



The Book of Revelation

Scripture's Crescendo and Culmination

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“The Inspiration of St. John” by Jean Duvet

The Message of Revelation

The message of the Book of Revelation is one of comfort and encouragement to beleaguered believers. Be strong in the faith! Take courage and persevere! Things are not as they seem! It may appear that the forces of evil are triumphant on every side but that is not true. God remains in control of His universe and all that takes place within it. Past, present, and future are in His hands alone. Do not despair. With the eyes of faith, look behind the deceiving facade of things as they appear to be and see things as they truly are. With the din of desperate battle raging all around us, listen with the ears of faith to the “*distant triumph song*” already resounding in the halls of heaven. The foe has already been defeated. Christ has won the victory. Dr. Donald Richardson says it well:



“John’s Vision of the Secret Revelation”
by Hans Memling - 1475

“The Christians of that generation were in the midst of an alien, hostile environment; and in a period of unprecedented persecution. The present was characterized by chaos and confusion, ruin was around them, and the future seemed impenetrably dark. To the ordinary observer it seemed as though the church and all it stood for would be utterly crushed, and that this community of those who followed Christ would be driven into denial of Him or done to death. John, however, with eyes that can see, looks beyond the borders of the visible. He lifts for his companions in tribulation the veil that obscures the far vision. When the hearts of others are failing them for fear, he sounds a clear note of confidence and of sure victory. The golden age, he tells them, is not behind us; the best is yet to be....The joys and sorrows of life, the pain and persecution of the present, are not without meaning. They are only parts of a great plan whose design for the moment we may be unable to see; but the plan is there, and behind it all is God. The present may be dark and troubled and our minds perplexed, but John calls upon the future to carry his readers courageously over the present...The Book of Revelation, says Dr. C.A. Smith, is the Christian epic of the day that is after tomorrow...Think of where you are going instead of where you have been, or now are. Things are bad today, but don’t act as if the heavens were falling in bits of blue plaster around your feet. “By God’s will doubt not, the last word is still victory.” The first word of the book is the key to its content and purpose: “Apocalypse,” revelation. The word means uncovering, unveiling. Christ is unveiled and the future of the church is unveiled. Unveiling is the key to the book. The word opens wide doors, and magnificent visions of conflict and victory and great glory appear. The unveiling of Christ, the

final truth about Christ and His Church, that is the purpose of the last book of the Bible. And in this book we have the unveiled Person, the unveiled program of His purpose, and the unveiled power. The central truth which the writer seeks to impress upon his readers is that the world and all of its events and affairs are under the control of Christ. History with all of its powers and forces, is under His direction; and He will ultimately bring about the full and final victory of good. He shows that the conflict between God and Satan, between good and evil, is inevitable, persistent, prolonged. The

Church is in the wilderness, meeting with opposition, enduring persecution; but Christ is present with the Church, the source of her life and the assurance of her ultimate victory. Evil for the present seems regnant, but it is only for a time, and times, and half a time. The final triumph of God's purpose and the reign of His righteousness is certain. In the midst of persecution and peril, the Christian should fear none of those things which he is called upon to suffer, but be faithful in his witness to Christ; and in the end he shall receive the crown of life. And so, the true Christian should be constantly looking forward. Of him it is true that hope springs eternal in the human breast; and when the night is darkest, he may be comforted and cheered by the promise of the coming day. There is a divine conviction in the soul of the Christian which causes him to believe that when all human resources have failed and he is utterly helpless, then a Helper is on the way. When man's means are exhausted, God is coming; for man's extremity is always God's opportunity....The coming of Christ is the dominant note of the book. "Surely, I come quickly!" is the word of Christ to His suffering saints...This a book of supreme optimism. There is an undertone of hope running through every page... The Church, with the risen, living Christ in the midst of her is to go into conflict. Her warfare in the world is inevitable. That warfare John pictures for us in all its tragedy. It is the tragedy of the struggle between right and wrong, and often wrong seems to be triumphant; but Christ is in the midst of the Church as she battles for the right. His presence and His power are the Church's assurance of her ultimate victory. And so, the Revelation is the symbolic story of the Church's journey through the wilderness of the world into the land of promise....The story of the Church is a story of unceasing conflict, but also of increasing victory; and in the end, the devil and all his works will go down before her, and she shall issue from the field of battle forever triumphant. That is the message of John, and that is the Christian's sure conviction." (Richardson, pp. 13-14)



“John on Patmos” by Ernst Barlach - 1919



“St John on Patmos” by Jan Wellens de Cock - 1520

The Author and Date of Revelation

The author of the Book of Revelation tells us four times that his name is “John” (Revelation 1:1,4,9; 22:8). The Greek name “*Ioannes*” is a form of the Hebrew name “*Yohanan*” which means “*Yahweh is gracious!*” The name was relatively common among the Jews of the first century. The fact that John considered it unnecessary to further identify himself indicates that he was a well known figure among the churches of Asia Minor who could safely assume that his audience would recognize him and acknowledge the authority of that which he wrote. It is the overwhelming testimony of the fathers of the early church that St. John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee and brother of James, was the author of the Book of Revelation.

Tradition indicates that St. John spent the last years of his life in the Greek city of Ephesus, on the western coast of the Roman Province of Asia. It is conjectured that John arrived in the city in the year 69 or 70 A.D. The fathers further indicate that

John was later banished from the city to the nearby island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea, during the persecution of the Roman Emperor Domitian who reigned from 81-96 A.D. St. Jerome reports:

“In the fourteenth year then after Nero, Domitian having raised a second persecution, John was banished to the island of Patmos, and wrote the Apocalypse on which Justin Martyr and Irenaeus later wrote commentaries. But Domitian having been put to death, and his acts, on account of his excessive cruelty, having been annulled by the senate, he returned to Ephesus under Nerva Pertinax and continuing there until the time of the emperor Trajan, founded and built churches throughout all Asia, and, worn out by old age, died in the sixty-ninth year after our Lord’s passion and was buried near the same city.” (NPNF, 3, pp. 364-365)

This, of course, conforms with the testimony of the text itself, which indicates that at the time when the Revelation came to John he was **“on the island of Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.”** (Revelation 1:9) Thus, the date of the Book of Revelation would seem to be in the early to mid nineties, during the last decade of the first century.



“St. John on the Isle of Patmos” - 19th Century Bible Engraving



“The Vision of St. John by Jean Duvet

Apocalyptic Literature and Revelation

The Book of Revelation calls itself the “*Apocalypse*” (Revelation 1:1) from the Greek word “*apokalypsis*” which means “*to remove the cover from*” or “*to reveal.*” It shares many basic characteristics with a unique form of literature which flourished among the Jews during the last two centuries B.C. and the first century A.D.

Apocalyptic literature is the product of hard times. It was directed mainly to a people in trouble, as people who saw themselves as God’s own, but who were puzzled by the plight in which they found themselves, dominated and oppressed by a succession of foreign conquerors. It is a uniquely Jewish form of literary expression which finds its way into both the Old and the New Testaments, although the great majority of apocalyptic writing is extra-biblical (i.e. The Book of Jubilees, the Psalms of Solomon, the Assumption of Moses, The Martyrdom of Isaiah, the Apocalypse of Moses, etc.).

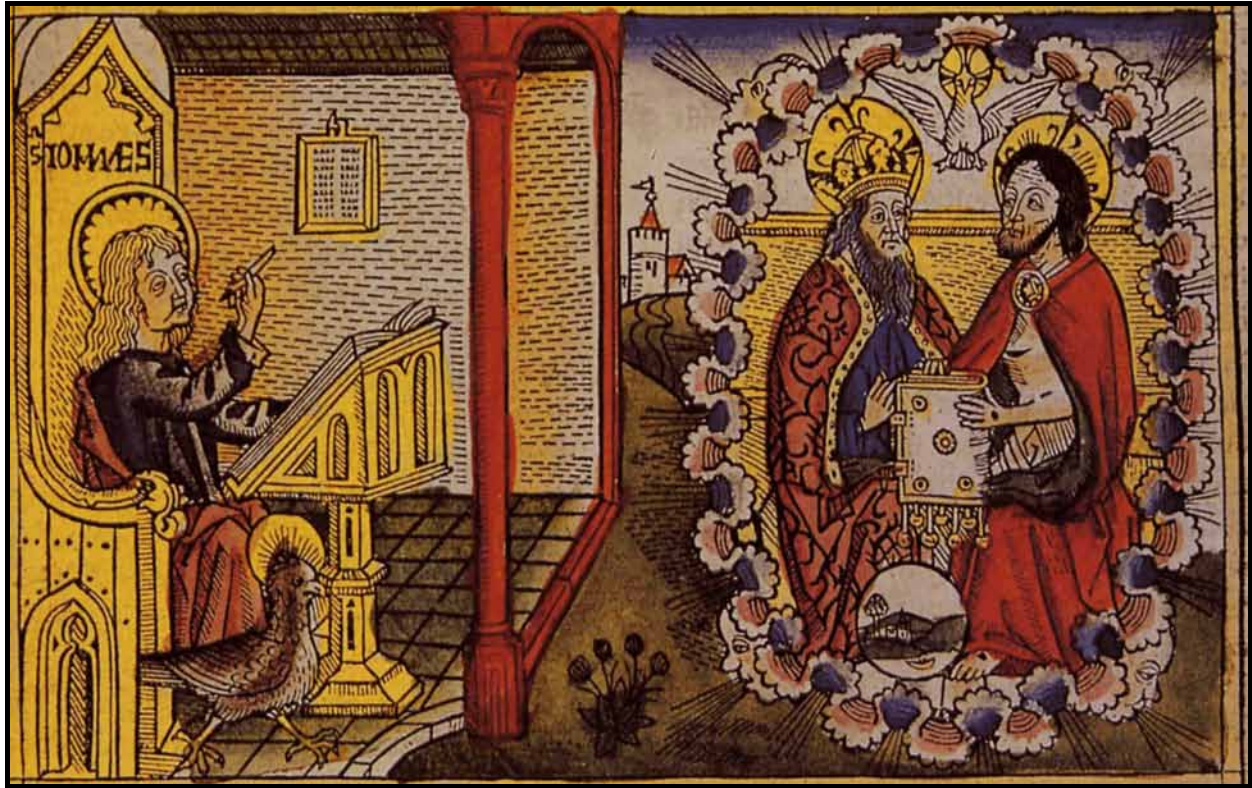
The basic characteristics of apocalyptic literature include the following:

1. Apocalyptic writing deals with secret or hidden information which can only be disclosed by supernatural means through dreams or visions from God or angelic intermediaries.
2. The message of apocalyptic literature is communicated in mysterious, enigmatical forms through the use of bizarre, oftentimes obscure symbolism and imagery. Its fantastic worlds of beasts, signs, colors, numbers, and angels seems to have functioned as a type of code which effectively communicated its message to a select group while concealing the message from the uninitiated.
3. Apocalyptic literature is basically pessimistic in its assessment of mankind’s potential. There is little possibility for progress or positive development within the normal framework of human endeavor. From the apocalypticist’s point of view, things are bad and they are only going to get worse as far as men are concerned.
4. Apocalyptic literature is written in times of catastrophic change as previously well-ordered world views collapse. Apocalyptic writers see themselves in the midst of the catastrophic destruction of a way of life, even of the entire universe.

5. Apocalyptic literature proceeds on the firm conviction that in his own good time, God will intervene to bring the evil of this world to an end and proclaim His ultimate victory. It has been aptly described as “ *the anticipatory raising of the curtain to display the final scene*” - it is, in a way, conveying pictorially and in symbol, the conviction of the ultimate victory of God.
6. Apocalyptic literature is rigidly deterministic. All of history is pre-ordained in the power and wisdom of God. Nothing can interrupt or frustrate His plans.
7. Apocalyptic literature is basically dualistic. History is perceived as an ongoing conflict between God and Satan, good and evil.
8. Extra-Biblical Apocalyptic literature is generally pseudonymous, that is to say, written under a false name, most commonly the name of one of the great heroes of the Old Testament.
9. A feature of many extra-Biblical apocalypses is that they take past or present events and rewrite them in the form of predictive prophecy.
10. Apocalyptic writing is produced to bring cheer and comfort to the righteous in the midst of their tribulations.
11. The assertion of the supernatural ability to predict future events is an important component of this type of literature.

