loving purpose for the heavens and the earth, reason dictates that we must value and protect our planet and its atmosphere. God made everything for a good purpose, so we should not want to lose or damage any of it. We should become conservationists in the best sense. By this I mean that we should avoid becoming embroiled in political controversies about the environment, but should daily

live in a way that common sense tells us is beneficial rather than detrimental for our environment. I realize that this may be challenging in view of the current controversies and social and economic exigencies, but at the very least we should not willfully damage our environment when we understand how to avoid doing so. As Christians, we should certainly not excuse behavior harmful to the environment on the basis that, “God will create a new heaven and earth anyway.”

8. The Book of Revelation brings to culmination the Bible’s theology of city.

The Bible tells us that God loves people, and cares about them both as individuals and as families. Students of the Bible know that God also cares about nations, including one nation in particular, the nation of Israel. Some have not realized, though, that the Bible also tells us of a vital interest that God has in cities. In other words, Scripture tells us that God is keenly interested in individuals and also in corporate entities: from families to cities and nations. In this section, we’ll see how the Bible’s insights about that middle entity, the city, begin in the book of Genesis and come to their culmination in the book of Revelation.

God’s Concern For Cities

Scripture introduces us to cities with the building of Enoch (Gen 4.17). Erected by Cain and named after his son, Enoch was important as the city that birthed the culture of Cain’s descendants. From the city of Enoch emerged “those who live in tents and raise livestock,” “all who play the harp and flute,” and a man “who forged all kinds of tools out of bronze and iron” (Gen 4.17-22). Surely many other cities sprang up after Enoch, but the next city the Bible mentions specifically is that which arose when Nimrod and his followers decided to “make a name” for themselves by building a city with a giant tower. With regard to this city, though, an astounding event occurred. Genesis 11.5 says, “But the Lord came down to see the city ...” The Lord came down! That doesn’t happen very often, but in this case the corporate rebellion of the city was so great that God made a close inspection and ended up scattering the inhabitants by confusing their language — a judgment which resulted in the city being known ever after as Babel. Gen 18.20-21, and

following, records a similar event with regard to the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. The sin of these cities became so great that the Lord and two angels came to make a close inspection of the cities and ended up destroying them completely.

The Bible prophets spoke of many wicked cities, and promised that their sins did not go unnoticed by the God whose eyes are in every place (Pro 15.3). One city in particular came to represent idolatrous evil, and it grew up on the very site of ancient Babel, receiving the name *Babylon*. You can look down on the ruins of this city today using Google Earth (image below). Saddam Hussein built a palace atop a circular mound, overlooking the ruins. Some of the walls and buildings of the ancient city have been sufficiently restored so as to become a tourist attraction. According to the prophets, ancient Babylon still has a role to play in future events, but a new Babylon still standing in the west came to mirror the wickedness of Nebuchadnezzar's currently ruined city in the east. The book of Revelation describes the newer western Babylon (Rev 17 and 18) as the immoral antithesis of the new holy city of Jerusalem (Rev 21 and 22), and the Revelation promises that this western Babylon, like its predecessor in the east, will be utterly destroyed.



Intercession And Promises For Zion

God is not interested in cities only to destroy them, though! If you know the story of Jonah, you know that God calls cities to repent and escape judgment. For example, though God had to use special persuasion to get Jonah to warn the wicked city of Nineveh, the prophet finally did what he was told, and it resulted in the entire city repenting. Everyone, from the king on down to his lowest subjects, humbled themselves before God, and the city enjoyed another several generations of prosperity. However, Jonah, out of concern for Nineveh's potential military threat to his own nation, Israel, sat watching on a hillside hoping that God would yet choose to rain fire from heaven and wipe out the city. As it became clear that God would spare Nineveh, Jonah vented his anger and frustration when God allowed a vine to wither that had provided Jonah with some shade on the prophet's hot hillside. At the close of Jonah's story, God says the following words, rendered beautifully in the NIVO,

"You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. **Should I not be concerned about that great city?**" (Jonah 4.10-11)³²

If God cared so much for Nineveh that He performed miracles in order to save the city, He cares even more for the city of Jerusalem. Various prophets interceded for Jerusalem with all their hearts, recognizing that God has a purpose for cities in general, but a purpose for Jerusalem in particular (Dan 9.19). Thus, Isaiah would not stop praying for Jerusalem (Isa 62.1-7):

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent, for Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet, till her righteousness shines out like the dawn, her salvation like a blazing torch.
The nations will see your righteousness, and all kings your glory...
As a young man marries a maiden, so will your sons marry you...
You who call on the Lord, give yourselves no rest,
and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.³³

³² Emphasis added.

³³ Cf. Psa 48.1,2; Lam 2.15.

When the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins after the Babylonian destruction of 587 BC, God gave the prophet Ezekiel a vision of Jerusalem transformed. The prophecy promises that the city will be geometrically beautiful, justly apportioned to its inhabitants, logistically efficient, illustrative of God's faithfulness to His promises, and most importantly, inhabited by God's glory. No longer will we call it Jerusalem, "City of Peace"; we will know it as YHVH Shammah, "The LORD is There" (Eze 48.35).³⁴

Christ's Attention To Cities

Bringing to culmination the work of the Old Testament prophets, Christ also demonstrated his awareness of cities as strategic cultural units. We see this in Jesus' warnings to specific towns. We do know that the towns Jesus reproved had some righteous families in them; Peter's family lived in Capernaum, for example. Nevertheless, Jesus assessed the corporate character of towns and cities and rebuked them accordingly:

Mat 11.20 Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. 21 "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. 22 But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. 23 And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. 24 But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you."³⁵

As Jesus warned of judgment upon cities, He also yearned for their redemption, expressing His greatest concern for the city of Jerusalem:

Mat 23.37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing."³⁶

³⁴ And also as Hephzibah, "My Delight" (Isa 62.4), and YHVH Tsidkenu, "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer 33.16).

³⁵ NIVO.

³⁶ NIVO.

Why The Divine Concern For Cities?

God cares about cities for two important reasons. First, cities are the corporate entities that birth, shape and drive culture. Culture is the interwoven fabric of knowledge, beliefs, values, and practices that both characterize a group and that the group transmits to its biological or social heirs. We saw the first indication of this phenomenon in the record of the first city, Enoch. However, we ourselves daily witness how cities birth and drive culture, and thereby influence an entire nation or nations! As Americans we can immediately think of a list of cities that have shaped our national culture, a list that would include:

Los Angeles
New York
Seattle
San Francisco
Chicago
Miami
... and others.

Sadly, as we think of the cities that have shaped our national culture, we realize that these cities, their many wonderful attributes notwithstanding, are not known for godliness and morality.

This brings us to the second great reason for the divine concern for cities: As the fountains of culture, cities are also the front lines of our spiritual warfare. We know that Jesus gladly ministered to individuals whom He met along the way, but He focused His ministry upon cities (Luk 4.43). We see this city priority famously imitated in the missions of Paul. This does not mean that spiritual battles never occur on farms or at vacation cabins in the woods, but only that the major battles of the spiritual warfare are fought in cities. As the city goes, so will the region; as the region goes, so will the nation — whether for good or for evil.

Cities And The Future

Thankfully, good will prevail. However, we will not complete the work of building a godly culture in all our cities until after the return of Jesus. When He comes, the redeemed will

receive the promise of Rev 2.26-27, and begin to rule over the nations of the earth. The Greek word for rule in Rev 2.26 is the verb which means *to shepherd, to pastor*. The Hebrew word in Psa 2.9, from which the Revelation promise derives, can be read as *break* or *rule*, but the Greek word chosen in the Septuagint³⁷ and by Jesus (and John) in Rev 2.26 unambiguously means to rule as a shepherd. The promise of God to His Son the Messiah in Psalm 2 includes connotations of judgment — a rod or staff of iron signifies zero tolerance for wickedness — but the Messiah does not destroy the nations, He inherits them as a possession.

For anyone new to the study of pre-millennial eschatology, it may come as a surprise that nations will remain on the earth after Christ returns. Jesus will destroy His adamantly antichristian enemies when He comes, and He will have translated the redeemed of the past and present into their immortal bodies, but there will still remain millions or billions of people on the earth (including a whole generation of children) who had not yet known enough about Jesus to receive or reject Him. These survivors of the End-Time upheavals (like those described in Isa 66.15-21) will need guidance to understand the cosmic change that has occurred. The newly resurrected and translated redeemed will become their pastors, serving as princes (and princesses) under King Jesus, as described in Isaiah 32.1-5. These immortal and finally sinless redeemed will become persons of refuge, shelter and sustenance to the traumatized and exhausted mortals still living on our planet.

This brings us to an important point for the biblical theology of city: the future, millennial shepherding of the nations will be done city by city. Jesus hinted at this reality in His parable of the returning King, i.e., the story of the minas (Luk 19.12-19). In this parable, the King rewards his faithful servants with authority over cities: “Well done, good slave, ... you are to be in authority over ten cities ... and you are to be over five cities.”³⁸ Isn’t this wonderful? We who love Jesus will have pastoral work to do in the coming age. We will do it without the hindrances of physical weakness or spiritual immaturity, and we will do it in a way that will finally change the culture of the world’s cities into a culture that honors God and His Son.

³⁷ The Greek version of the Old Testament Scriptures and Apocrypha translated and compiled between 250 and 100 BC.

³⁸ NAU.

The Heavenly City

However, we must not lose sight of the fact that the entire body of the Redeemed will themselves constitute a city, the heavenly Jerusalem. Let us remember that a city is its people, not its buildings. Just as “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb,” rather than a physical building, are what constitute the heavenly temple (Rev 21.22), so the redeemed, rather than gates and walls and streets, constitute the city. The Revelation describes the gates, foundations, wall and street, as well as the river and garden, of the new Jerusalem (Rev 21.2-21; 22.1-2), but the description of these things only conveys the holy and divine character of the city. The city proper is the corporate body of the redeemed, “those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life” (Rev 21.27), God’s servants who will have His name on their foreheads, and will see His face (Rev 22.3-4), and reign forever and ever (Rev 22.5), the Bride of the Lamb (Rev 19.7-8; 21.2,9; 22.17). It is this corporate body of redeemed people, given immortality at Christ’s coming, who will constitute the holy, heavenly city of new Jerusalem. *Their* heavenly culture will transform the culture of every city on planet earth. As it says in Revelation 21.24, “the nations will walk by [this city’s] light.”

9. The book of Revelation brings to culmination the Bible’s theology of the Bride.

Now that we have seen the Bible’s causal answer to the question of why there is something rather than nothing, and observed the biblical indications of God’s interest in cities, we can explore the Bible’s *teleological* answer for why the universe exists. We know that God, through Jesus, willed and brought everything in the universe into existence, but what does the Bible say about *the end purpose* of His creation?

