

UNDERSTANDING REVELATION

J A C K K E L L E Y

Understanding Revelation



Gracethrufaith.com | Jack Kelley

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Introduction

No other book of the Bible was so specifically written for our generation. Of its 22 chapters 19 are about a time that's still in our future.

And no other book of the Bible promises blessings to those who read it, hear it and take to heart what is written in it.

In short, the Book of Revelation is arguably the most important book you will read in your life time.

People have shied away from this book because of its use of symbolism and its cryptic references. In writing this commentary, I've tried to explain these things in common everyday language to make it easier to understand while remaining true to the book's purpose, which to inform us of things that will soon be taking place.

Here then is my commentary on the Book of Revelation.

-Jack Kelley

Revelation 1

PROLOGUE

The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw – that is the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it, and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near. **(Rev 1:1-3)**

It was 95 AD, over 60 years since Jesus had walked among His people. Jerusalem and the Temple had been destroyed, leaving the Jews defeated. Paul was dead, beheaded in Rome nearly 30 years earlier. Peter had been crucified there about the same time. Of all the disciples only John was still alive. He had written his gospel and his 3 letters sometime earlier, and had served for a time as the Bishop of the church in Ephesus, having moved there with Mary, the Lord's mother, about the time of the Temple's destruction in 70 AD.

It's not that the Romans and Jews had left John alone. Tradition has it that several times they'd tried to kill him, even throwing him live into a cauldron of boiling oil, but the Lord had prevented it, fulfilling His promise of John 21:22. (Responding to Peter's question about what would become of John, Jesus had said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?") Finally the Romans had exiled him to Patmos, a prison colony off the coast of modern Turkey, thinking they had heard the last of him.

But the Lord had other plans, and appeared personally to John, commanding him to write one final letter and send it to seven churches in Asia Minor. As an old man at the end of his life, John was about to undertake one of his greatest challenges. After writing the Revelation, he died of natural causes in about 100 AD.

By the way, your Preterist friends have had to give the book an early date to get around verse one because they contend that it was all fulfilled by 70 AD, but they needn't have bothered. In the first place the later date is pretty well established, but the word translated soon or shortly actually means quickly or rapidly and describes the speed with which events will unfold once they begin, not their chronological nearness to John's day.

GREETING TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

John, to the seven churches that are in Asia:

Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us to be a kingdom (or kings), and priests to serve his God and Father, to him be glory and power forever and ever. Amen.

Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be. Amen.

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev.1: 4-8)

Of the 404 verses in the Book of Revelation, 278 are taken from the Old Testament. In fact, Esther is the only Old Testament book not directly quoted. So it's not surprising to find these Old Testament constructions like him who is and who was and who is to come and the seven spirits who are before his throne. The first is an approximate translation of God's name and the second is a name for the Holy Spirit, literally the seven-fold Spirit of God. We'll see plenty of these through out the book, and in chapter 19 we'll see the untranslated Hebrew word Hallelujah (it means praise the Lord) used four times. It's the only place it appears in the New Testament. In fact the Revelation has so many Old Testament nuances that some believe that John was actually translating from Hebrew into Greek as he wrote.

The phrase Alpha and Omega comes from the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and refers to God the Father and recalls His claim to Israel.

“You are my witnesses,” declares the LORD, “and my servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor will there be one after me. I, even I, am the LORD, and apart from me there is no savior. (Isaiah 43:10-11)

Jesus will later use the phrase of Himself.

VISION OF THE SON OF MAN

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. On the Lord's

Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea” (Rev. 1:9-11).

By this command it's clear that John is actually going to witness some events that the Lord wants him to document and then distribute to the seven churches he has named. Some contend that John saw all this in a vision on one Sabbath Day, while others say he was actually transported through time to the Day of the Lord. I lean toward the latter.

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance (**Rev. 1:12-16**).

Though the man speaking to John was clothed in light and had a distinct otherworldly appearance, John recognized Him. He had seen Him looking like this once before, on the Mount Of Transfiguration.

There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light. (**Matt. 17:2**)

It was the Lord!

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I

am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!
And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches (**Rev. 1:17-20**).

In this way, the Lord divides the Book John will write into three sections. The things John has seen, contained in chapter 1, those that are, which will fill chapters 2 and 3, and those that will take place after this, chapters 4-22.

The fact that the Lord is seen standing in the midst of the seven lampstands indicates His direct involvement with the church. Holding the seven stars in His right hand speaks of the intimate relationship He has with its leaders. Whether you see them as the pastors or as angelic overseers, He’s got them in the palm of His hand. The number 7 figures prominently in the Book of Revelation. In fact, before we’re finished we’ll see it used 52 times. And isn’t it interesting that 5 plus 2 equals guess what? Seven!

The Lord’s use of first and last here recall the two most important steps in the process of product development. The Greek word translated first is protos, from which we get prototype. A prototype is the original. It sets the standard to which all subsequent copies are compared to make sure they conform. Paul wrote,

“For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers” (**Romans 8:29**).

When we’re perfected we’ll be exact copies of our prototype, the Lord, and that’s the way God already sees us (**2 Cor. 5:17**).

And the word for last is eschatos, the superlative, the perfect example, the highest and best that can be achieved. Though we're destined to look like Him and act like Him, we can never be Him.

Revelation 2

SEVEN LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES PART 1

According to **Revelation 1:11**, the book was written to seven congregations in Asia, modern Turkey. For 2,000 years scholars have wondered why such an important message would be sent to these churches since they weren't even the most important of their day, let alone now.

True, Ephesus was a leading city of the time, but the church there was small and so were the others. Why wasn't the book written to the Church in Rome, for example? Surely the Lord knew that Rome would be the capital of Christianity for much of church history, the perfect addressee for such a timeless message. Or how about Jerusalem, where the Church was born?

FOUR LEVELS OF APPLICATION

The answer lies in the realization that the letters of chapters 2 and 3 have a representative as well as a specific purpose. They can actually be read with four levels of application. The first level is historical. These seven churches really existed and each was experiencing the particular problem to which the Lord referred as He dictated the

letters to John. Second, since all the churches were to read all the letters, the letters were also admonitory to all. Third, since both the challenge and promise with which each letter ends are personal rather than corporate, the letters were for individuals as well as congregations. And fourth, read in the order in which they appear they outline church history and so are prophetic. They chronicle the gap between the 69th and 70th weeks of Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy. (**Daniel 9:24-27**)

The Lord began each letter with a different one of the 24 titles that are used to describe Him in the book, and the title He selects gives a clue to the letter's theme. The name of each Church also contains a clue. Each letter can be divided into seven parts, the Lord's title being the first one. Then come a commendation, a criticism, an admonition, a call, a challenge, and a promise. Two of the seven letters, Sardis and Laodicea, contain no commendation, and in two, Smyrna and Philadelphia, no criticism is given. Pergamum has no admonition, but has two criticisms. In the last 4 letters the challenge and the promise are reversed.

I'll dissect each letter into its component parts as we go. And since I visited the sites of each of the seven churches a few years ago, I'll include a personal note or two as well. With that, let's get started.

TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS (REV 2:1-7)

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

Ephesus means darling, or beloved, maiden of choice. Ephesus represents the 1st century church.

(Title) These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

In using this title the Lord identifies Himself as the One who came to visit John, the One with authority over the Church, and the One to whom the Church owes affection as well as allegiance.

(Commendation) I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.

The Church in Ephesus had worked tirelessly to remain true to His Gospel.

(Criticism) Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.

Already the church had become so busy in its service to the King that it had forgotten about the King! The relationship He sought was turning into another religion.

(Admonition) Remember the height from which you have fallen!

How many times have we heard friends comment about the “good old days” when they were new believers? How exciting and emotional it was, and how quickly our prayers were answered? The Lord wants us to stay that way.

(Call) Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

Here’s the remedy. Go back to doing what you did at first. Remember when you couldn’t get enough of the Bible? When you showed up at church half an hour early, just because you loved being there, and didn’t want to leave when the service was over? How you kept up a running conversation with the Lord that began when you woke up in the morning and didn’t end till you fell asleep at night?

The Nicolaitans were a heretical sect that advocated a blending of pagan customs, like eating food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality, into Christian worship. There’s only

One worthy to receive our worship, and worshiping Him is the Church's primary purpose.

The lamp stand is identified in **Rev 1:20** as the church, so removing it means removing the church of Ephesus. Though the ruins of Ephesus are extensive and impressive, requiring most of a day to see, when we were there a few years ago we found only the faintest traces of a 1st century church in Ephesus.

(Challenge) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Reach up along each side of your head. Do you have ears there? Then this letter was written to you. Though the letter to Ephesus describes the Apostolic era, the church struggles with the same problems today. The church as a whole is too distracted with programs and plans, your congregation is too busy implementing them, and you're too busy helping. We're human beings, not human doings, and once we're saved being with the Lord in fellowship is our life's purpose.

(Promise) To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

Because of the emphasis on good works and programs in the church today, many who call themselves Christians, and rightly consider themselves to be hard working members of their congregations, have never taken the time to meet the King they claim to serve and receive the pardon He purchased for them with His life. How shocked they'll be to hear Him say,

"I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers." (**Matt. 7:23**)

TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA (REV 2:8-11)

"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

Smyrna means crushed. It comes from the same root word as myrrh, an embalming spice that releases its aroma when crushed. Smyrna represents the 2nd and 3rd Century church that suffered intense persecution.

(Title) These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.

The emphasis in the title is obvious, overcoming death.

(Commendation) I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.

The first to persecute the church were Jews. Polycarp, the most famous of the early martyrs was the Bishop of Smyrna and was burned at the stake there at age 86.

(Admonition) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.

From history we know the ten days refers to the reigns of 10 Roman Caesars, covering a period of 250 years.

(Call) Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

There's no promise of deliverance, only of reward in Heaven. The stories of believers' grace in the face of death while ingenious and diabolical methods were employed to exterminate them as a form of public entertainment have achieved legendary status.

(Challenge) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Many of us in the west have never faced serious threats on account of our faith, but world wide the number of known Christian martyrs has averaged from 100,000 to

150,000 per year for the last 10 years. Their number will only grow as the End draws nearer.

(Promise) He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”

The old adage goes: Born once, die twice. Born twice die once. It’s the second death that you have to watch out for. It’s the permanent one.

Today a prosperous city called Izmir, third largest in Turkey, stands where ancient Smyrna once was. An incident that clearly displayed the Lord’s sense of humor, while emphasizing the point of the letter, happened as we drove through the city. We saw prominent signs on a freeway exit just outside Izmir pointing to Smyrna and thinking we had found the ancient site, I quickly pulled off. But at the bottom of the short exit ramp was a T intersection with no indication as to which way we should turn. And there were no more signs pointing the way to Smyrna. After an hour of driving back and forth searching in both directions, I gave up and drove on. I didn’t get the point till later after describing the event to our Turkish travel agent. He told me the sign points to where Smyrna was. There’s no trace of Smyrna today. The church of Smyrna is in heaven.

TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM (REV. 2:12-17)

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

Pergamum means mixed marriage and represents the merger of pagan and Christian practices in the 4th century when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire.

(Title) These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.

In **Hebrews 4:12** the double-edged sword is used to describe God’s Word, the source of Truth.

(Commendation) I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.

With the establishment of Baghdad as the major distribution center between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea following Alexander's death, Babylon had gone into decline so the original mother/child cult religion moved its headquarters from there to Pergamum. (It eventually settled in Rome.) The reference to Satan's throne there shows the true source of this false religion.

(Criticism 1) Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality.

These were actual physical sins in the time of Balaam but here are mentioned in the spiritual sense. Idol worship can be anything you venerate, whether a false god or part of creation or material possessions. When intended symbolically, as it is here, sexual immorality stands for the worship of another god.

(Criticism 2) Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

These pagan practices crept into the church at Pergamum, just as they had in Ephesus.

(Call) Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

The truth of the Gospel has always been the best defense against the cults.

(Challenge) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

There are still plenty of idols in the church. Maybe you parked yours in the parking lot, or shaved its face this morning, or keep it in a bank downtown.

(Promise) To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it.

Just as the black ball was a vote against someone, a white stone was a sign of trust. When an important businessman had to complete a transaction in a distant city, he didn't travel there. It was too dangerous. Instead he sent a trusted servant empowered to act on his behalf. The servant carried a coin like form of identification made of baked white clay. The seal of the businessman being represented was pressed into the clay as was a secret name, known only to the other party in the transaction. By the presentation of the white stone, the servant authenticated himself as being entitled to all the rights and privileges of his master. In this way, our Lord Jesus will identify us as being entitled to all the rights and privileges due Him, when we enter into the Presence of our Father in Heaven.

Our Lord instructed the Disciples to take the Church into all the world (**Matt 28:19-20**), but in Pergamum the world came into the church. In the 4th century the Edict of Milan made Christianity legal and ultimately the official religion of the Empire. When that happened, pagan festivals became Christian holidays. The Feasts of Saturnalia and Ishtar became Christmas and Easter. This explains why such pagan symbols as the Yule log and evergreen tree, which symbolized the sun dying and being born again at the winter solstice, are associated with Christmas, while fertility symbols like rabbits and eggs are connected with Easter. Ishtar was the Babylonian goddess of fertility.

The impressive ruins on a hill 1000 feet above the surrounding valleys near modern Bergama are markedly pagan with remains of great temples to Roman gods and emperors but only faint traces of the church that was there.

CHILDREN OF A MIXED MARRIAGE

It's my belief that the churches in Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum have all disappeared, symbolically and in reality. But the marriage of Christian beliefs with the pagan religion of Pergamum produced 4 offspring that all survive to this day and are represented by the four remaining letters. We'll cover them next .

As the Roman Empire grew in prominence, Rome soon became the world's center for the practices and traditions of the Babylonian pagan religion. Pergamum slowly faded from the scene, but the mixed marriage of Christianity and Paganism that originated there has produced four offspring, Roman Catholics (Thyatira), Main Line Protestants (Sardis), Evangelicals (Philadelphia) and the Apostate Church (Laodicea). All are alive on Earth today.

TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA (REV. 2:18-29)

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

Thyatira means continual sacrifice. (In the Catholic Church, the Lord is still on the cross, and Catholics believe that the communion wafer becomes His actual body and blood as it's consumed.) It's the first letter with a future in view, which led me to the conclusion that the earlier three churches are gone. It's also the first whose members are divided into two categories, the saved and the unsaved.

(Title) These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

It couldn't be clearer. While born of the Virgin, the One speaking to them with fire in His eyes is to be addressed as the Son of God, not the son of Mary.

(Commendation) I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

The Catholic Church is known for its efforts in bringing mercy and compassion, as well as the Gospel, to God's children.

(Criticism) Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling.

The title "Queen of Heaven" by which many Catholics refer to Mary, was first used of Semeramis, wife of Nimrod the founder of Babylon, and mother of Tammuz. Semeramis declared herself a goddess, claimed that Tammuz was born of a supernatural conception involving the Sun god, and began the first counterfeit religion, a mother-child cult.

According to legend, while out hunting one day Tammuz was killed by a wild animal. Semeramis mourned for 40 days at the end of which Tammuz was raised from the dead. She formed a celibate priesthood to commemorate this and named a chief priest who she declared to be infallible. The 40 day mourning (now called Lent), the Yule log, evergreen tree, mistletoe and hot cross buns were all used in the rituals they instituted, and the mother-child cult was born.

Later the Romans adapted these to the death and re-birth of the Sun at the winter solstice, but in the 4th century the traditions surrounding Semeramis and Tammuz were attributed to Mary and Jesus and came almost unchanged into Catholicism, where they remain to this day.

Semeramis is symbolically called Jezebel in the letter, leading people away from the truth into idolatry. But the real Jezebel is also in view here. She was a daughter of the King of Phoenicia, a pagan princess best known for her advice to her Israelite husband King Ahab on how to obtain a vineyard he wanted. She brought trumped up charges against the vineyard's owner, hired witnesses to bear false testimony, and had him convicted and executed. Then she confiscated the vineyard in the name of the King (**1 Kings 21:1-16**). Centuries later the Catholic Church would obtain much of its wealth in the same way. Fortunes beyond measure were gained during these inquisitions.

Jezebel was also the patron of the 450 prophets of Baal who Elijah slew on Mt. Carmel. The Lord views idolatry as infidelity and Jezebel had encouraged the worship of Baal, leading the people into spiritual adultery. The many saints to whom some Catholics pray, and the sacramental works they must perform to attain and keep their salvation are not scriptural and deny the sufficiency of the cross. For these reasons the Catholic Church is often called the "plus religion." Jesus plus Mary. Grace plus works. The Scripture plus tradition. This giving of credit for the works of God to others is an example of spiritual adultery that endures today.

(Admonition) So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

Those who insist upon being judged by their works will be granted their wish. Sadly the emphasis on these religious works has clouded the true message of the gospel to the extent that some life-long Catholics never come to know the Lord on a personal basis. He will judge them according to the motives of their hearts. Are their good works performed out of gratitude for the free gift of salvation He offers, or they done in a futile effort to earn it on their own?

(Call) Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come.

Others will have seen through the layers of traditions and works and saints and rituals and found the face of the Lord looking back at them. Those who do and cling tenaciously to Him will have their reward.

(Promise) To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery— just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star.

They'll join Him on His throne as co-regent of the universe, the Bride of Christ, His beloved church.

We're not in the Church because of the pew we occupy, or the name over the door, or the good works we do. We're in the church because we've believed by faith that

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. (**1 Cor 15:3-4**)

(Challenge) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

There's a little bit of Thyatira in all of us. Even after we're saved by Grace, we all have our lists of do's and don'ts. We derive our self- image as a believer from our adherence to this list, often judging others by how well they keep our commandments. When we fail, we fall back on God's grace, but we don't really feel good about ourselves until we're obeying our list again. We forget that grace plus works equals works. The two are like oil and water, they don't mix.

To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (**Romans 4:5**)

The only negative experience we had in our entire visit to the sites of the seven churches in Turkey took place in Thyatira, called Akhisar today. After a friendly and helpful guard opened the site where the church once stood for us and gave us material that explained what we were looking at, we left to find some lunch thinking how pleasant our time there had been. Down the street, we spotted an open-air shop where a vendor was selling the barbecued chicken sandwiches that are so popular in Turkey, and that we had come to enjoy as well.

Waiting for our sandwiches, we were approached by a man who appeared to hold some position of authority. His manner was most unfriendly, and his questions conveyed an air of suspicion. We left there quickly wondering if he was a policeman, a government agent, or an official from a religion unfriendly to Christians. Driving away we also discovered our food was not edible. The chicken was bad, as if the innards hadn't been removed before cooking, and the bread was stale. Re-reading the letter to Thyatira we were struck by the contrasts between good and evil, in the letter and in our visit.

Revelation 3

SEVEN LETTERS TO SEVEN CHURCHES PART 2

TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS (REV. 3:1-6)

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

Sardis means remnant. As He did in the Letter to Thyatira, the Lord will distinguish between the lost and the saved (the remnant) in Sardis. The church in Sardis represents the Protestant Reformation. When Luther and others led the way out of Catholicism, it was in search of truth. The Catholic leadership had distorted God’s word into something it was never intended to be, adding to the Scriptures and imposing heavy spiritual burdens on their followers.