Martin Franzmann offers this helpful summary of the differences between apocalyptic literature in general and the Book of Revelation:

“As the man of Jewish descent, language, and culture that he obviously was, John was acquainted with and influenced by a form of Judaic religious literature which modern scholars have classified as “apocalyptic.” Apocalyptic literature elaborated certain elements or aspects of Old Testament prophecy, found in such passages and books as Isaiah 24-27, Zechariah 9-14, Ezekiel, Joel, and Daniel. It sought to interpret all history on the basis of purported visionary experiences of the author. It was especially interested in eschatology, that is, in the end of history and the ushering in of the world to come. It utilized pictures, allegories, and symbols (which soon became traditional); numbers, colors, and stars were in these images endowed with a profound significance....Formally, the Revelation to John belongs to this class; apocalyptic furnished the familiar vocabulary of its speech. The influence of



“The Vision of St. John” from the “Koberger Bibel - 1483

apocalyptic on the Revelation to John can be and often has been exaggerated. The Revelation to John is set apart from the general run of apocalyptic literature by profound differences. Apocalyptic itself drew heavily on the Old Testament; John draws even more heavily. In fact, it is the Old Testament itself and not apocalyptic that constitutes the immediate background and the richest source for Revelation. Revelation is at bottom much more deeply akin to the Old Testament than it is to apocalyptic which it resembles so strongly on the formal side. Other differences are equally striking. Apocalyptic works are generally pseudonymous; that is, they claim some great figure from Israel’s past, such as Enoch, as author; and the past course of history as known to the actual author is made a prediction in the mouth of the purported author. John, however, writes in his own name. Apocalyptic has speculative interests and seeks to calculate the times of the world’s days and of the world’s end. John has no such speculative interest; he does not aim to satisfy men’s curiosity but to give them hope and courage, and he does not attempt to calculate the approach of the end...The visions of apocalyptic betray their origin; they are fantasies of men. The visions of John have on them the stamp of genuine visionary experience; they are not products of the study. If apocalyptic can be termed literary meditation on prophetic themes, Revelation is genuine prophecy, a prophecy which uses apocalyptic motifs and forms insofar, and only insofar, as they are legitimate explications of Old Testament prophetic themes and are germane to its own thoroughly Christ-centered proclamation.” (Franzmann, pp. 27-28)



“St. John on Patmos” by Hans Burgkmair - 1518

Interpreting the Book of Revelation

There are four basic interpretive approaches to the Book of Revelation. Their perspectives may be summarized as follows:

1. THE PRETERIST OR CONTEMPORARY HISTORICAL VIEW

This view is favored by theological liberals and those who reject the inspiration of Scripture and the possibility of predictive prophecy. The Preterist View assumes that Revelation is no different than any other example of apocalyptic literature from the

period. The author, whomever he may have been (most preterists reject the traditional view that St. John the Apostle was the author of Revelation), is describing events from the recent past and the present as if he were foretelling future events. According to this view the book is a tract on contemporary history written for the First Century. It deals with nothing more than Roman or Jewish persecution of the Christian Church during that period.

2. THE FUTURIST VIEW

This view is favored by fundamentalists who subscribe to the theory of dispensational pre-millennialism. It is sometimes called “Dispensational Futurism.” According to this view the visions of chapters 4-22 refer exclusively to a future time immediately preceding the end of history. Dispensational Futurists emphasize a rigid literalism through which they decipher a hidden time line for the end of the age. The time line includes these events: 1. The restoration of ethnic Israel to its promised land; 2. The rapture of the Gentile church into heaven; 3. A seven year tribulation period; 4. The reign of the Antichrist in Jerusalem during the Tribulation Period; 5. The gathering of the godless nations to battle for Jerusalem; 6. The triumphant return of Christ to defeat His foes in the battle of Armageddon; 7. The thousand year (millennial) reign of Christ on earth; 8. Satan’s final rebellion at the end of the millennium; and, 9. The destruction of Satan and the eternal reign of Christ in heaven.

3. THE HISTORICIST OR CONTINUOUS HISTORICAL VIEW

There are many varieties of the Historicist view. It is the traditional viewpoint of mainstream Christendom. In this view, Revelation is seen as predicting the major events and movements of Christian history throughout the first and second comings of Christ. Individual symbols and signs within the Book are specifically identified with personalities, places, and events in Christian history providing a chronological sequence of prophecies which are being continuously and successively fulfilled from the days of John the Revelator until the Last Day. The difficulty with these specific identifications is that they cannot be validated in the text and often tend to focus the applications of the text to persons and events contemporary to the interpreter.

4. THE IDEALIST OR SYMBOLIC VIEW

The fourth and final view is, in a sense, a variation of the Historicist viewpoint that has prevailed throughout much of Christian tradition. The Idealist agrees that Revelation describes and predicts persons and events throughout the New Testament era. However, he disagrees with the Historicist, in that he generally refuses to limit

the identification of the symbol or application of the prophecy to only one historical reality. Such specific individual application may be made only when it is facilitated and required by the text of Revelation itself. However, in most cases, the prophecies of Revelation portray events and patterns that are repeated over and over again throughout history. In this way, Revelation is relevant for God's people in every time and place, as pertinent to us today as it was to the First Century believers of John's original audience. Conservative Lutheran scholar Siegbert Becker argues that the idealistic view is based on Scripture's interpretation of itself and is thus the true literal interpretation of the Book:

“The idealistic interpretation is really only a variation of the church historical interpretation of Revelation...The idealistic or church historical interpretations are really the grammatical-historical method of interpretation applied to this particular form of literature. And it ought to be stressed again and again that the words of the text itself tell us that we are dealing with symbols that stand for something else...The idealistic interpretation is the literal interpretation.” (Becker, pp. 18-19)



***“St John Delivered from the Boiling Oil”
by Albrecht Dürer***

An Outline of Revelation

- I. The Prologue (1:1-20)
 - A. Introduction (1:1-3)
 - B. Salutation (1:4-8)
 - C. John's Commission from Christ (1:9-20)

- II. The First Vision - The Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)
 - A. The Letter to Ephesus (2:1-7)
 - B. The Letter to Smyrna (2:8-11)
 - C. The Letter to Pergamum (2:12-17)
 - D. The Letter to Thyatira (2:18-29)
 - E. The Letter to Sardis (3:1-6)
 - F. The Letter to Philadelphia (3:7-13)
 - G. The Letter to Laodicea (3:14-22)

- III. The Second Vision - The Vision of the Seven Seals (4:1-7:17)
 - A. The Throne of God in Heaven (4:1-11)
 - B. The Book of the Seven Seals (5:1-5)
 - C. The Lamb Before the Throne (5:6-14)
 - D. The First Seal - The White Horse (6:1-2)
 - E. The Second Seal - The Red Horse (6:3-4)
 - F. The Third Seal - The Black Horse (6:5-6)
 - G. The Fourth Seal - The Pale Horse (6:7-8)
 - H. The Fifth Seal - The Souls Beneath the Altar (6:9-11)
 - I. The Sixth Seal - The Final Judgement (6:12-17)
 - J. The Servants of God (7:1-17)

- IV. The Third Vision - The Seven Trumpets (8:1 -11:19)
 - A. The Seventh Seal - The Seven Angels with the Seven Trumpets (8:1-5)
 - B. The First Four Trumpets (8:6-13)
 - C. The Fifth Trumpet - Locusts from Hell (9:1-11)
 - D. The Sixth Trumpet - The Host From Beyond the Euphrates (9:12-19)
 - E. The Impenitence of Those Who Remained (9:20-21)
 - F. The Angel with the Little Book (10:1-7)
 - G. John's Commission to Preach ((10:8-11)
 - H. The Two Witnesses (11:1-14)

- I. The Seventh Trumpet and the End of the World (11:15-19)

- V. The Fourth Vision - The Seven Scenes (12:1-15:8)
 - A. The First Scene - The Great Red Dragon's Assault (12:1-13:1)
 - B. The Second Scene - The Beast from the Sea (13:1-10)
 - C. The Third Scene - The Beast from the Earth (13:11-18)
 - D. The Fourth Scene - The 144,000 with the Lamb (14:1-5)
 - E. The Fifth Scene - The Three Angels (14:6-13)
 - F. The Sixth Scene - The Harvest (14:14-20)
 - G. The Seventh Scene - The Angels with the Plagues (15:1-8)

- VI. The Sixth Vision - Christ and Anti-Christ (17:1-19:21)
 - A. The Great Harlot (17:1-18)
 - B. The Defeat of Babylon (18:1-24)
 - C. The Church's Victory (19:1-21)
 - D. The Marriage Feast of the Lamb (19:1-10)
 - E. The Rider on the White Horse (19:11-21)

- VII. The Seventh Vision - The Final Victory of Christ and His Church (20:1-22:5)
 - A. Christ and Satan (20:1-3)
 - B. The 1,000 Year Reign (20:4-6)
 - C. The Defeat of Satan (20:7-10)
 - D. The Final Judgment (20:11-15)
 - E. The New Heaven and Earth (21:1-8)
 - F. The New Jerusalem (21:9-27)
 - G. Paradise Restored (22:1-5)

- VIII. The Conclusion (22:6-21)



“St. John the Revelator” by Carlo Dolci

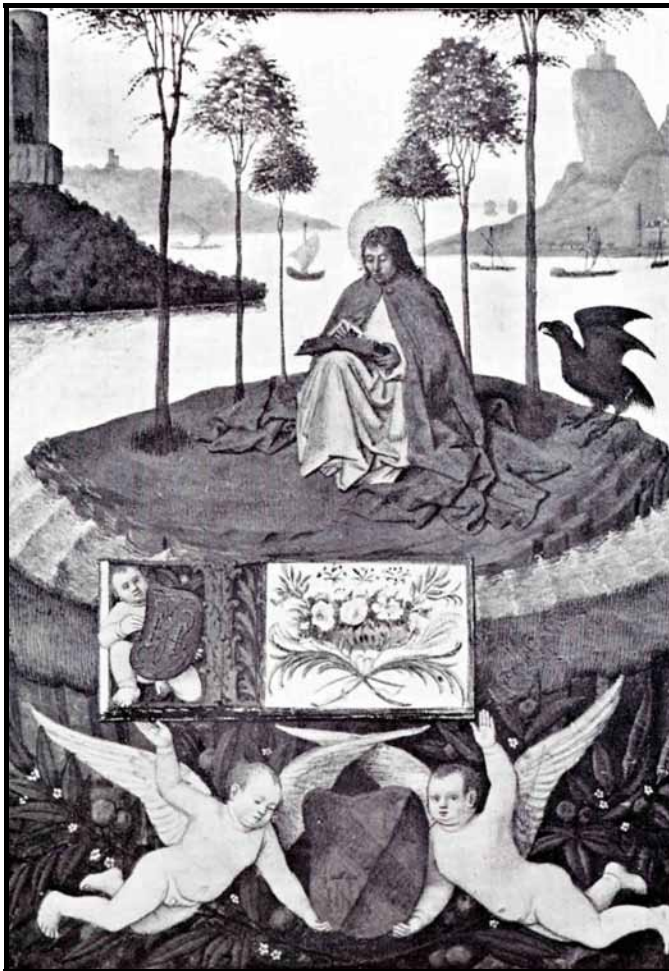
The Prologue (Revelation 1:1-3)

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 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.

“The revelation of Jesus Christ” - The opening phrase provides the title of the Book, thus “Revelation” in most English Bibles although some simply transliterate

the Greek word and title the Book the “*Apocalypse*”. (Greek - “*apokalypsis*”) - literally “*to take away the cover*” or *to take away the veil*,” the term pertains to uncovering that which is hidden or concealed and comes to refer to the action of God in revealing that which could not naturally or normally be known by men. In this instance the agent of revelation is identified as “*Jesus Christ*.” The text spells out a clear chain of communication. GOD >> JESUS CHRIST >> ANGEL >> JOHN.

“*To show His servants what must soon take place.*” - Those to whom the revelation is directed are “*His servants*,” that is, the community of God’s people. This is a message for the encouragement of the saints. That which is to be uncovered in this divine revelation is “*what must soon take place.*” This thought is reinforced in the next sentence: “*because the time is near.*” Note the sense of imminence. These are not far distant events. The last days foretold by Daniel (2:28) have arrived. The final era of human history has begun.