The Historic Answer

Through the centuries, both Jewish and Christian scholars have offered their answers to this ultimate *why* question, and more often than not they have said, in essence, that the reason for which God created all things, i.e., the final cause for creation, is *for His own glory*. However, while the Scriptures affirm that “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psa 19.1), and urge us to “do all for the glory of God” (1Co 10.31), no Bible passage

explicitly states that God created the universe for the ultimate purpose of His glory. Nevertheless, this idea has been the predominant teleological theory among Jewish and Christian theologians up to the present day.

Perhaps the earliest expression of the theory, dating to the early middle ages, and possibly back to the time of Christ, appears in the Sheva B'rakhot, i.e., the seven Jewish wedding blessings preserved in the Babylonian Talmud.³⁹ The second of the seven blessings reads, "Praised are you, O Lord, King of the universe, who created all things for Your glory." Of course, this blessing does not explicitly say that God created all things for the ultimate purpose of His glory, or for the exclusive purpose of His glory, but it nevertheless has an all-encompassing teleological ring to it, and leaves us with the impression that God's own glory is the ultimate reason for everything. In other places, the Babylonian Talmud repeats the idea that, "All which the Lord hath created, He created only for his glory."⁴⁰ The word *only* gives the statement a global sense; God's glory is the ultimate and only final cause for creation.

While early Christian writers loved Psa 19.1 and 1Co 10.31, only a lonely example of the inclination toward the idea of God's glory as the final cause appears in a 4th century monastic rule written by Basil the Great. In this rule, he wrote, "For the life of the Christian is uniform, ever tending to one object, namely, the glory of God."⁴¹ We see however, that this statement only speaks explicitly to the purpose of Christians, not to the purpose of all creation. The formal idea that God's glory is the final cause of *all* things, didn't come into full expression in Christian theology until the Protestant Reformation. In 1552, John Calvin wrote that many "testimonies of Scripture ... make the glory of God to be the highest object and ultimate end of man's salvation."⁴² In 1562, Jerome Zanchius, famous for his book *Absolute Predestination*, submitted the position that,

... the final causes of election appear to be these two: 1. and principally, The glory of God; 2. and subordinately, The salvation of those he has elected: from which the former arises, and by which it is illustrated and set off.

³⁹ Neusner translation, Ketubot 1.1,I.33.A-G.

⁴⁰ Rodkinson's translation, Tract Yomah, ch. 3. The source justifies the statement by citing Isa 43.7.

⁴¹ Quoted in the 3rd vol. of Aquinas' *Catena Aurea* on Luke, p. 380.

⁴² John Calvin, *A Treatise On The Eternal Predestination Of God*, p. 69.

In other words, God has two ultimate purposes; the first is His own glory, and the second is to bring Him glory and make it manifest. So, really, only one final cause, namely, God's own glory. Similarly, in a systematic theology first published in 1656, German theologian, Marcus Friedrich Wendelin wrote, "The end [purpose] of providence is the glory of God and the salvation of the elect."⁴³ Later, Robert Haldane (1764-1842), known for his commentary on Romans wrote,

Numerous passages of Scripture assert that the manifestation of the glory of God is the great end of creation, that he has himself chiefly in view in all his works and dispensations, and that it is a purpose in which he requires that all his intelligent creatures should acquiesce, and seek and promote it as their first and paramount duty.⁴⁴

The Westminster Confession of the 17th century finally codified for many the idea that God's glory is the ultimate purpose for everything. This influential document states,

It pleased God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, **for the manifestation of the glory of his eternal power, wisdom, and goodness**, in the beginning, to create, or make of nothing, the world, and all things therein, whether visible or invisible⁴⁵

Current theologian, Wayne Grudem, follows the Westminster Confession, as do many others, in saying, "we affirm that God created the universe to show his glory"⁴⁶

Basis For The Historic Answer

However, since no passage of Scripture explicitly states what theologians all the way up to Grudem say about God's glory being the final cause of creation, how did they arrive at this idea? The answer is: *by inference*. Francis J. Hall provides a great example of this in his book *Creation And Man*, published in 1912. He wrote,

Creation being supposed, the glory of God must be its chief end, for God is by eternal necessity the *Summum Bonum* of all that is or can be.⁴⁷

⁴³ Quoted in Gregg R. Allison's *Historical Theology*, p. 290.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Mark Water's *New Encyclopedia Of Christian Quotations*, and abundantly confirmed in Haldane's commentary, *Romans*.

⁴⁵ Ch. IV, "Of Creation," emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), pp. 347-348.

⁴⁷ Francis J. Hall, *Creation And Man*, p. 64. It is true, as Grudem notes, "that God created his people [Israel] for his own glory," according to Isa 43.7, but that passage has to do with the spiritual creation of a people group, rather than the material creation of the heavens and the earth. Wayne Grudem,

See the inference here: “Creation being supposed ... the glory of God must be” We must certainly agree with the major and minor premises of Hall’s statement: Creation is an obvious reality, and God is the *Summum Bonum* of all who have the grace to recognize Him as our Highest Good, but does the conclusion follow?

Theologians remain well within their mandate when they make inferences about the ultimate reason for creation and our existence, because the Bible does not provide us with a definitive teleological statement about the reason for everything. We must arrive at an answer to the question by inference. However, when we arrive at an answer by logical reasoning instead of on the basis of an explicit text, how can we assess our conclusion? All will agree that we must judge such an inferred conclusion, particularly one that constitutes the basis for a comprehensive theology, by the following two criteria:

1. Is it biblical? That is, does it agree with (or at least not contradict) what we know explicitly from Scripture, is it anchored in what we know of God’s eternal character,⁴⁸ and does it support the claims of Christ and promote His interests?⁴⁹
2. Does it improve upon other theories with regard to its explanatory power, and in its encouragement to holiness and obedience among God’s people?

A Better Inference

Theologians have certainly articulated the theory that God’s glory is the ultimate purpose for everything so as to satisfy the first criterion. However, I have proposed a “theology of the Bride” as not only having an inherent Christological focus, but as also having greater explanatory power than the theory of God’s glory. Let me state the theology of the Bride succinctly (in the words of my unfinished book on the topic):

The impetus for creation was the Father’s love for the Son, and the end purpose of creation is the fullest possible expression of that love. The Father will multiply the expression of His love for the Son through the building of a suitable, corporate bride, who loves much for having been forgiven much (cf. Luke 7.47). The preparation of the bride (Revelation 19.7) involves the Father’s love being perfected in her (1John 4.12) as

Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine, Second Edition, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), p. 347.

⁴⁸ I.e., will it still have force throughout the coming ages, even after the Great Commission is fulfilled?

⁴⁹ A theory or theology that supports the claims of Christ and promotes His interests can simultaneously maintain that blessings accrue to humanity, but a biblical theology will prioritize Christ’s interests over *merely* human concerns.

she learns deep obedience to the greatest commandment (Matthew 22.37-38), and does all things for God's glory in this age and the next (1Corinthians 10.31), drawing others to the heavenly Bridegroom (Revelation 22.17).

We see that this theology does not exclude our mandate to do all things for God's glory, but incorporates that mandate into a higher purpose, namely, the goal of providing a suitable bride for God's Son. To compare the two theories of God's ultimate purpose at a glance, we can state them this way:

God's ultimate purpose for everything is to be glorified.

OR

God's ultimate purpose for everything is to express His love for His Son.

In assessing the second alternative, the theology of the bride, we see that it *does not* contradict what we know explicitly from Scripture and *is* rooted in the eternal love of God. In addition, we see that it supports the claims of Christ and promotes His interests above all else (without excluding tremendous blessings to humanity). As to its improvement over other theories with regard to explanatory power, consider its ability to shed light on the following questions:

1. How can we explain creation in terms other than that it had to do with some inherent "need" in God?
2. Why is loving God, rather than glorifying God, the greatest commandment?
3. Why is our true happiness found in loving God and loving people?
4. Why did Lucifer rebel? If from envy, of what was he envious?
5. Why did God make creatures in His own (relational) image?
6. What does it mean to be human?
7. Why is relational intimacy the deepest longing of the human heart?
8. Why, in contrast to his forming of the other creatures, did God give special attention to building a suitable counterpart for Adam?
9. Why did God institute marriage and family for mankind?
10. Why does God abominate homosexual practice and all other violations of sexual sanctity?
11. Why does God hate divorce (Malachi 2.15-16)?
12. Why did God permit evil to enter the universe and planet earth?

13. Why did God permit the fall of man into sin?
14. Why does the idea of covenant permeate the biblical revelation?
15. Why does Scripture constantly characterize idolatry as adultery?
16. Why has God purposed to produce sons of God and siblings for His Son (Romans 8.19,29)?
17. What was the “joy set before [Christ]” (Hebrews 12.2; cf. Isaiah 61.10; 62.5; Zephaniah 3.17)?
18. What is Christ’s “inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1.18)?
19. What does it mean that Christ loved the church and give himself for her “that he might present the church to himself in splendor” (Ephesians 5.25-27)?
20. What exactly is the profound mystery that Paul mentioned in Ephesians 5.32?
21. What is the purpose of our mandate to do all things for the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10.31)?
22. Why is the Song of Songs in the biblical canon, and how should we interpret this book of the Bible?
23. Why is the essence of eternal life to know God and Jesus Christ (John 17.3)?
24. Why did Jesus refer to Himself, as did others, as the bridegroom (Matthew 9.15; 25.1-13; John 3.27-30; Romans 7.1-4; 2 Corinthians 11.2)?
25. Why did Jesus depart to prepare a home for His disciples the way a betrothed man in Israel went to prepare a home for his bride (John 14.2)?
26. Why does the Bible conclude with a revelation of the bride of the Lamb and an invitation issued jointly by the Spirit and the Bride (Revelation 19.7-8; 22.17)?

Those who prefer the idea that God’s ultimate purpose for all things is His own glory can offer answers from that theological perspective for some of these questions, and — without rejecting key elements of the theology of the bride — may propose that the biblical teaching about the bride of Christ serves the higher purpose of God’s glory. I suggest, however, that the theology of the bride gives better answers to more questions than does the alternative theory, and that it makes more sense that it is the mandate to glorify God *that is ancillary* to God’s plan to provide a bride for His Son. It should give theologians and Bible teachers pause when they consider that we *cannot* love God

without glorifying Him, but we *can* glorify God without loving Him.⁵⁰ Should we not expect then, that God’s ultimate purpose for all things would first and foremost involve *loving Him*, particularly as He has revealed Himself in Jesus the Bridegroom?