The call of the reformation was “Sola fides (only through faith), sola gratia (Only by grace), solus Christus (only with Christ), and sola Scriptura (Only His Word).”

(Title) These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.

The Lord reminds the Church in Sardis just Who is writing to them. He is the Giver of the Holy Spirit, and the Guardian of the angel who shepherds them.

(Criticism) I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.

Jesus told the woman at the well,

“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” **(John 4:24)**

In their quest for the truth, the Protestant reformers neglected the things of the Spirit and for several hundred years almost never heard the rustlings of the Ruach Elohim (Spirit of God) in their midst. When the Great Awakening of the late 1800's and early 1900's brought the Gifts of the Spirit into the open again main line protestants denied their legitimacy. This caused many to leave the main line denominations, giving birth first to the Pentecostal and then the Charismatic movements.

(Admonition) Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God.

When the German School of Higher Criticism invaded protestant seminaries with its godless theories about the “real” authorship of the Bible and the Modern Rationalists they spawned explained away its miracles, there was no Spiritual discernment to resist them. And so, having earlier rejected the Spirit, they now lost the Truth as well.

(Call) Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.

As is the case in the Catholic church, there remains but a remnant of denominational protestants who are saved. The rest, having worked so hard to make God small enough to fit in their minds, now find Him too small to meet their needs. They will be among the most surprised to find themselves left behind as End Times events unfold. (Notice, the Lord doesn't promise to come for them, as in the rapture, but to them.)

(Promise) He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.

But to the believing remnant He will give the white robes of the righteousness that comes by faith, and will be pleased to introduce them to His Father as members of God's Forever Family.

(Challenge) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

There are two extremes in Christianity today. The dead orthodoxy of main line Protestantism, who can't hear the Spirit and whose watered down gospel is powerless to save, is on one end of the spectrum. The "zeal without knowledge" of Charismatics who all too often ignore the admonitions of His word and permit the most outrageous excesses of spiritualism, is on the other. We're told to worship God in spirit and in truth, but too great a focus on either can cause the loss of both.

The most significant site in Sardis today is the huge abandoned synagogue and gymnasium (school). As I stood there I was reminded how the protestant church has abandoned its Jewish roots and ignores the Old Testament, even doubting its veracity. Having learned what the Lord did from their New Testament but not understanding why He did it because they've never read the Old, they've lost the last of the meaning that once validated their theology. It's become form without substance.

These two children defined Christianity until the 1800's when the Lord again did a remarkable thing and the Church was born again in the 3rd child of Pergamus.

The letters to the churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea will bring our study on the Seven Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation 2 and 3 to a conclusion.

TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA (REV. 3:7-13)

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: Philadelphia means brotherly love.

In the chronicle of church history, Philadelphia represents the evangelical church born in the 1800's during the 2nd Great Awakening. (The first took place about 100 years earlier primarily in the Northern colonies.)

For centuries scholars had taught an allegorical interpretation of scripture, especially prophecy, but in the mid 1800's the rank and file was energized by a return to the literal interpretation. The pre-tribulation rapture and 1000 year reign of the Lord on Earth, views that were prevalent during the 1st century but abandoned with the allegorical interpretation were once again popular. The church was born again.

(Title) These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

Jesus is the Messiah who holds the keys to the Davidic Kingdom. He alone has the authority to grant and refuse entry.

(Commendation) I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

The open door is the one through which John will enter heaven in chapter 4 to stand before the Throne of God, a type of the Rapture. The Church in Philadelphia, receiving

no criticism, is also granted admission. This is symbolic of the fact that for those saved by grace through faith, it's as if they've never committed a single sin.

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God (**2 Cor. 5:21**)

In the 1st Century Philadelphia, like other gentile churches of the day, was beset by "Judiazers." They insisted that before a Gentile could become a Christian, he had to become a Jew and keep the law. They'll be forced to admit that the path to Christianity did not lie through Judaism, but went straight to the foot of the cross.

In the latter days, the advocates of Replacement Theology (those believing the church has replaced Israel) and other groups claiming Israel's inheritance as the favored children of God, will also be required to bow down before the true church and admit the error of their ways.

(Admonition) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

This the Lord's promise of a pre-trib rapture. The Greek word translated "from" in this passage literally means "out of altogether" and excludes us from the time, place, and cause of the end times judgments. Only one "hour of trial" is prophesied to be world-wide, and only one is designed for the Earth dwellers. It's the Great Tribulation. Throughout the balance of Revelation the church is referred to as those who dwell in Heaven.

(Call) I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.

Here's one of those places that distinguishes the free gift of salvation from the crowns we'll earn as prizes for things we do in the Lord's name out of gratitude for His gift. One of those crowns is reserved for those who long for His appearing (**2 Tim. 4:8**) and that describes the attitude of the Church in Philadelphia perfectly.

The Greek word translated soon in the NIV actually means speedily. When He comes, He'll come suddenly, without warning. Don't let anyone talk you out of the promise of His coming. Don't lose hope!

(Challenge) Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name.

Who is it that overcomes the world, John asks? Only those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God. (**1 John 5:5**) Through out the seven letters, the overcomers are those who resist the additions and deletions mankind has made to the Lord's salvation equation and remain steadfast in the belief that we're saved by grace alone.

The New Jerusalem is the home of the church. Nothing impure can ever enter it, only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life. (**Rev. 21:27**) With all that identification, there will be no doubt as to who is authorized to live there.

(Promise) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Once again we're admonished to stick to the basics of the Gospel. Keep to His Word. Don't deny His name. Hold on to your convictions. Keep looking up.

It was a clear and beautiful day when we arrived in Philadelphia, modern Alashehir, just after lunch. Perfect timing, I thought, since historical sites in Turkey often close at 3:00 PM. We spotted the signs pointing the way to the church site and arrived without difficulty about 1:30. It was a quiet neighborhood and the site itself was like a park, green and clean.

The sign on the gate told us we were there during visiting hours and, like the other sites we had visited, there was a little office for collecting fees and distributing literature. The

door was open and we entered the site. But unlike every other place, though we stayed for almost an hour, we saw neither visitor nor employee. It was as if everyone from the Church in Philadelphia had disappeared, just like the Lord promised.

TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA (REV. 3:14-22)

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

Laodicea means “the people rule.” The Laodicean church represents the apostate church at the end of the age. Many in the New Age and Emergent Church movements are part of this church.

(Title) These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.

He’s letting them know that they don’t rule the church, He does.

(Criticism) I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

The church in Laodicea receives no commendation, only this criticism, rich in symbolic sarcasm. Laodicea got its water from nearby Heiropolis, a hot spring resort that still flourishes today, now called Pamukkale. The water came across the valley in an open aqueduct. Having begun its journey fresh from the hot springs, it was luke warm by the time it arrived. Too cool to be used for cleaning or bathing, and too warm to be refreshing, it was unfit for use until it could be either heated up or cooled down.

The fire of the Spirit had gone from the Church in Laodicea leaving its members engaged in “form without substance” ritual. Not that they minded. They were happy as

clams with their no commitment, no responsibility religion. So it is in much of the emergent church today. They look like a church and do some things that a church does, but you won't detect the power of the Holy Spirit there and the gospel of our salvation is only obvious by its absence. Even though their congregations are often large and well financed, their spiritual condition is one of poverty.

(Admonition) I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

Laodicea was a prosperous regional banking center, also famous for a rich black wool cloth its residents produced, and a soothing salve that helped reduce the painful effects of eye strain caused by astigmatism. They were rich in the worldly sense but poor in the things of the Spirit, thought themselves well dressed in their shiny black wool, but lacking the white robes of righteousness they were actually naked, able to see all the opportunities for worldly gain, but in need of a healthy dose of the Lord's eye salve to restore their eternal perspective. Sound like anyone you know? The Church of Laodicea is alive and prospering in the 21st Century.

(Call) Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

Often called the great evangelistic call, this passage screams out one extraordinary fact. The Lord's standing outside! He's knocking on the door trying to get in, hoping (dare I say praying?) that someone, anyone, will hear His voice and invite Him in. If they do, He'll say, "Better change your mind about your need for a savior. Time's about up."

(Challenge) To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.

Right up until the time of the Rapture, anyone in the Church of Laodicea can recognize his or her need for a savior and look to the Lord for salvation. And even if it makes them the very last member of the Body of Christ they'll receive full rights and privileges. The

number's almost complete. If you're a Laodicean reading this, you just may be the one we're all waiting for.

(Promise) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

There's a bit of the Laodicean in all of us. Some part of the Word we're lukewarm about, some area of our life where we think we're self-sufficient, some sin we've blinded ourselves to. Let's get right about it while there's time.

As we stood beside the Greek amphitheater that morning (Laodicea has both Greek and Roman amphitheaters) it was clear that the Laodiceans did not hear the Lord knocking at their door. What remained of the church was but an empty shell.

LET'S GET PERSONAL

As you sit in your seat each Sunday, regardless of the sign on the church door, you're joined by folks from Thyatira. They're the ones who add to the Gospel: Jesus plus someone or something else, grace plus works, scripture plus tradition. There are also some from Sardis. They subtract from the Gospel. “You don't need to be born again, just join the church, give some time and money, you'll be fine.” And then there's the group from Laodicea. “Jesus was a great man and teacher, and lived a life of such gentleness and grace that it's ALMOST as if he was God. Just love everybody like he did. The good life you live is an obvious sign of your favor with God, and everyone knows there's no real heaven, I mean come on.”

But if you know you're a sinner and have given your heart to Jesus because He gave His life for you, then you're from Philadelphia. There may be some others there with you, but you'll never really know for sure how many till you all vanish together some day soon. And don't be surprised when you're joined by some who're Catholic, some who're Protestant, some conservatives, some liberals, and even some who didn't appear to

attend any church at all. After all it's not what you say you are, but what you believe in your heart that matters.

Revelation 4

THE THRONE IN HEAVEN

After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." (Rev. 4:1)

Having reviewed the things that have been (**Rev. 1**) and the things that are (**Rev. 2-3**), we have now arrived at part three of the book, the things that will be after this. John looked up and saw an open door, the one he had first heard about when he wrote down the letter to the Church in Philadelphia. And just like Paul said would happen to us (**1 Thes. 4:16**) he heard a loud command, "Come up here!"

At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. (Rev. 4:2-3)

In the twinkling of an eye, John was catapulted forward in time to the day we all dream of, the Rapture of the Church. Since he was traveling through time, he had to have what

we call an out of body experience, because he wasn't given a resurrection body, like we will be, and would soon be going back. He called it being in the spirit.

The same thing had happened to Paul about 40 years earlier, when he also was taken to the Throne of God (**2 Cor. 12:1-4**). Paul wasn't allowed to tell about it, but its memory provided more than enough motivation for him to withstand the severest forms of persecution and suffering. Unlike Paul, John was told to record everything he saw. The Jasper and Carnelian he saw are the first and last stones on the High Priest's breastplate and may summarize them all, and the rainbow is a symbol of God's mercy.

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.(Rev. 4:4)

These 24 elders confuse some people, but they shouldn't. Their appearance gives them away. They have thrones, so they're rulers. They surround the Throne of God, so they're assisting Him. They're seated, a sign of royalty. They're dressed in white, so they're righteous. They're wearing the Greek "stephanos" crown, so they're victors, over comers. They're called Elders, a title long associated with Christianity. So far we have a pretty strong case for them representing the Church. But there's more.

Some try to explain the 24 thrones by saying that they belong to a group of ruling angels. But four Prophets saw the throne of God and recorded their experience. They were Isaiah (**Isaiah 6**), Ezekiel (**Ezek. 1 & 10**), Daniel (**Dan. 7**), and John (**Rev. 4**). In their descriptions, neither Isaiah nor Ezekiel made any mention of the 24 elders indicating that they weren't present in Old Testament times. Daniel's vision concerned the End Times and in **Dan. 7:9** he mentioned multiple thrones but didn't add any details as to the number or type of occupants. This is consistent with the fact that the Church was hidden to Old Testament prophets even in visions of the future. Only John made mention of the 24 Elders. And note that these elders are wearing the crowns of over comers. The Church won't receive crowns until the Bema Seat judgment that takes place after the Rapture.

The New Testament contains additional support for the 24 elders representing the Church. In **John 1:12** we're told that because we believe in Jesus we've been given the authority to become children of God. **Romans 8:29** says that when God foreknew we would believe, He predestined us to be conformed to the likeness of His Son so He could be the first of many brothers. In **Galatians 4:4-7** we read that since we're sons of God we're also heirs, joint heirs with Jesus. **Romans 8:16-17** confirms this.

Hebrews 2:7 makes the point that Jesus was temporarily made lower than the angels, becoming a man to save mankind. Having done so, He was crowned with glory and honor and everything was put under His feet. **Ephes 1:20-22** agrees, saying that when He was resurrected Jesus ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of majesty, far above every other rule and authority, power and dominion and every title that can be given. And finally **Ephes 2:6-7** says we've been seated there too, right beside Him. Since the 24 elders are missing from every Old Testament view of the Throne of God, they must represent the Church, seated with the Lord at the right hand of Majesty.

And there's still more. Through out the Bible there are a number of "peak-to-peak" prophecies, as Clarence Larkin began calling them over 100 years ago. They take in the first and second comings in a single passage, sometimes in a single sentence. He likened them to mountain peaks seen from a distance, between which is a valley. The observer sees the two peaks, but the valley between them is hidden from view. So it is with distant prophecies. The prophet records God's messages but can't always determine the span of time that separates them. One of the best known is **Isaiah 9:6-7**.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice

and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Of this entire prophecy, only the first half of the first sentence has actually been fulfilled. The Child was born and the Son was given. The rest awaits the 2nd Coming, leaving a span of time between the giving of the Son and His assumption of world government.

Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy contains a similar gap between verse 26, where the people of the ruler who will come destroy the city and the sanctuary, and verse 27 where the ruler himself confirms a covenant with Israel.

And the same is true of **Isaiah 61:1-3**.

The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion—to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor.

Jesus quoted from this passage at the beginning of His ministry in Nazareth, but stopped at the comma following “the year of the Lord's favor.” (**Luke 4:18-19**) The rest of the prophecy describes the Great Tribulation and Kingdom age yet to come.

Each of these prophecies contains a hidden span of time that lasts from the 1st Coming to the 2nd like an otherwise complete puzzle with one piece missing. The Church Age is always the missing piece. These three are but a sample of Larkin's “peak to peak” prophecies. Some claim to have found a total of 24 of prophecies like this, each with a gap where the Church fits, the same number as the elders surrounding God's Throne.

From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. (Rev. 4:5)

Literally, this is the seven-fold Spirit of God, an Old Testament idiom for the Holy Spirit. The sea of glass was characterized on Earth by the bronze laver or wash-basin that stood outside the Holy Place. It symbolizes God's Word. On Earth we wash in His Word (**Ephesians 5:26**). In Heaven we "stand on it." (Remember the old hymn "Standing on the Promises"?)

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." (Rev. 4:6-8)

These are the four cherubim who guard the throne of God. In the beginning there were five, but their leader betrayed both them and his trust, rebelling against God and causing the introduction of a second will in the universe. We call him by his primary activity, Satan, (it means accuser in Hebrew) but in **Ezekiel 28:14** he's called "the anointed cherub." The Hebrew from **Isaiah 14:12** gives us his name, "Helel ben Shachar" the shining one, son of the dawn. When the Bible was translated into Latin in the 4th Century this phrase was rendered as Lucifer, which means light bearer, and early English translations kept the name. He is not the Morning Star, as some modern versions incorrectly state. That's a title the Lord Jesus uses only of Himself (**Rev. 22:16**).

Ezekiel's vision of God's Throne showed each cherub with four faces, Isaiah doesn't describe their faces at all and John gives them each only one, but whether on one or all

four, the faces are the same. A lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. They can be likened to the ensigns of the four camps of Israel.

THE FOUR CAMPS

When the Jews camped in the wilderness after leaving Egypt, they were instructed to set up in 4 sub-camps, one for each point of the compass with the tabernacle in the center. The first was called the Camp of Judah and included Issachar and Zebulun. Members of those 3 tribes would look for the ensign of Judah, a flag with a large lion embroidered on it, to locate their campground. It was always due east of the tabernacle. The second camp was called Ephraim and included Manasseh and Benjamin and was positioned opposite to the west. Ephraim's flag depicted the figure of an ox. The third camp was headed by Reuben and included Simeon and Gad. Reuben's flag showed the face of a man. They were located south of the tabernacle. The fourth camp was that of Dan with Asher and Napthali included and was located on the North. Dan's flag pictured a large eagle.

Looking down from above God would see the camp of Israel with the tabernacle in the Center and the 4 sub-camps around it. The large flag waving in the East pictured the Lion, and opposite it was the Ox. To the south was the face of a Man and opposite it was the Eagle. Was God modeling His throne in the Camp of Israel with the four flags representing the four faces of the cherubim?

THE FOUR GOSPELS

Some also see the four gospels symbolized in the four faces, the Lion for Matthew, the Ox, being a beast of service, for Mark, the Man for Luke and the Eagle, a symbol of royalty, for John.

Matthew was written to the Jews. His purpose was to demonstrate who Jesus was; presenting overwhelming evidence that Jesus was Israel's long awaited Messiah: The Lion of Judah. The genealogy in Matthew begins with Abraham and runs through King David (**Matt 1:1-17**). The most frequently used phrase in Matthew's Gospel is "it was fulfilled." There are more references to events foretold in Old Testament prophecy and fulfilled in the Life of Jesus in Matthew than in any other gospel account. Partial copies discovered in the caves at Qumran suggest that Matthew may have originally been written in Hebrew. The first miracle, the cleansing of a leper, was highly symbolic for Israel. Leprosy was viewed as a punishment for sin, and cleansing a leper signified taking away the sin of the nation. Matthew's gospel ends with the resurrection signifying God's promise that David's Kingdom would last forever.

Mark's gospel is actually Peter's account and was written to the Romans. His purpose was to portray Jesus as the obedient servant of God. Since no one cares about the heritage of a servant there is no genealogy in Mark. The most frequently used phrase in Mark's Gospel is "straight away" sometimes translated immediately, so Mark is called the snapshot gospel, giving us picture after picture of Jesus in action. The first miracle is the casting out of a demon, demonstrating that the God whom Jesus served was superior to all other gods, a matter of great importance in Rome's polytheistic society. Mark's gospel ends with the ascension, signifying that the servant's job was finished and He was returning home.

Luke's account portrays Jesus as the Son of Man, a title Jesus often used of Himself, and was written to the Greeks. It presents the human side of Jesus and emphasizes his teaching. Greeks were famous for their story telling form of oratory, so the most frequent phrase in Luke is "and it came to pass." Most movies of the life of Jesus rely primarily on Luke's gospel because of its flowing narrative form. Luke's genealogy traces Jesus all the way back to Adam, the first man (**Luke 3:21-38**). Since the Greeks, like the Romans, were a polytheistic society, Luke used the casting out of a demon as his first miracle, and ended his gospel with the promise of the Holy Spirit, uniting man with God.