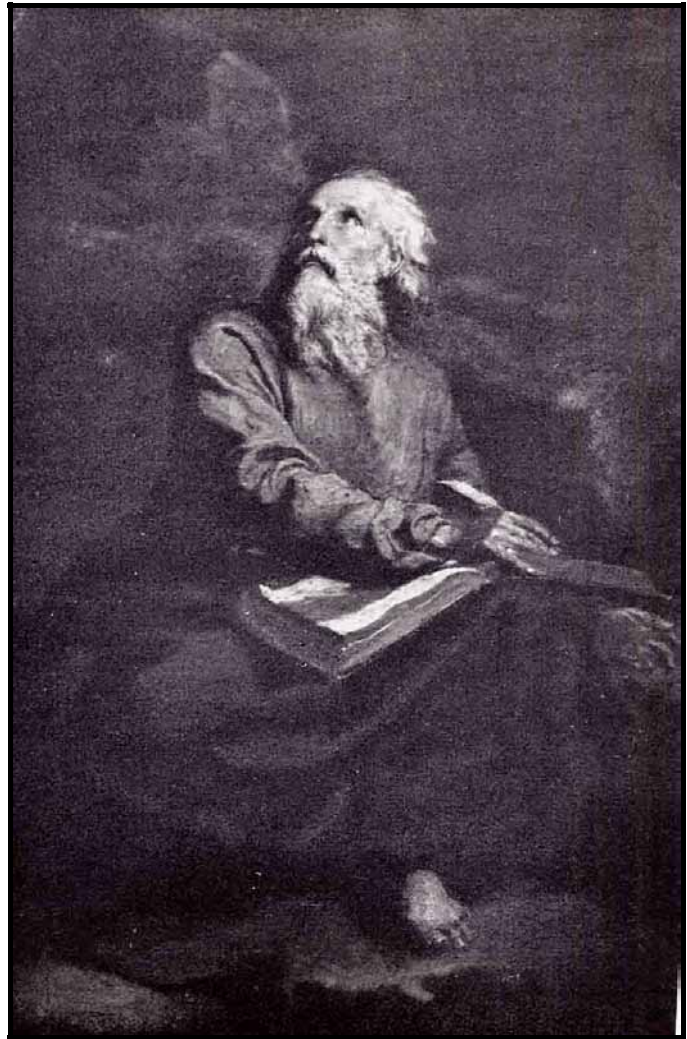


“*St. John on Patmos*” by Jean Fouquet - 1450

“*John, who testifies to everything he saw - that is, the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*” - These are not the fever dreams of a man’s overactive imagination. This is “*the Word of God, and the testimony of Jesus.*” This revelation does not originate with John; he merely “*testifies to everything he saw.*” Note the emphasis on the visual nature of that which is to be revealed.

“*Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy...*” - This is the first of Revelation’s seven beatitudes, pronouncements of blessing (cf. 14:13;16:15;19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). As the Word of God, Revelation carries the power and the promise of the Almighty. The second phrase in the sentence, “*and blessed are those who hear it*” reflects the

practice of the New Testament church in that these apostolic letters were read in the worship service of the congregations, much like the Scripture readings of our liturgy today. Accordingly, the majority of those in the first generation who would encounter John's letter would hear it rather than reading it. Those who not only hear it but also keep it ("*take it to heart*") will truly be blessed (cf. Luke 11:28). The usefulness of the information to be revealed is indicated in the phrase "*because the time is near.*" This is not abstract theology or information about the distant future. That which is about to be disclosed is vital and necessary for immediate practical application. The Greek word for time in this phrase is "*kairos*" not ordinary chronological time, but a moment of opportunity offered by God for the benefit and blessing of His own.



"St John on Patmos" by J.L.E. Meissonier - 1850

The Salutation (Revelation 1:4-8)

John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from Him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a kingdom 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 the 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."



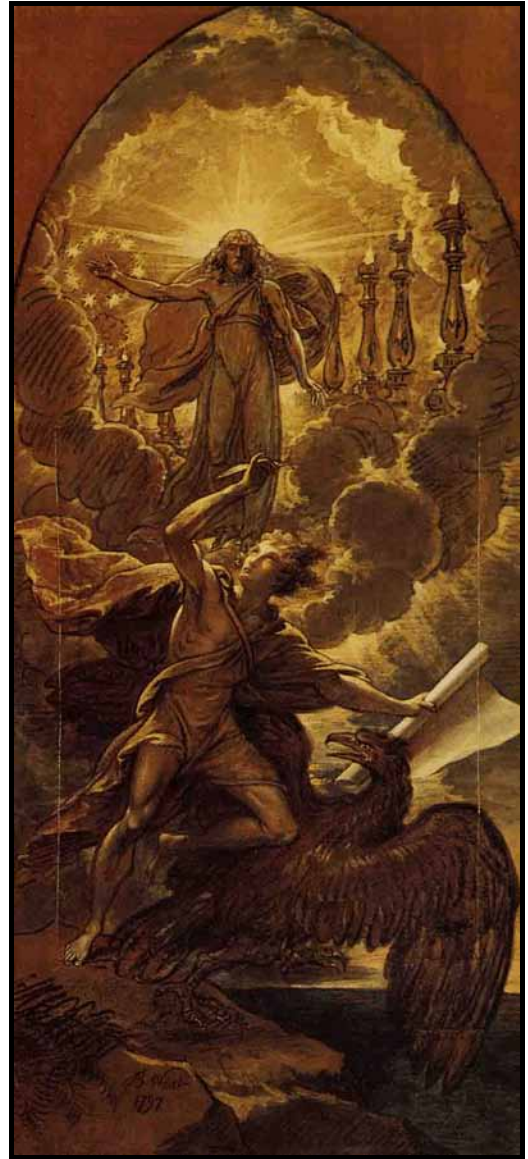
*“John’s Vision of the Seven Candlesticks”
by Giovanni Andrea Vavassore*

“John, to the seven churches in the province of Asia.” - The Book of Revelation has the form of a letter and John now inserts the standard epistolary greeting formula which typically includes three components: the writer, the addressees, and the greeting. The writer identifies himself simply as *“John.”* The recipients of the letter are designated as *“the seven churches in the province of Asia.”* The reason for the selection of these particular churches is much debated. These were not the only churches in the region. Surely the fact that seven are chosen is no accident, the use of the perfect number indicating completion and thus signally that this is a message intended for the entire church. It is likely that these particular churches were singled out because they were representative of the specific spiritual situations and characteristics that the inspired writer wished to highlight. It may,

of course, also be true that these were the seven churches most closely related to John and with which he was most familiar. They cluster geographically around John’s base in Ephesus.

“Grace and peace to you from Him who is...” - This is the standard form of greeting among Christians of the First Century. It combines a Christianized form of the ordinary Greek salutation in which the verb *“chairein”* - *“to greet”* is converted into the noun *“charis”* - *“grace,”* thus emphasizing the undeserved love of God to His people in Christ with the traditional Hebrew salutation *“shalom”* - *“peace.”* The Triune God, identified in the phrases which now follow, is the source of the grace and peace which we enjoy as the people of God. God the Father is identified as *“He who*

is, and who was, and who is to come.” The threefold designation stresses the timelessness of God and reminds us of “*Jahweh - I Am*” the sacred name of God in the Hebrew Old Testament. The second member of the divine Trinity mentioned here is “*the seven spirits before His throne.*” There are those who argue that this is not a reference to the Holy Spirit, but rather to the seven angels who stand before the throne of God (cf. 8:2). However, nowhere else in the book of Revelation are angels referred to as “*spirits*” and the immediate context makes it very clear that in this instance, the reference to “*the seven spirits before His throne*” who are, along with the Father and the Son, a source of the grace and peace that belong to the people of God, must be identified with the third Member of the holy Trinity, God the Holy Spirit. In that sense, the perfect seven is not an inappropriate designation and may refer back to the traditional sevenfold gifts of the Spirit outlined in Isaiah 11:2 - “*The Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord.*” Another interesting parallel to this description of the Holy Spirit is found in Zechariah 4 where the prophet urges the leaders of Israel to rely upon the power of the Spirit: “*Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.*” (Zechariah 4:6) In the vision which surrounds that admonition the prophet sees “*a solid gold lampstand with a bowl at the top and seven lights on it, with seven channels to the lights...These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the earth.*” (Zechariah 4:2,10)



*“John Called to Write Revelation”
by Benjamin West*

The typical order of the Trinity - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - has been altered in this Verse to allow for an expanded description of God the Son. In Hebrew numerology, three is the God number. As God the Father was identified with a series of three phrases (“*Him who was, and who is, and who is to come*”), so



“St. John on Patmos” by Martin Schoengauer

now God the Son is also labeled with three designations - ***“who is the faithful witness, the first-born from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.”*** Each of these three descriptive titles is drawn from Psalm 89 which affirms the messianic promise of a royal king from the line of David. ***“The faithful witness”*** is an allusion to Psalm 89:37, and serves to describe Christ’s role as our divine prophet who reveals the truth of God’s love for men in word and deed. The next title, ***“the firstborn from the dead,”*** is drawn from Psalm 89:27 - ***“I will also appoint Him My Firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.”*** The reference is to the resurrection of Christ, who demonstrated His total victory over sin, death, and the devil by His resurrection from the grave on the third day. The language is virtually identical to that of St. Paul in Colossians 1:18 - ***“He is...the first born from among the dead.”*** The

third title, ***the ruler of the kings of the earth,***” also comes from Psalm 89:27. All of the petty kings, emperors, and rulers of this world are but pawns in the hand of this mighty ruler, for Jesus is ***“King of kings and Lord of Lords.”*** (Revelation 19:16). On the last day, His rule over all will be revealed as all of humanity bows down before Him. Many commentators see in these three titles a sequential reference to the work of Christ past (***“faithful witness”***); present (***firstborn from the dead”***); and, future (***“ruler of the kings of the earth”***).

“To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins...” - The Revelator’s description of Jesus Christ now naturally flows into triple doxology, a spontaneous song of praise and thanksgiving to God in three parts. The ongoing love of Christ for

His own is demonstrated by His redemption of mankind - ***“has freed us from our sins by His blood.”*** The blood of the Redeemer poured out in saving abundance upon the cross has loosed us from the curse and dominion of sin. ***“He has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve His God and Father.”*** Now we reign with Him in His kingdom and enjoy direct access to God as His priests. The Old Testament theme of the people of God as a kingdom and priests is repeated several times in Revelation (cf. Revelation 5:10; 20:6). The language closely reflects that of 1 Peter 2:9 - ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.”*** (Cf. Exodus 19:6)

“To Him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.” - The recitation of that which God has done provokes and irrepressible outburst of praise. The only fitting response to that which God in Christ has accomplished is doxology, an endless, eternal song of praise. The song closes with the traditional Hebrew *“amen.”* It is at the same time an affirmation and a prayer. The ***“Amen”*** occurs six times in the Book of Revelation (1:7; 5:14; 7:12; 7:12; 19:4; 22:20)

“Look, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him...” - This is the first prophetic oracle of the Book. It is based on Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. Jesus cited the same combination of texts in the *“Little Apocalypse”* of Matthew 24 (vs.30). The Christ once scorned and crucified will return in majestic splendor before the eyes of all mankind. The true meaning of his ignominious death will then be clear to all and the response from those who conspired to murder the Son of God will be profound mourning and bitter regret. This is as it should, and it must be. Amen. These verses were incorporated into the 5th Century Liturgy of St. James from Antioch in Syria. In the prayers which precede the consecration of the bread and wine for Holy Communion the priest intones:

“Let all mortal flesh be silent, and stand with fear and trembling, and meditate nothing earthly within itself: For the King of kings and Lord of lords, Christ our God, come forward to be sacrificed, to be given for food to the faithful; and the bands of angels go before Him with every power and dominion, the many eyed cherubim, and the six winged seraphim, covering their faces, and crying aloud the hymn, Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!” (Earliest Christian Prayers, p. 131)

This ancient liturgy is preserved in the modern hymn *“Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence.”*

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is...” - The Lord who will return in triumph to judge humanity is the divine Son of God. These are the first words of Christ directly quoted in Revelation. They serve as a unequivocal affirmation of the deity of our Lord. Jesus uses the same terminology in reference to Himself in Revelation 22 as the book comes to its triumphant conclusion (cf. vss. 22:12,16,20). In Exodus 3, the Angel of the Lord, had revealed Himself to Moses as *“Jahweh,”* the great *“I Am,”* the Almighty and Eternal God. Our Lord now reveals Himself to have been the Angel of the Lord who is the timeless and eternal Son of God. In this instance, the speaker is labeled as ***“the Lord God”*** (Greek - *“kurios ho theos”*) which is the Greek equivalent of the majestic Hebrew title *“Jahweh Elohim.”* He further claims as His own the title ***“the Almighty”*** (Greek - *“pantokrator”*) which is the New Testament’s version of the Hebrew title *“Jahweh Sabaoth”* (*“Lord of Hosts”*). Christ, the Almighty (*“Christos Panokrator”*) is an extremely popular theme in the art of the Eastern Orthodox Church, typically depicted in mural or mosaic on the domed ceiling above the altar. The assertion of Christ’s power and authority as the divine Son of God becomes the foundation for the assurance presented in Revelation. Do not grow weary or despair. Behind the powers and authorities of this world there is One greater than them all, our Lord Jesus Christ.



“Christ as the Almighty Judge” - From the Baptistery of the Cathedral in Florence



*“Christ Amid the Golden Lamps”
by Hans Burgmair - 1522*

John’s Commission from Christ (Revelation 1:9-20)

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, which said: “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.” 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. 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 forever 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."

"I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering..." - John once again identifies himself (for the third time), and at the same time asserts his solidarity with the beleaguered believers to whom his message is addressed. Like them, he is paying the price for faithfulness to the Lord and His Word - *"because of the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus."* He joins with them not only in *"suffering"* and *"patient endurance,"* but also in *"kingdom"* (literally *"kingship"* in the Greek). In the original text all three nouns are modified by one article, thereby emphasizing that they are to be considered together as a unit. To reign with Christ in His kingdom in this world is to endure suffering and tribulation, for Christ's is no earthly kingdom of glory and power.