With regard to providing an improvement in its encouragement to holiness and obedience among God’s people, the theology of the Bride first of all removes all suspicion of egotism on God’s part, that is, of a psychological lack that causes Him to seek adulation. Far from suggesting some innate deficiency in God, the theology of the Bride explains all things in terms of an overflowing abundance in God, namely an abundance of love for His Son. Secondly, rather than suggesting a human destiny that is really not about people at all, i.e., an “it’s all about Him” theology, the theology of the Bride proposes an “it’s all about Us” theology in which the *Us* includes Jesus Christ — first and foremost — but also His human bride. While God has every right to have decreed an “it’s all about Him” purpose for all things, the “it’s all about Us” theology of the Bride resonates immediately in our minds as involving a destiny truly suited to the deepest longings of the human heart. The understanding of this destiny, and of our bridal identity, cannot help but provide every reason a person could hope for to devote himself or herself to the God of love and to His Son, Jesus Christ. I do not imply that *an academic understanding* of one theology or another can compel us to love God; only the grace of God and His Holy Spirit have the power to free our hearts from our selfish idols and fasten our affections upon Christ instead. Nevertheless, the more true the theology, the more conducive it will be to the Holy Spirit’s work of reorienting our affections, and the more it will preclude doubts about God and His motives.

A Suitable Bride

If we accept, at least tentatively, the theology of the Bride as the explanation of God’s purpose for all things, we can now examine a key principle of this theology: A bride for God’s Son *must be suitable* (see the word נִגֵּד in Gen 2.18, meaning *a counterpart, one corresponding, one that is fitting*). What criteria, then, would render a bride suitable for the very Son of God? The criteria would certainly include the following:

⁵⁰ Every person in heaven, on earth and under the earth will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, whether they do so willingly or grudgingly (Phil 2.8-10).

1. Ability to form relationships.
2. Ability to love, i.e., ability to consider someone else more important than self.
3. Intelligence and the ability to articulate both concrete and abstract thoughts.
4. The ability to partner with the Bridegroom in accomplishing divine purposes in the world, e.g., capacity to reign with Christ.
5. A warrior's heart (in view of the cosmic conflict in the universe, and the Bridegroom's own character as "a man of war," Ex 15.3).

The first criterion rules out all inanimate things (rocks and trees) and all the lower animals. The second rules out many of the higher animals, if not dogs. The third, fourth and fifth criteria require a being "in God's own image." Thus, it is only from among such image bearers that a suitable bride for the Son of God can possibly be found. We discover in Scripture that, though angels share many of both God's and humanity's traits, God has chosen the human bearers of the divine image for this nuptial destiny.⁵¹

We can presume one more quality required to make a bride suitable for the Son of God, and perhaps the best way to summarize it is with the general adjective *greatness*. Now, let us think of the greatest woman we can possibly imagine, a woman of unequalled intelligence, with supreme physical health and beauty, and having the fruit of the Spirit in abundance, as well as one or two amazing spiritual gifts like prophecy and healing. She may be greater than Eve, greater than Sarah, than Deborah or Esther, even more holy than Mary, but could one human woman truly become a fitting counterpart for the divine Son of God whose greatness is infinite? No. God in His wisdom knew that if the bride for His Son was to emerge from finite creatures, she would have to be a corporate bride, an entity intimately unified and directed by the same Spirit, certainly, but a corporate being embodying every positive human attitude and aptitude, all the spiritual gifts, and all the best qualities of countless human cultures.⁵² Only thus could a bride, who is not herself deity, be supremely great.

⁵¹ A discussion of how angels differ from humans, and why humans were given the higher destiny must be reserved for another study.

⁵² The book of Revelation confirms that this corporate entity will include a number of people beyond human counting (Rev 7.9-10).

A Suitable City For The Bride

It should not surprise us, therefore, that the book of Revelation depicts the bride of the Lamb as a *great* city. As stated above, a city is its people, not its buildings. Nevertheless, the buildings and other structures of a city provide living space for the people and ideally promote their happiness and productivity. With regard to the bride's city described in the Revelation, the author of the book of Hebrews mentioned it as the city that faithful Abraham looked for, a "city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God," a city prepared by God for His people (Heb 11.10,16). As described by John in the book of Revelation, this "holy city, new Jerusalem," is a golden cubical city⁵³ the size of our moon, a city that will one day become visible, "coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev 21.2). It is too large to descend all the way through our atmosphere and land on the surface of planet earth (its 1,500 by 1,500-mile footprint would bury many nations). It's astronomic size, however, will allow it to accommodate the great multitude of the redeemed mentioned above. Let us note that if this city has 1,500 *levels*, or *floors*, each with a mile-high ceiling, the combined floor space would be 68 times the entire land area (habitable and inhabitable) of the earth! We see, then, that the size of the heavenly city accords with the immense number of people who will constitute the bride who dwells within its palaces.

The City Destiny Of The Bride

However, the holy city of New Jerusalem will do more than simply provide living space for the redeemed. The city helps reveal the bride's destiny, alerting us to wonderful aspects of her future life, and explains much more besides. In fact, John's vision of the heavenly city finally brings to culmination the biblical theologies of *the heavens and the earth*, of *the city*, and most importantly, of *the bride*.

City Of Fellowship

The ultimate purpose of the heavens and the earth and their creation comes into focus in the one city, New Jerusalem. A joyful announcement summarizes that purpose: "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man, and He will dwell with them, and they

⁵³ John described the city as cubical like the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and temple of Solomon.

will be His people, and God Himself will be with them” (Rev 21.3). Now we can summarize the purpose of the heavens and the earth in one word, *relationship*, or perhaps, *fellowship*. God created the heavens and the earth as an environment conducive to relationships between finite persons, and fellowship between such persons and their Creator. Can we imagine friendships, families or fellowships *without* a material universe? Could we have established meaningful relationships with other people and with God in a material void, as souls floating about in no environment other than the light of God’s presence? Perhaps, but not the kind of relationships that God intended. It is the created universe that provides the ideal environment for the fullest revelation of God’s attributes to His creatures, *and* for their participation in aspects of His divine nature (2Pe 1.3-4). In short, the heavens and the earth, both present and future, provide the ideal environment for the kind of intimate, deepening, growth-producing relationships, both with people and with God, that our hearts long for.

The bride-city will shine in the sky as a vision of this kind of fellowship for all creation (cf. Rev 21.9-11; 23-24). It will picture for all mankind that intimacy that Jesus Christ has made possible, not only between man and man, but between man and his Creator. Hence The bride of Christ will not be an outpost, a hidden island, a private retreat, as though she has no connection to the rest of humanity. She will not do as the new bride at the end of the movie who rides off into the sunset with her beloved to live happily ever after, presumably in her own little world. Instead, the bride of the Lamb will be a city whose gates always stand open, inviting all humanity to the fellowship of the redeemed.

City Of Ministry

Consider this interesting thought experiment: Ask a man what it would mean if someone described his wife, *in a positive way*, as “a city”? Though it’s romantic for a man to tell his wife, “You’re all I need,” and while this may be true with regard to his personal need for human intimacy and belonging, the reality is that a man needs much more in his life than a wife, *unless* she is also the source and means of all his food, clothing, shelter, medical treatment, legal services, entertainment, intellectual growth and occupational fulfilment. All these other things, beyond personal intimacy and belonging, generally come from a city. We see, then, that if someone described, say, a pastor’s wife in a

positive way as “a city,” the metaphor would imply that the pastor’s wife was amazingly gifted in meeting a variety of needs for the people around her.

Indeed, as cities are the nexus for goods, services and ideas, so the heavenly bride-city will be the center for all that humanity needs in its new era. Thus, that the Bible can characterize the bride as a city confirms that our destiny is not an individualistic or self-centered one (like the Muslim idea of a hedonistic paradise for men), but a corporate destiny of ministry to others. The bride-city will provide government, succor, and teaching to the traumatized survivors of the End Time upheavals (Isa 32.1-5). She will provide healing for the nations (cf. Rev 22.2). The city bride will be the opposite of aloof; she will take up pastoral responsibility for all the peoples of the earth (see the Greek text of Rev 2.27).

City Of Influence

As the bride-city takes up her pastoral responsibility, she will reshape the world’s culture throughout the coming age (cf. Rev 21.24). This does not mean that she will erase all the distinctive cultural traits of the nations, nor that the present cultural centers of New York, London, Tokyo, Mexico City, etc., will no longer contribute to the cultural growth of humanity. The Scriptures do not speak of the future of these cities, but we can reasonably expect that Christ and His bride will refine all the world’s cultures, and cleanse them of destructive elements, so that all their wonderful features can fully glorify the Creator and Redeemer (cf. Isa 19.18; Zec 14.16). We will probably still recognize a native of Boston, but that person’s *primary* cultural identity will derive from the heavenly city rather than the earthly.

The Implications For Now

The culmination of several theological streams in the book of Revelation brings into focus different aspects of the destiny of the redeemed, and has powerful implications for how the people of God should live now. Since we can sum up the great purpose of God with the words *relationship* and *fellowship*, the local church (today’s “mini-city”) must show a welcoming face and heart to all who seek reconciliation with their Creator and desire a redemptive family. While not disregarding the very real challenges of multicultural ministry, the church must ever strive for the ideal of “a house of prayer for all

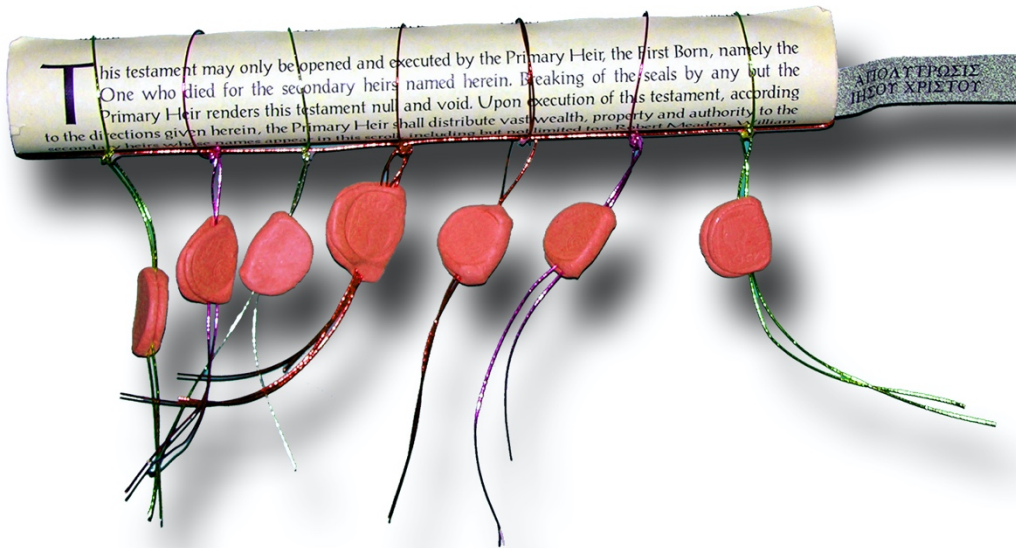
peoples” (Isa 56.7; Mar 11.17). If a certain ethnicity predominates in our congregation, and visitors of a different ethnicity choose not to join us long-term, that’s okay. However, *before God* we must be sure that the visitors who didn’t stay continued their search for a church home *not* for lack of feeling welcomed, included and wanted by our church family. Besides striving for ethnically diverse congregations, the church must *certainly* become a classless society in the sense that it welcomes the poor and ragged equally as it does the wealthy and refined (Jam 2.1-9). As the bride-city is a city of ministry, followers of Christ today must endeavor to make the Christian culture known as a culture of giving, rather than a culture of taking. Again, without ignoring the historical shortcomings of a “social gospel” that never proclaims the gospel of Jesus, the church must minister to the *felt needs* of their community. If the larger community would not miss our church if it disappeared, we are falling short. If we do not minister to the physical needs in our community, our community will doubt the relevance of the spiritual provision we offer. If the local church is irrelevant to its community, it is failing in its mission to influence culture. It has become insipid, and hardly the salt of the earth that Jesus intended. To be truly salty, the church must become outward-looking and take up the biblical concern for the city.