John wrote to the church describing how Jesus felt about peoples' reaction to His ministry. His gospel is the most unique, based upon 7 miracles, 7 "I Am" statements and 7 discourses. John pays little attention to chronology, sometimes placing events out of order (like the Temple cleansing in Chapter 2) for their effect in presenting Jesus as the Son of God. John's gospel covers only about 21 days out of the Lord's 3 ½ year ministry. 10 chapters are devoted to one week and 1/3 of all the verses in John describe one day. His genealogy begins before time and identifies Jesus as the Eternal One Who was with God and Who was God (**John 1:1-2**). The most frequently used phrase in John is "Verily, verily", or truly, truly. His first miracle was changing water into wine, an act of enormous symbolism by which He "revealed His Glory and His disciples put their faith in Him" (**John 2:11**). John's Gospel ends with the promise of the 2nd Coming.

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:
"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."**(Rev. 4:9-11)**

Another hint as to the identity of the 24 elders. Reading it always calls to mind the words of the old hymn I sang as a boy, "Holy, Holy, Holy," particularly the verse that goes "casting down their golden crowns upon the glassy sea." It's author, Reginald Heber, was an Anglican clergyman. He was writing about the Church.

Revelation 5

THE SCROLL AND THE LAMB

Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. (Rev 5:1-4)

This scroll has been called the title deed to planet Earth. Scrolls normally had writing on one side only, but in a few cases the Lord writes on both sides. When He does it indicates that there’s a judgment coming.

In **Ezekiel 2** a scroll with writing on both sides meant that Israel was about to be judged, and Ezekiel was being chosen to bring the news to the other captives in Babylon that soon the whole nation would be joining them for a 70 year stay. In **Zechariah 5**, a flying scroll the same size as the tabernacle’s Holy Place warned that those who failed to keep the Law would be banished from God’s presence and their homes destroyed. Although this scroll mentioned only the commandment against theft on one side and only the one against false witness on the other, the fact that one was in the middle of the first stone tablet and the other was in the middle of the second one leads scholars to believe that they represent all 10 Commandments.

The reason John wept so bitterly is because he knew what was at stake here. Only someone who could redeem Planet Earth and return it to its rightful owner would be

able to open the scroll, and no one could be found. Not in Heaven, not on Earth, not under the Earth. Without a qualified redeemer Earth would be lost for all eternity.

Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. (Rev. 5:5-6)

There is someone worthy to open the scroll, after all! The fact that the word Lamb is capitalized here means that this is The Lamb of God from **John 1:29** who takes away the sin of the world. He’s also the Lion of Judah from **Genesis 49:9-10** and the Root of David from **Isaiah 11:1-3**.

John described Him as a Lamb looking as if it had been slain, so we know He’s still in human form, and still bears the scars of His crucifixion. Once Jesus agreed to become a man, He became a man forever. This Lamb is the giver of the Holy Spirit, confirming that it’s the Lord who has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals because He redeemed the planet at the same time He was saving us. (**Romans 8:19-21**)

I DIDN’T KNOW IT WAS LOST

How was the Earth lost in the first place? Some believe that in Eternity past, the one we call Satan was given the Earth as his kingdom. It was a gift in keeping with his stature as both the anointed cherub, in charge of the ones who guard the very Throne of God, and Worship Leader in the heavenly realms as well. He truly was the light bearer then (Lucifer means light bearer in Latin) adorned with every precious stone with a voice like a pipe organ. He was the model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty, the ultimate created being (**Ezekiel 28:11-14**).

But puffed up in the arrogance of self love and pride, he rebelled and was driven out in disgrace, his positions and his possessions taken from him, his kingdom laid waste (**Ezek. 28:15-17**). He sat there amidst the ruin for who knows how long, powerless to do anything, until God said, "Let there be light," and all the angels shouted for joy. (**Job 38:7**)

When God created Adam five days later and gave him dominion over the Earth, Satan conspired to get it back. Indwelling a serpent, he tricked Adam and Eve out of their land, gaining back through deception that which he had lost through rebellion. In the process he had also divested Adam and Eve of their immortality, causing their deaths and the deaths of all their children (**Genesis 2:16-17**). He immediately set about to rebuild his kingdom, becoming the prince of this world (**John 12:31**) and the god of this age (**2 Cor. 4:4**).

God's law requires that a next of kin redeem that which a family member has lost (**Leviticus 25:25**). According to the law a son could redeem what his father had lost, but in the transaction Adam had become a sinner, disqualifying all of his sons from ever redeeming him. The coin of redemption was the blood of a sinless man, and all of Adam's sons were sinners, having been born in their father's likeness. (**Gen. 5:3**) Adam was a son of God (**Luke 3:38**) so only another son of God would suffice.

Since the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons (**Exod. 20:5**) a woman could give birth to a sinless man, but only if she could do so without the aid of a husband. Thus, in the garden God announced that the seed of the woman would redeem what Satan had stolen, (**Gen 3:15**) a prophecy of the virgin birth.

In due time, the Son of God, born of a virgin, gave His life to pay mankind's debt of sin and redeem Adam's stolen property, Planet Earth. All God (sinless) and all human (man), He is the only One in creation worthy to take the scroll and open its seals.

As Adam's Kinsman Redeemer, He paid the debt of sin owed by Adam's progeny and redeemed the property that Adam lost as well. Now He's come to take possession of

that which He's paid for. Since the next of kin was also responsible for avenging the death of a family member, He also comes as Adam's Avenger of Blood (**Numbers 35:16-21**), and that's one of the reasons why the rest of this book is the story of great judgments.

He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And then he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men (**us**) for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them (**us**) to be a kingdom (**kings**) and priests to serve our God, and they (**we**) will reign on the earth." **Rev. 5:7-10** -

I've placed the more accurate translations of this passage in parentheses. The Greek word used here is a first person pronoun, the plural of me. It appears 173 times in the Bible as us and we, never as third person words like men or them or they. Also the Greek language uses the same word for king and kingdom, so you have to decide which one to use from the context. Kings fits better than kingdom. All my substitutions are consistent with the KJV translation.

Some of the modern translations take either the post trib or a-millennial view or both and are therefore reluctant to show the raptured church in Heaven in **Revelation 5**. Instead, by changing the passage to the third person, they have the 24 elders sing about the church as if we're still on earth. But it doesn't work. The 24 elders are the church. This is a song for the redeemed and only the church can sing it. The King James version is correct.

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped. (**Rev. 5:11-14**)

The powerful work done by George Frederic Handel in setting these words to music in his “Messiah” will pale into insignificance when compared to this angelic choir. No one knows just how big this choir is. Ten thousand was the largest number in use in those days. Writing today John might have used “millions and millions” just as easily.

C.H. Spurgeon wrote that the Greek word translated all (or every) had seven or eight different uses, and only on rare cases did any of them literally mean each and every one. More likely John meant that every classification of mankind was represented, the rich, the poor, the free, the enslaved, the Jew, the Gentile, etc. These were joined by the animals on land, the birds in the air, the fish of the sea, and even those in the underworld, who though they rebelled and await their judgment in chains, recognize the authority of The Christ. (**James 2:19**)

Like the four living creatures, I can only add, “Amen!”

Revelation 6

Now I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, “Come!” and I looked, and behold, a white horse! And its rider had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he came out conquering, and to conquer. (**Rev 6:1-2**)

The first of the seven seals will be broken early in the 70th week of Daniel, soon after the church has disappeared. Liberal scholars often identify the rider of the white horse as the Lord Jesus, pointing to his crown and the fact that he’s a conqueror. I think some part of their conclusion comes from watching all those TV westerns as kids, where the good guys always rode white horses. I say that because this rider is most definitely not Jesus. He’s the anti-Christ.

WHAT MAKES YOU THINK SO?

In the first place he carries a bow. The Lord’s weapon of choice is a sword. The reason he has no arrows is that he won’t use force to make his initial impact on Earth. He comes as a peacemaker (**Daniel 8:25**). Since the Book of Revelation is filled with symbolism explained elsewhere in the Bible, I looked for a reference to a man with a bow, hoping to get an additional clue to this rider’s identity. I found it in **Genesis 21:20**, referring to Ishmael as an archer. It’s the Bible’s first mention of a man with a bow. Earlier God said Ishmael would be a wild donkey of a man with his hand against everyone (**Genesis 16:12**).

As details of Islamic eschatology become more widely known, prophecy students are discovering a striking similarity between descriptions of al Mahdi, a Messianic figure from the Shiite tradition, and a figure Christians call the anti-Christ. (Please note that I'm not saying al Mahdi is the Moslem anti-Christ, called the Dajjal, but that he resembles the Christian anti-Christ.) Both come on the scene during a time of great turmoil on Earth, both come claiming a desire to restore peace, both have a seven year reign, both head a one world religion and one world government, both claim supernatural origins, and both reigns end in a battle between good and evil that brings about Earth's final judgment.

The number of similarities between the two defies coincidence and continues to grow as knowledge of al Mahdi increases. Now with the connection between the Bible's first archer and the man with a bow in **Rev. 6**, another piece of the puzzle may have fallen into place. Mohammed was descended from Kedar, second son of Ishmael, and Al Mahdi is the 12th Iman, descended from Mohammed. So he's another son of Ishmael.

After the true Church is gone, those who also call themselves the church, but have been left behind, won't have much trouble at all accepting Islam. They are already convinced that Islam is a religion of peace, and that Allah is another name for the God of the Bible. And like Paul said, the anti-Christ's display of "miraculous power" will be all it takes to deceive the whole world. Having refused to believe the truth they'll be fair game for the lie (**2 Thes.2:9-10**).

GOT ANYTHING ELSE?

In the second place this guy's wearing the wrong kind of crown. The Greek word for a king's crown is diadem. But the rider on the white horse wears a stephanos, or victor's crown. It was the award given to winners in the ancient Olympics and other public games. It was typically an ivy wreath, and in fact the word stephanos comes from a root meaning wreath. It identifies the wearer as a conqueror, but not as royalty. And in **Revelation 13** where the Great Tribulation begins, we're told that He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them.

And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. (Rev. 13:7)

Why would Jesus make war with the tribulation saints to conquer them? Like I said, while he fools people into thinking he's the Christ, he's really the anti-Christ.

When he opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" And out came another horse, bright red. Its rider was permitted to take peace from the earth, so that men should slay one another, and he was given a great sword. (Rev. 6:3-4)

This is the point at which the anti-Christ turns to war to establish his authority over human governments and move the world toward his religion. The Moslem prophecies say this will be Islam, of course, and the Koran teaches conversion or death as the only alternatives available to "non-believers". Current studies speculate that Europe, far into its post Christian era, may already be on the verge of yielding to the growing Moslem influence, but other parts of the world will resist, causing much bloodshed.

IF YOU THINK THIS IS BAD ...

Historically, the great sword held by the rider on the red horse was a long two-handed weapon wielded by mighty warriors who received double the average soldier's wage. With overwhelming strength they hacked their way through enemy lines, leaving a gaping hole for the regular troops who followed. In just this way the anti-Christ will use supernatural power to tighten his grip on the world, enforcing his will upon the people of Earth. And remember, the Seal judgments are just the beginning of Daniel's 70th week. The last half, called the Great Tribulation, is still to come and will be significantly more deadly.

When he opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" And I looked, and behold, a black horse! And its rider had a pair of scales in his hand. And I heard what seemed to be a voice in the midst

of the four living creatures, saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not harm the oil and wine!” (**Rev 6:5-6**)

Two things result when the world is plunged into uncertainty and wars erupt. First comes inflation, causing the prices of everything to skyrocket. When John wrote this, a denarius was the average pay for a day’s work, and that’s what it will cost to buy enough food for one day. Think of it. For many, a whole days wages will barely buy their food for that day. The next day it starts all over again. No money left for anything else.

Of course, the wealthy always benefit from inflation. When they see it coming, they’re able to convert their wealth into things that are either inflation proof, or actually increase in value during periods of inflation. The earliest example of this is comes from the Book of Genesis, when Joseph, who gained control of the world’s wheat supply on Pharaoh’s behalf, eventually acquired the entire wealth of Egypt in exchange for it. That’s what John meant by not harming the oil and wine, commodities that in his day were symbols of wealth. The vision he saw was famine amidst plenty. Both the Book of Daniel and the Moslem prophecies speak of the anti-Christ/al Mahdi showering lavish gifts on his followers while forcing his enemies into submission. (**Daniel 11:39**)

When he opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” And I looked, and behold, a pale horse! And its rider’s name was Death, and Hades followed him. And they were given authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by wild beasts of the earth. (**Rev. 6:7-8**)

The second result of war is famine and pestilence. Crops and food processing facilities are destroyed. Transportation networks are disrupted. Dead bodies are left where they fall and public health systems break down. Mass starvation and rampant disease often claim more victims than the battles that caused them. Animals become desperate for food and attack humans.

Some think the phrase “a fourth of the Earth” relates to geography and some think it describes the number of people involved. Either way, many will suffer and die during this time, while those not in the direct path of war will enjoy a false sense of peace and prosperity.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. (**Rev. 6:9-11**)

Just as the church has a fixed number to achieve before its time on Earth is fulfilled (**Romans 11:25**) so it is for believers who’re martyred for their faith following the Church’s disappearance. I believe these are the first post-rapture believers, martyred for their faith in the anti-Christ’s quest for world dominance. Another large group will arrive in heaven soon after (**Rev. 7:9**) and through out the coming Great Tribulation untold numbers will be executed for the crime of believing in Jesus. They’ll all receive resurrection bodies at the time of the Second Coming (**Rev. 20:4**).

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

In Hebrew the word translated “kinsman redeemer” also means “avenger of blood.” The same next of kin who was responsible for buying a relative out of debt related servitude or redeeming his lost property, was also responsible for avenging physical attacks against a relative that resulted in death (**Numbers 35:18-19**). The tribulation martyrs are calling for enforcement of this law.

Our Lord Jesus is our Kinsman Redeemer, come to pay our debts and buy back that which our father Adam lost. But He's also our Avenger of Blood, responsible for bringing to justice the one who maliciously murdered our first parents and therefore all of us. Everyone who sides with Satan, called those who dwell on the Earth in Revelation, will share his punishment, just as we who side with the Lord, called those who dwell in heaven, will share His inheritance.

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale. The sky vanished like a scroll that is being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. (**Rev. 6:12-14**)

Some say this verse points to **Matt. 24:29** and say it proves the seal judgments are an overview of the entire 70th Week. But that can't be true. Although there are similarities between the two verses, they can't be the same. In **Rev. 6:17** below the Kings of the Earth say the time of wrath has begun, but **Matt. 24:29-31** describes the time just after the Great Tribulation ends. Also **Rev. 6:12-14** says the sun turns black and the moon blood red whereas in **Matt. 24:29** the Sun and Moon both go dark, meaning they give no light.

A careful reading of this verse shows that the darkening of the Sun and the Moon turning to blood can't be caused by an eclipse either. A Solar eclipse occurs when the Moon passes between the Sun and the Earth. This causes the Sun's light to go dim since a portion of it is blocked by the Moon. But the moon, being much smaller cannot make the entire Sun turn black as this verse requires.

A Lunar eclipse happens when the Earth passes between the Sun and the Moon. Here the intensity of the Sun's light is not altered, but being in the shadow of Earth the Moon can turn a dark red, depending on the density of particulates in the Earth's atmosphere. As you can see, either one of these conditions can be caused by an eclipse of some

sort, but no eclipse can cause both the Sun and Moon to be affected because it would require the Moon to be on both sides of the Earth at once.

A more likely cause would be a vast amount of particulates thrown into the atmosphere by the eruption of volcanoes or by massive fires on Earth caused by warfare.

Recently the magnetic North pole has begun drifting across Canada and is headed for Siberia. Also, the strength of the Earth's magnetic field has weakened noticeably, being about 10% weaker now than when scientists began measuring it in 1845. Based on these findings, some scientists are now convinced that a reversal of the Earth's magnetic poles is underway.

The Earth's magnetic field helps protect us against harmful rays from the sun, and a polar reversal could cause this field to temporarily collapse just like the water vapor canopy around the earth collapsed at the time of the Great Flood. That event brought violent weather and drastically shortened life spans.

The effects of a magnetic field collapse would be even more severe. According to some projections, the electromagnetic energy released from the sun during a polar reversal could cause Earth's upper atmosphere to "erupt in flames" if our magnetic field isn't there to deflect it. Was John referring to this in saying the sky vanished like a scroll being rolled up? No one knows. We can only imagine what a sudden reversal of magnetic poles would do to life on Earth. Predictions range all the way from a temporary increase in the frequency and severity of volcanic eruptions and earthquakes to a worldwide disaster of "Biblical proportions." The convergence of other prophetic timelines leads me to believe that the 6th Seal Judgment might very well be John's description of this coming dual Magnetic Polar Reversal.

Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free, hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the

throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev. 6:15-17)

It's no surprise that verse 15 is reminiscent of **Joshua 10:16**. Of the 404 verses in Revelation, 280 are taken from the Old Testament. As they hide, the kings of the Earth unknowingly utter a prophecy we should all read carefully. "The great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" This passage has always been associated with the beginning of God's wrath. The view that His wrath begins with the bowl judgments of **Revelation 16** is a newcomer to studies of prophecy, and is incorrect.

Next time we'll see the first group of 144,000 (there are two and they're not the same) the arrival of an enormous group of Tribulation martyrs in Heaven, the completion of the Seal Judgments, and the beginning of round two, the Trumpet Judgments.

Revelation 7

Between the 6th and 7th seals there's a pause where two important events take place, one on Earth and the other in Heaven. Both involve the disposition of a group of God's people, but neither one is the Church. It won't be mentioned again until the end of chapter 17.

144,000 SEALED

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God."

Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000. (**Rev.**

7:1-8)

The multiple use of the number four here emphasizes that the Creation is in focus, because by the end of the Fourth Day of Creation light had been distinguished from darkness, the atmosphere had been formed, the land had been separated from the water, vegetation had begun to grow and with the addition of the sun, moon, and stars, day had been divided from night. By the end of Day Four the Creation was complete and ready to support life, and so the number four is thought of as the number of Creation.

But the next cycle of judgments will be delayed until one other event takes place. This is the commissioning of the 144,000 Jewish believers who many believe will be the Lord's primary evangelists during the remainder of Daniel's 70th week. They carry the seal of God on their foreheads which makes them the only ones on Earth to be protected from the coming judgments. In **Ezekiel 9:4** we read of a similar case where before the City of Jerusalem was destroyed by the Babylonians, angels went through out, searching out and sealing the faithful to protect them from the destruction. Here the Lord again delays the coming judgments until His faithful can be sealed, but this time it's just a select few that He's chosen for His specific purpose. Everyone else on Earth will be at risk, whether believers or not.

After Jacob adopted Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh (**Genesis 48:5**), there were fourteen names to choose from in naming the tribes of Israel. But the Bible never lists more than 12 at a time, so sometimes the mix is different. The Levites received no land and never went to war, so they're often omitted. Joseph was also left out when Ephraim and Manasseh were included, since each of them received half of his tribal allotment as an inheritance. But the listing in **Rev. 7** is unique in that Levi and Joseph are included while Dan and Ephraim are not.