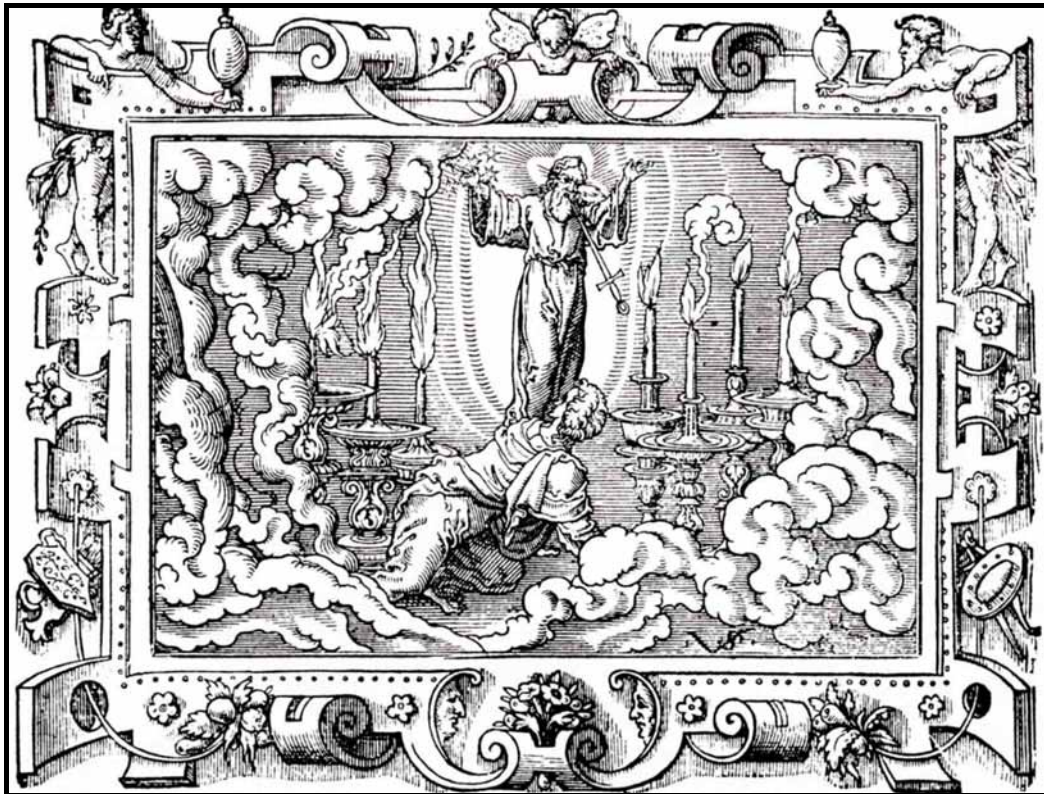
"I...was on the island of Patmos" - The specific circumstances of his commission from Christ are carefully noted. Patmos is a small island off the coast of Asia Minor southwest of Ephesus, about forty miles west of the town of Miletus. The island is crescent shaped, about thirteen square miles in size, ten miles long and five miles wide at its extremities. A barren rock place, it was often used by the Roman authorities as a penal colony and place of exile. Irenaeus tells us that John was exiled there to work in the mines in the fourteenth year of the reign of the emperor Domitian, or 95 A.D., and that he remained in exile until 96 A.D. when Domitian was overthrown and replaced by Nerva.

"On the Lord's day, I was in the Spirit..." - The vision occurs on Sunday, *"the Lord's day,"* so designated because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead on the first day of the week. Although this is the only use of the term in Scripture the designation is quite common in Christian usage by the beginning of the Second Century. John tells us that he was *"in the Spirit"* as the commission came to him.



"Christ Amid the Golden Lamps" by Albrecht Dürer

That is to say, the Spirit of God came upon him and enabled him to receive the revelations of this book. One commentator describes this condition as “*a state in which the ordinary faculties of the flesh are suspended, and inward senses opened.*” (Hort, p. 15) In this state, God brings the spirit of His man into contact with the invisible spiritual world and the things of God in such a way that they may be apprehended by and accommodated to finite human perceptions. Note that this is not a trance or a dream in the ordinary sense of those terms as John remains conscious and awake throughout the communication.



“John’s Vision of Christ Amid the Golden Lamps” by Virgil Solis - 1560

“And I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet...” - Like the ancient prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 3:12) the revelator’s commission begins with the sound of a loud voice coming from behind him. Here, as elsewhere in the Book, the incredible volume of the sound indicates the importance of the message it conveys. It is the voice of authority and command with the clarity and power of the trumpet’s blast. John is commanded to carefully record that which is revealed (**“what you see”**) and to deliver the message to seven churches scattered throughout the Roman province of



“Christ Amid the Golden Lamps” by Jean Duvet

Asia. The churches are listed in the order one might follow if he were riding a circuit made up of these congregations and the letters will subsequently be presented in the same order.



“Christ Amid the Golden Lamps” by Matthias Merian

“I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me...” - The sound had come from behind, and John now naturally turns to see who had spoken to him. The first detail that catches his eye are seven magnificent golden lampstands (Greek - *“lychnion”*). These are not *“candlesticks,”* in the modern sense of the term, but rather stands or brackets which held portable oil lamps. The best known example of such a lampstand was the famous seven branch menorah of the tabernacle and the temple. (Exodus 37:17-24; Numbers 8:1-4) Here the seven lampstands are individual and fashioned of precious gold. Christ Himself informs us that the seven lampstands represent the seven churches to which letters have been addressed (Revelation 1:20). The symbol is apt since the people of God are to be *“the light of the world.”* (Matthew 5:14) The image appears to have been adapted from Zechariah Chapter 4

and the prophet's vision of a golden lampstand with seven lights at its top. (Zechariah 4:2,10) In the midst of the seven golden lampstands there stands *"someone like a son of man."* This may be a reference to the prominent messianic title of the Old Testament (Daniel 7:13) which is referred to Jesus eighty times in the Gospels and Acts. However, the phrase is also commonly used in reference to any human being, and that could be the intent in this text. In any case, there is no doubt as to the identity of the figure who stands amid the golden lamps. The position of the man in the middle of the seven golden lampstands is profoundly important. Jesus stands in the midst of His church just as He has promised: *"Where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18:20)



*"John's Vision of Christ Amid the Golden Lamps"
15th Century Bible Illumination*

"Dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet..." - The glorious appearance of the figure is described in precise detail. The imagery is drawn from Daniel chapters 7 and 10. It serves to present the Lord as our great High Priest and King. The flowing robe with the golden sash is reminiscent of the vestments of the high priest (cf. Exodus 28:4-5; Zechariah 3:4). The same word (Greek - *"poderes"* - a floor length robe) is used seven times in the Old Testament and in six of those instances it refers to the robes of the high priest. The priestly connotation is certainly fitting in this context amid the golden lamps, since it was the responsibility of the priest to tend the lampstands of the temple, to trim the wicks, refill the oil, and relight the lamps that had gone out. Thus, Christ is

the great High Priest who tends and cares for His churches. In Daniel 10:5, the messenger of God is similarly dressed in fine linen with a belt of gold.

“His head and hair were white like wool...” - Once before, on the Mount of Transfiguration, St. John had seen the face of the glorified Christ. Now that awesome sight is repeated and carefully described. In Daniel 7:9, the prophet uses the imagery of pure white hair to signal the eternity of the Ancient of Days: ***“His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of His head was white like wool.”*** John uses virtually the same language here in reference to Jesus to portray Christ as the eternal Word who ***“was in the beginning with God.”*** (John 1:1-2). The ***“blazing fire”*** of His eyes indicate the omniscience of God, whose divine vision penetrates through every barrier, from whom nothing can be hidden, and to whom all things are known. The terminology in this phrase comes from Daniel 10:6 where the Angel of the Lord’s eyes burn like flaming torches. This is a figure who is holy and without sin, indicated by ***“his feet,”*** which ***“were like bronze glowing in a furnace.”*** The purifying fire of the furnace burns away the impurities and the dross until only the perfectly refined metal remains. The figure is barefoot as was Moses before the burning bush (***“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”*** Exodus 3:5). So also the High Priest entered into the Holy of Holies barefoot on ***“Yom Kippur,”*** the great Day of Atonement. ***“And His voice was like the sound of rushing waters.”*** There is a matchless power in the voice of this man, like a thundering waterfall or the crash of the surf upon the rock (cf. Ezekiel 43:2)

“In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth...” - Here, for the first time, the imagery of Revelation 1 lacks specific Old Testament precedent. There is, nonetheless, no doubt as to the significance of the seven stars since John later informs us that they represent the angels of the seven churches (cf. Revelation 1:20). The right hand is the traditional position of favor and protection. It also carries the connotation of power and strength. To be held in the right hand of God is to know peace and security that can be experienced nowhere else. ***“And out of His mouth came a sharp, double-edged sword.”*** Both St. Paul and the writer to the Hebrews describe the Word of God as a sharp sword (cf. Ephesians 6:17; Hebrews 4:12). John, however, may have had in mind the judgement image of Isaiah 11:4 - ***“He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth.”*** (Cf. also 2 Thessalonians 2:8). Thus does the Revelator portray our Lord as the Almighty Judge of the universe. ***“His face was like the sun, shining in all its brilliance.”*** This phrase calls to mind the Transfiguration when the face of Christ ***“had shone like the sun”*** (Matthew 17:2)

enabling John and the others there on the mountaintop to catch a brief glimpse of Christ's heavenly glory as the Son of God.



“John’s Vision of the Golden Lampstands” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“When I saw him, I fell at His feet as though dead...” - John, as a sinful human being, is overwhelmed by this stunning vision of the majestic and holy God. He responds in the only appropriate way - he falls face-down upon the ground in fearful awe. Thus had it been for Daniel (Daniel 10:7-9) and the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5) and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:28) before him. John and his companions had reacted in a similar fashion on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:6). On that occasion, and also here, Jesus reaches out to comfort and reassure his frightened disciple (Matthew 17:7). The Lord reaches out to John with the same strong right hand which had held the seven stars. His reassuring touch is accompanied by a comforting word. **“Do not be afraid.”** - The Greek verb is in the present imperative and would most accurately be translated - **“Stop being afraid.”** These words in the New Testament

often precede the proclamation of the Gospel, the good news that takes away our fear. Gabriel spoke them to Zacharias and to Mary (Luke 1:13,30) as he announced the births of John the Baptist and Jesus. The angel declared the same to the shepherds outside Bethlehem on the night of Christ's birth (Luke 2:10). Fallen man's first words to God were "***I was afraid***" (Genesis 3:10) because fear is the inevitable result of sin's guilt. God has acted in the person of His Son to pay the price for that sin and remove the basis for its guilty fear.



"Christ Amid the Golden Lamps" by Hans Burgmair - 1522

"I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One..." - Christ's further self-identification not only continues John's reassurance, but also provides the foundation and authority for his commission to John. "***I am***" echoes the sacred Tetragrammaton "***Jahweh***," the pre-eminent divine name of the Old Testament (Exodus 3:14). When confronted by skeptical Jewish religious leaders Jesus had bluntly declared, "***Before Abraham came to be, I AM!***" (John 8:58). In Verse 8 the Lord had asserted, "***I am the Alpha and the Omega.***" He now reiterates that claim, again declaring His eternity - "***I am the First and the Last.***" Not only the Lord of time, Jesus is also the Lord of Life - "***I am the Living One; I was dead and behold, I am alive forever and***



“I Am Alive Forever” by Rudolf Schäfer

ever.” The resurrection of Christ affirms his claim to divinity and demonstrates His victory over death and its power. The reality of His resurrection becomes the basis for every Christian’s expectation of life eternal (cf. 1 Corinthians 15). **“And I hold the keys of death and Hades.”** The imagery signifies authority, control, and ownership. Death holds no terror for the Christian for Christ has risen and in so doing has conquered death for us. The Greek noun *“hades,”* transliterated in the NIV text, literally means *“the place that is not seen.”* It is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew word *“sheol.”* It is often used in Scripture to refer to hell, the place of the damned. However, on occasion, it is also used in a neutral sense to simply describe the place of the dead. That would appear to be the sense in this text as the state of death and the place of death are combined, both subject to the power and authority of the Lord.