In the light, then, of our destiny as the bride of the Lamb, and recognizing that the bride is a bride-city, we must grow into that identity now by becoming a community that calls our world into fellowship with God and His people, ministers to the varied needs of our community, and seeks in every appropriate way to improve the culture of our earthly cities.

10. The Revelation tells how the Redeemer completes a redemption that His enemies viciously dispute.

People in the Roman provinces of the first century would have recognized a scroll with “seven seals” as a legal scroll of great importance. When they saw its seven seals, they would assume that the scroll was a will, a deed, or a certificate of redemption. The scroll

with seven seals, introduced in Rev 5.1-10, tells us that the book of Revelation brings to culmination the Bible's story of redemption.



The biblical law of redemption appears in Leviticus 25.23-34,39-42,47-55,⁵⁴ and the book of Ruth, along with Jeremiah 32.1-15, illustrate its application. This redemption law codified by Moses reflects Hebrew tradition from before his time,⁵⁵ and more importantly, it reflects the character of God and how He designed human relationships to work in a theocratic community. The highlights of God's redemption law are as follows:

- A. Redemption applies first to land, or more properly, to a person's possession of his ancestral dominion, but also applies to persons who have sold themselves into servitude.
- B. A person can sell his ancestral land, but not in perpetuity; it can only be "leased" to another until the year of jubilee, and the owner must calculate the price for the land accordingly. Due to the priority of keeping ancestral lands in the hands of one's family, a person who needs to sell must offer his land first to a kinsman.

⁵⁴ There are also special formulas of redemption for persons, animals or property that have been dedicated to the LORD (Lev 27).

⁵⁵ For example, the principle of the levirate marriage codified in Deu 25.5-10 reflects the unwritten law acknowledged by Judah in Gen 38.1-26).

- C. A person who can afford to do so can redeem the land which he has sold, paying the person to whom it was sold a price based upon the years remaining in the “lease.”
- D. A person who cannot afford to redeem his land on his own may call upon his nearest kinsman, Hebrew *goel*,⁵⁶ to redeem the property for him.
- E. Likewise, a person who has sold himself into servitude may redeem himself out of servitude if he can afford to do so, or a near kinsman may redeem him.
- F. When a property was sold, the payment was witnessed and two deeds of sale were written out and signed; one deed was sealed to protect it from tampering and the other was left unsealed so that it could be examined at any time (Jer 32.11).
- G. The laws of redemption intersected with the law of the levirate marriage (Deu 25.5-10), to the effect that if a kinsman redeemed the land of a deceased relative who had left a widow, the redeemer was simultaneously obligated to marry the widow in order to preserve the family line of the deceased on the land.

With these points in mind, let’s consider the following scenario:

- A. A man receives a property as a perpetual inheritance.
- B. He sells his inheritance and does not have the means to redeem it.
- C. In time, the man dies and leaves a widow but no male heir.
- D. A near relative buys (redeems) the property to keep it in the family.
- E. A scribe produces a public deed, certifying that the redemption price has been paid, and also produces a copy of the deed to be witnessed and sealed.
- F. If the redemption is contested, the sealed copy of the deed is brought forth as proof that the redemption price has been paid, and that the public deed of sale has neither been forged nor altered.
- G. The Redeemer takes physical possession of the property.
- H. The Redeemer marries the original owner’s widow, and produces descendants for the original owner.
- I. The dominion over the property is finally restored to the original family line.

⁵⁶ This word means kinsman but is translated according to context as either relative, redeemer, or avenger.

Now consider the parallels between this scenario and the cosmic story of redemption that culminates in the book of Revelation:

- A. Adam receives dominion of the earth, Gen 1.26.
- B. Adam and Eve “sell” themselves into servitude, giving themselves and their domain over to the Serpent, Gen. 3.6.
- C. Adam finally dies, but leaves impoverished descendants who can neither pay the redemption price for themselves nor for their domain, since the price is death.
- D. God Himself becomes a near relative to humanity in Christ (a descendant of Adam), and as One with the right of redemption and as One who can afford to pay the price of death, Jesus pays man’s debt on the cross, Rev 5.9.
- E. The redemption is recorded in the public scroll of Scripture, and in a scroll sealed with seven seals in heaven. (The redemption is sealed on earth by the presence of Holy Spirit in the lives of the redeemed, Eph 1.13-14.)
- F. Because the Serpent and his minions contest the redemption (and the dominion of the earth) as declared in the open scroll of Scripture, God holds forth the sealed scroll of redemption in heaven, Rev. 5.1. Logically, only the Redeemer Himself has the right to open the sealed scroll, and it must be opened before witnesses.
- G. By the provisions of the redemption written in the scroll, Christ has the right to use force to take possession of the earth and restore His people’s dominion over it, even as God used force to redeem His people from Egypt and restore their dominion over the land given to Abraham. As each seal of the heavenly scroll is broken, increasing force is brought to bear against the unlawful occupants of the earth until the Redeemer Himself comes and takes possession of it, Rev. 11.15.
- H. Redeemed humanity, widowed from the law, now marries the Lamb, Jesus the Redeemer, Rom 7.4; Rev 19.7-9.
- I. Holy humanity once again rules the earth, Rev. 5.10.

In summary, this is the story of the book of Revelation.

11. The Revelation describes the ultimate exodus prefigured by the exodus of Moses.

The many allusions that the Revelation makes to the exodus under Moses helps us understand that the Revelation depicts the ultimate exodus predicted by other prophets and apostles. Consider the parallels between the stories of the earlier exodus and the Revelation:

1. From a burning bush, the Lord commissions exiled Moses (Exo 3); from burning lampstands, the Lord commissions exiled John (Rev 1).
2. God strikes Egypt (Exo 3.20); God chastens spiritual Egypt (Rev 11.8).
3. God redeems 12 tribes of Israel by great judgments (Exo 6.6); the Lamb purchases people from every tribe and nation (Rev 5.9).
4. God pours plagues upon Egyptian oppressors (Exo 7-12); God pours plagues upon the kingdom of the Beast (Rev 16.10).
5. Water turned to blood (Exo 7); waters turned to blood (Rev 8 and 11).
6. Plague of frogs sign of God's power (Ex 8.1-15); frog-like spirits perform signs (Rev 16.13-14).
7. Plague of hail and fire strikes Egypt (Exo 9; cf. Jos 10.11); hail with fire cast to the earth upon blasphemers (Rev 8.7; 16.21).
8. Plague of locusts (Exo 10); locust-like creatures torment the ungodly (Rev 9).
9. Darkness over land of Egypt (Ex 10.21); darkness over the kingdom of the Beast (Rev 16.10).
10. Israelites told to be clothed and ready (Exo 12.11); Jesus tells people to be clothed and ready (Rev 16.15).
11. Israelites slay the Passover lamb (Exo 12); John sees the Lamb who had been slain (Rev 5).
12. God comes to the Israelites in a pillar of cloud (Exo 13); Jesus comes with the clouds (Rev 1.7; 10.1; 14.14-16).
13. Israelites must cross sea to serve God (Exo 14); John must cross crystal sea to approach God's throne (Rev 4).

14. Pharaoh and army fight against the Lord at the Red Sea (Exo 14); Antichrist and army fight against the Lamb (Rev 17.14; ch. 19; Dan 11.45).
15. Oppressor Pharaoh goes into the Sea (Exo 14); oppressive Beast comes up out of the sea (Rev 13).
16. Victorious Israelites sing the song of Moses (Exo 15); those victorious over the Beast sing the song of Moses (Rev 15.3).
17. Bitter waters sweetened for the Israelites (Exo 15.23-25); the ungodly die from bitter waters (Rev 8.10-11).
18. God feeds Israel in the wilderness (Exo 16); the woman Israel ministered to in the wilderness (Rev 12.6,14).
19. God brings Israel to Himself on eagle's wings (Exo 19.4); God carries woman Israel safely on eagle's wings (Rev 12.14).
20. Israelites wash clothes to appear before God (Exo 19.10-14); the redeemed wash their robes to enter the City (Rev 7.14; 22.14).
21. God appears amidst thunder and lightning (Exo 19); John sees God enthroned amidst thunder and lightning (Rev 4).
22. Mountain of God quaked violently (Ex 19.18); a seismic quake emanates from God's temple (Rev 11.19).
23. God "marries" Israel by covenant (Isa 54.5; Jer 31.14,32; Eze 16; Hos); marriage of the Lamb (Rev 19.7-9).
24. God chooses Israel to be a kingdom of priests (Exo 19.6); the redeemed made into a kingdom and priests (Rev 5.10; 20.6).
25. God's tabernacle among the Israelites (Exo 25-39); God's tabernacle "with man" (Rev 21.3).
26. Ark of covenant made for the closed sanctuary (Exo 25.8-10); ark of the covenant seen in the open temple of heaven (Rev 11.19).
27. Those who sinned will be blotted out of God's book (Ex 32.32-33); overcomers will not be blotted out from the book of life (Rev 3.5).
28. Moses' face shines with divine light (Exo 34.30-35); face of the divine Redeemer shines like the sun (Rev 1.16).
29. God's name inscribed on front of priest's turban (Exo 39.27-31); God's name on the foreheads of the redeemed (Rev 7.3; 22.4).