Most scholars believe that Dan was omitted because it was through the tribe of Dan that idolatry was introduced into the land after Solomon died (**1 Kings 12:28-30**). Jacob had prophesied in **Genesis 49:17** that:

Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward

hinting that Dan would be responsible for Israel's fall back into idolatry. There's a tradition that Dan was a ringleader in the kidnapping and sale of Joseph into slavery, and another one that the anti-Christ will come from the tribe of Dan, but neither one of these can be confirmed Biblically. For these or other reasons, no one from the tribe of Dan will receive God's protective seal. But God is merciful, and the faithful from the tribe of Dan will survive. We know this because at the beginning of the Kingdom Age when the land is redistributed, Dan's descendants will receive the first share. (**Ezekiel 48:1**)

Although Ephraim is not mentioned by name, his people are included since they make up the group called Joseph here. Remember, the tribe of Joseph was divided between Ephraim and Manasseh. Including Joseph and Manasseh in the list means the people from both halves of Joseph's tribe are sealed without mentioning Ephraim's name. **1 Kings 12:28-30** also tells us that a golden calf was set up in Bethel, in the land of Ephraim, in addition to the one in Dan. The Lord hates idolatry.

Efforts to spiritualize this passage into a group symbolic of all believers are a woefully inadequate attempt by replacement theology advocates to deprive Israel of its End Times role in God's redemptive plan. The passage is simply too clear to justify any interpretation other than a literal one.

And those who say the list can't be accurate because 10 tribes disappeared in 721 BC when the Northern Kingdom was scattered would do well to read **2 Chronicles 11:16**:

Those from every tribe of Israel who set their hearts on seeking the LORD, the God of Israel, followed the Levites to Jerusalem to offer sacrifices to the LORD, the God of their fathers.

Josephus reported that this migration caused a substantial increase in Jerusalem's population. God has always maintained a faithful remnant of His people.

Now we'll identify the other group, the one in Heaven.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE IN WHITE ROBES

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?"

I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (**Rev. 7:9-17**)

There are differing opinions as to who this multitude is. By their white robes and their declaration as to the Author of their salvation, everyone agrees that they're believers from Earth.

But the facts that 1) John, the disciple most closely associated with the Church, didn't recognize them, 2) their arrival in Heaven follows the Rapture by three chapters, and 3) their destiny is that of servants in the Temple and not co-regents of the Universe, mean they are post rapture believers and not part of the Church. They've been victims of the destruction on Earth during the Seal judgments and have paid the ultimate price for their new-found faith.

They're called Tribulation martyrs or Tribulation saints, but technically that's not accurate either, because the Great Tribulation hasn't begun yet. We're still in the first half of the 70th week. Remember, Daniels' 70th Week is a seven year period that begins in **Rev. 6**. The Great Tribulation is the second half of the 70th week and begins in **Rev. 13**.

How do we know that? The Greek word translated "**out of**" in the phrase "*these are they who have come **out of** the Great Tribulation*" is the same word that's translated "**from**" in **Rev 3:10** where the Lord promised the Church deliverance **from** the end times judgments.

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you **from** the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. According to The Strong's Concordance it's a primary preposition denoting origin. It means "from, or out of, the place, time, or cause" of a specified event.

So, like the Church, these saints have been removed from the place, the time, and the cause of the Great Tribulation. They didn't come to faith in time for the Rapture so they won't share in the Church's unique destiny and blessing. But most likely they'll finally be persuaded to believe by the Church's disappearance. They will be martyred early in the

70th week, and so will escape the worst of the end times judgments. Later on the living will envy the dead so much that they'll long for death, but death will elude them. (**Rev. 9:6**)

These saints will live a privileged existence in eternity, always in the presence of the Lord. They'll serve Him day and night in His Temple and will never want for anything. The Lord will spread His tent over them, meaning that He'll be personally responsible for their welfare. They'll neither hunger nor thirst, and the Lord will remove every regret from their minds, wiping every tear from their eyes.

But although they serve the Lord in His temple, they're never called priests, as the Church is. Neither will they ever sit on a throne at the side of their Beloved as examples of the incomparable riches of God's grace, expressed in His kindness to the Church, His work of art (**Ephes. 2:6-10**). They'll never share in His inheritance or be counted among the most favored group in all of Creation. When push came to shove they needed one final unmistakable sign that it was right to believe. Lacking the faith to accept what they could not see, they required evidence. That evidence came to them in the form of the Rapture of the Church, when those who believed by faith alone disappeared before their very eyes. Too late to be included in that incredible event, they will finally believe because of it.

As the Lord said to Thomas:

“Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” (**John 20:29**)

With the coming seventh seal, the Trumpet judgments are introduced. This second cycle of judgments will complete the first half of Daniel's 70th week and set the stage for the introduction of the anti-Christ and the Great Tribulation.

Revelation 8

The first cycle of judgments is ending. The 144,000 have been commissioned and a huge group of martyrs has arrived in Heaven. In many places on Earth war rages unchecked, with its attendant famine and pestilence, and yet in other places peace still prevails. Those lucky enough to enjoy it are fooled into thinking that soon the rest of the world will settle down too, and it'll be business as usual. Since the anti-Christ has not yet been revealed as Satan's man for Planet Earth, many still see him as a talented world leader doing his best to restore order, and despite the unprecedented death tolls and all the missing people, they still give him high ratings.

But in Heaven it's a different story, because God is about to unleash the 7 Trumpet judgments. It gives Him no pleasure to do this. But as bad as they were, the now concluding Seal Judgments simply weren't severe enough to turn man's stubborn heart back to Him. Alas, He knew it all along, but that doesn't make matters any easier. If only He didn't love them so much, He could just let them destroy each other. But while His righteousness demands justice, His love requires that He keep on trying to save them.

THE SEVENTH SEAL AND THE GOLDEN CENSER

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. (**Rev. 8:1-5**)

The half hour of silence fills Heaven with a sense of foreboding, as if all the angels are holding their breath, waiting for the Lord to act. The post-Rapture believers on Earth know what's coming too, and their urgent prayers come up before the Throne in a giant cloud of incense.

But the time for mercy ended with the Rapture. This is a time for justice and as the angel hurls fire from the altar, God announces the coming judgments in His traditional way, with thunder, lightning and earthquakes.

THE TRUMPETS

Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. (**Rev. 8:6-7**)

Reminiscent of the plagues of Egypt, the first judgment is upon the land. Fire breaks out over a third of the Earth, the acrid smoke from the grass and trees filling the skies above.

The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. (**Rev 8:8-9**)

This judgment appears to be a giant asteroid or meteor crashing into the Earth's oceans. This has happened to Earth hundreds of times in its history. The latest was on June 9, 2006 when a meteor slammed into Northern Norway with an impact force equal to the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima, Japan.

Astronomers are currently watching thousands of potentially hazardous asteroids (PHA) and Near Earth objects (NEO). As of now none are projected to collide with Earth but these scientists caution us that NEO's often appear suddenly and with very little warning. How many of us knew in June 2006 that one was about to strike Norway?

The meteor strike referenced in this passage causes astounding devastation, turning 1/3 of the world's oceans a poisonous red color, killing 1/3 of marine life and destroying thousands of ships. (There are over 40,000 commercial and merchant ships registered in 143 countries. In addition there are more than 9,000 naval ships from 50 different countries, and an unknown number of large private vessels.)

The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. (**Rev. 8:10-11**)

The next judgment falls on the world's fresh water supply. One third of it will become poisonous because of something like a shooting star that will fall from the sky. John called the star Wormwood, from the Greek word **apsinthos** (absinthe). Because of

this, some commentators believe that the agent making the waters poisonous is radioactive contamination.

They say this because, although it's not free of controversy, the Russian word chernobyl can be translated as wormwood and on April 25 and 26 of 1986 the world's worst nuclear disaster occurred in the Ukrainian city by that name. A nuclear reactor in the Chernobyl power plant exploded during testing, releasing amounts of radioactive fallout into the atmosphere 300 times greater than the atomic bomb exploded in Hiroshima. If you saw the movie "China Syndrome" you learned that out of control reactors can burrow into the ground and once that happens are all but unstoppable.

There's no official word on whether that did or can happen at Chernobyl. But containment efforts are still ongoing 25 years later, and if European aquifers become contaminated, it's easy to see how this view of **Rev. 8:11** could be accurate.

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. (**Rev. 8:12**)

Between the smoke from the grass and forest fires, and particulates thrown into the air by the meteor strike the atmosphere will become so dense that 1/3 of the light from the heavenly bodies will be blocked. I'm reminded of TV footage from the fires that Saddam's troops set in Kuwait's oil fields while retreating toward the end of Gulf War I. The smoke was so dense that it was like night during the day, the sun like a dark red ball floating in the blackened sky above. That's about what it'll look like as the world awaits the fifth trumpet.

As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!" (**Rev 8:13**)

This is no ordinary eagle. The Greek text uses the word normally translated angel, indicating some kind of supernatural messenger, sent to prepare the world for what's ahead. Four of the trumpets have sounded, and the Earth is reeling from this onslaught. But now the judgments turn supernatural and are directed at man himself. It's about to get personal.

Revelation 9

The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. (**Rev. 9:1-2**)

This star had fallen some time previous to the 5th angel's trumpet, and by using a personal pronoun, John identifies him as a living being, most likely a supernatural one. Whoever he is he's been told to open the shaft of the Abyss to release a swarm of "locusts."

And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them

the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. (**Rev 9:3-11**)

These locusts are unlike any such creatures ever seen on Earth before. Normal locusts are vegetarian, but these creatures are prevented from eating the grass, plants, or trees. Instead they attack people, and when they do they sting them like a scorpion would, causing pain so intense that their victims will pray for death. It's been said that the sting from a small scorpion compares to hitting your thumb with a hammer at full force, but a sting from a large one is like a nail being driven through your thumb. The sting from these locusts is like nothing man has ever experienced. And their leader is the angel of the Abyss, whose name means "Destroyer" in both languages. (In one of those precious little tidbits of wisdom that God's word is noted for, **Proverbs 30:27** informs us that normal locusts have no king lending credence to the idea that these "locusts" are something else.) Only the 144,000 witnesses will be protected from this excruciating pain.

John had certainly never seen such a thing before, and in describing them he exceeded even the limits of his imagination. You've got to appreciate the nature of his challenge here. He was a first century man called upon to describe twenty first century warfare. But he had to do it in such a way that all the generations in between could interpret it as well. Even today we can't relate these so-called locusts to anything in our world. They're clearly a demonic manifestation of some sort.

Certainly this is a God ordained judgment, but did Satan willingly turn these little monsters loose on his own followers? Was he ordered to, or is it some diabolical scheme to further inflame the hatred of the people of Earth toward God? Did Satan deliberately do this so he could blame God for it, advancing his strategy of turning Darkness into Light and the Lie into the Truth? A little later John will inform us that none of these torments turned the people of Earth from their rebellious ways.

The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.” And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. (**Rev. 9:12-19**)

Traditionally, the Euphrates River has been the territorial, cultural and religious boundary between East and West. Rarely have customs, traditions or philosophies crossed from either direction. As a result the Eastern world is far different in almost every respect from its Western counterpart. This passage helps to explain why that's so. There's been a boundary in the spiritual world as well. But with this command from the very throne of God the boundary comes down and the effect is deadly beyond comparison.

The combatants released by the lowering of this barrier wind up killing 1/3 of the remaining population of Earth. Remember 1/4 of mankind met their end in the seal judgments. With this additional third that means that over 3 billion people will have died by the time the Trumpet judgments are over, and the Great Tribulation hasn't even begun yet.

The cause of this destruction is the release of angels at the Euphrates River, but the River hasn't been dried up yet allowing the Kings of the East to cross. That comes later in **Rev. 16:12**. Therefore, I think this passage is describing warfare that takes place in

the Far East where over 40% of the world's population lives (many in crowded conditions increasing the potential for mass casualties) where religious and ethnic tensions are traditionally high, and where several countries can mount huge armies. I think it's the coalition formed by the winners of this war that storms across the dried up Euphrates while the anti-Christ is distracted by other uprisings. **(Daniel 11:40-44)**

The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts. **(Rev. 9:20-21)**

You'd think that with those demonic locusts attacking them and 3 billion people dying from wars and other disasters, people would be flocking to the Lord in search of comfort and security. But this just doesn't happen, and I'll tell you why.

There is a belief floating around that's as old as mankind but in the last days will become a religion that deceives almost everybody. It's called the Luciferian Doctrine and understanding it helps explain why the world won't turn to its Creator in this, the worst time in human history.

The Luciferian doctrine is named of course after Lucifer, a Latin name meaning, "light bearer." It holds that Lucifer is the Angel of Light, the good guy trying to enlighten the people of the world in preparation for the spiritual evolution necessary to bring peace to all mankind. According to Luciferian Doctrine our physical evolution is finished and all we need to do now is throw off the bonds of Judeo-Christian thinking to complete our spiritual evolution and enter into our long awaited Utopian Era.

But Lucifer's being hindered in all this by the evil Adonai (Hebrew for Lord) Who, along with His followers, is working to thwart Lucifer's grand plan, effectively preventing our spiritual evolution. In order for humanity to achieve Utopia those who insist on clinging to their obsolete Judeo-Christian faith have to be eliminated. The Great Tribulation is

characterized in Luciferian Doctrine as the evil Adonai's last great effort to destroy mankind's "light bearer" and prevent our ascension into Utopia, keeping us in bondage to Him.

Following the church's disappearance the Truth will become pretty scarce on Earth and the whole world will be deceived into believing the Luciferian Doctrine just as Paul warned would happen (**2 Thes. 2:9-12**). So naturally, thinking the Lord is the bad guy, they will become even more intense in their worship of Lucifer, hoping that he'll prevail and bring an end to their suffering. (There is a way that seems right to man, but the end thereof is death ... **Prov. 14:12**) Lucifer, of course, is also widely known as Satan or The Devil.

Revelation 10

We take a break from the Trumpet Judgments now to give the world its final warnings before the Great Tribulation begins. These are the Seven Thunders and the Two Witnesses that God will send to Israel to warn His people to “get right” with Him while there’s still time. Remember, after the end of the Battle of **Ezekiel 38-39**, God will have brought every living Jew to Israel, leaving none behind (**Ezek. 39:28**).

Even though many will have already been martyred during the Seal and Trumpet judgments, especially among those who’ve found the Messiah, there will still be a huge population of religious Jews in Israel with a fully functioning Temple (**Daniel 9:27**). The Abomination of Desolation will put an end to the sacrifice and offerings, but that won’t happen until the middle of the last 7 years, described in **Rev. 13**.

THE ANGEL AND THE LITTLE SCROLL

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” (**Rev 10:1-4**)

Lots of things in this passage hint at the possible identity of this angel. He's clothed in a cloud and his legs are like pillars of fire, which reminds us of the Angel of the Lord who protected the Israelites in the wilderness. The Rainbow over his head is symbolic of God's mercy. His voice is like the roar of a lion. Could this be the Lord? The angel's identity is not disclosed but the passage is certainly rich in symbolism.

The Seven Thunders most probably contain an undisclosed warning spoken by God between the 6th and 7th Trumpets. John was about to detail this for us when the Lord told him not to.

As a point of interest, in **Psalm 29** the voice of the Lord is compared to the sound of thunder. His name is spoken four times in the two-verse introduction of the Psalm and four times more in the two-verse conclusion (four is the number of Creation). It appears ten times in verses 3 through 9 (ten is a number that denotes the completeness of Divine Order) and the phrase "Voice of the Lord" is repeated seven times (seven is the number of perfection). **Psalm 29** is often called "the Seven Thunders of God" as well.

With the coming Seventh Trumpet, we'll be told that the Kingdoms of the world have become the Kingdom of our Lord (**Rev. 11:15**) and for the first time the traditional translation of God's name as "the One Who is and Who was and Who is to come" is changed to just "the One Who is and Who was" (**Rev. 11:17**) The omission of the phrase "Who is to come" indicates that His reign has begun. (Some translations put the "Who is to come" part back in but the Greek text doesn't include it.)

This means that in the Heavenly view, the Great Tribulation will have begun. After Satan's losing battle in Heaven and confinement to Earth in **Rev. 12**, the anti-Christ will make his official appearance on Earth as Satan's host at the beginning of **Rev. 13**. (He will have first come on the scene in **Rev. 6** as a mere man.) This will signal the start of the Great Tribulation on Earth. The seven Bowl judgments will begin soon thereafter.

Put all this together and you can make a circumstantial case that the Seven Thunders will announce that the Great Tribulation with its Bowl Judgments will complete the

Divine Order, perfectly satisfying God's righteous requirement that the people of Earth be judged for their sins, and leaving Earth in a condition of readiness to receive her King.

Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more:

"Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings." (**Rev. 10:5-11**)

The Lord told John to take the scroll and eat it. At first taste, it seemed sweet as honey, but after he swallowed it, his stomach turned sour. This is to signify that as followers of the Lord, we anticipate the fulfillment of End Times prophecy with much excitement and joy. We know His judgment is righteous, and that He's been long-suffering, and patient almost to a fault. But because our enemy is so intent upon succeeding in his rebellion against God, the horror and carnage of the warfare necessary to accomplish his defeat is enough to make you sick.

Revelation 11

THE TWO WITNESSES

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. (**Rev. 11:1**)

Here’s evidence along with **Daniel 9:27** and **2 Thes. 2:4** that a Temple will exist before the beginning of the Great Tribulation. Having seen the miraculous way in which God delivered them from certain defeat in the battle of **Ezekiel 38-39**, Jews from all over the world will respond to His offer of reconciliation and make aliyah (return to Israel). Once their Old Covenant relationship is restored, they’ll need a Temple for worship, and early in the 70th Week of Daniel it will be built. Nearly 2000 years of diaspora (scattering) will finally end.

But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. (**Rev. 11:2**)

This verse has been used to support the idea that the Temple will be built next door to the Dome of the Rock. Later, I’ll offer an alternative to this view. But first let’s meet the Two Witnesses.

And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power

to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. (**Rev. 11:3-6**)

The 3½ year ministry of the two witnesses is not congruent with either half of Daniel's 70th week but overlaps them, beginning late in the first half of the 70th week and ending sometime before the 2nd Coming. Before discussing the identity of the two witnesses we should note that they provide the ultimate fulfillment of **Zechariah 4:11-14**, the "Sons of Oil" prophecy partially fulfilled by Zerubbabel and Joshua in the time of the 2nd Temple's construction.

WHO ARE THOSE GUYS?

There are three primary candidates for their identity; Moses, Elijah and Enoch. Elijah and Enoch are popular choices because they're the only two in the Old Testament who didn't die, but were taken into heaven alive. And Moses and Elijah are liked because the powers of the two witnesses are identical to those exercised by Moses in the Plagues of Egypt and Elijah in his contention against idolatry in Israel. Remember, it climaxed in his spectacular defeat of the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel with fire from heaven and the end of the 3½-year drought he had earlier proclaimed (**1 Kings 17:1, 1 Kings 18:16-46**). (You have to read **James 5:17** for the duration of the drought.)