“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.”
- The Revelator’s commission is repeated in this renewed command to write. This book was not produced at the initiative of man nor is its content determined by the mind of man. The command to write comes from God and the content of that which is written is determined by God and revealed to the human writer by Him. The grand sweep of Revelation’s message encompassing past, present and future is outlined in the threefold phrase ***“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:...” - Following the command to write, an explanation of the two primary symbols of the initial vision is provided. The symbolism of the seven stars and lampstands is described as the ***“mystery.”*** The term refers to that which is hidden or secret to the natural mind and must be therefore be revealed by God. Ordinary understanding is not adequate here. Supernatural revelation is required. The lampstands are the seven churches previously introduced. The identification is simple and straightforward. The seven stars are identified as ***“the angels of the seven churches”*** through whom the letters will subsequently be presented to the congregations. The Greek word *“angeloi”* simply means *“messengers.”* It is commonly used in Scripture both in reference to human beings and to spirits. Accordingly, the commentators have debated the intended sense here. Some would argue that the reference is to angels of God appointed as the guardian spirits of each congregation. While this view is not impossible, there is no indication anywhere else in Scripture of the existence of such ecclesiastical guardian angels. At the same time, it does not seem to fit the context. Why would Christ reveal His message to John, a man, who would then convey that message to seven angels, so that they, in turn, could take the message back to the people of the churches. Others argue more convincingly that the messengers in question are the pastors of the respective churches. This view makes better sense in the context, and is completely consistent with a Biblical view of the pastor’s role and responsibility. Conservative Lutheran scholar Siegbert Becker contends:

“The messenger of the church is the man who delivers the Lord’s message to the church. He is the pastor of the congregation...If we understand the messenger of the church to be the pastor of the congregation, then we can in a very natural way look upon the pastors of each of the seven congregations as the messenger through whom the message intended for each congregation is conveyed from Jesus to the people of God.” (Becker, p. 41)



"The Letters to the Seven Churches" by Heinrich Vogtherr

Introduction: The Letters to the Seven Churches (Revelation 2:1- 3:22)

The typical pattern of the epistles of the New Testament is to present the doctrinal teaching first and follow it with practical application to the life of the church. In the Book of Revelation, that pattern is reversed. The practical application comes first, in the form of the letters to the seven churches of Asia.

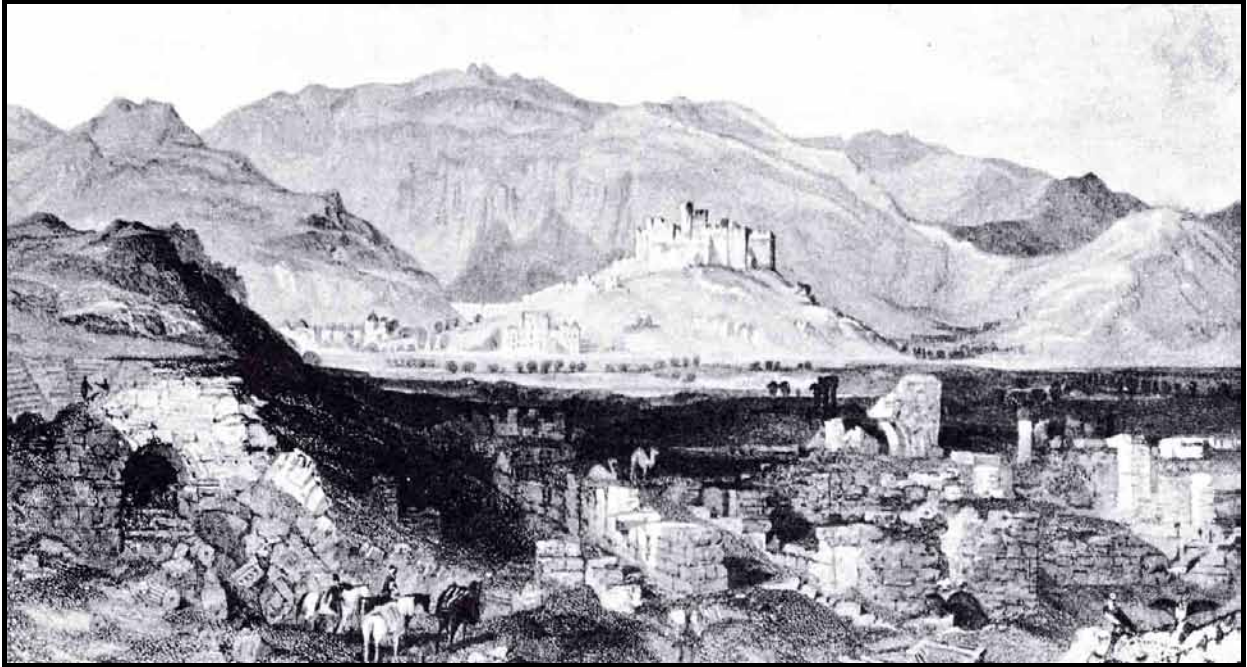
The letters to the seven churches are in the first instance actual descriptions of the historical situations of a cluster of congregations that existed in the Roman Province

of Asia at the end of the First Century. To be sure, there is much that can be learned for the church in every time and place from these letters, for the characteristics, both positive and negative, that they reflect are in no way unique to these seven churches. That universal application may well explain why “seven” churches were chosen, utilizing the Biblical number for completion or perfection. There are those who chose to ignore this historical context and its obvious importance in the text of Revelation and arbitrarily reduce the seven letters to a symbolic representation of seven different periods of future church history. It is ironic that this view has been largely popularized by the Scofield Reference Bible and those who most vehemently insist upon a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation. R.C.H. Lenski says it well in his classic commentary:

*“The order in which the letters are dictated is that found in 1:11; it is geographical and has nothing to do with a prophetic, chronological succession of churches and church conditions to the end of time. The seven churches and their varying conditions existed **simultaneously** when Jesus dictated these letters in the year 95. They are typical of the conditions obtaining in the churches of all time irrespective to the number that at any time may belong to one type or to another.”* (Lenski, p. 82)

The letters follow the same general pattern including the following seven components: 1. The address with the command to write; 2. The description of the Speaker; 3. The assertion of complete knowledge about each congregation; 4. The word of commendation and/or the word of criticism; 5. The admonition; 6. The call to hear and heed; and, 7. The promise of blessing. Thus, generally, the seven letters consist of seven parts and conform to the overall sevenfold pattern of the entire Book of Revelation. In each letter, the description of the Speaker correlates to the content of the message to the church. The various details of the vision of Christ amid the golden lampstands in Chapter 1 provide the substance of the descriptions. The same type of pattern is also evident in the seven promises of blessings that conclude the letters. In this case, however, the blessing is formulated in terms of topics that will later be repeated in the closing chapters of the Book.

Ephesus - the Tree of Life (22:2)
Smyrna - the Second Death (20:6)
Pergamum - a New Name (22:4)
Thyatira - the Morning Star (22:16)
Sardis - the White Robe (19:8)
Philadelphia - the New Jerusalem (21:2)
Laodicea - Christ Upon His Throne (20:4, 22:1,3)



"The Ruins of Ephesus in 1830" by T. Allom

The Letter to the Church in Ephesus

The Loveless Church

(Revelation 2:1-7)

To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars in His right hand and walks among the seven lampstands: 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. Yet I hold this against you: You have forgotten your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and will remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:" - The city of Ephesus was one of



“Great Artemis of Ephesus”

the three major commercial and cultural centers of the eastern Mediterranean. The other two were Antioch in Syria and Alexandria in Egypt. St Paul visited this strategic city during his second missionary journey in 52 AD. He returned on his third missionary journey and spent three years in the city as Ephesus became his base for the mission to the province of Asia (Acts 18:23-20:38; Ephesians 1-6). The port of Ephesus was situated on one of the major trade routes between the Aegean Sea and the plateau of Asia Minor thus bringing immense wealth to the city. It was culturally and commercially the most important city in the province. At the center of the city’s religious life was the magnificent temple of the Greek goddess Artemis (Latin - Diana). The Temple of Artemis in Ephesus, 425 feet long by 220 feet wide with 120 gold covered marble columns, was considered to be one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Thousands of pilgrims traveled to the city each year for the great festivals and a flourishing industry in silver artifacts and images was established around the temple. Diana of the Ephesians was a mother goddess, representing the power of fertility and life. The worship of her cult in Ephesus involved the most flagrant

immorality with droves of temple prostitutes dedicated to her service. Her grotesque multi-breasted images are among the most common surviving artworks of the period.

“These are the words of Him who holds the seven stars...” - The description is intended to highlight Christ’s care and concern for His church. He stands in the midst of His people and holds them safe and secure in His loving hand. (Cf. John 10:28-29)

The image of Christ walking among the golden lampstands also serves to emphasize His role as a powerful and watchful guardian over the church.

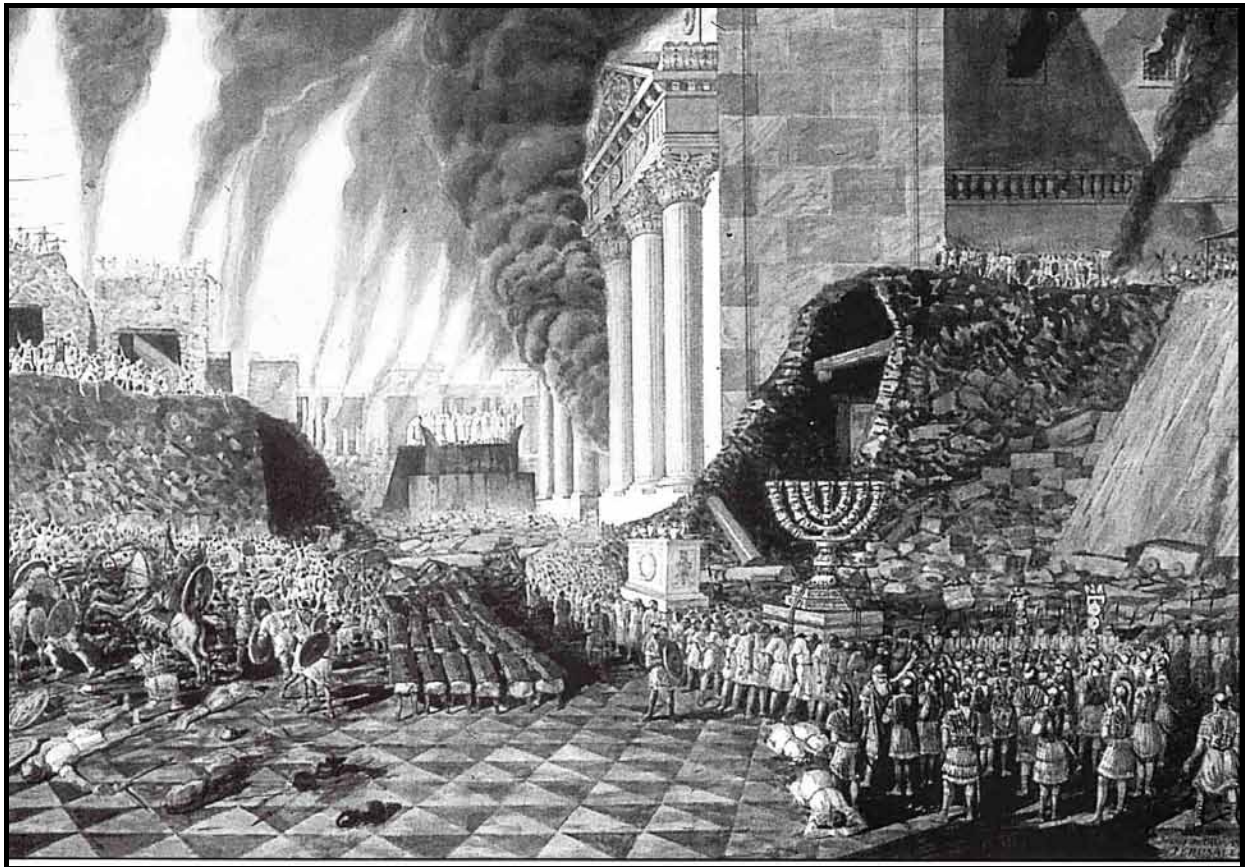
“I know your deeds, your hard work...” - The commendation begins with the assertion of Christ’s intimate knowledge of the people and their spiritual achievements. The Greek verb indicates a knowledge that is perfect and complete - I know everything there is to know about you. This is a congregation which understood duty and responsibility. They have worked hard and persevered in the face of overwhelming opposition over a long period of time - ***“and have not grown weary.”*** They have been faithful in matters of doctrine carefully testing the claims of those who falsely asserted apostolic authority (cf. 1 John 4:1) and ***“found them to be false”*** (literally - *“found them to be liars.”*) In the face of false teaching they have diligently attempted to ***“contend for the faith once delivered to the saints.”*** (Jude 6) They have been absolutely intolerant of wickedness, and properly so. Our tolerance obsessed church would do well to note this commendation for intolerance. In all this, the Lord acknowledges that the Ephesians have been acting ***“for My name”*** and He commends them.