30. Golden altar of incense put with the ark in the tabernacle (Ex 40.5); prayers of the saints rise from the golden altar before God (Rev 8.3-5).
31. Moses unable to enter Tabernacle filled with God's glory (Ex 40.35); no one able to enter the temple filled with God's glory (Rev 15.8).
32. Israelite warriors from each tribe numbered (Num 26.2 ff.); End-Time "warriors" from each tribe numbered and sealed (Rev 7).
33. Blessing on those who keep the commandments (Deu 7.11-15); blessing on those who keep the words of the prophecy (Rev 1.3; 22.7).
34. Israelites burn idolatrous cities (Num 31.10; Deu 13.12-16; Jos 6.24; 8.19); Mystery Babylon, mother of harlots, burned (Rev 17.16-18; 18.15-18).
35. Two spies sent to Jericho, rise from "burial" under flax (Jos 2.1-6); two witnesses sent to spiritual Egypt, rise from death (Rev 11.3-12).
36. Jordan river backs up so Israelites cross on dry land (Jos 3); earth drinks up river to help woman Israel (Rev 12.15-16).
37. Joshua falls down before the Lord who appears with sword (Jos 5.13-15); John falls down before the Lord who appears with sword (Rev 1.16-17).
38. Seven trumpets of judgment (Jos 6.4); seven trumpets of judgment (Rev 8.2 ff.).
39. Joshua destroys Jericho, Babylonian wealth (Jos 6.19; 7.21); God destroys commercial capital, Mystery Babylon (Rev 16.17 to 19.6).
40. Harlot Rahab saved out of city of Jericho (Jos 6.25); God's people called out of the city of the great harlot (Rev 17.18; 18.4).
41. Israelites enter the promised land (Jos 3-4); redeemed enter the Holy City (Rev 22.14).
42. God will dwell among the sons of Israel (Ex 29.45-46); God will dwell with [all] men (Rev 21.3).

From these parallels, we see that though the book of Revelation does speak of fearful judgments to come upon the world, the overall message for God's people is one of joyful liberation from the age-old oppression of the Serpent!

12. As for all biblical prophecy, the geographical center for the Book of Revelation is Jerusalem and the land of Israel.

Not only does Israel retain her calling and special role in God's eschatological plans, but Jerusalem also retains her status as the city of the Coming King. As Benjamin Newton wrote, "The facts of prophetic history are made by Scripture to revolve around Jerusalem as their centre — and therefore any system of interpretation which violates this cardinal principle will soon find itself lost in inconsistency."⁵⁷ The final battle of the apocalypse will be fought at Jerusalem, and Messiah's feet will touch down on her Mount of Olives when He descends from heaven (Zec 14.4).

Because Jerusalem is the geographical focal point of the eschatological scriptures, we should recognize that prophetic references to "the earth" or "the land" may refer only to the land of Israel, and that references to "the world" probably refer to the "prophetic world," that is, to the known world of the prophets. Unless we have clear indication in the text that the words *earth* or *world* refer to a greater region, we should probably take them as referring to *ha-eretz yisrael*, the land of Israel, or at most the greater Mediterranean world.⁵⁸

13. The Revelation gives a detailed warning to the world about the coming Antichrist and the seductive sin of Mystery Babylon.

The Coming Antichrist

The Bible's teaching about a Satanic adversary who will maintain a constant enmity toward the coming Redeemer begins in Gen 3.15. Understanding this verse requires a technical analysis of the text, for which I refer the reader to my article "The Antichrist In

⁵⁷ Newton, Benjamin, *Aids to Prophetic Enquiry*, p. 11.

⁵⁸ For a thorough demonstration of the Bible's "limited" geography, please see my treatise entitled, "The Beast At The Center Of The World," available without charge at the Timothy Ministries website, www.tmin.org.

The Proto-Evangel.”⁵⁹ For now, suffice it to say that Gen 3.15 predicts a progeny of Satan who will energize an ages-long hostility toward the coming Christ of God. This progeny of Satan, himself a spirit (1Jo 4.3), has in one way or another inspired all the antichrists who have come, and will finally inhabit the ultimate Antichrist of the End Time (1Jo 2.18).

Prophecy About The Antichrist Before The Revelation

The apostle John gave us the term *antichrist* in his epistles near the end of our Bible, but the earlier Scriptures refer to this ultimate adversary of Christ as:

- The seed of the serpent (Gen 3.15),
- The king of Babylon (Isa 14.4-25),
- The Assyrian (Isa 14.4-25),
- The prince who is to come (Dan 9.26),
- The little horn (Dan 7.8),
- The king of the north (Dan 11.40-45)
- The man of lawlessness (2Th 2.3,8),
- The son of destruction (2Th 2.3; cf. Rev 17.8,11).

Of this variously named Antichrist, the prophets of both testaments, had much to say! The apostle Paul said explicitly that this adversary would be a lawless man, destined for destruction (2Th 2.3,8), and that the spirit that will drive him is being restrained at present until God’s time for this rebel’s unveiling to the world (2Th 2.6-8).⁶⁰ In accord with Gen 3.15, Paul said that this man of lawlessness will act with Satanic power to do signs and false wonders, and will succeed in deceiving those who do not love the truth (2Th 2.9-10). Paul said further that this lawless man would oppose every known object of worship and take his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself as God (2Th 2.4). Finally, the Lord Himself will wipe out this “son of destruction” (2Th 2.8,10-12).

The earlier prophets had taught all these things implicitly. Daniel described this coming evil man as insolent, cunning, deceitful and skilled in intrigue (Dan 8.23-24).

⁵⁹ http://www.tmin.org/pdfs/ID_666_Appendix_1_v.2.pdf

⁶⁰ Paul spoke of the unveiling or *apocalypse* of the man of lawlessness, as the Revelation speaks of the *apocalypse* or unveiling of Jesus.

Daniel also indicated that this evil man would be an Arab prince. We infer this ethnicity from Daniel's prophecy that this man's people would destroy Jerusalem and the temple. This destruction occurred in AD 70. The Jewish soldier and historian, Josephus, documented the destruction, and attributed it to the *Arab* auxiliaries of Rome (Dan 9.26; Josephus *Wars* 3.1.3; 3.2.4; 3.4.2). Daniel also pointed us to the ethnic identity of his "little horn" by telling us that this wicked man would arise from within the territory of the Roman Empire, but more specifically from within the geographic area that had previously been within the Grecian Empire, and even more specifically (by calling him "the king of the north") placing his origin within the territory once ruled by Seleucus, that is, the eastern-most territory of the Roman and Greek empires (Dan 7.7-8,24; 8.22-23; 11.40), the area encompassing the present nations of Iraq and Iran. If we interpret Isaiah, chapters 13-14, as referring prophetically to the same coming Antichrist, then Isaiah identifies him specifically as an Assyrian and the [future] king of Babylon (Isa 14.4-25; cf. Isa 7.18-25). All this suggests that the Antichrist will arise from the modern nation of Iraq, perhaps even taking over the palace built by Saddam Hussein overlooking the very site of ancient Babylon (see Google Earth image in §8 above).

Daniel states clearly that this coming wicked prince (also called a king) will ratify and extend an existing covenant (treaty) with Israel, and this appears to be Antichrist's first public act predicted by Scripture (Dan 9.27; cf. Zec 11.10). However, assuming his identity with Daniel's "little horn," this wicked man will violate the treaty by shutting down the daily sacrifice of the Jews and setting up what Daniel calls the "abomination of desolation" (Dan 8.11-14; 9.27; 11.31). He will hate God's covenant with Israel, and will honor Jews who forsake their covenant with God (Dan 11.28,30). He will destroy military leaders and many of the holy people (Dan 8.24-25). He will continue to wreak havoc for 3½ years, even seeking to change times (the calendar) and laws (Dan 7.25; cf. Dan 2.21). At some point in the career of this evil ruler, ten other kings will arise in his region, and he will subdue three of the ten (Dan 7.24). He will finally make a military stand against the Messiah Himself (Dan 8.25; cf. Ps 2).

These are the broad outlines of what the prophets and apostles revealed about the Antichrist before John recorded the Book of Revelation.

The Revelation's Added Details About The Antichrist

Kings, Signs, and 666

The Revelation gives us a new title for the Antichrist, namely, *the beast*. This title alludes directly to the various symbolic beasts of Dan 7 and 8,⁶¹ and particularly to the fourth beast of Dan 7.7. The subtle difference in the Revelation is that, while the beasts of Daniel represent kings and their kingdoms (from the fourth kingdom of which emerges the “little horn,” Dan 7.17,23-27), the beast of the Revelation primarily represents the Antichrist himself (while also pointing symbolically to seven predecessor kings and ten other kings who will form a federation with him; Rev 17.7-13).

As we study the information about this final beast, we see that the Revelation confirmed much of the antecedent teaching about the Antichrist, including Paul's mention that the man of lawlessness would receive his power and authority directly from Satan (called “the dragon” in the Revelation; Rev 13.1-2). The Revelation goes on to clarify that the ten kings, mentioned in Daniel 7.24, will receive authority as kings *with* the Antichrist beast. These kings will unite in purpose with the Antichrist and give him “their power and authority” (Rev 17.13). The Revelation also gives us further information about the deceptive signs that the Antichrist will bring about, namely giving authority to a false prophet to bring fire down from heaven, and to create a talking image (this image will likely constitute the “abomination of desolation” set up in the temple; Rev 13.12-15). Coinciding with this devilish deception, the Revelation tells us that the Antichrist's false prophet will force everyone under the beast's dominion “to be marked on the right hand or the forehead,” without which no one will be permitted to buy or sell, and which consists of “the name of the beast or the number of its name.” The number is 666 and has to do with the Antichrist's identity (Rev 13.16-18).

The requirement that all worship the image of the beast or face death (Rev 13.15), and that all receive the mark of the beast in order to buy or sell (Rev 13.17), will constitute two of the horrors that will occur during what Jesus and John called “the great tribulation” (Mat 24.21; Rev 7.14). Jeremiah called this same future period, “the time of Jacob's distress” (Jer 30.7, NAU), and Daniel referred to it as “a time of trouble” unprecedented since the first appearance of nations (Dan 12.1). This nightmare will

⁶¹ Like the beasts of Dan 7.3, the beast of Rev 13.1 comes up out of the sea.

begin with the setting up of the “abomination of desolation” (presumably the image of the beast) in the holy place of the Jerusalem temple (Mat 24.15-21), and continue for 3½ years, until brought to an end by Christ’s coming. During this “great tribulation,” the beast will make war against the people of God and subjugate many other peoples besides (Rev 13.7). God’s people will have to repudiate the worship of the beast and refuse to take his mark, or they will come under the same divine judgment that will fall upon the beast at Christ’s coming (Rev 14.9-12).