Also Moses and Elijah were on the Mt. Of Transfiguration with Jesus and the disciples (**Matt.17:1-13**) and according to early church tradition were the two men in white who appeared to the disciples following the Lord's ascension (**Acts 1:10-11**). And finally, Moses and Elijah are two of the most highly revered figures in all of Israel's past, more able than anyone else God could send to convey His message. Moses was the Law Giver and Elijah was the greatest of Israel's Prophets. Their two names are all but synonymous with the Jewish name for their scriptures, the Law and the Prophets.

I believe Enoch's disappearance before the Great Flood was a special event designed to pre-figure the disappearance of the Church before the Great Tribulation.

As it was in the days of Noah, so will it be at the Coming of the Son of Man. (**Matt 24:37**)

In the days of Noah the world perished in the Flood. They represent those who will perish in the End times judgments. Noah and his family were preserved through the Flood and represent Israel, preserved through the judgments. Enoch was taken alive into Heaven before the Flood, representing the Church who will be taken alive into heaven before the judgments begin. For all these reasons, I hold the Moses and Elijah view.

Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon. (**Rev. 11:7-14**)

There's no question that their bodies will be left where they fall in the streets of Jerusalem, because that's the city where the Lord was crucified. And through the

technology of satellite communications their dead bodies will be visible all over the world.

In Middle Eastern cultures the greatest insult one can convey is to deny burial to one's enemy. Their deaths prompt the only expression of joy on earth in the entire book. But after 3½ days, symbolic of the length of the Great Tribulation, the two witnesses will hear the same command that John heard in **Rev. 4:1**, "Come up here!" and will ascend into Heaven in full view of the whole world. Just as the Lord's command in chapter 4 was a model of the Rapture of the Church, the command here is a model of the resurrection of the Tribulation martyrs.

In the Psalms we read,

O God, the nations have invaded your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple, they have reduced Jerusalem to rubble. They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there is no one to bury the dead. (**Psalms 79:1-3**)

It's a clear prophecy of things to come, and it begins in **Revelation 11**.

By saying that the earthquake survivors gave glory to God, John didn't mean that they worshiped Him or came to faith in Him. It means that they correctly attributed these miraculous events to Him, like the Egyptian priests did in explaining the cause of the plagues in **Exodus 8:19**.

WHERE'S THE TEMPLE?

This part of chapter 11 hints at some troubling inconsistencies with our understanding of the coming Temple's location. It's given as the Holy City in verse 2, but in verse 8

Jerusalem is called the Great City, figuratively Sodom and Egypt. Are they the same? The Holy City will be trampled on by the Gentiles for 42 months, but Jesus said that Jerusalem would be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles were fulfilled, over 2000 years.

For generations a controversy has existed among Jews and Christians alike as to the exact location of Solomon's and Herod's Temples. The Jewish Sanhedrin, formed again a few years ago after 1600 years, is tackling the question as one of its first priorities. It's a good start, but I don't think they're asking the right question. Sure it's great to know the exact placement of these historical monuments to God, but the real question is, "Where will the next Temple be?"

Many Christians think the coming 3rd Temple will be desecrated by the Abomination of Desolation during the Great Tribulation and then destroyed. For that reason they call it the Tribulation Temple. Then another Temple, number four, will be built at the beginning of the Millennium. But the only model we have for what will happen is something that already has happened, the desecration of the 2nd Temple leading up to the Macabbean Revolt. And it's something that Jesus took pains to point us toward in the Olivet Discourse (**Matt. 24:15**).

In the model, Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes stormed the Temple and converted it into a pagan worship center in 167 BC. He slaughtered a pig on the altar and erected a statue of Zeus (Jupiter) in the holy place with his own face on it, proclaiming himself to be God (Epiphanes means god made manifest). Then he forced the Jews to worship him on pain of death. In 1 Macabbees, this act was called the Abomination of Desolation, the only event so named in history. It triggered the Macabbean revolt, a 3 ½ year battle to oust Antiochus from the Promised Land. Almost 200 years later Jesus told Israel to look for the same thing to happen again in the future as the sign that the Great Tribulation has begun (**Matt. 24:21**), thereby identifying the statue of Antiochus as a model of the End Times Abomination of Desolation. The Macabbean Revolt contains many remarkable similarities to the Great Tribulation.

Here's the point. The Jews didn't demolish the Temple after the Abomination of Desolation in 167 BC. When they recaptured it, they destroyed the statue and replaced the Altar. Then they subjected the Temple to the eight-day purification ceremony required by Law and began using it again. The purification is remembered to this day in the Feast of Hanukkah. If the model is complete, then the Temple built during Daniel's 70th week won't be destroyed either, but will become the Millennial Temple described in great detail in **Ezekiel 40-44**. (The Jews call Ezekiel's Temple the 3rd Temple, which would make it the next one.) And that means it won't be built in Jerusalem. Next, I'll show you where it will be.

LET'S REVIEW

I promised to tell you where in Israel the next Temple will be located. So let's get started with a little review.

According to prophecies in **Daniel 9:27**, **Matt 24:15** and **2 Thes 2:4**, a Temple will exist in Israel at the beginning of the Great Tribulation. This is confirmed in **Revelation 11:1** where John is being told to measure a Temple and count the worshipers there shortly before the Tribulation begins.

He's instructed to omit the outer court because it's been given over to the Gentiles. Its location is the "Holy City" which will be trampled on by the Gentiles for 42 months, the length of the Great Tribulation. As you remember, **Rev. 11** also introduces the 2 witnesses who preach in the "Great City" and are ultimately killed there, their bodies left lying in the street. The Great City is identified as the place where the Lord was crucified: Jerusalem. It's been trampled on by the Gentiles for 2000 years. Are the Holy City and the Great City the same or different? Let's see.

According to **Zechariah 14:6-9**, on the day of the Lord's return an earthquake will split the Mt. of Olives in two along an East-West line forming a great valley through the center of Jerusalem. Immediately a river will fill the valley creating a waterway from the Mediterranean to the Dead Sea. If the Lord returns to the same area of the Mt. of Olives

from which He left, as suggested by **Acts 1:11**, the earthquake will destroy the current Temple mount and anything that may be standing upon it.

Ezekiel 47:1-12 describes a great river flowing from under the south side of the Temple and then eastward to the Dead Sea during a period of time that most scholars believe has not occurred yet. **Revelation 22:1-2** confirms this. If as it appears, Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Revelation all describe the same river, then an interesting scenario begins to emerge.

This scenario requires a Temple to be present on the day the Lord returns, but since the current Temple mount will have been destroyed by the earthquake mentioned above, this Temple must be somewhere else. The river originates under the Temple and flows from its south side in a southerly direction before heading East and West, so the Temple must be north of the newly created valley.

WHERE ARE THE 12 TRIBES?

Plotting on a map of Israel the land grants for the 12 tribes given in **Ezekiel 48** shows the precincts of the Holy City to be somewhat north of the current city of Jerusalem. This new location is the ancient city of Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood for nearly 400 years after the Israelites first conquered the Land. This is the Holy City and its name is Jehovah Shammah according to the last verse in Ezekiel. The Hebrew translates as “the LORD is here.”

If my interpretation is accurate, this location would meet all the requirements for the Temple mentioned in the above references. The current Temple Mount in Jerusalem would not.

According to **Ezekiel 44:6-9**, this Temple will have been defiled in a way never seen in history, therefore at a time yet future to us. A foreigner un-circumcised in heart (neither Christian) and flesh (nor Jewish) will have been given charge of the sanctuary while offering sacrifices. If we understand the chronology of Ezekiel, this will have taken place after both the 1948 re-gathering prophesied in **Ezekiel 36-37** and the national wake-up

call prophesied in **Ezekiel 38-39** but before the Millennial Kingdom begins. The only event we know of that fits the time frame is Daniel's 70th Week. This is confirmed by Paul's prophecy of **2 Thes. 2:4** where the anti-Christ sets himself up in the Temple proclaiming himself to be God.

Here then is a rough outline of events. Following Israel's return to God after the battle of **Ezekiel 38-39**, the Jewish people will re-establish their covenant (Old not New) with Him. This will require a return to Levitical practices and so a Temple will be built. This is the Temple spoken of in Daniel and Revelation. Following instructions recorded by Ezekiel and needing to avoid the enormous problems a Jerusalem Temple would create in the Moslem world, this Temple will be located north of Jerusalem in Shiloh. It will be defiled in the middle of the last 7 years as outlined in **Daniel 9:24-27**, **Ezekiel 44:6-9**, **Matt 24:15** and **2 Thes 2:4** kicking off the Great Tribulation, but it won't be destroyed.

This Temple will be the source of the living water that begins flowing on the day the Lord returns (**Zech 14:8**). After a cleansing and re-dedication similar to the one memorialized in the Feast of Hanukkah, it will be used during the Millennium. Its purpose will be to memorialize the Lord's work at the cross and provide the perspective for children born during the Kingdom Age to choose salvation. **Acts 15:14-16** confirms that after the Lord has chosen a people from among the gentiles for Himself (the church) He will return and re-build David's fallen Tabernacle (the Temple). This is the Third Temple, so carefully detailed in **Ezekiel 40-44**. Now let's get back to Revelation.

THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: “We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great— and for destroying those who destroy the earth.” (**Rev. 11:15-18**)

One of the names for God is an expansion of the great “I AM” declaration of **Exodus 3:14**. Remember, Moses wanted to know God’s name in case the Israelites asked who sent him when he went to Egypt to deliver them from slavery. God replied, “Tell them that I AM has sent you.” John has used this name earlier, translated as “the One who is, and who was, and who is to come.” (**Rev. 1:4**) Notice how the “who is to come” part has been left out of this passage. That’s because with the 7th Trumpet the future has arrived. The Lord has taken up the Kingdom He bought and paid for at the cross, and is now set to claim it.

Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm. (**Rev. 11:19**)

Here are more of God’s signature warnings of impending judgment. In Heaven the Great Tribulation has begun, and the first order of business is to get the enemy out of there.

Revelation 12

A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. (**Rev. 12:1-2**)

The fact that John identifies her as a sign means the woman's not real but stands for something else. And the something else is Israel. We get hints of this from **Genesis 37:9-10** where Joseph dreams that his family are the sun, the moon and 11 stars, he being the 12th one. And as we'll see in a moment, this woman is about to give birth to the Messiah, which makes it impossible for her to be the church, as some insist. Jesus gave birth to the Church, not the other way around.

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days. (**Rev. 12:3-6**)

This sign begins a sweeping overview of of Satan's rebellion against God and his hatred for men who align themselves with Him. He's seen as the Great Dragon who led a rebellion in Heaven that resulted in 1/3 of the angelic host joining with him. He tried to destroy the Messiah, but God resurrected Him and took Him to Heaven. When they see the Abomination of Desolation, believers in Israel will heed the Messiah's warning from

Matt. 24:15 and escape into the Jordanian desert where He will have prepared a hiding place for them, while He spends 3 1/2 years getting the Earth ready for His return. This 3 1/2 years is known to us as the Great Tribulation (**Matt. 24:21**).

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. (**Rev. 12:7-9**)

Satan's on the run now. No longer allowed in heaven, he's been cast to earth as foretold in **Isaiah 14:12** and **Ezekiel 28:17**. Some incorrectly teach that this happened long ago, at Satan's judgment. But as **Job 1:6-7** and **Rev. 12:10** below clearly show, Satan's had access to heaven all along. He was divested of his titles and of his prominent position at his judgment, but until now he's been allowed to come and go. And when he does, he whispers his accusations against you and me in God's ear. Whenever I think of this, I take comfort from the fact that our Lord Jesus is whispering in God's other ear, making intercession for us. (**Romans 8:34**)

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.” (**Rev. 12:10-12**)

Notice that as the Lord had done in **Rev. 3:10** John distinguished between those who dwell in Heaven and the Earth dwellers. It's not just due to our different physical locations, but is an indication of the state of our hearts. For the Church in Heaven Satan's impending defeat is greeted with rejoicing, but on Earth it's a time of great woe because the war's come home to them. Another hint of the pre-trib rapture.

The Kingdom that Satan lost at his rebellion and judgment, and that he later stole back from the man to whom it had been given (Adam) has become the battleground for the most incredible contest in history. Spiritual forces on both sides line up unseen behind their human counterparts. They'll battle to the death for control of Planet Earth. Will the usurper who has put it to the torch and sword, laying waste to the very thing he's fighting for, finally prevail? Or will the Kinsman Redeemer, whose shed blood has legally redeemed what Adam had lost so long ago, carry the day?

We'll soon see, but first there's one last troublesome detail to handle. Ever since the beginning, Satan has been trying to wipe out every trace of God's people, for they hold the power to call forth the Redeemer.

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring—those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. (**Rev. 12:13-17**)

The phrase time, times, and half a time is a way of saying one year, two years and half a year, or 3 1/2 years. It's the third indication of the length of the coming Great

Tribulation we've seen. From **Rev. 11:2** we learned that the Gentiles will trample on the Holy City for 42 months. Then in **Rev. 12:6** we saw the woman being taken care of for 1260 days. Now we see this same period of time referred to as 3 1/2 years. Many scholars believe the Lord never abandoned the 360 day calendar He instituted at the Creation. That being the case 42 months, 1260 days and 3 1/2 years are all equivalent periods of time and they all describe the Great Tribulation.

After His rejection and death, the Lord went back to Heaven, where He had come from. He vowed to stay there until His people acknowledged their sin. He knew that things would have to get pretty rough before they'd humble themselves enough to call Him back, but that eventually they would. This was all foretold in **Hosea 5:15-6:2**. In the meantime, if Satan can wipe them out, there won't be anyone left to petition Him.

And so it's been. Using the Romans, the Muslims, the Christians, the Spaniards, the Russians, the Germans, the Italians, the English, and now the Muslims again Satan has been obsessed with ridding the world of its Jewry. He knows that if he can accomplish this before they wake up and call on the Name of Jesus, he's won.

When he brings Gog and Magog in a sneak attack that will begin Daniel's 70th Week he will almost succeed, but God will intervene and save them. Astonishingly this will turn them back to Him, although still blinded to their Messiah. Here in **Rev. 12:15** Satan's using a torrent of water, like God had used against Satan's hybrid warriors 5000 years earlier, but the Earth cooperates with its Creator and swallows up the water. The Jews are safe once again. Furious, Satan turns on the post-Church Gentile believers, known by some as as Tribulation Saints.

Revelation 13

The Great Tribulation is about to begin on Earth. The Temple will soon be made desolate. When that happens, the Jewish remnant will heed the Lord's call from **Matt. 24:15-16** and flee to a place of supernatural protection as we saw in **Rev. 12**. When they do, Satan's target of opportunity will become the so-called Tribulation Saints, those who've come to faith in the Lord after the Rapture.

One of the anti-Christ's first goals after proclaiming himself to be God and setting up his counterfeit religion will be to shut down this new movement of God's. Since they're scattered all over the place the best way to do that is to freeze them out of the economy, making it impossible for them to earn wages or buy life's essentials.

While discussing Job, Satan had chided God, "He only worships you because you bless him and protect him. Take it all away and he'll curse you."(**Job 1:9-11**) Now he has his man, the anti-Christ, go after the Tribulation Saints the same way. Deprive them of enough and these new converts will either turn or die. Either way, he'll soon be rid of them, or so he thinks.

And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. (**Rev 13:1**)

Having been cast out of Heaven, Satan stands by the sea, a euphemism for the gentile nations (**Daniel 7:2**) ready to do his worst on Planet Earth.

THE BEAST OUT OF THE SEA

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" (**Rev. 13:2-4**)

As the same beasts in **Daniel 7:1-7** represented Babylon (lion) Persia (bear) and Greece (leopard) it makes sense to see them that way here. The order is reversed because Daniel was looking forward in time while John was looking back. When Daniel saw Rome, he couldn't compare it to any animal he'd seen, so he called it a large and terrifying beast. John shows it to be a monster with multiple heads and horns.

But the personal pronouns in John's description indicate a king rather than a kingdom. That means that the speed of Alexander (the leopard), the strength of Cyrus (the bear), and the boastful roar of Nebuchadnezzar (the lion) are all present in this king. And what's more, he wields all the power and authority of Satan, even seating himself on Satan's throne. This monster in the guise of a man is the anti-Christ, finally revealing his true nature. Having complete power (10 horns) supernatural wisdom (7 heads) and officially recognized authority over all (10 crowns) he's set to make the world over in his own image, and those whose hearts are focused on the things of Earth are loving it. He's apparently come to power through a botched assassination attempt that's left his right eye blinded and his right arm withered (**Zech. 11:17**) The world thought he had

died, but here he is alive. Rumors of his resurrection add to his aura and are encouraged.

By the way, notice he comes out of the sea, symbolic of the Gentile nations, and that he has the dominant characteristics of the three most powerful Gentile Kings. John may be telling us that the anti-Christ is a Gentile. And from **Ezekiel 44:7-8** we learn he isn't circumcised. Confirmation?

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. (**Rev. 13:5-8**)

The saints being conquered here can not be the Church, because Jesus promised that the gates of Hell would not overcome the Church (**Matt. 16:18**). In Biblical times the rulers or leaders of a city had their offices in the large structure that surrounded the main gates into the city. We can see evidence of this in the Books of Ruth (**Ruth 4:1-2**) and Esther (**Esther 5:9**). The gates came to symbolize the leaders. It's the same today when we say, "You can't fight City Hall." We aren't referring to the building but to the officials who work there. The phrase gates of Hell is a euphemism for Satan.

Having consolidated his power over Earth, and endearing himself to the Jews by helping them build a Temple, the anti-Christ now marches into the Holy City to stand in the Temple and declare that he's God in the flesh (**2 Thes. 2:4**), slandering His Name, making His House desolate, and mounting a full scale attack on remaining believers. Satan's boast that he would make himself like the Most High (**Isaiah 14:14**) got him kicked out of Heaven for good and marked the beginning of the Great Tribulation in Heaven. But on Earth it's different. People from every part of the Earth will worship

Satan and the anti-Christ. Jesus warned the believing remnant of Israel to flee into the mountains when they see this happening (**Matt. 24:15-16**) saying it will signal the beginning of the Great Tribulation on Earth (**Matt. 24:21**)

A more literal translation of **Rev. 13: 8** reads,

And all who dwell on earth will worship it (the beast), everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain.

It's the version used by the New American Standard and the English Standard, two of the most literal translations of the Greek. It speaks clearly to the validity of the doctrine of Eternal Security.