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.” - The tone of the letter abruptly changes in Verse 4. In one pointed sentence Christ summarizes the critical problem in the church - ***“You have forsaken your first love.”*** This is a very strong statement, a severe word of criticism. Despite a consistent concern for moral



“Christ or Diana?” by Alwin Long

and theological purity the Ephesian church was lacking in love. This is both love for Christ and love for the brethren for these two can never be separated from one another (1 John 4:20) That which had in the beginning been a spontaneous, joyful response to the love of God in Christ had gradually degenerated into duty and routine. The amazing grace of God came to be taken for granted and consciences grew dull and insensitive to the incisive demands of the law and our desperate need for forgiveness.



“The Roman Sack of the Temple Sanctuary and Removal of the Golden Lamp”

Orthodoxy had become dead orthodoxy, the evidence of self-righteous superiority and legalistic judge mentalism rather than a loving concern for sound doctrine and saving truth. The externals were maintained. The Ephesians continued to go through the motions. But the motive had subtly changed. The love which ought to naturally flow from our experience of the love of Christ was being slowly replaced by legalistic compulsion. Genuine love was not yet completely absent, but it was diminishing instead of growing. If this trend was not reversed, the critical moment would soon be at hand when the Lord would *“come and remove your lampstand from its place.”*

This vivid symbol represents the complete loss of faith and the apostasy of the church.

“Remember the height from which you have fallen. Repent and do the things you did at first.” - The first verb in this sentence is a present imperative indicating ongoing activity - *“keep on remembering!”* The church at Ephesus has existed for over a generation, and they are urged to recall the way it had been in the beginning. The decline of the present would only be evident in comparison to the lofty heights of the past. The next two verbs, ***“Repent and do”*** are imperatives in the aorist tense, peremptory commands for immediate, decisive action. *“Repentance”* (Greek - *“metanoia”*) is the change of heart and mind that turns away from sin and returns to God. It is not merely external action but internal transformation. The change of heart, of course, must always result in a life that is transformed, thus the combination ***“repent and do the things you did at first.”*** (Cf. Luke 3:8) The consequences of a failure to repent at this point would be catastrophic - ***“If you do not repent, I will come to you and will remove your lampstand from its place.”*** This is not the final judgement of the world but a specific act of judgement in time upon the apostate Ephesian church. John’s metaphor may well have been chosen with the grim events of 70 A.D. in mind when the Roman legions forced their way into the temple and removed the golden seven-branched lampstand from its place in the sanctuary. The light of a Judaism that had rejected its Messiah was literally taken away and extinguished. This tragic event was immortalized on the great Arch of Titus, erected in Rome to commemorate the emperor’s decisive victory over the Jewish revolt and his conquest of the city of Jerusalem. The Romans soldiers are depicted carrying off the great golden Menorah which had stood with the Holy Place of the Temple.

“But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans...” - An additional word of commendation now follows. There is still cause for hope in that the Ephesians still love the Lord enough to hate that which is hateful to God. Indifference in the face of sin and error is not a sign of love’s presence, but its absence. The fathers of the early church identify the *“Nicolaitans”* as followers of Nicholas of Antioch, a Jewish proselyte who was one of the original seven deacons (cf. Acts 6:5). Irenaeus tells us that Nicolas fell away from the true faith and became the leader of a heretical sect which rejected the law and indulged in the flagrant immorality characteristic of paganism. Like many other Gnostic groups of the time they claimed special knowledge from which authorized their aberrant behavior. Note that it is the ***“practices of the Nicolaitans”*** that are properly to be hated, not the Nicolaitans themselves. Hate the sin. Love the sinner.



"The Tree of Life" by Rudolf Schäfer

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches." - This admonition to hear and heed is identical in all of the seven letters. The message is identified as having come from the *"Spirit"* of God, thus reinforcing the divine inspiration of this book. Jesus and the Holy Spirit speak as one within the unity of the Trinity. The message is clearly intelligible and available to anyone who cares to listen. Not hearing in this context is an act of willful deliberate disobedience. The admonition of the text is reminiscent of the often repeated words of Jesus during His teaching ministry - *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."* (I.e. Matthew 11:15; 13:9) The Lord laments the unbelief of Israel with the words of Isaiah the prophet:

"You will be ever hearing but never understanding; you will be ever seeing but never perceiving. For this people's heart has become

calloused; they hardly hear with their ears, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them." (Matthew 13:14-15)

"To him who overcomes I will give the right to eat from the tree of life..." - The letter concludes with a promise drawn from the closing visions of the book. In Revelation 22:2 we are told that in the midst of the heavenly New Jerusalem there *"stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month."* The obvious reference is to the Garden of Eden and the tree of life which once stood within it. The believer who repents and perseveres in the faith will be restored to the perfection for which mankind was created in the beginning. Life with God in eternity

will be life as it was meant to be by our loving Creator. The text uses the Persian loan word “*paradise*” to describe heaven. In the original, the word referred to a pleasure garden or park with wild animals built for the kings and emperors of Persia. It is an appropriate term to indicate that heaven will be a return to the perfection of Eden, the Garden of God. The word occurs only three times in the New Testament: here, in our Lord’s words to the repentant thief on the cross (Luke 23:43), and in St. Paul’s description of his own vision of heaven (2 Corinthians 12:4).

The Letter to the Church in Smyrna The Persecuted Church (Revelation 2:8-11)

To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. 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. 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. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.

“*To the angel of the church in Smyrna...*” - The city of Smyrna is located about 35 miles north of Ephesus. It was also a prosperous trading center and was renowned throughout the ancient world for the beauty of its architecture. The ornate buildings of the town’s acropolis high on Mt. Pagus were referred to throughout the ancient world as “*the crown of Smyrna.*” Smyrna was the birthplace of Homer, the greatest of the Greek poets. It is the only one of the seven cities of Revelation which has functioned continuously since ancient times. It is presently the Turkish city of Izmir, a focal point of the country’s tourist industry specializing in antiquities and pristine white sand beaches. Ancient Smyrna was a town noted for its exceptional loyalty to Rome and the emperor. A temple dedicated to the worship of the divine Tiberius was erected there early in the First Century. During the reign of Domitian, the current emperor, emperor worship was made compulsory. Every year, every citizen had to burn incense on Caesar’s altar after which he was issued a certificate. To be without such a certificate was to risk imprisonment or death. The city also included an unusually large Jewish population. The combination of these two factors,

exceptional dedication to the cult of the emperor and a large Jewish population, may well explain the letter's emphasis on courage in the face of persecution. The story of the martyrdom of Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna, in 155 A.D. was one of the best known and most popular historical tales of the early church. Polycarp, the "*Twelfth Martyr in Smyrna,*" was burned at the stake at age 86 because of his steadfast refusal to betray his Lord.

"These are the words of Him who is the First and the Last..." - Christ's identification in this letter stresses His crucial role as the divine Sovereign who is



"Bishop Polycarp and St. Sebastian Smashing Idols In the Home of Christian Convert" by Pedro Garcia de Benabarre

the Victor over the power of death. This would have been a most pertinent message for a church confronting bitter persecution. This congregation hears no word of criticism, but only commendation and encouragement.

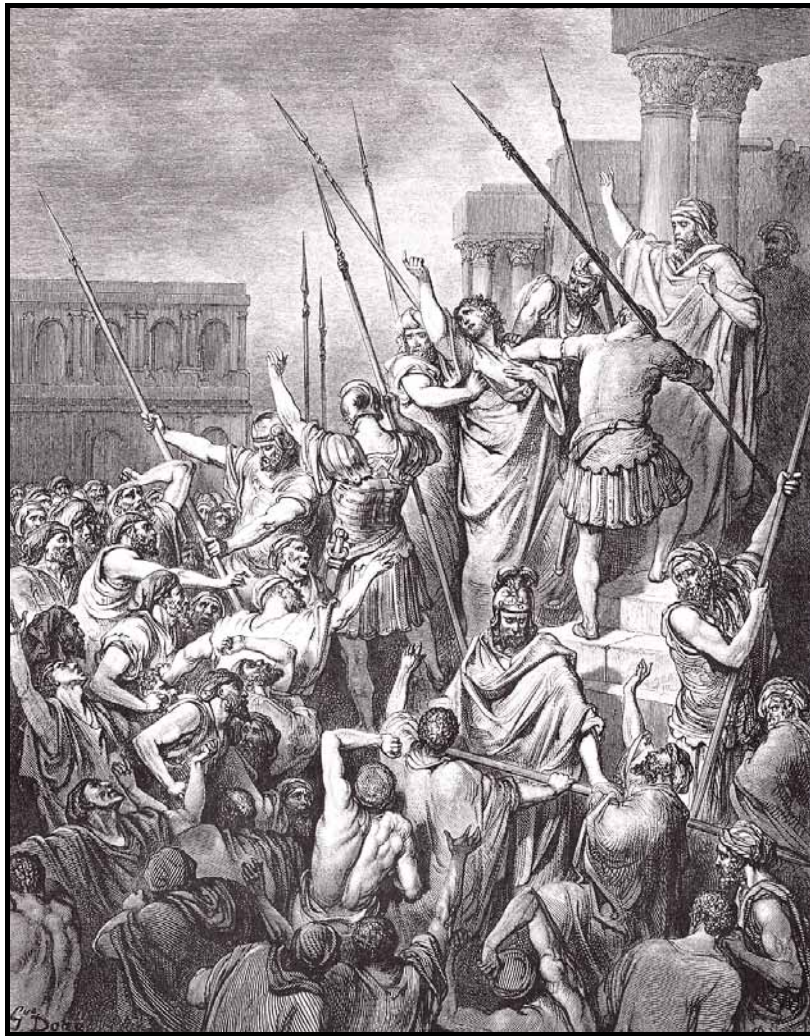
“I know of your afflictions and your poverty - yet you are rich!”

- Three terms summarize the condition of the church in Smyrna: ***“afflictions,” “poverty,”*** and ***“slander.”*** This is a congregation struggling to survive in a most hostile environment. ***“Afflictions”*** is a general term which refers to persecution of suffering of every sort. ***“Poverty”*** in this prosperous and wealthy city suggests that the Christians of Smyrna have endured economic hardship as a result of their loyalty to Christ. Yet despite that poverty, comes the assertion - ***“You are rich!”***

We are reminded of the Beatitude: ***“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.”*** (Luke 6:20) Like the great missionary apostle Paul, the Christians of Smyrna were ***“Poor, yet making many rich.”*** (2 Corinthians 6:10). While poor in the temporary material things of this world, the faithful believers of Smyrna were rich indeed in the eternal riches of the Spirit of God. The third condition of the church in this city is ***“slander”*** (Greek - ***“blasphemian”***). During the first century Christians were falsely accused of the most vile and immoral activities including cannibalism, lust and sexual immorality, home-breaking, atheism, sedition, and incendiarism. The source of the slander in this instance is ***“those who say they are Jews and are not.”*** These physical descendants of Abraham proudly consider themselves to be the chosen



“The Risen Christ -Triumphant Over Death, the Devil and the World” by Martin Knoller - 1771



*“Paul Rescued from the Mob in Jerusalem”
by Gustav Dore*

people of God but they are not. They have failed to recognize that descent from Abraham is a matter of faith, not of blood (Romans 2:28-29; 9:6 Galatians 3:7). They call themselves Jews. They believe themselves to be Jews, but they are wrong. The book of Acts documents repeated instances where the local Jewish population would aggressively and maliciously incite the Gentile authorities to action against the Christian church (i.e. Acts 13:50; 14:2,5,19; 17:5;26:2). Like the Jewish leaders who confronted Jesus in John 8:31-47 claiming to be descendants of Abraham, these slanderers are instead children of the devil. They are not a church of God, but instead a *“synagogue of Satan.”* They may have claimed to be an assembly of the Lord, but in fact, they have placed themselves at the disposal of the Accuser, the Prince of

Darkness, the Father of the Lie. The Hebrew title “*Satan*” literally means “*Slanderer*” or “*Accuser*.” Its Greek equivalent is the more familiar “*diabolos*” or “*devil*.”