This news about the mark of the beast and the threat of death to those who refuse to worship him is perhaps the most frightening topic in the book of Revelation. However, we need to understand that the dominion of the Antichrist beast will be geographically limited to a region in the eastern Mediterranean world. Though much of the language about the beast in the book of Revelation sounds global, it refers to the biblical world, which, as I have stated above, is centered around Israel and Jerusalem. Western Europe and the regions beyond will never fall under the Antichrist’s rule, in spite of popular prophecy teachers who affirm otherwise. One proof of this geographical limitation is that, at the very end of Antichrist’s career, he and his federation will make war against their economic competitor in the western Mediterranean, a war which would hardly occur if the Antichrist already ruled the entire planet (see the details about the beast’s economic competitor, “Mystery Babylon,” below). Another proof is that even the nation of Jordan (or part of it) which will be in close geographical proximity to the beast’s sphere of influence, will nevertheless escape his rule (Dan 11.41). If you would like to read a detailed study of the Antichrist’s geographical domain, please see my article entitled, “The Beast At The Center Of The World.”⁶²

In spite of all the biblical evidence for it, the idea that the Antichrist’s rule will be geographically limited remains a controversial idea among Bible-prophecy buffs. I nevertheless affirm that the region of Antichrist’s rule will be *limited* to the eastern Mediterranean world (including Asia Minor and some coastal nations of north Africa), and that this *geographical limitation* is a vital eschatological truth. Nevertheless, I also hasten to say that this truth must not lull Christians of the West into passivity as the End

⁶² <http://www.tmin.org/pdfs/BeastatCenter.pdf>

Time approaches. The fact that we who live outside of the Mediterranean world will never face the life-and-death choice of rejecting or accepting the mark of the beast should not lead us to think that we will have no worries during “the time of Jacob’s distress.” On the contrary, the military and political upheavals of the Middle East, and the cosmic disturbances described in the End-Time prophecies of the Old and New Testaments, imply that the last 42 months before the Lord’s appearance will be trying times for everyone on planet earth. Furthermore, if Antichrist’s dominion will consist of ten nations in the Mediterranean world, then Christians from all over the globe should pray and think about how the church can help those caught under the beast’s rule. The time of Jacob’s distress may demand that Christians create and run the most ambitious underground railroad of all time to help people escape from Antichrist’s reign of terror.

Antichrist vs. Mystery Babylon

The part of the Antichrist’s career that was least known in prophecy before the Revelation, is the part in which God will use him and his federation to bring judgment upon what the Revelation calls Mystery Babylon The Great (Rev 17.5). In other words, God will use the final “king of [literal] Babylon” (Isa 14.4-25) to bring down a different entity mystically called “Babylon.” It should not surprise us that God will use the Antichrist to accomplish a divine judgment. Remember that God used king Nebuchadnezzar (who in some ways foreshadowed the Antichrist) to bring God’s chastening upon Israel and other nations. That God, for His own holy purposes, uses a wicked man, in no way exonerates the evil agent. Just as God finally brought judgment upon Nebuchadnezzar in his own turn, so God will bring decisive judgment upon the final king of Babylon, the Antichrist, after God accomplishes His purposes through him.

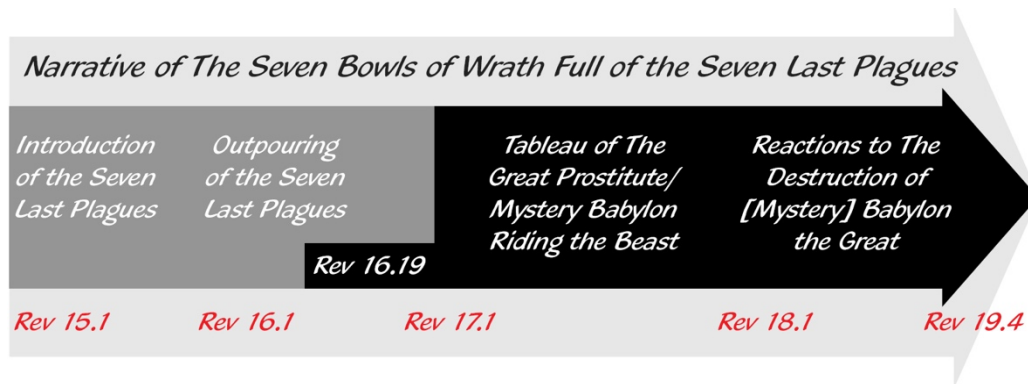
The way God uses wicked agents for divine purposes provides important warnings for us today. That God used Nebuchadnezzar to chasten Israel for her persistent idolatry, warns us against idolatry in all its forms today. That God will use the Antichrist to destroy Mystery Babylon warns us also against participation in her crimes, the chief of which will be unrestrained commercialism. In view of this, we had better take a closer look at Mystery Babylon, her sins, and her final demise.

Mystery Babylon The Great

The book of Revelation predicts a yet future judgment upon “the Great Prostitute ... Mystery Babylon the Great.” John’s vision of this judgment, in Rev 17.1 to 19.4, provides us with startling insight into coming sociopolitical developments in the Mediterranean world. More importantly, this vision warns God’s people away from the End-Time idolatry of *Mammon* (money deified). The Revelation foretold that the worship of Mammon would reach a new zenith in the ultimate commercialism of human trafficking, a plague already spreading its ugly tentacles around our globe. While the full manifestation of the Great Prostitute is yet future, the time for repentance has already come. We must turn from living in the spirit of Mystery Babylon, and learn, by God’s grace, to love people far more than we love money and things.

The Identity Of Mystery Babylon

As with their many speculations about the identity of the Antichrist, Bible interpreters have offered many diverse theories about the identity of Mystery Babylon. However, her identity is not difficult to understand if we read the Revelation text carefully and without preconceived opinions. To identify Mystery Babylon and correctly interpret the vision about her, we must first recognize that chapters 17 and 18 of Revelation are part of a single thematic unit within the narrative of the book. This topical unit begins at 17.1 and ends at 19.4, and in turn comprises part of the larger narrative about *The Seven Bowls of Wrath Full of the Seven Last Plagues* (see diagram below). We must recognize that the one vision of “The Great Prostitute ... Mystery Babylon the Great” spans multiple chapters. I emphasize this because many interpreters have erroneously seen two different Babylons in Revelation, chapters 17 and 18 respectively, saying that chapter 17 depicts a religious entity while chapter 18 describes a city. However, we must not let our modern chapter divisions — nor our theological presuppositions — mislead us into thinking that there is a stronger narrative transition between Rev 17 and 18 than actually exists.



The Revelation first introduces the topic of “Babylon the Great” to John and his readers in a brief, angelic declaration about Babylon’s fall:

Rev 14.8 And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality.” (NAU)

This first “teaser” statement, about Babylon the Great in Rev 14.8, begins a thematic flow that continues with a second preview statement in the context of the final bowl judgment in Rev 16.19, and culminates in the lengthy vision about “The Great Prostitute ... Mystery Babylon the Great” in Rev 17.1 to 19.4.⁶³ The specific topic announced in the first verse of chapter 17, namely, “***the judgment of the Great Prostitute,***” is:

1. logistically described near the end of Rev 17 (v. 16),
2. mourned through most of Rev 18,
3. poetically described near the end of chapter 18 (v. 21),
4. and finally rejoiced over in heaven in Rev 19.1-4:

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. ***He has condemned [judged, NAU] the great prostitute*** who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.” (NIVO)

We see that the “Great Prostitute” introduced in Rev 17.1 is mentioned a final time at the end of the vision about her in Rev 19.2. Clearly, no change of topic occurs between Rev 17 and 18. Both chapters speak of “Babylon the Great” (17.5; 18.2), with whom “the kings of the earth committed adultery” (17.2; 18.3), and who is finally “consumed by fire”

⁶³ The Beast is similarly introduced in the Revelation with a brief mention in Rev 11.7 before being treated at length in Rev chs. 13 to 20.

(17.16; 18.8). Both chapters describe the same entity “drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus” (17.6 NIVO; 18.24). A slight change of scene *does occur* between Rev 17.18 and 18.1, but this consists only of another angel entering the picture to make loud proclamation about the continuing topic of Babylon’s fall (echoing Rev 14.8). Yet another voice joins the dirge in Rev 18.4, but this no more signals a change of topic than does the appearance of the angel in 18.1. The vision of The Great Prostitute, given to us in Rev 17.1 to 19.4, is a unified scene and describes the judgment of *a single entity*. Who or what, then, is she?

John saw her as a woman riding the beast, and saw that “upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, ‘BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH’” (Rev 17.5, NAU). For now, we shall concern ourselves only with the first half of her name, “BABYLON THE GREAT,” or as the NIVO puts it, “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT.” In the Greek text, the word *mystery* either stands in apposition to the preceding noun, *name*, or complements the following proper noun, *Babylon*. This allows for two ways to read the verse:

...upon her forehead a name was written, a mystery, “BABYLON THE GREAT...” (NAU, cf. NLT)

OR

This title was written on her forehead: “MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT” (NIVO, cf. ASV, KJV).

Either John describes her name *as* mysterious, or the first part of the name itself is the word *Mystery*. As A. T. Robertson explains, “in either case the meaning is the same, that the name Babylon is to be interpreted mystically or spiritually...”⁶⁴ (Such a mystical interpretation of a city’s name is likewise indicated for Jerusalem in Rev 11.8.) The first thing we learn, then, about the identity of this Great Prostitute is that she is *not* the

⁶⁴ Robertson, Vol. VI, p. 430. James Moffatt, in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament* (Vol. 5, p. 452), writes “Roman *filles de joie* wore a label with their names thus (Juv. vi. 123). μυστήριον (which hardly belongs to the title itself) indicates that the name is to be taken πνευματικός (xi.8), not literally; ‘a name written which is a symbol,’ or a mysteriously significant title.”

famous Babylon in Mesopotamia once ruled by Nebuchadnezzar. If that were the case, the text would call her “Babylon the Great” throughout the Revelation with no mention of *mystery*. Instead, this Great Prostitute is a different entity, but mystically called Babylon because the same idolatrous and avaricious spirit possesses her as once possessed Nebuchadnezzar’s ancient city on the Euphrates.

Is she nevertheless a city? Yes. Here we must embrace the literal interpretation given in the text by John’s angelic guide. In Rev 17.18, the angel says, “the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” This statement presents no new metaphor or symbol, but provides the interpretation of the symbolic woman already seen in the vision. The text speaks clearly: the immoral woman is *a city*. Revelation, chapter 18 (NIVO, with emphasis added), hammers home this fact:

Rev. 18.10 ... “‘Woe! Woe, O great *city*, O Babylon, *city* of power! In one hour your doom has come!’

Rev. 18.16 ... “‘Woe! Woe, O great *city*, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls!

Rev. 18.18 ... ‘Was there ever a *city* like this great *city*?’

Rev. 18.19 ... “‘Woe! Woe, O great *city*, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!

Rev. 18.21 ... “With such violence the great *city* of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again.

The woman *is a city*, and we must not lose sight of this. Mystery Babylon the Great, is *not* a country. If an author or preacher says that the United States or any other *country* is the great harlot of Rev 17, don’t believe it, because though she resides within and even rules her own nation and others, the woman is a *city*.