If you're saved, God knew about it before He created the Earth. Prior to giving Adam his first breath He looked down over the vast span of time and saw the moment when you would make your independent decision to serve Him. (**He foreknew.**)

And that's when He made a reservation for you in His Kingdom, swearing never to blot your name out of the book. (**He predestined.**)

When the time was right he spoke to your heart, knowing you'd respond. (**He called.**)

And when you did He cleansed you from all of your sins, regarding you from that time forward as if you've never sinned at all. (**He justified.**)

And one day soon He will give you a new eternal body and a place near Him in His Kingdom. (**He glorified.**) — **Romans 8: 29-30**

In the context of time you made your own free choice to accept the pardon that Jesus purchased for you. But having seen the end from the beginning, He has always known that you would. All your life He's watched over you, preparing you for your day of decision. And ever since then He's protected you, for He promised He would never lose

any of those He's been given. (**John 6:39-40**) He knows that it's the shepherd's job to keep the sheep. And He's the Good Shepherd.

He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints. (**Rev. 13:9-10**)

Again we're told that the Great Tribulation will not be cut short, but will run the full 3 1/2 years ordained for it from ancient times. Nor will anyone from this point on be miraculously preserved. The judgments will come and will run their course.

"Be faithful unto death," He told the Church at Smyrna, "And I will give you the crown of life." (**Rev. 2:10**) Like it was at the beginning of Christianity, so it will be at the end. The penalty for loving Jesus is death. Let me hasten to remind you that the Christian Era doesn't end with the Church. There will be Christians on Earth long after the Church is gone.

THE BEAST OUT OF THE EARTH

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.

Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it

could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. **(Rev. 13:11-17)**

We call this second beast the False Prophet. The fact that he comes out of the Earth means that he's an ordinary man. Saying he has two horns like a lamb but speaks like a dragon means he's the religious authority for those who worship Satan. It's a counterfeit version of the relationship Jesus (the Lamb) had with His father (God). In **John 8:28** Jesus said, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." So it will be with the false prophet. He will speak only what Satan has taught him.

He heads up the one world religion, and makes certain that it's united in its worship of the anti-Christ. Building a great image of him, he uses supernatural power from Satan to give it a semblance of life and makes everyone worship it on pain of death. Because no one can tell if another person is really worshipping or just going through the motions, he devises a test. Those who are loyal to the anti-Christ and truly worship him, must agree to take a mark to prove it. It will not only demonstrate their sincerity, but allow them to participate fully in mainstream life without fear. Refusing the mark means they've given their heart to Jesus. If they're caught, the penalty is death. And even if they're not, they will face a nearly impossible challenge in just staying alive.

This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666. **(Rev. 13:18)**

This verse has been subject to much speculation and incorrect interpretation because it tells us so little. It says only that the anti-Christ's number is the number of a man, and that his number is literally 600 and 60 and 6, which may be different from 666. We don't know.

What we do know is that both Biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek) gave numerical values to the letters of their alphabets to compensate for their lack of a direct numbering system. The Romans used Roman Numerals, assigning numerical values to a few letters, and today much of the world uses Hindu-Arabic Numerals, value specific symbols originally developed in the 2nd century BC but not widely used until several hundred years later. If (and it's a big if) the numbers six hundred, sixty, and six, are supposed to signify a name, then the numerical value of the anti-Christ's name would probably have to equal that amount in its Greek form, Greek being the language of the Revelation.

I don't think it makes sense to devise a numerical equivalent for the letters of the English alphabet to figure this out because, outside of certain pagan religious practices, there's no accepted valuing system for doing so. We've always used Arabic numerals and so haven't assigned numerical equivalents to the letters in our alphabet like the Hebrews, Greeks and, to a lesser extent, the Romans did.

Some think that the number might apply to something other than his name, his birthday for instance, or a title of some sort. It could also be a registration number, like the American Social Security number, or any one of the other numbers by which we're known in various aspects of our lives.

The big qualifier for the verse is the phrase "let him who has understanding." To me that disqualifies most of us from even guessing. It seems that a person would have to have an understanding of the practice of gematria, the calculation of the numerical equivalence of letters, words, or phrases in Biblical Greek to come up with the answer.

Daniel 12:4 tells us that in the latter days knowledge will increase. That means that pretty soon someone will crack this code. Personally, I think it's unlikely that this will happen before the church disappears.

Revelation 14

THE LAMB AND THE 144,000

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. (**Rev 14:1-5**)

In **Rev. 7** we saw that it makes sense to view the 144,000 there just as they're described ... Messianic Jews from the 12 tribes of Israel, witnessing to the world after the church is gone. They are the end times fulfillment of the prophecy in **Isaiah 43:10**, being witnesses for the Lord to the nations of Earth during Daniel's 70th week.

THEN WHO ARE THESE GUYS?

Here, the same sized group, 144,000, is shown standing on Mt. Zion and they have the names of both the Father and the Son written on their foreheads. They are described as having been redeemed from the earth and are before the Throne of God singing a new song, a song only they can sing.

Hebrews 12:22-24 provides a beautiful description of this group.

“But you have come to Mt. Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the Living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the Church of the Firstborn whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of a new covenant and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

It was written to the Church.

The similarity is unmistakable. By their location (heaven) their spiritual state (righteous men made perfect) and their dedication to both God and Jesus they are reminiscent of a group first seen in **Rev. 5** and described as Kings and Priests. They sing a new song just like that group, they follow the Lamb wherever He goes, signifying that they're His disciples, and they were purchased from among men (**1 Cor 6:19-20**) and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.

Though it's tempting to see them as the original 144,000, martyred and in heaven, only one group fits that description perfectly ... the Church. This 144,000 is a sampling of the redeemed, brought to heaven in the rapture of **Rev. 4**, and presented as the first fruits of the harvest of souls, just as the wave offering was the first fruits of the harvest of grain (**Lev. 23:9-14**). All the grain was harvested, but only a sample was presented. So it is with the Church. The 144,000 is not meant to be the full number of raptured believers, just a sample.

As far as the phrase “defiled themselves with women” is concerned, it's used to symbolize the worship of idols. Since pagan worship was sexual in nature, the Lord sometimes described idol worship in sexual terms. (Read **Ezekiel 16 & 23** if you dare.) These 144,000 had not done that. In fact they were found to be totally blameless, further evidence that they're the redeemed in Heaven. No human on Earth is blameless, and there's no Biblical evidence that men who remain celibate will receive special rewards.

THE THREE ANGELS

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” (**Rev 14:5-7**)

Notice the tremendous contrast between the preceding view of things in Heaven and this warning of what’s about to befall the Earth. It’s the last warning before the dreaded Bowl Judgments that will soon come to complete, not begin, God’s wrath.

In **Matt. 24:14** Jesus promised that the Gospel would be preached in all the nations before the end of the age. People have speculated on whether this angel is really satellite TV or something of that nature, but it doesn’t matter. Between the first 144,000, the Tribulation believers, and this angel, His promise has been kept.

A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” (**Rev. 14:8**)

This verse speaks of the coming collapse of the one world church. As we’ll see in **Rev 17**, the anti-Christ has used this “church” as a means to an end. But now it’s time for all the world to worship him and him alone.

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for

those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.” This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”

“Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them.”(**Rev. 14:9-13**)

A clear warning of the dire consequences for worshiping the anti-Christ and taking his mark, this passage also gives us a hint that Tribulation believers will have a different relationship with the Lord from the one enjoyed by the Church. Like Old Testament believers they’ll be required to keep God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus to keep their salvation. It appears that they won’t be given eternal security but will be responsible for demonstrating their faithfulness by their actions. The only time their work will be done will be after their death. No “sabbath rest” for the Tribulation saints.

What an absolutely untenable spot to be in. Worship God and die now. Worship the anti-Christ and die forever. The voice from heaven agrees by pronouncing the 2nd of seven blessings in the Revelation. The first was for those who read, hear and take to heart what is written in this book. (**Rev 1:3**) This one is for those who are martyred for their faith during the Great Tribulation.

THE HARVEST OF THE EARTH

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one “like a son of man” with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is

ripe.” So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. (**Rev 14:14-16**)

Some want to see this angel as Jesus, because of the phrase “son of man.” To me the biggest argument against this is the fact that he’s wearing a stephanos, or victor’s crown like the Church wears. Jesus wears a diadem or crown of royalty. But whether he is or isn’t the Lord doesn’t affect our understanding of the passage. He’s being told to begin the final phase of Earth’s judgment.

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, “Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth’s vine, because its grapes are ripe.” The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia. (**Rev 14:17-20**)

This passage, like the one before it, is an overview, a description of things to come. Those being harvested are the non-believers of Earth. We know this because reference is made to the Earth’s vine, not the true vine. Also the wine press of God’s wrath which is located outside the city symbolizes the coming bowl judgments, culminating in the Battle of Armageddon.

This period of time is also in view in the Kingdom Parable of the Wheat and the Tares, where before the Wheat (sons of the Kingdom) are brought into the Millennium, the sons of the Evil one are harvested and thrown into the fiery furnace. (**Matt 13:36-45**) Sons of the Kingdom refers to believers alive on Earth during the Great Tribulation.

This shows the extent to which Satan will sacrifice mankind to maintain his hold on Planet Earth. **Isaiah 63:1-6** gives us a prophetic view of this time from the Old Testament. It’s a conversation between Isaiah and the Lord.

Isaiah: Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength?

The Lord: “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.”

Isaiah: Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?

The Lord: “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support, so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground.”

Things are happening pretty fast now, so John has to keep skipping back and forth between things in heaven and things on earth, first presenting overviews and then coming back to fill in the details, to make sure we get it all. The main thought here is to convey the extent of the carnage. The average horse's bridle is 4.5 feet off the ground, and 1600 stadia equal about 175 miles. Imagine a river of blood 4.5 feet deep and 175 miles long and you get the idea. If you could drive along its length at 30 miles per hour, it would take nearly 6 hours. Next time we'll get the detail of the Bowl Judgments.

Revelation 15

The time of the Bowl Judgments is upon us. The full fury of God's Wrath, begun in chapter 6, is coming. It's been building in stages to give all those who will, the opportunity to seek and find Him before it's too late. But now the climax is at hand. Upon the completion of the Bowl Judgments, God's righteous requirement for judgment upon those who have rejected His earnest and unceasing pleas for reconciliation will have been satisfied. At long last Planet Earth will be ready to receive Her King, and enjoy the peace He alone can bring.

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb:

“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.” (**Rev.**

15:1-4)

What I've said before bears repeating. God's wrath doesn't begin here. It began with the seal judgments as indicated by **Rev. 6:17** and will end with the coming bowl judgments of **Rev. 16**.

Jews and Gentiles who've been martyred for refusing the mark of the beast begin showing up in heaven. They're the ones who will be reunited with physical bodies in **Rev. 20:4**. Just like the multitude from **Rev. 7** who serve in God's Temple but are never called priests, these martyrs will reign with Christ but are never called kings. Only the Church can be Kings and Priests.

The conformity of man's will to God's, so long resisted, will finally be achieved. Following the certain and total defeat of the anti-Christ and his allies, every knee in Heaven, on Earth, and under the Earth will bow, and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (**Phil. 2:10-11**)

After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. (**Rev. 15:5-8**)

The fact that these angels are clothed in spotless linen means that the judgments are righteous. The Earth deserves every bit of what's coming and it won't be a pretty sight. The King of the Universe will shut Himself inside His temple to mourn the necessity for all this, and once again we're shown that He'll do nothing to either shorten the duration or lessen the impact of these final judgments. They're going to run their course and no one can change that.

Revelation 16

THE SEVEN BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. **(Rev. 16:1-2)**

Everyone was warned about the dire consequences that would attend taking the mark. **(Rev. 14:9-12)** But as usual where God's word is concerned, lots of people ignored the warning. They have only themselves to blame for what's happening to them.

The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died. **(Rev. 16:3)**

One third of the sea had been struck in the Trumpet judgments. Now the rest is contaminated.

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say:

"You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve."

And I heard the altar respond:

“Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.” (**Rev 16:4-7**)

And again the fresh water supply is also attacked. Partially poisoned earlier (**Rev. 8:11**), it now turns to blood like the sea.

For the second time, there’s no “is to come” in God’s name. But now the Name also indicates the plurality of the Trinity. (Some translations add the “is to come” phrase and some don’t.) Those under the altar cry out in support of these judgments. It’s their blood the angel in charge of the water is talking about. They had asked the Lord how long they would have to wait until their blood was avenged, and now their wait is over. (**Rev. 6:9-10**)

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him. (**Rev. 16:8-9**)

2014 is predicted to be the hottest summer yet, surpassing 2012 when thousands of high temperature records were equaled or broken. The number one cause of this is the increasing temperature of the Sun. Regardless of man’s pathetic effort to legislate a reversal of our changing climate, this trend will continue until the day when people will actually burst into flame if they’re directly exposed to its heat.

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done. (**Rev. 16:10-11**)

Now it’s getting personal. Having plunged the Earth into Spiritual darkness, the anti-Christ will now be treated to physical darkness, adding further discomfort to the sores and the burns. No lamp, no fire, not even the Sun will provide relief from darkness so thick you can almost feel it. Satan’s effort to turn the truth into a lie has been so effective

that men curse God for their plight, hardening their hearts even further against repentance. Believing that God is their enemy and that Satan's trying to save them, they resolve to stand firm in their loyalty to the anti-Christ.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. (**Rev. 16:12-14**)

The Great Border between East and West will finally be removed and the coalition of victors from the Eastern Wars of **Rev. 9:13-16**, their minds stirred up by the evil spirits, will come rumbling toward the Middle East for the final showdown.

Before we go on, it's time for a brief history lesson, courtesy of **Daniel 11:40-45**. When Alexander the Great died in 323 BC, the Greek Empire was divided up among his four generals. Cassander took the Eastern European territories around the Adriatic Sea. Seleucus took Turkey, Iraq and Syria. Lysimachus got the Eastern provinces stretching from Iran to India, and Ptolemy got Egypt. Cassander is not mentioned in **Daniel 11**, and Seleucus later defeated his friend Lysimachus, acquiring Iran and the Eastern Empire in the process. The story throughout **Daniel 11** is of the Kings of the North (the Seleucids) and the Kings of the South (the Ptolemys) fighting each other for control of the known world over a 150 year period. These are the Kings in view in **Daniel 11:40-45**.

Of course when Daniel wrote chapter 11 in about 539BC these men hadn't even been born yet, and Alexander's Kingdom was still 200 years away. But in an overwhelming demonstration of God's knowledge of the future, there are 135 historically verified fulfilled prophecies in the first 35 verses of **Daniel 11**, all written from 200-400 years

before the fact. That lends credibility to what He had Daniel write about the end times beginning in verse 36. But for now, we'll focus on verses 40-45.

At the same time that the Kings of the East from **Rev. 16:12** begin their march, another large force from the North begins mobilizing. Earlier, the King of the North, (mainly Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria) will have joined up with the King of the South (Egypt) to oppose the anti-Christ's move to control the Middle East, but he will overcome them. Only Jordan, the hiding place of the Jews, will remain unscathed. (**Daniel 11:40-43**) So this new threat from the north can't be the already defeated King of the North.

Reports of the movement of this huge combat force from the East and North will greatly alarm the anti-Christ. What are they up to? Is this a Russian Chinese alliance that the world has long feared? Or is it going to be every man for himself?

Setting up his headquarters in Jerusalem the anti-Christ readies his troops to meet them in the last great battle for planet Earth. (**Daniel 11:44-45**) By some estimates, up to 400 million combatants will be involved before it's all over. The blood from their slain forms the river that flows from Megiddo in central Israel all the way to Petra in Jordan, about 175 miles away. (**Rev. 14:20**)

“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”

Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon. (**Rev. 16:15-16**)

This warning is the second indication (the first was in **Rev. 14:12-13**) that Tribulation believers will be responsible for maintaining their own salvation, symbolized by keeping their clothes with them. It also confirms three statements in **Matt. 24-25** that believers on Earth at the end of the Great Tribulation won't know exactly when the Lord will return. (**Matt, 24:42-44, Matt. 24:50 & Matt. 25:13**)

If you're familiar with the symbolic reference to clothing, you know what this verse means. If not, let's review it. **Isaiah 61:10** says,

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

Just as clothing provides physical covering, righteousness provides spiritual covering. At the first moment of belief God clothed the Church in His own righteousness (**2 Cor. 5:21**) and sealed the Holy Spirit within us guaranteeing our salvation (**Ephes. 1:13-14**).

But in the Book of Revelation, there's no indication of the indwelling Spirit guaranteeing the security of Tribulation believers like He does during the Church age. As was the case with Old Testament saints, they have to stay awake and alert and look after their position before God constantly. Here they are cautioned to stay alert and keep their righteousness intact because the time is very short and if they're not careful they'll be caught unawares.

The name Armageddon comes from the Hebrew phrase Har Megiddo, or Mt. Megiddo. It's a place in central Israel at the western entrance to the Jezreel Valley. King Solomon had massive stables there, and Napoleon called this valley the most ideal battlefield on Earth. Here it's used as the staging area for the troops amassed against Jerusalem. It's the only place on Earth God has claimed for Himself (**2 Chron. 6:5-6**), so naturally the forces opposed to Him want it for themselves.

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and

gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible. (**Rev 16:17-21**)

This passage defies description. God has given Planet Earth His most severe judgment ever. Any more and the planet would literally cease to exist.

Earthquakes level every city. Babylon, God's ancient enemy, is singled out for special treatment that we'll tackle next time. The entire Earth is being re-formed in this final cycle of judgment, partly to eradicate every trace of man's evil intentions, and partly to complete its restoration in preparation for the Kingdom Age (**Acts 3:21**).

The Biblical penalty for blasphemy is death by stoning. (**Lev. 24:10-16**) The anti-Christ and the people of Earth have been blaspheming the Name of God since the beginning. Now comes the penalty phase. 100 pound balls of ice come crashing down out of the sky causing unparalleled devastation. God is stoning the people of Earth for their blasphemy. And still they curse Him.

Next time, we'll cover the destruction of the three powerful forces that make up Babylon the Great, and that have oppressed and enslaved mankind through out most of his history. They are religious, commercial, and governmental in nature and each is treated to a special measure of God's wrath.

Revelation 17

With the conclusion of the bowl judgments we're right at the end of the Great Tribulation. Now we'll back up a little and get the detail on Babylon's Destruction. Remember the verse from **Rev. 16:19**?

God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.

Well, chapters 17-18 will give us the blow-by-blow. Almost since the beginning of time, the story of man on Earth has been the Tale of Two Cities, Babylon the city of man, and Jerusalem the City of God. It's no coincidence that the final days of the Age of Man are taken up with a battle involving these two cities.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY

BABYLON THE GREAT

THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. (**Rev 17:1-6**)

As I said in our last segment, there are three facets to the Babylonian world system that have enslaved men through the Ages. They are religious, commercial, and governmental in nature. We'll deal with the religious first, characterized here by the woman.

A woman, identified as mystery Babylon, the mother of prostitutes, will be riding a beast. The rider always controls the animal, and the third mention of seven heads and ten horns indicates that this is the same beast that came out of the water in **Rev. 13**, the one empowered by Satan, the dragon from **Rev. 12**. This tells us that the anti-Christ will initially derive his power through his association with religion.

The woman and the beast are not the same, but for a time will appear to be in league with each other. The woman, being the rider, will actually be the dominant partner at first. But as **Rev. 17:16** tells us, the anti-Christ and his associates will actually hate the woman, and acting on God's orders will destroy her. More about that later.