“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer...” - Christ does not offer this long-suffering church an easy way out. There is no prescription here as to how persecution may be avoided. Things are bad and they are going to get worse. The mounting intensity of that persecution is described in all of its grim reality. ***“I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.”*** The Lord of the Church knows what is going to happen and remains in control of everything that is taking place. Even the activities of His most bitter enemies serve to accomplish His plan and His purpose. The faith of the church in Smyrna in the face of persecution, as one after another they were killed and cast into prison, would become an inspiration for the church throughout the world. The ***“ten days”*** of testing may be an allusion to Daniel 1:12-15 and the testing of Daniel and his three companions. In the numerology of Revelation, ten is the ordinal number, the number upon which the whole system of enumeration is based. In this instance it refers to a complete time period ordered by the purpose and plan of



***“Satan and the Jaws of Hell”
by Francesca Romana - 1430***

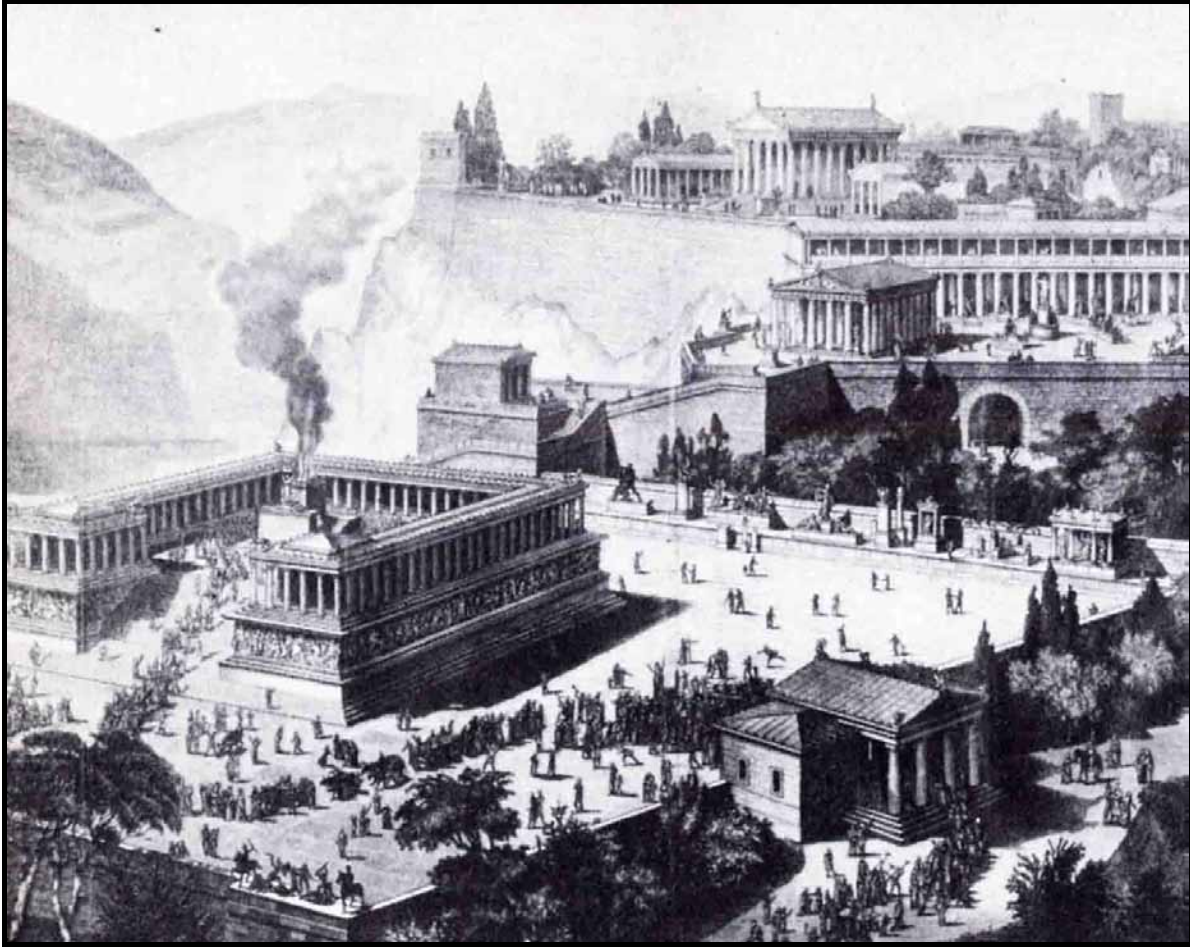
God. This persecution will continue, but it will not continue forever. God remains in control.

“Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.” - The Lord’s encouraging promise to the church in Smyrna to look beyond suffering, and even death itself to the prospect of life eternal. He who has Himself overcome death now promises His people a share in his victory. The ***“crown of life”*** is the laurel wreath awarded to the victorious athletes of the Olympic games (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:24-25; Galatians 2:2; Philippians 3:14; 2 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 5:4). Those who die in the faith and for the faith have not truly died at all but have passed from life in time to life in a glorious eternity.

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.” The promise of life eternal is repeated after the admonition to hear and heed. The ***“second death”*** is eternal death and damnation in Hell (cf. Revelation 20:14).



“The Crown of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer



“The Acropolis of Pergamum” - 19th Century Engraving

The Letter to the Church in Pergamum The Permissive Church

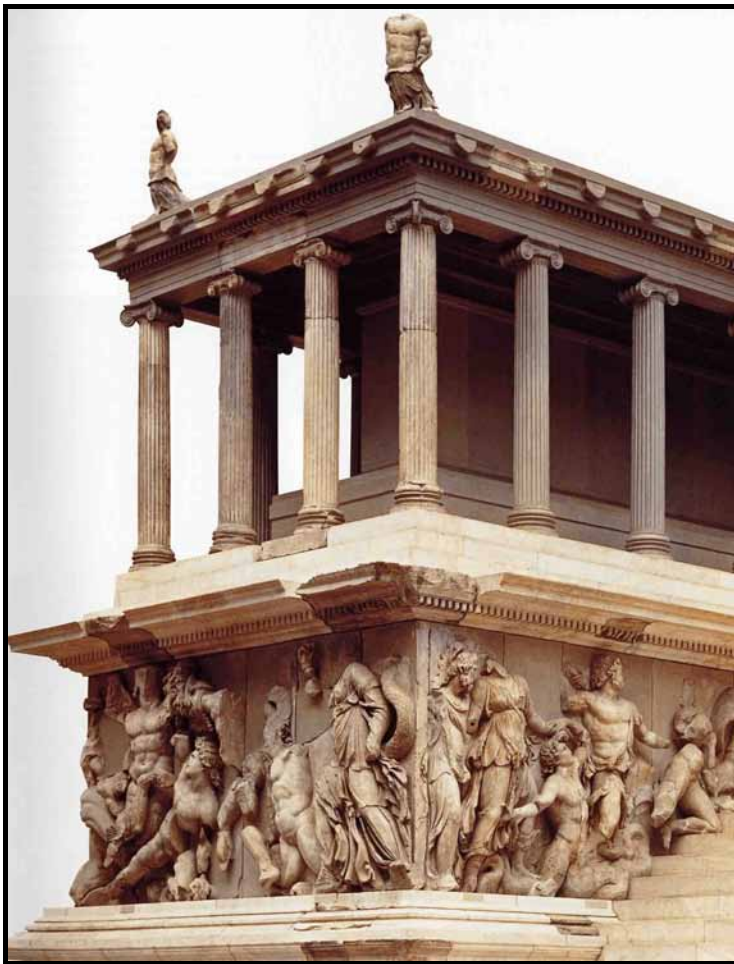
(2:12-16)

To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. 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. 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. Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the

sword of My mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. 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.

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:” - Pergamum was the official capital of the Roman province of Asia, the seat of Roman authority and power in the region. The city was built on a 1,000 foot high cone-shaped mountain. Situated fifty-five miles north of Smyrna and twenty miles inland from the Aegean Sea, it was a city with a rich cultural past. Under the Greek King Eumenes (197-159 B.C.) Pergamum became one of the intellectual centers of the ancient world. Eumenes established a magnificent library with some 200,000 books and sought to outshine the great library of Alexandria in Egypt. In order to frustrate his rival, Ptolemy, the

Greek King of Egypt, prohibited the sale of papyrus paper to Pergamum. Forced to find an alternative writing material, the use of vellum, a fine parchment made from animal skins was developed in Pergamum and eventually replaced papyrus as the basic material for scrolls and books. As the provincial capital, Pergamum was an important center for the official state cult of the emperor. The massive Pergamum Altar, 125 feet long and 115 feet wide, from the Temple of Zeus, was surrounded by beautiful statuary and carved reliefs. The altar has now been rebuilt in a Berlin Museum, and is one of the ancient world’s most impressive works of art. Pergamum was also well known as a center of medicine. The cult of the Greek god of healing Asclepius, whose symbol was the serpent was based in the city. The sick came from all over the world to spend the



“The Pergamum Altar of Zeus”

night in the Temple of Asclepius which swarmed with hundreds of snakes . Those who fondled or fed these serpents thereby worshiped the god and sought his favor. The famed Greek physician Galen came from Pergamum.

“These are the words of Him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.”

- The reference is to Revelation 1:16.

The image of Christ the threatening Judge permeates the letter to the church in Pergamum. This is a place of great evil and corruption - ***“where Satan lives”*** (Verse 13) and the Lord sternly warns His people to recognize the deadly dangers that they face. The Roman governor in Pergamum exercised the ***“right of the sword”*** (Latin - ***“ius gladii”***) in that he alone had the power to administer capital punishment. The ***“sharp double-edged sword”*** serves as a reminder that even in the face of the mightiest powers of this world, the Lord retains the ultimate authority.



“Christ the Judge” 13th Century Mural

“I know where you live - where Satan has his throne.” - John describes this city as the throne of Satan presumably because of its role as a prominent center of Roman government and pagan religion. The power of the enemy is unusually strong in this place. The particular reference may be to the serpent cult of Asclepius which would remind Christians of the Satanic serpent through whom the Tempter beguiled Eve in Eden. The congregation is commended because despite this evil environment ***“You remain true to My Name.”*** To remain true to the Name of Jesus means to hold fast to the truth of the Gospel and to refuse to deny or abandon the Lord even in the face of overwhelming pressure. The Roman government demanded that every citizen acknowledge the emperor as divine and participate in the worship of the official cult. The pagan culture was more subtle, but every bit as dangerous, urging conformity and



“Eve and the Serpent” by Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer - 1896

compromise. To yield in either case would have required the Christians in Pergamum to **“renounce your faith in Me,”** and this they consistently had refused to do. Little is known of **“Antipas, my faithful witness who was put to death in your city - where Satan lives.”** An early church tradition indicates that he was burned to death in a bronze bull during the persecution of Domitian, and that he was not a native of Pergamum but had been brought to the capital for execution from a small town nearby. The Greek word **“witness”** is **“martyr.”** The term gradually took on the significance of one who is willing to die for his beliefs and was carried over into the English language in the word **“martyr.”**

“Nevertheless, I have a few things against you:..” - Once again, as in the letter to Ephesus, the tone abruptly shifts from commendation to condemnation with the adversative conjunction **“Nevertheless”** (Greek - **“all”**). Despite their faithful resistance to Satanic pressure from the government and the culture, the congregation is guilty of harboring and tolerating false teachers in its midst. The problem is the

opposite of that in Ephesus, where doctrinal discipline was practiced in the absence of love. John identifies the nature of the threat by reference to the Old Testament incident of Balaam and Balak (Number 22:5-25:3, 31:8,16). ***“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.”*** Balaam was the Sumerian prophet/magician hired by the Moabites to curse the nation of Israel. When God frustrated this attempt, Balaam advised Balak, the Moabite king, to lure the men of Israel into participation in the idolatrous rites of Moab which involved feasting, drunkenness, and sexual orgies. This effort was successful and

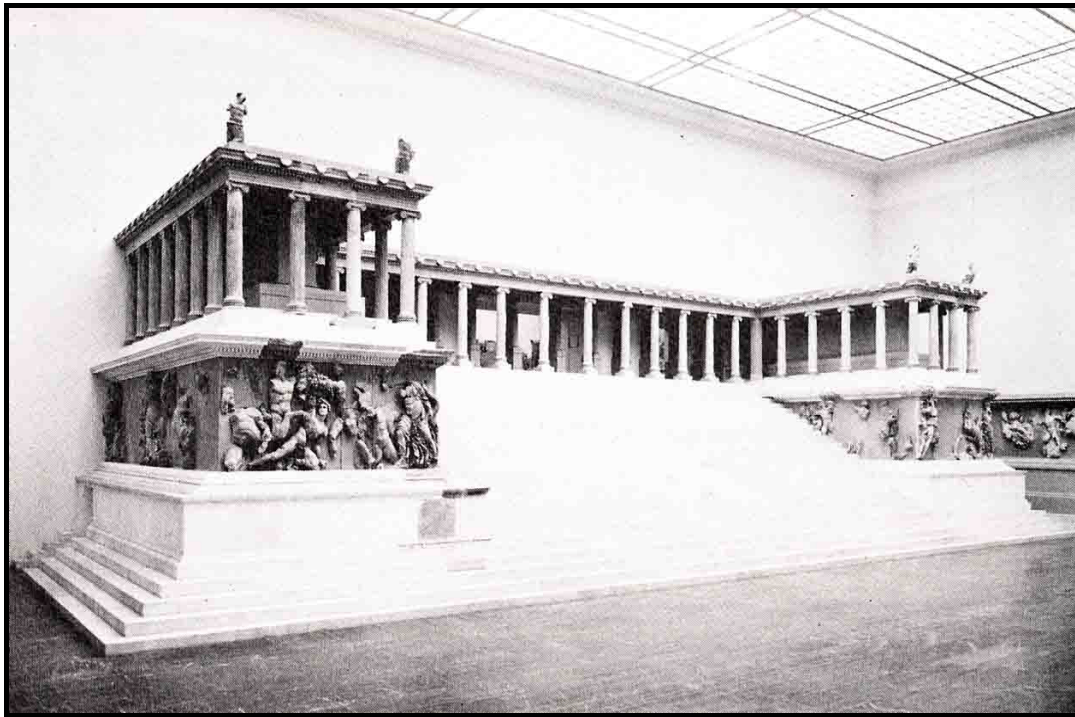


“The Oracle of Balaam” by J. James Tissot

brought God’s judgement upon Israel. Evidently there were those in Pergamum who saw nothing improper in Christians taking part in pagan celebrations and ceremonies, many of which involved feasting, drunkenness, and sexual orgies. These may have included the festivals of the various trade guilds held in honor of their patron deities. To refuse to participate would have resulted in economic and social ostracism. It has always been difficult to resist the temptation to try and have it both ways. The Nicolaitan heresy, denounced in Ephesus, with its similar involvement in sexual immorality, was also present in Pergamum - ***“Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans.”*** The willingness of the congregation to tolerate these false teachers and their failure to discipline and remove them from their

midst is firmly condemned.