Nor should we think that the Great Prostitute is a religious system or an ecclesiastical body, in spite of the giants of the faith who have called her such. Martin Luther and the Protestant reformers could not resist interpreting Revelation’s “whore of

Babylon” as the Roman Catholic Church, but this was a rash interpretation.⁶⁵ Many since, like A. R. Fausset, in his commentary *The Revelation Of St. John The Divine*, echo the bias of the Reformers. Like others, Fausset focused upon the clothing of the Prostitute:

[Rev 17, verse] 4. Scarlet is the colour reserved for popes and cardinals....compare *Roman Ceremonial* [3.5.5].... In it are enumerated five different articles of dress, all *scarlet* color; a vest is mentioned studded with *pearls*. The Pope’s miter is of *gold* and *precious stones*. The very characteristics outwardly which Revelation thrice assigns to the harlot or Babylon. [Italics are original.]⁶⁶

Fausset errs, however, because scarlet was the color of blood and (by extension) sin (Isa 1.18), and of seduction (Jer 4.30), as well as a symbol of royalty (Mat 27.27-28), long before it was associated with the Roman Catholic Church. Regrettably, the *Scofield Reference Bible* has contributed to the longevity of the reformers’ biased exegesis of the Great Prostitute vision.⁶⁷ In our time, some have added much speculation to this ecclesiastical interpretation and now envision a future syncretistic religion that absorbs, or is ruled by, Roman Catholicism. For example, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum writes,

Babylon the Harlot represents the one-world religious system that rules the religious affairs during the first half of the tribulation. She rules over the nations of the world (the many waters) fully controlling the religious affairs and has the reluctant support of the government.⁶⁸

Nevertheless, though Mystery Babylon adheres to a religion of sorts, and though she will indeed assert her influence over many nations (Rev 17.1,15), she is not a religious system, but a city. Nor does the Revelation picture her as *a religious city*, though certainly a spiritual one, and wickedly so. Nevertheless, we find not a word in the whole vision of Rev 17 about temples, priests, worship, or ritual. Furthermore, when the beast destroys Mystery Babylon, it is not priests and religionists who mourn her demise, but *kings and merchants*.

⁶⁵ We must distinguish between the *interpretation* and the *application* of Scripture. To interpret the Great Prostitute as the Roman Catholic Church is incorrect. However, the Revelation’s warnings about the Great Prostitute’s sins could appropriately be applied to some of the practices of the Roman Catholic Church of Luther’s time.

⁶⁶ JFB, Vol. 6, p. 710.

⁶⁷ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whore_of_Babylon

⁶⁸ Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events*, p. 161.

What city, then, is Mystery Babylon? The Revelation leaves no doubt about the answer to this question. In Rev 17.18 (NAU), the angel says, “the woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” These words explain the symbol of the Great Prostitute; they do not present a new mystery calling for further interpretation. Also, let us note that the angel speaks emphatically in the present tense (the Greek text uses a present participle). “The Great Prostitute ... Mystery Babylon the Great” is not a city that *once reigned* over the kings of the earth. Mesopotamian Babylon *once reigned* over the kings of the Middle East, but in John’s day, its greatness lay in ruins.⁶⁹ Nor is “Mystery Babylon the Great” a city that would *someday in the future* — from John’s perspective — reign over the kings of the earth.⁷⁰ She is not, for example, New York, because New York did not exist in John’s time, though it is the city that economically sways so many nations today. Rather, “The Great Prostitute ... Mystery Babylon the Great” is the city that wielded imperial sovereignty over the kings of the earth *when John received this Revelation*. The Lord knew, and the angel knew, that given this information, John could only draw one conclusion as to the identity of the Great Prostitute. In fact, given the description in Rev 17.18, any of Revelation’s first readers in Asia Minor would consider the city’s identity just as obvious as Caesar’s image on the local coinage: she was Rome! For Jesus and his angel to secretly mean any other city would have been *to knowingly deceive John and his first-century readers*.⁷¹

For John and the first readers of his Revelation, the currently ruling city was none other than Rome. Nevertheless, John’s angelic interpreter made doubly certain that readers then and now would make the connection between the Great Prostitute and the

⁶⁹ While many Jews still lived in its vicinity, this Babylon of the East slowly declined to become nearly deserted by the time of Marcus Aurelius. See Newton, Benjamin Wills; *Babylon: Its Future History and Doom*, ch. 2 “Brief History of the gradual Declension of Babylon.”

⁷⁰ Outstanding eschatology teacher, David Pawson, has missed the force of the Greek present tense here when he interprets the city “as a new metropolis rising to dominate others during the ‘end-time’” and says “... it would appear to be a fresh creation of man rather than the re-establishment of a former city (whether ancient Babylon or Rome).” See his excellent book, *When Jesus Returns*, p. 149.

⁷¹ The Revelation’s first readers were not encouraged to look to the distant future for the book’s significance. Rather, the angel said, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near” (Rev 22.10). Granted that much of the book still awaits fulfillment, nevertheless, when the Revelation presented entities as *presently existing*, John and his congregations knew to interpret those entities in their first-century cultural and political context.

imperial city. Having refocused John's attention by saying, "This calls for a mind with wisdom," the angel interpreted the seven heads of the beast as "seven mountains on which the woman is seated" (Rev 17.9). By "mountains" the angel meant physical heights (ὄρος), like Mount Zion (Rev 14.1). In other words, the Great Prostitute sits on mountains that we in the Pacific Northwest would call *hills*, as the NIV and NLT suitably render the Greek word. Rome, of course, is known to this day as "the city on seven hills," a nickname she has enjoyed from antiquity. As Alexander Hislop wrote,

"No other city in the world has ever been celebrated, as the city of Rome has, for its situation on seven hills. Pagan poets and orators, who had not thought of elucidating prophecy, have alike characterised it as 'the seven hilled city.'" Thus Virgil refers to it: "Rome has both become the most beautiful (city) in the world, and alone has surrounded for herself seven heights with a wall." Propertius, in the same strain, speaks of it (only adding another trait, which completes the Apocalyptic picture) as "The lofty city on seven hills, which governs the whole world." Its "governing the whole world" is just the counterpart of the Divine statement--"which reigneth over the kings of the earth" (Rev 17:18). To call Rome the city "of the seven hills" was by its citizens held to be as descriptive as to call it by its own proper name. Hence Horace speaks of it by reference to its seven hills alone, when he addresses, "The gods who have set their affections on the seven hills." Martial, in like manner, speaks of "The seven dominating mountains."⁷²

Coins minted in AD 71 even depicted the goddess Roma reclining on the seven hills:

A number of scholars have independently recognized a connection between the description in Rev 17.9 of the whore seated on seven mountains and a particular sestertius.... The obverse depicts a realistic portrait of the emperor...Vespasian.... The reverse depicts the goddess Roma in military dress ... sitting on Rome's Seven Hills with a parazonium (small sword) in her left hand resting on her left knee, a symbol of the military might of Rome.... There are two other figures on the reverse. The anthropomorphic figure of the river god Tiber reclines against the Seven Hills at the right (the right foot of the goddess extends toward him, apparently touching him). A group consisting of a miniature she-wolf with the twins Romulus and Remus suckling is located on the lower left.⁷³

⁷² Hislop, pp. 1,2.

⁷³ Aune; *Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 52C: Revelation 17-22*.



Students of this coin believe that the image of Roma resting on the seven hills is a copy or adaptation from an earlier artwork “which may have been a marble or bronze relief, ... dominated by the seated figure of Dea Roma, the goddess who personified Rome for the Greek world.”⁷⁴ We see, then, that by John’s time the idea of Rome as the city on seven hills was already long embedded in the Roman culture and in the popular thinking of the empire.

Admittedly, other cities have also been associated with seven hills, most notably Jerusalem and Constantinople. The city of Constantinople (ancient Byzantium, now Istanbul) also had seven hills “because the historic peninsula, the oldest part of the city, was built by Constantine on seven hills to match the seven hills of Rome.”⁷⁵ However, we must again note the chronological disqualification of both these cities. At the time when John received the Revelation, Jerusalem had been trampled by Rome’s auxiliary legions and had its temple destroyed. It hardly ruled “over the kings of the earth.” Constantinople did not even exist at the time. Furthermore, Constantine’s motivation for designing the layout of Constantinople as he did, “to match the seven hills of Rome,” points us back to the original city of seven hills, Rome herself.

In spite of these facts, those who write commentaries on the Revelation and books about Bible prophecy, continue to propose other cities as fulfilling the prophecy of

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Wikipedia.

Mystery Babylon. In his recent book, *Mystery Babylon: Unlocking The Bible's Greatest Prophetic Mystery*, Joel Richardson argues that Mystery Babylon is Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Each of these alternative proposals involve more violations of hermeneutical principles than I can discuss here. However, each alternative theory about which city is Mystery Babylon points to certain character qualities that other cities have shared with the great prostitute, and when it comes to applying the vision of Mystery Babylon, understanding her character is more important than certainty about her civic identity. So, let's see what *kind* of city she is.

The Character Of Mystery Babylon

The whole vision of Mystery Babylon begins with her introduction as “the great prostitute ... with whom the kings of the earth prostituted themselves ...” (Rev 17.1-2, my trans.). At the heart of this city's character is the drive to prostitute herself and seduce others into prostituting themselves. The words *prostitute* and *prostitution* evoke thoughts of “sexual immorality,” and many of our English versions use this phrase in Rev 17.2. However, we must understand that prostitution is most fundamentally an economic enterprise. For a city to prostitute herself means that she willingly violates any number of ethical, moral and spiritual principles in order to enrich herself. This particular prostitute, Mystery Babylon the Great (Rome), like her ancient Mesopotamian counterpart *dwells by* or *sits on* “many waters” (Jer 51.13; Rev 17.1). The angel who spoke to John interpreted the “many waters” in the Revelation passage as meaning “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages” (Rev 17.15). For a great prostitute to “sit” on “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages” implies that she exercises economic control over them. Mesopotamian Babylon literally dwelt by many waters in that she sat on the banks of the Euphrates and near the Tigris, the great trade rivers of the Middle East. Controlling the water ways and crossings of these rivers brought Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon great wealth and political power. Mystery Babylon (Rome) *literally* “sits on many waters” in that she has proximity and port access to the Mediterranean Sea, but she also *figuratively* “sits on many waters” in the sense that she will dominate many peoples, as she once did, by controlling the trade not only along the distant Euphrates which lay at the edge of imperial Rome's eastern domains, but also the commerce of all the nearer nations whose shipping routes crisscross the Mediterranean Sea.

We next see this great prostitute sitting on the beast! We must not miss the significance of this. The one astride a beast controls the beast. As we have already seen, the beast is the Antichrist and also symbolizes his ten confederate kings. Therefore, if Mystery Babylon is a great prostitute, and she sits atop the Antichrist and his federated kings in the same way that she sits upon “peoples, multitudes, nations and languages,” then *she controls Antichrist and his federation economically*. No wonder the beast hates her and will rise up to destroy her!

One other aspect of Mystery Babylon’s character must not escape us. While human prostitutes may drink alcohol or take drugs to salve their consciences or dull their misery, Mystery Babylon has, like Herodias (Mar 6.21-29), attempted to silence the voice of conscience that comes from God’s people. Thus we see Mystery Babylon drunk, not with wine, but with the blood of the saints and witnesses of Jesus (Rev 17.6).