Having fought for most of the past century to divest himself of his relationship with the one true God, man will embrace this false religion. Speaking of the anti-Christ and his false religion, Jesus said,

“I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me; but if someone else comes in his own name, you will accept him (**John 5:43**).

The Woman is called mystery Babylon because she's not in Babylon, as we'll soon see. But the Babylonian religion is literally the mother of all the cults and mythologies that have been set up in opposition to the Gospel.

Briefly, back in the time of **Genesis 10**, when Nimrod founded Babylon, his wife Semeramis sowed the first seeds of false religion by claiming that her son Tammuz was the supernatural offspring of the Sun God, counterfeiting the promise first disclosed in the Garden that the seed of the woman would redeem mankind.

According to tradition, when Tammuz was killed in a hunting accident, she went into 40 days of mourning. Near the end of this time she burned a yule log (yule means child in the Babylonian language) as the Sun slowly died. After the longest night of the year, the winter Solstice, Tammuz came back to life in the world's first counterfeit resurrection.

In joy, she decorated an evergreen tree, a symbol of life, and passed out pastries with her son's initial on top to commemorate the event. Today we call these pastries hot cross buns, since the Babylonian "T" looks like our "X". As if to validate this celebration, the sun began coming back to life as well.

She memorialized the 40 days of mourning (which we now call Lent) by forming a celibate priesthood to lead the people in the worship of her risen son. She declared the high priest to be infallible and herself to be the Queen of Heaven.

Every mythology from that time forward has carried elements of this story. In the Egyptian version she was known as Isis, in neo-Babylon as Ashteroth or Ishtar, in Canaan as Astarte, in Greece as Aphrodite and in Rome as Venus. She's variously called the goddess of love and fertility. Her main objective has always been to usurp God's role as the sole Giver and Sustainer of Life. (Some traditions hold that far from being the Virgin of the Sea, as she once called herself, Semiramis was the madam of a brothel when she first met Nimrod. If so, she really was the "mother of prostitutes".)

Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the

creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. (**Rev. 17:7-8**)

The inhabitants of the Earth will be astonished to see the Beast because he was once, now is not, and yet will come. The Greek word translated astonished here means to marvel at, or hold in admiration.

Some believe that the phrase once was, now is not, and yet will come means that the anti-Christ will be a figure from the past, someone who had lived before John's time, was dead when John wrote the book of Revelation, but will come back at the End of the Age as the anti-Christ. The most popular candidates are Antiochus Epiphanes who died in 163BC, the Roman Emperor Nero who died in 68 AD, and Judas Iscariot who died in 32AD. Antiochus Epiphanes and Nero are two of the most specific historical models of the anti-Christ, and Jesus called Judas the son of perdition (**John 17:12**) the same title by which Paul referred to the anti-Christ (**2 Thes. 2:3**)

“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. (**Rev 17:9-11**)

The traditional view of this passage is that it refers to Rome, known around the world as the City on Seven Hills. But some believe this is not true to the Greek rendering of **Rev. 17:9** which actually speaks of seven mountains. The Greek word for hills is different and only appears twice in the New Testament, both in Luke's gospel. You can see the difference in **Luke 23:30** where both oros, the word for mountain, and bounos, the word for hill, are used in the same sentence. If John was using the word mountain symbolically, they say, he would be speaking of governments not topographical elevations. This would have the woman seated atop seven governments.

But since the word for mountain is used in the illustration of the city on a hill (**Matt. 5:14**) and in describing the Mount of Olives (**Matt. 26:30**), others say the translation of **Rev.**

17:9 as seven hills is appropriate. This is one of several points of contention between those who believe the End times world government will be a revival of the Biblical Roman Empire, and those who say it will be an Islamic Caliphate. Caliphate proponents rightly claim that Rome never held all the territory of the Babylonian, Persian and Greek empires, but a previous Caliphate (the Ottoman Empire) did. They also point out how hard it is to justify the two legs of the statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream (**Daniel 2:31-43**) as pointing to the eastern and western legs of the Roman Empire because the legs had their beginning in the Greek Empire (belly and thighs of bronze) that preceded it, and the two divisions of Rome only existed together for a short time. Therefore, they say notion that the feet and toes must be an extension of Rome is similarly suspect.

At the time of John's writing, history had noted the passing of five kings, representing Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, and Greece. The king ruling in John's day was the Roman Emperor. Everyone agrees on that. But depending on your point of view, the one that had not yet come in John's time could either be head of a revived Rome or the Islamic Caliphate.

Rev. 17:11 makes it clear that the beast (anti-Christ) is a king and not a kingdom. We know this because the Greek word for king is in the masculine gender, while kingdom is a feminine word. John has just said the seven heads are seven kings. This eighth king is not specifically identified with any of the seven, but in his goals and ambitions he will be like all of them. This could be a hint that the anti-Christ will not have previously held a leadership position in world government, and may even come from outside the world's political structure.

“The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will

overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.” (**Rev. 17:12-14**)

The 10 horns represent those who will assume leadership of the world’s government under the headship of the anti-Christ, eventually massing all the armies of man to oppose the return of the Lord with His Church. The three words used to describe the Lord’s followers (called, chosen, and faithful) are always and only used of the Church. That means He’s coming with us, not for us.

Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.” (**Rev 17:15-18**)

This is the destruction of religious Babylon foretold in **Rev. 14:8**. Although the anti-Christ will come to power through the influence of the Babylonian religion, this very religious system will become a barrier to his ultimate goal of being worshiped exclusively. In **2 Thes. 2:4** Paul said he will exalt himself above everything that is called god or is worshiped. And so he and his cohorts will turn on religious Babylon to destroy it. Notice that it’s God Who puts them up to this. For “one hour” (the time of the Great Tribulation) the Beast and his 10 kings get power over Earth just so they can destroy the “woman” who made their rule possible, thereby fulfilling God’s purpose to destroy the false religion that has done so much harm to His creation.

Revelation 18

At some point along the way, the headquarters of these three world systems will be consolidated in Babylon. **Zechariah 5:5-11** speaks of a woman in a basket, representing the iniquity of the world, being carried from her current position to a place prepared for her on the plains of Shinar, a reference to Babylon's location in modern day Iraq. Women with the wings of storks, unclean birds, lift the basket into the air and carry it there.

Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon had been conquered by the Persians nearly 100 years before Zechariah's prophecy. Within 200 more years the Persians would lose it to Alexander who intended to dredge the Euphrates and make Babylon into a giant river port for ships from the Persian Gulf and points East. Alas, he died before he could start it. When one of Alexander's successors built his dreamed of port in a natural harbor on the neighboring Tigris River and named it Baghdad, Babylon dwindled to a town of 10,000, its massive walls cannibalized for building blocks.

Current conditions in Iraq may just be leading us toward the fulfillment of the Bible's prophecy to restore Babylon to a mighty city in preparation for its ultimate and complete destruction. No other city except Jerusalem is given as much mention in the Bible as Babylon, and in the 6 chapters devoted to its destruction (**Isaiah 13-14, Jeremiah 50-51, and Rev. 17-18**) it has never been so completely overcome as these passages require. In fact, one of the great surprises from the Gulf War was the vision of Babylon, having undergone a billion dollar reconstruction, sitting there tall and proud on the banks of the Euphrates.

As tempting as it is to read these passages figuratively and see them as representing New York or some other city, and as much as we can all agree that such punishment is certainly warranted for them, there's simply no Biblical reason to do so. The plains of Shinar is a specific geographical location in Iraq, and after the center of pagan religion moved from Babylon to Pergamum during the time of the Greek Empire it never came back there as Zechariah's prophecy requires. And remember, we not just talking about religion here. The Babylonian system includes government and commercial components as well. This will be confirmed through out **Rev. 18**. There's no single city in the world today that houses the headquarters of all three.

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted:

“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”

Then I heard another voice from heaven say:

“Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself.

In her heart she boasts, ‘I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.’ Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

“When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry:

” ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!’ (**Rev. 18:1-10**)

The Babylonian religion was destroyed in **Rev. 17**. Now Babylon itself will be reduced to ruins, burned in the fire of righteous judgment, a haunt for demons. World leaders who have enriched themselves through this corrupt system will weep and mourn in terror. The governmental systems from which they’ve gained their unjust wealth at the expense of their subjects is no more. Next comes the commercial component.

“The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more— cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

“They will say, ‘The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.’ The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out:

” ‘Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!’

“Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, ‘Was there ever a city like this great city?’ They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out:

” ‘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! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.’ “

People who subscribe to the theory that the Babylon spoken of here is meant to symbolize some other city often point to specific details in this passage to support their view. In doing so they rely on their human perception of what is or is not possible rather than trusting the Word of God.

For example some say the phrase “Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off” suggests a port by the sea. They remind us that the plains of Shinar are nowhere close to the sea, or visible from the sea and claim it would be impossible for someone on a ship at sea to see Babylon burning.

While serving in the US Navy, I was stationed aboard the USS Independence. At the time it was the world’s largest aircraft carrier and our lookouts stood watch on a platform 9 stories above sea level. We considered their line of sight range to be about 20 miles. This was not considered to be “afar off” so their abilities were augmented by aircraft who were stationed several hundred miles ahead of us flying high enough to “see” several hundred more miles with their search radar and relay information back to the captain. In this way he could “see” things that were “afar off” and take appropriate action. These days we also have cell phones and satellite TV that make it possible for anyone to see almost anything from anywhere.

In addition, **Rev. 18:18-19** says when these ship masters and sailors see the smoke of Babylon burning they’ll throw dust on their heads and cry out with weeping and mourning. If they can throw dust on their heads they must be on land, and if they’re on land they could be close enough to see from afar.

We could devote much time to a discussion on the details of Babylon's destruction, but if you consider all the six chapters that the Bible devotes to the ultimate destruction of Babylon (**Isaiah 13-14, Jeremiah 50-51 and Rev. 17-18**) you'll find there's no Biblical reason to assume they refer to any place other than the actual city on the plains of Shinar. It will also become obvious that never in history has this evil city and all it represents been so totally brought down. And even if the city itself had been dashed to the ground and its refuse dumped into the sea, the systems created there have certainly survived to this day.

What I'd like us to focus on here is the insidious nature of the world's commercial system and how it's enslaved mankind to an extent that actually surpasses the religious oppression we've discussed because by its nature, it closes the door to God's truth. Consider these words from the Lord in His Kingdom Parables.

The one who received the seed that fell among the thorns is the man who hears the word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke it, making it unfruitful. (Matt. 13:22)

From my studies, I've concluded that with the rise of the anti-Christ the world's religious, political and economic systems will all be consolidated under one authority, and this authority will be headquartered in Babylon. It will be the Vatican, Mecca, the UN, the stock and commodities markets and the monetary exchanges of the world all rolled up into one.

Today many of us don't realize the extent to which we've become enslaved. It isn't until you opt out of the system that you begin to realize the hold it's had on you. His American audiences used to roar in laughter when Charles "Tremendous" Jones, one of my favorite humorists accused them of "spending money we don't have, to buy things we don't need, to impress people we don't like." The accusation was all too true, but it seems like all we can do about it is laugh at ourselves.

The secret to success was once identified as the ability to find a need and fill it. Now the advertising industry promises, "Bring us a product, and we'll create the need for it." Promotional costs can add 30-50% to the price of the things we buy, and yet we willingly pay the premium, because we've been convinced that we need what the advertisers are selling. And then we have to add in the cost of financing our purchases because we don't really have the income to support the lifestyle we've been manipulated into. So we borrow from the future to pay for the present.

Also, each year a cost of government day is calculated to show how much of the average person's income goes to support our various levels of Government. In 2012 that day came on July 15 for US citizens. It means every dollar that we earned from January 1 to July 15 was required to pay the various taxes levied against us by our government. For most, the hidden costs of promotion and credit will more than consume the rest.

So it should come as no surprise that for years Americans have spent up to 125% of their annual incomes, accumulating trillions of dollars in consumer debt just to appear more successful than reality would permit because the advertising industry makes it sound like the right thing to do, and because our government requires so much of us. And we think we're free.

Similar statistics can be cited for much of the so-called developed world, though they're often obscured by the ridiculous promise of their governments to take care of them. (Don't they realize that governments don't produce wealth, but consume it?) For the rest, wages counted in pennies keeps people in a state of poverty you can actually feel, while those who pay them often enjoy lives of obscene luxury.

So whether he thinks he's rich or knows he's poor, the average human being is economically enslaved for life. As much as God hates false religion, He hates the economic enslavement of His people no less. And so when it comes time to visit His vengeance on those responsible, there's no holding back. Cries of excessive force and improper lack of restraint will fall on deaf ears this time. Commercial Babylon and its

worldwide system of enslavement will oppress mankind no more, and those who've been enriched by it will lament its loss.

Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said:

“With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.” (**Rev. 18:11-24**)

Everyone of Earth's current evils had its origin in Babylon, and finally the utter and permanent destruction man's religious, governmental and commercial systems has come. Next time we'll see what God has ordained to replace them as the fifth kingdom of **Daniel 2** arrives. And this one will never be destroyed or left to another, but will endure forever (**Daniel 2:44**).

Revelation 19

The Great Tribulation has ended, Babylon has been destroyed, and Planet Earth is ready to receive her King. All that remains is the capture of that unholy trinity that's caused all the devastation and the annihilation of their army. It sounds like a big job, but with the Lord personally directing events it won't take long at all.

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 the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants.”

And again they shouted: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “Amen, Hallelujah!” (**Rev. 19:1-4**)

Hallelujah is made up of two untranslated Hebrew words that taken together mean, “Praise the Lord.” Its four appearances in **Rev. 19** are unique to the New Testament. Since “Praise the Lord” is a phrase used almost exclusively by born again believers, it's fascinating to me that it's Hebrew version appears 24 times in the Old Testament, the same number as the elders who echo it here. Is this another subtle clue that the 24 elders represent the Raptured Church as I suggested in **Rev. 4**?

Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!”

Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’ ” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (**Rev 19:5-10**)

From the use of past tense verbs referring to the wedding, the bride and the clothing she was given, it looks like John’s describing an event that has already taken place, and indeed it will have, seven years earlier. Notice that while the clothing represents the bride’s righteousness, it’s not her clothing. It was given to her. We’re not righteous by our own works. Our righteousness is given to us by the Lord. (**2 Corinth. 5:21**) The Greek word literally means righteousness rather than righteous acts. Our righteousness is imputed to us by faith alone (**Romans 3:21-22**).

Isaiah 61:10 describes this scene more clearly.

I delight greatly in the LORD; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

When John changes to the present tense in speaking of those invited to the Wedding Supper, he’s making reference to believing Tribulation Survivors on Earth, soon to be invited into the Kingdom as described in the parable of the 10 virgins. (**Matt. 25:1-13**)

The Church is the Bride, and the Bride is not a bunch of invited guests, nor even a group of bridesmaids. Like the Church, she's one body. And she doesn't need an invitation to her own wedding banquet, because she's the main attraction. Without her there wouldn't be a banquet.

THE RIDER ON THE WHITE HORSE

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes 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. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (**Rev. 19:11-16**)

Here is the legitimate Man on a White Horse, not the impostor from **Rev. 6**. The crowns He wears are diadems, the crowns of royalty. The sharp sword is His Word as explained in **Hebrews 4:12**, and His robe is dipped in blood as foretold in **Isaiah 63:1-6**. John gives Him the name from his gospel, The Word. (**John 1:1**)

"He will rule them with an iron scepter" is a direct quote from **Psalms 2:9**, a promise given by God to His Son, and by the Son to the over comers of Thyatira. (**Rev. 2:26-27**) This signifies that His Church will rule with Him. Although those on white horses and dressed in white linen who accompany Him are the armies of heaven, He's doing all the fighting.

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” (**Rev 19:17-18**)

The contrast between the Great Supper of God and the Wedding Supper of the Lamb is all too evident. I’ll guarantee you that the armies of Earth won’t feel blessed to be invited. They’re the main course.

Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh. (**Rev. 19:19-21**)

In a fulfillment of **Psalms 2:1-6** that’s unbelievable in its arrogance, the people of Earth prepare to take on the Messiah and His heavenly army. But their leaders, the anti-Christ and his False Prophet, are immediately captured and thrown live into the Lake of Fire. The massive army that had followed them on this suicidal mission are slain by nothing more than the Word of the Lord’s mouth, their bodies devoured by the birds. I told you it wouldn’t take long.

Revelation 20

THE THOUSAND YEARS

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. **(Rev. 20:1-3)**

The purpose of the Millennium is now revealed. Many have wondered why God would put this unique 1000-year period between the 2nd Coming and eternity. I believe it's a response to man's three primary excuses for his inability to live a life pleasing to God.

The first excuse originated in the Garden when the woman blamed the Serpent for her disobedience. Ever since then mankind has blamed his bad behavior on the devil's deceptive influence. So now in response to that excuse, God has the devil bound for 1000 years. No more bad influence.

Man's second excuse has been the over powering temptation to sin created by the unbelieving world in our midst. So as the account of the Sheep and Goat judgment explains, at the establishment of the Kingdom all surviving unbelievers will be removed from Earth. Only surviving believers will populate Earth at the Kingdom's outset. **(Matt 25:31-46)**

Third is the absence of our Lord from among His people for 2000 years. It wasn't fair, man says, to leaves us alone like that for so long. So all during the Millennium Planet

Earth will be the headquarters of the Universe, with the Father in Israel and the Son in the nearby New Jerusalem.

In a few verses we'll see if things turn out differently with the removal of these obstacles to righteousness. But first let's look in on the conclusion of the First Resurrection.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. **(Rev. 20:4-6)**

Jesus promised His Disciples that they would sit in judgment of the 12 Tribes of Israel at the renewal of all things (**Matt. 19:28**) Now their time has come, as the believing dead from Israel's past are given their new bodies to join their countrymen in Israel. (**Daniel 12:1-2**) And the Tribulation martyrs are given bodies as well, completing the First Resurrection that began in the Garden Tomb 2000 years earlier with our Lord, the First Fruits of the First Resurrection. (**1 Cor. 15:20**)

Take note that although John said these martyrs will reign with the Lord, he never called them kings. So in the Book of Revelation we see three groups of believers in Heaven. There's the Church in **Rev. 5** who are called Kings and Priests. There's the multitude of **Rev. 7:9-17** who will serve God in His Temple but are never called priests, and there's the group of martyrs from **Rev. 20** who will reign with Christ but are never called kings. I believe this is a hierarchy of authority with the Church in the superior position, assisted by the others.

And as the Sheep and Goat judgment explains, Tribulation survivors are judged at this time as well. All this is in fulfillment of **Joel 3:14-21**.

SATAN'S DOOM

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (**Rev. 20:7-10**)

We skip ahead now to the end of the Millennium, to see how well natural man has performed in the absence of all his obstacles to righteous living. During the preceding 1000 years Earth will have been restored to its Garden like environment. Perfect weather, perfect peace, perfect rule, perfect conditions. With the return of long life spans, (**Isaiah 65:17-25**) the population of natural humans on Earth will have skyrocketed as children are born to their believing parents. And like all of mankind before them, these children will have the opportunity, indeed the obligation, to decide whether to allow the Lord's death to purchase their pardon from sin.

Even with believing parents, idyllic conditions, and a fully functioning Temple in Israel as a memorial to remind them of what the Lord has done, many will reject Him in favor of their own remedies for sin. So many in fact, that when Satan is released at the end of the 1000 years he'll be able to muster up a huge army for another attempt to kick the Lord off the planet. But of course they'll be defeated and this time Satan will be thrown into the Lake of Fire forever to join his fallen henchmen in their eternal torment.

So what's the point of the 1000 years? It's to show that there is no circumstance, no matter how favorable, in which sin infested man can live a life pleasing to God. Even after 1000 years of perfect life, perfect peace, and perfect rule, there's still enough residual sin in the hearts of natural man that he'll rebel against God at the first opportunity. And so the seventh dispensation concludes exactly like the six before it, in natural man's utter failure to live in peace with God, requiring a judgment. Jeremiah was right:

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (**Jere. 17:9**).

THE DEAD ARE JUDGED

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (**Rev. 20:11-15**)

While he's describing events at the end of the Millennium, John now turns our attention to the resurrection of the dead, which takes place then as well. It appears that this judgment will take place somewhere in the Outer Darkness, since the Earth and its immediate atmosphere, in which the New Jerusalem exists, are absent.

All the unsaved dead from all ages will suddenly come to life to stand before the Great White Throne of God. Each will see the events of his or her life unfold again as those who chose to be judged by their own works finally get their chance. They'll see again

the times when they heard the Gospel and rejected it, and how they even failed to live up to their own standards, let alone God's.

Some understand the phrase "*each person was judged according to what he had done*" as evidence that God will determine each person's punishment for failure to accept His pardon on the basis of the quality of their lives. Those who lived "good" lives will receive comparatively less punishment and those whose lives were worse will get more. According to this view, once someone has endured the full measure of his or her punishment, that person will be destroyed and will cease to exist in any form. Only Satan, the anti-Christ, and the False Prophet, they say, are destined for eternal torment. This view is called Conditional Hell and has come into mainstream thinking fairly recently.

Others hold to the traditional position that judgment of the unsaved brings eternal torment for all. Since the only work God required of them was to believe in the one He sent (**John 6:28-29**) and since there's nothing mankind can do that will substitute for that, it doesn't make sense to me that God would judge them on any other qualification. But no matter which view you hold, this judgment is no place to wind up, even for a time, especially when a little study to confirm God's obvious existence, followed by a decision to receive His pardon, can change everything.

THE LAKE OF FIRE

The Lake of Fire is a place of torment somewhere unknown to us, but the name has an interesting parallel in history that gives us a frighteningly clear model of the torment the unsaved will suffer. The Dead Sea is filled with water so rich in salt and other mineral content that it supports the human body. In other words you can't sink while floating in (on) it. In ancient times crude oil would periodically bubble up to the surface and solidify into a tar-like substance that harvesters chopped into blocks and towed to the shore for sale. When melted down again, it made a good adhesive to cement building blocks together, and the Egyptians used it in their embalming procedure as well. It was so

prevalent on the water's surface that the Romans called the Dead Sea "Lake Asphaltus" using the word from which we get asphalt. From time to time, during an electrical storm, lightning would strike the surface setting the solidified tar aflame. When that happened they called it "The Lake of Fire."

Imagine this. You're in deep water. As long as you keep your head above the surface you can breath. But the surface is on fire, so you hold your breath to sink under the surface to escape the flames. But the water pushes you back up like a cork into the fire. On it goes day and night. You twist and turn and squirm on the surface looking for some kind of respite, however brief. You'd welcome death and long for it, but you can't die because there's no escape from the punishment. Get the picture?

Don't let this happen to you. Get out your Bible and re-read passages like **John 3:16**, **John 6:28-29**, **Romans 10:9-10**, **Ephes.2:8-9** and **Titus 3:4-7**. Make sure you're saved. No attack against the Bible's authority has ever been sustained except in the minds of those who stubbornly refuse to believe in spite of all the evidence. The richest and most privileged unbeliever in the world would gladly trade places with the most severely mentally and physically handicapped beggar as an alternative to spending time in the Lake of Fire. All it takes is one decision. Be absolutely certain that you've made it, while there's time.

Next, we'll go back to the beginning of the Millennium and get a closer look at our eternal home as well as seeing the changes the Lord has in mind for the Middle East.

Revelation 21

Having carried his description of Satan's destiny and the resurrection of unbelievers to their conclusions in chapter 20, John now returns to the beginning of the Millennium to describe the new home of the Church in chapter 21 and the new Earth in chapter 22. We know this because the phrase "new heaven and new earth" also appears in **Isaiah 65:17** at the beginning of a passage describing Israel during the Millennium.

Let's take a minute to confirm the timing of **Rev. 21**. People who think the New Jerusalem doesn't appear until the end of the Millennium don't realize that **Rev. 20:7-15** is a parenthetical insert John used to carry his discussion on the destinies of Satan and the unsaved to its ultimate conclusion. This is something John did several times in the Revelation narrative to help complete a thought. (For example in **Rev. 12:3-6** he took four verses to summarize Satan's interference in God's plan over a period stretching from his pre-Adamic rebellion to the 2nd Coming.) In **Rev. 21** John returned to the beginning of the Millennium to describe the New Jerusalem.

There are several clues in the text that support this interpretation. First, **Rev. 20:7** begins, "when the thousand years are over" indicating that John has skipped to the end of the Millennium. Second, **Rev. 21:1** is a direct quote from **Isaiah 65:17** where the context is clearly Israel's Kingdom Age, aka the Millennium, and third the first 5 verses of **Rev. 22** are a summary of **Ezekiel 47:1-12**, which is also about the Kingdom Age in Israel. If you think about it for a minute you'll see there's neither need nor purpose for a river of life in the New Jerusalem, it being the exclusive home of the redeemed Church. There will be no more sickness or death there, so we won't need healing, and there won't be anyone from the nations there either (**Rev. 21:27**). That plus the similarity of

wording confirms that in **Rev. 22:1-2** John was describing the River of Life on Earth, just like Ezekiel had done.

And then there's the mention of the trees growing a different fruit each month in **Rev. 22:2**. This reference to time confirms that John was not talking about eternity, which by definition is the absence of time.

Also, the word translated new in John's quote of **Isaiah 65:17** can also mean refreshed or renewed. It refers to the time Jesus called the renewal of all things in **Matt. 19:28** and Peter mentioned in **Acts 3:21**. This will take place at the time of the 2nd Coming.

At the rapture of the Church the Lord will take us to His Father's house to be with Him where He is (**John 14:2-3**). **1 Thes 4:17** says once we go there, we'll always be there. This is the New Jerusalem. As we'll see **Rev. 21:2** shows the New Jerusalem coming down out of Heaven and goes on to describe an entity far too big to be located on Earth. It must only come to Earth's proximity.

In **Matt. 24:29** Jesus said the Sun and Moon would no longer shine after the end of the Great Tribulation. **Rev. 21:22-27** will describe the nations walking by the light of the New Jerusalem. After the 2nd Coming the New Jerusalem will replace the Sun as Earth's source of light.

Rev. 21:22-27 also shows the Kings of Earth bringing their splendor to the New Jerusalem, but says nothing impure can ever enter it, only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life, which is a description of the Church.

Taken together these verses show there are still three groups of humans during the Millennium. Israel in the promised land, the nations of Earth still in their natural state, and the perfected Church, living nearby but protected from impurity, Once eternity begins there won't be any impurities left in God's Creation (**1 Cor. 15:24-25**). OK. Let's begin our study of **Rev. 21**

THE NEW JERUSALEM

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (**Rev. 21:1**)

As I said, Jesus called this “the renewal of all things” in **Matt. 19:28**. According to **Romans 8:19-22** the creation itself has been writhing and groaning, waiting for the Sons of God to be revealed so it could finally be liberated from its bondage to decay. The judgments of the Great Tribulation served in part to prepare the Earth for its restoration. In all probability, its orbit and axis will have been returned to their original configurations, bringing again the world wide sub-tropical environment likely enjoyed by our first parents. The vast oceans, silent witnesses to the enormity of Noah’s flood will be hoisted back into the outer atmosphere, restoring the water vapor canopy that protected early man and allowing the return of long life spans they experienced (**Isaiah 65:20**). The sea floors will be elevated and the mountains lowered, and Earth will once again resemble the Garden Planet it was when Adam came on the scene. Its atmosphere will no longer be the haunt of demons, and the heavens will have been purified of Satan’s rebellious minions forever (**Rev. 12:7-8**).

I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!”
Then he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.” (Rev. 21:2-5)

Notice that while John watched the New Jerusalem descending from Heaven, he didn't report it as landing anywhere. Though it's close enough to Earth for him to describe it accurately, it's not on the Earth.

And don't be fooled into believing that the phrase “prepared as a bride” means that the New Jerusalem is the Bride. No, the word “as” tells us that John's comparing the New Jerusalem to a bride on her wedding day. Just as no expense is spared in making a bride look as beautiful as possible for her wedding, so none of God's creativity has been spared in making the home of the redeemed His ultimate expression of beauty.

Finally, because of that one death on a hill outside of Jerusalem, God and man have been reconciled (Col. 1:19-20) and His heart's longing to dwell with His creation has been fulfilled. For in the Church, He's done nothing less than create a new race of human, as righteous as He is, fit to dwell in His Presence.

And so the Creator of the Universe has made everything new, a New Heaven, a New Earth, and a New Race of Human. The damage caused in the Garden by the Serpent has been repaired.

He said to me: “It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” (Rev. 21:6-8)

In his first letter to the Church John had asked the rhetorical question, “

Who is it that overcomes the world?"

His answer was,

“Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.” (**1 John 5:5**)

Once again God makes the alternatives clear. Jesus said,

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.” (**John 7:37**)

Come to the One who gives the Living Water and drink from Him without cost, or remain in your sins and die forever.

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.” And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. (**Rev. 21:9-14**)

When Judas Iscariot betrayed the Lord and killed himself, the 12 were disciples, or students. Later the remaining 11, now Apostles (sent ones), voted and chose Matthias to replace Judas (**Acts 1:21-26**). Nothing more was written about him, and we don't know why. Obviously, God's choice was Paul, by far the most prolific of New Testament authors. I think it'll be his name we see on the foundation.

The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000

stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. (Rev. 21:15-21)

12,000 stadia are equal to about 1380 miles, meaning that if this city came to rest in Europe, it would cover everything from Scandinavia to Gibraltar and from the Coast of Spain to Italy's heel. Alternatively, it would hide the entire Middle East, or all of the Eastern US from Maine to Florida and from the Atlantic to the Mississippi. And at 1380 miles tall it would be about 4000 times as tall as the next tallest building on Earth. A globe with a 1380 mile diameter would be about 1/6th the size of Earth or about 2/3rds the size of the moon. More likely, it's a small planet or low orbit satellite. Some see it as a cube and others as a pyramid, and we may live on it or in it or both. What we know is that it's laid out as a huge city with streets paved in the purest gold, so pure it's nearly transparent, and according to **John 14:2** it's filled with many mansions.

While the names of these precious stones don't move easily between languages, it's likely that they're the same as the stones on the High Priest's breast plate.

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it.

Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life. (**Rev. 21:22-27**)

Not only does the home of the Redeemed not need the sun, but in fact it's the source of light for the nations of Earth. Their kings bring the best of Earth's production into it for our use, although as natural humans they themselves cannot enter. Having been the Lord's Temple for all the Age of the Church, we now discover that He's become ours for Eternity.

Revelation 22

THE RIVER OF LIFE

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place.”(**Rev. 22:1-6**)

As we saw at the beginning, this same river with its trees bearing a different fruit every month and leaves with healing power is described in **Ezekiel 47:1&12** as flowing from under the south side of the Temple in the Holy City, now called Jehovah Shammah (The Lord is there) , in Israel (**Ezekiel 48:35**). This tells us that we’re back on Earth, admiring the crystal clear river flowing through the Holy City.

According to **Zechariah 14:4-8** this river will suddenly begin flowing on the day of the Lord’s return. It will flow south toward the valley formed by a giant earthquake that will

split the Mount of Olives from east to west. Once there it will fill the valley, flowing to the Mediterranean in the west and the Dead Sea in the east. Its healing waters freshen the Dead Sea and fish from the Mediterranean will now swim there in abundance. (**Ezekiel 47:9-10**)

Where the river splits to flow east and west, what remains of the city of Jerusalem will line its banks. But the old Temple Mount along with the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aksa Mosque will lie in ruins beneath the deep waters, never to be seen again. They were right in the path of the earthquake, and the river will swallow them up, ending centuries of contention over the place God once called the apple of His eye. (**Zech 2:8**) (We covered this in greater detail in our study of **Revelation 11:15-12:17.**)

These verses confirm that John is speaking of the Millennium on Earth, not of eternity. And once again we're told of servants who serve Him and reign with Him but are never called Priests or Kings, and they're on the Earth not in the New Jerusalem. They're the resurrected Tribulation martyrs from **Rev. 7:9-14** and **Rev. 20:4**.

JESUS IS COMING

“Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.”

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”

Then he told me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong;

let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy.” (**Rev. 22:7-11**)

Being an eyewitness to the culmination of human history is overwhelming to John and he falls at the feet of the angel guiding him in an act of worship. But unlike that other angel, the one who started all the trouble because of his craving for worship, this one rebukes John, admonishing him to worship the One Who is worthy.

John was called the disciple who Jesus loved and received the clearest description of the End of the Age. Earlier Daniel, called the beloved prophet, (**Daniel 10:11**) had also received detailed descriptions of the same period. When Daniel asked for clarification he was told the words were closed up and sealed until the time of the end (**Daniel 12:9**). Here John is told not to seal up what he'd been told because the time is near. All through the Church Age God's prophecies of Earth's final days would be available for everyone to read. Those who were so inclined could ignore them and continue to be disobedient and those who read and applied it could do right and be Holy, but the End would come just as John had seen it regardless of man's response.

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. (**Rev. 22:12-13**)

This passage makes three sets of claims about The Lord. He is Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, and the First and the Last. These aren't just repetitive thoughts.

Variations on the phrase Alpha and Omega have autographed God's greatest work from the beginning. The first letter of the Greek alphabet is Alpha and the last is Omega. It's like saying, “From A to Z” in English. The Hebrew equivalents are Aleph and Tau. These two letters appear un-translated in a couple of interesting places in the Hebrew Scripture. One is in **Genesis 1:1** right after the phrase

“In the beginning God ...”

making the Hebrew version read,

“In the beginning God, the Aleph and the Tau, created the Heavens and the Earth.”

You have to get a Hebrew interlinear Bible to find it but it's there.

The other place is in **Zechariah 12:10** where the Hebrew reads,

“They will look upon me, the Aleph and the Tau, the one they have pierced ...”

It's a prophecy of Israel finally recognizing the true identity of the Messiah at the End of the Age. To the Greeks He's the Alpha and the Omega, the Christ. To the Hebrews He's the Aleph and the Tau, the Messiah.

The Greek word translated beginning is “arche” and denotes an order of time, place or rank. End comes from “telos”, which means the ultimate result or purpose; the upper limit. And so Jesus is the first in order of time, place and rank (**Col 1:18**), and represents the ultimate result or purpose of man; to be one with God (**John 17:20-23**).

The word translated first is “protos” and means the foremost or best. We get prototype from this word. And last comes from “eschatos” a superlative meaning farthest or uttermost. The term eschatology (the study of the end times) originates here. He is the prototype, against whom all will be compared (**Rom 8:29**), the uttermost or perfect example of the race, (**Hebr 1:3**) the only one ever born.

And so He was there before the beginning and will be there after the end. He represents man's ultimate purpose and is our perfect example.

“Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

“I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.” (**Rev. 22:14-16**)

The last of seven blessings in The Revelation. The other six are found in **Rev. 1:3, 14:13, 16:15, 19:9, 20:6, and Rev. 22:7**. One last time we’re reminded that while we may not be Jewish, the God we worship is. The phrase root and offspring of David recalls a Messianic prophecy from **Isaiah 11:1-3**.

Some modern versions incorrectly translate the Hebrew in **Isaiah 14:12** giving Satan the title Morning Star. When first translated into Latin, the Hebrew word “heylel” became Lucifer, or light bearer, and that’s how the name originated. Heylel literally means shining one, but its intent describes someone who is boastful or proud, calling attention to ones self, as in “always in the spotlight”. The entire Hebrew phrase in **Isaiah 14:12** is Heylel ben Shachar and means Shining One, Son of the Dawn. Our Lord Jesus is the one and only Bright Morning Star.

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. (**Rev. 22:17**)

This is the Lord’s final reminder that the price for our salvation has already been paid, and is available to everyone without condition.

Everyone who asks receives, he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks the door will be opened (**Matt. 7:8**).

How many times does He have to say that He didn’t create anyone to be without hope?

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. (**Rev. 22:18-19**)

In spite of this clear warning, there have been many attempts to allegorize or spiritualize this book into something it was never intended to be. It's neither history, nor allegory, nor fantasy, but prophecy. And it will be fulfilled just as God has promised, all of our efforts at denial notwithstanding.

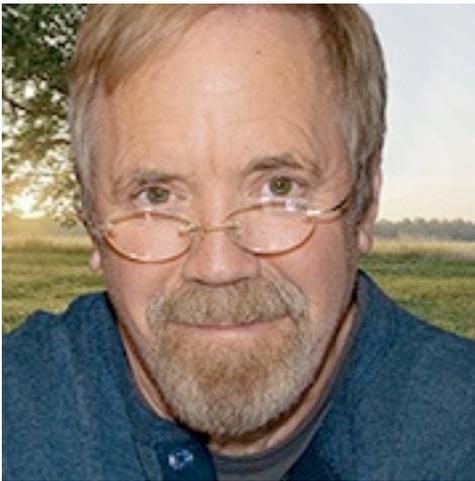
He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen. (**Rev. 22:20-21**)

This concludes our study of the Book of Revelation.

About the Author



Jack Kelley is a former a business man who “grew up” in a main line denomination but 25 years ago experienced a radical conversion to Evangelical Christianity. Since then he has devoted most of his time and energy to studying and teaching the Bible, conducting studies throughout the western US and serving as teacher, counselor, and lay pastor.

Thirteen years ago he and his wife Samantha founded www.gracethrufaith.com where he has posted all his past and current studies and answers questions about the Bible from followers around the world. His Bible studies and answers to Bible questions have been read by millions of pastors, teachers and students and are regularly used as sermon topics and Sunday School lessons .

He has also written several books including [Children's Stories of the Bible](#), The Adult Version, [Seven Things You Have To Know To Understand End times Prophecy](#), and [The Redeemer](#). He has also posted numerous [mp3 studies and ebooks](#) which you can download from the site.

Jack and his family currently reside on the Baja Peninsula in Mexico where they serve as volunteer missionaries.

(Jack is not the former USA Today reporter, nor is he the former TV star and game show host.)

Find him [@gtfjack](#) on Twitter, on [Facebook](#) and at www.gracethrufaith.com