Removing all doubt as to the nature of Mystery Babylon’s prostitution, the Revelation tells us, “the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality” (Rev 18.3 NAU). The Greek word translated *sensuality* by the NAU can mean *desire* or *longing*, but by extension means *extravagance* and *luxury* (ESV, NIVO, NLT). **The fundamental sin of Mystery Babylon is her addiction to luxurious living.** When the beast destroys her, it is the kings who shared in her luxury, and above all the merchants enriched by her, who mourn her demise (Rev 18.9-19). Repeatedly they mourn the destruction of her luxury and wealth (Rev 18.14,17,19). As the weeping merchants list the cargoes that she had imported, at the emphatic end of the list we find “slaves and human lives” (Rev 18.13 NAU). Mystery Babylon (Rome) was in antiquity, and is becoming again, a world capital of human trafficking.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ The U.S. State Department currently reports: “Italy is a destination and transit country for women, children, and men trafficked internationally for the purposes of commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor. Women and children are trafficked for forced prostitution mainly from Nigeria, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova, Albania, and Ukraine but also from Russia, South America, North and East Africa, the Middle East, China, and Uzbekistan. Chinese men and women are trafficked to Italy for the purpose of forced labor. Roma children continue to be trafficked for the purposes of sexual exploitation and forced begging. Men are trafficked for the purpose of forced labor, mostly in the agricultural sector in southern Italy.” <http://gvnet.com/humantrafficking/Italy.htm>

Coming Out Of Mystery Babylon

Now that we understand the character of Mystery Babylon, and that her fundamental sin is the worship of Mammon, that is, addiction to money and the luxury it buys, we begin to understand the voice from heaven when it says,

Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues; for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities. ... To the degree that she ... lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning In one day her plagues will come ... and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong. (Rev 18.4-8)

This is *not* a call to renounce all commerce. Commerce is the legitimate, large-scale pursuit of trade and profit. Every honest worker has at least an indirect connection to commerce. The Bible mandates that we work and engage in legitimate business in order to provide for our families (1Ti 5.8). However, while commerce is a legitimate pursuit, *Commercialism* is an attitude of the heart that can grow into the worship of Mammon. *Commercialism* is the *love of money and luxury* that seeps into our psyches, hardening our hearts to needy people and distracting our minds from all the priorities of God's kingdom. Just as national security and intelligence agencies endeavor to corrupt and defeat enemy agents by entangling them with prostitutes, so the Satanic Empire has endeavored to neutralize Christians by entangling our hearts with the love of material luxury.

So, to “come out” of Mystery Babylon the Great and repent of her sins is to repent of *Commercialism*. Repentance involves a “turning away” and of necessity a “turning toward.” To fully *turn away* from Mystery Babylon, we must fully *turn toward* our Lord Jesus and His kind of love. *Commercialism's* creed is greed. Greed uses people to win things, but love uses things to win people (Luk 16.9). To turn and walk in the opposite spirit from Mystery Babylon means to walk in love, in Jesus-quality love (1Jo 2.6), valuing people far more than money and things.

14. The Revelation reminds us to prepare for our millennial destiny.

Walking Into New Jerusalem

To come *out* of Mystery Babylon is to walk *into* the heavenly New Jerusalem. This spiritual action implies further priorities for God's people in the present time. These priorities include the following:

1. By God's grace we must faithfully steward whatever assets and responsibilities God has given us (Luk 16.10; 19.17).
2. We must continue to work for the unity of the city church. It is always challenging to join inter-denominational congregations in prayer and worship, let alone in ministry projects, but we must find ways to love and trust other congregations whose traditions differ from ours but whose faith for salvation is wholly and solely in the same Lord Jesus Christ (cf. Mar 9.38-40). We will not prevail in the front-line battles of our spiritual warfare until the church of the city becomes a united front.
3. We must become city-conscious; as congregations we must look outwardly, thinking beyond our four walls to understand and minister to the needs of our civic community.
4. We must teach and encourage one another, as individual Christians, to train for our future millennial work.
5. We must rediscover the Church's identity as the Bride of Christ, and serve Him and one another in the light of that identity.

Preparing For An Intimate Relationship With Jesus

The Book of Revelation discloses much about our corporate and individual identities, and some wonderful insights on this topic emerge in Jesus' promises to the person "who overcomes." John had already explained in his earlier letter that whoever is born of God overcomes the world, and that we overcome by our faith in Jesus (1Jo 5.4-5). Thus, the promises of Jesus in the Revelation are to those who have truly trusted in Him. One of those great promises sounds strange to modern ears: "To him who overcomes ... I will

give to him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it” (Rev 2.17 NAU). With a little research, we discover that this stone is a stone of acquittal, of admittance, and of identity.

The White Stone of Acquittal

The Roman poet Ovid (43 BC – AD 16) mentioned the custom in which juries voted by dropping black and white pebbles in an urn (*Metamorphoses* 15.41): “Mos erat antiquus, niveis atrisque lapillis, His damnare reos, illis absolvere culpa. Nunc quoque sic lata est sententia tristis.” English poet John Dryden preserved the rhyme of this passage in his translation:

A custom was of old, and still remains,
Which life or death by suffrages ordains:
White stones and black within an urn are cast,
The first absolve, but fate is in the last.⁷⁷

Henry T. Riley translated less poetically:

It was the ancient custom, by means of white and black pebbles, with the one to condemn the accused, with the other to acquit them of the charge; and on this occasion thus was the sad sentence passed, and every black pebble was cast into the ruthless urn.⁷⁸

Paul alluded to the like practice in the Sanhedrin when he said that he cast his pebble (ψῆφος) against the saints (Acts 26.10). Ovid’s fable, in which the above quote appears, tells of the trial of Myscelos. Myscelos was guilty, and condemned by a vote of black stones, but finally acquitted when Hercules miraculously turned all the pebbles in the urn white. Our miracle of acquittal involved a higher cost to the Hero. How wonderful that, at the final judgment, the Christian overcomer will receive a white stone of acquittal from the One who kept all the black stones of condemnation for Himself.

The White Stone Of Admittance

Besides acquittal, white stones had another connotation in antiquity, connected to the widespread use of a *tessera hospitalis*. Existing in different forms, and used in varied

⁷⁷ John Dryden, Joseph Addison, et al, translators, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses, In Fifteen Books*, (London: Samuel Garth, 1748).

⁷⁸ Henry T. Riley (Translator), *The Metamorphoses of Ovid Literally Translated*, Vol. 2, (New York: Hinds, Noble & Eldredge).

situations, the *tessera hospitalis*, a marked stone or tile, was essentially a guarantee that the bearer would be recognized and admitted as a friend. Some scholars have proposed a use of the *tessera hospitalis* in the recognition of valiant athletes or gladiators. When a gladiator or athlete performed victoriously in the arena, a nobleman might send the champion a *tessera hospitalis*. This stone, with the noble patron's name etched upon it, served as a pass granting the champion admittance into the nobleman's post-contest festivities.⁷⁹ In similar fashion, once the Christian overcomer has "fought the good fight" and run the race of faith (1Co 9.24; 1Ti 6.12; Heb 12.1), his white stone will admit him into the King's banquet. The King Himself will greet the faithful overcomer with the words, "enter into the joy of your master," and crown him with a crown of righteousness (Mat. 25.21; 2Ti 4.7-8).

Unlike the gladiators of old, however, the Christian overcomer will not leave the banquet with the same rank he possessed when he entered it. As Paul wrote, "if we endure, we will also reign with him" (2Ti 2.12). The Christian overcomer who enters the post-contest banquet of the Lord will emerge from it a co-regent with the Master, a prince or princess in the Lord's eternal kingdom (Rev 5.10; 22.3-5). That is not all. The overcomer will receive an even more important identity at this "wedding supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19.9). That additional identity is signified by the name etched on the white stone, for unlike the *tessera hospitalis* of old, the white stone of the Christian overcomer bears his own new name, rather than the name of his benefactor.

The White Stone Of Identity

The white stone conveys a name to the recipient that is new, permanent and unique. By its uniqueness, the stone becomes a precious symbol of personal identity, and teaches us that identity is ultimately defined by relationship. The permanence of the name "carved in stone" prompts us to realize that a meaningful identity must be a lasting one. The white stone teaches us then that a meaningful identity depends upon a relationship with an eternal person, a person like the One bequeathing the stone. Indeed, to the question, "who are you?" only the overcomer in Christ can give a meaningful answer, because only

⁷⁹ Ramsay, pp. 302-303.

the Christian will live forever with the Great Shepherd who calls him or her “by name” (John 10.3).

The White Stone Of Intimacy

Along with all its other significance, the white stone symbolizes its giver, the Lord Jesus. Jesus of Nazareth is “the living Stone — rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him ... For in Scripture it says: ‘See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame’” (1 Pet. 2.4-7 NIVO). Jesus is the rock that was cleft to hide His beloved (Song of Solomon 2.14). He was broken open that the living water might spring forth, for the Israelites “drank from the spiritual rock that accompanied them, and that rock was Christ” (1 Cor. 10.4 NIVO). He is the rock upon which people build their houses securely (Mat. 7.24). He is the stone with “seven eyes” that removes sin in a single day (Zech. 3.9). He is the stone “cut from a mountain by no human hand,” who reduces the kingdoms of this world to dust and replaces them with His kingdom which will never end (Dan. 2.45). He is the uncreated Stone which the unbelieving Jews presumptuously thought to pelt with pebbles He Himself had created (John 10.31-32). Jesus is “the Rock eternal” (Isaiah 26.4 NIVO).

But wait! The white stone of Revelation has *our name* written upon it; does Jesus have our names written upon Him? Probably so. When the heaven stood open, John saw Christ on a white horse (Rev 19.11-12 NIVO). Christ’s eyes, John said, “are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.” That name written upon Jesus may well signify the corporate multitude that He purchased with His blood. Why does no one else know that name? Probably because no one else *can* know it. Only Jesus Himself can comprehend the price by which he earned the right to bear that name, the name of the redeemed, tattooed upon His shoulders by a Roman lash. We realize that as a mariner might endure the tattooer’s needle to engrave the name of his bride over his heart, Christ endured the Roman nails to engrave our names upon Himself, for we are the object of His eternal affection.

By giving us the engraved white stone then, Jesus symbolically gives us Himself. By giving us an object we can easily enclose in the palm of our hand, He shows that He gives Himself to us wholly, and as an eternal possession. In other words, Jesus gives Himself to us as our Bridegroom. Christ has not only purchased our acquittal and

admittance into the banquet, but has also given us meaningful identity as His co-regents, and even more importantly as His bride. Our identity as rulers signifies purpose, but our identity as His bride signifies intimacy. Intimacy is the very deepest longing of our hearts, *the longing to be fully known and yet wholly loved*. The white stone is a promise that we will receive this intimacy we yearn for, intimacy with a Lover Who is Faithful and True, if we hold fast to our faith and thereby overcome the world.

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