“Repent therefore! Otherwise I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of My mouth.” - The Lord urges this permissive church to repent and return to the conscientious practice of doctrinal discipline. To His admonition is added the threat that if the congregation fails to act, the Judge Himself will come to Pergamum to deal with the false teachers and with the church itself. The NIV’s translation weakens the force of the original text which literally says - *“Otherwise I will soon come for you.”* The weapon of His warfare with these false teachers and those who tolerate them will be the mighty Word of God which is sharper than any two edged sword.



The Altar of Zeus at Pergamum

“He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. 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.” - The promised blessing is carefully designed to match the circumstances of the congregation. They were tolerating those who had yielded to the temptation to participate in the heathen festival banquets of their city. Christ offers them a place at an infinitely superior banquet, the eternal marriage feast of the Lamb in heaven. ***“Manna”*** was the

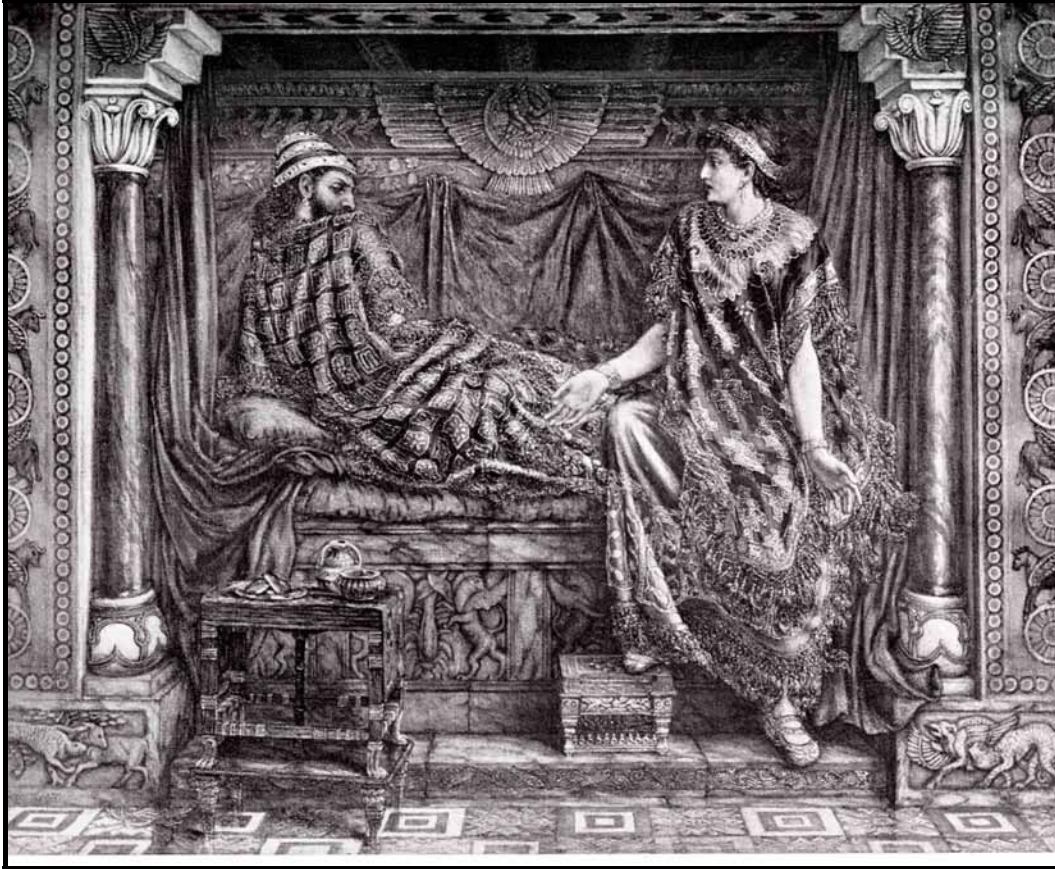
heavenly food provided to the Children of Israel by God during their forty years of wandering in the wilderness. They grew weary and unappreciative of that food and thus fell easy prey to Balaam's trickery. They should have relied upon what God had given them instead of feasting on the food of idolatry. The church in Pergamum now faces the same temptation and the Lord promises "**him who overcomes**" an eternal place at the heavenly feast. The "**manna**" is "**hidden**" now in that here in time, surrounded by this life's trials and temptations, the joys of the heavenly banquet cannot yet be seen. We look forward to them by faith. They will be revealed at the end of time, or at the time of death, which ever precedes for the individual believer. The "**white stone**" further reinforces the idea of admission to the eternal feast. In the Roman world it was a well established custom to reward victorious athletes or heroes with a "**tessara**," that is a personalized pass or ticket to special feasts and celebrations. That "**tessara**" came in the form of a white stone with the victor's name inscribed upon it. White, in this case, is the color of victory. "**To him who overcomes**" the Lord promises to present such a stone guarantying admission to the heavenly banquet. The name to be inscribed upon that stone is "**a new name...known only to him who receives it.**" The new name, and the secrecy that surrounds it signifies the unique intimacy of the believer with His Lord. G.K. Beale correctly notes:



*"The Prophecy of Balaam"
19th Century Bible Illustration*

"In the ancient world and the Old Testament, to know someone's name, especially that of God, often meant to enter into an intimate relationship with that person and to share in that person's character or power. To be given a new name was an indication of a new status." (Beale, p. 254)

Those who here in time "**remain true to My Name**" (Verse 13) will receive in eternity a new name indicative of their close and intimate fellowship with the Lord Jesus, who will raise them up to dwell within His presence throughout all eternity.



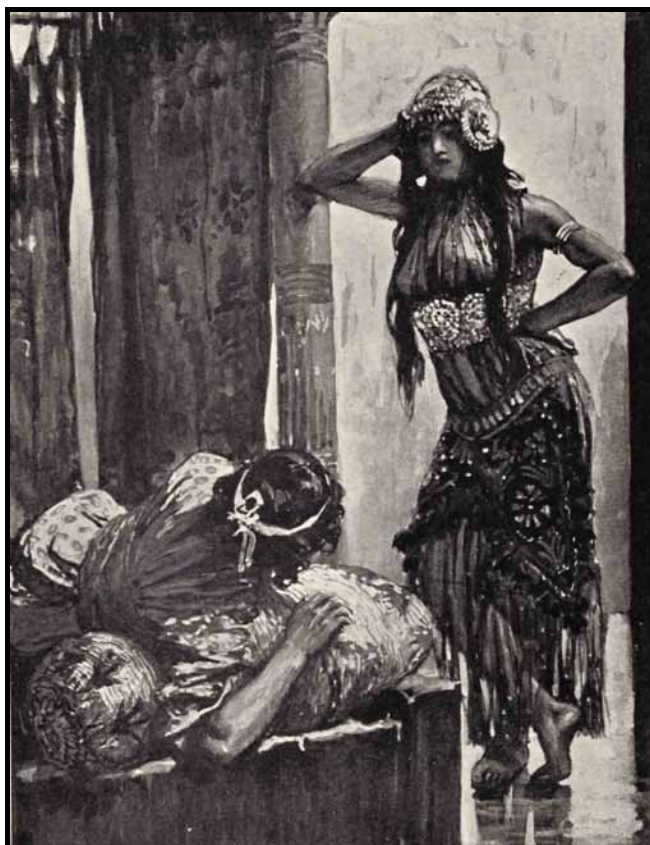
“Ahab and Jezebel” by T. M. Rooke

The Letter to the Church in Thyatira
The Compromising Church
(2:18-29)

To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. 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. 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. 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. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:" - Thyatira was the smallest of the seven cities, although it received the longest of the seven letters. It was a military base and trading center located in the middle of a fertile valley which connected two of the major river valleys of the region and linked the cities of Ephesus and Sardis. Thyatira remained primarily a garrison town, although the trade guilds, with all of the idolatrous practices associated with them, were very prominent here. Thyatira was the home of Lydia, the seller of purple whom Paul met in Philippi (Acts 16:14). One of its primary industries was the manufacture of bronze armor which was exported throughout Asia Minor and beyond.



"Jezebel" by J. James Tissot

"These are the words of the Son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze." - The speaker identifies Himself as *"the Son of God,"* a title not found in the original description of Chapter 1. In fact, this is the only time in the Book of Revelation that Jesus is called the Son of God, although John repeatedly used the title in his Gospel. Its use here serves to emphasize the profound seriousness of the judgement pronounced upon the congregation. The Speaker's blazing eyes and gleaming feet depict the fearsome judgement of the holy and righteous God from whom nothing can be hidden. Thyatira with its numerous forges and armor industry would be most familiar with the image.

“I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.” - A brief word of commendation now follows. The situation in Thyatira is the reverse of that in Ephesus where the congregation’s first love had grown cold. The all-seeing eyes of the Lord note that in Thyatira love had continued to grow and increase. The Son of God is well aware of the ***“deeds”*** (Greek *“erga”* - literally - *“works”*) and the text specifies four categories of those works - ***“your love and faith, your service and perseverance.”*** Love (Greek - *“agape”*) comes first for it is the basis of all that follows and faith follows closely thereafter. Love and faith are accompanied, as they must always be, by ***“service”*** (Greek *“diakonia”*), that is voluntary ministry to the needs of others (cf. Acts 11:29; 1 Corinthians 16:15) and ***“perseverance,”*** the willingness to endure

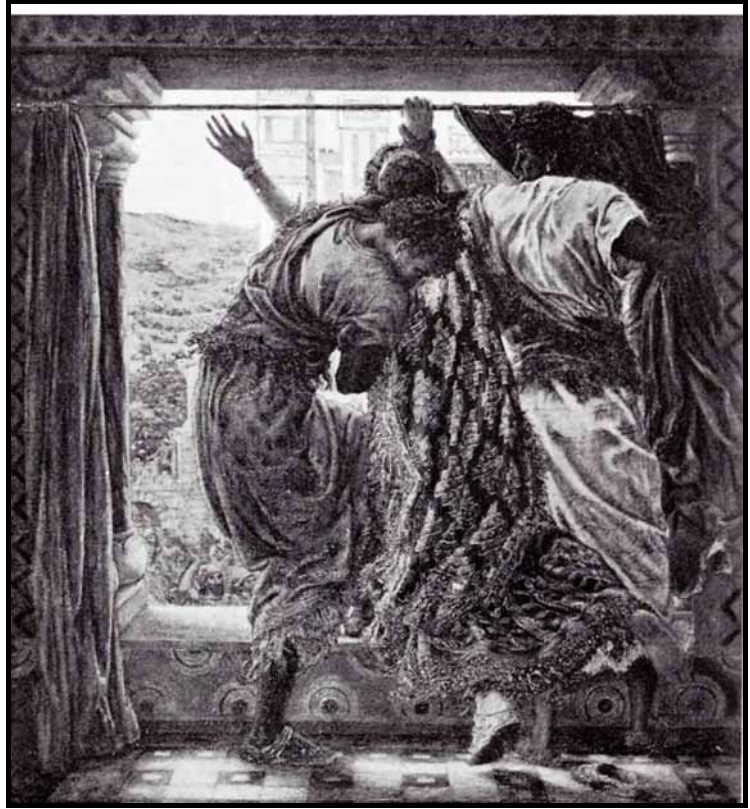
hardship and persecution. The natural dynamic of a living relationship with Christ in which faith and love and the evidence thereof in works are consistently increasing is evident and commendable in the congregation in Thyatira.



“The Death of Jezebel” by J. James Tissot

“Nevertheless, I have this against you...” - Words of high praise quickly give way to most severe criticism. The verb ***“tolerate”*** defines the essence of the problem. The danger to this church was not from the outside. No external enemy threatened Thyatira. The foe was already inside the church itself and the congregation was guilty of permitting and approving this most dangerous false teaching. The false teacher is identified with Jezebel, the infamous Sidonian princess who became the wife of Ahab and queen over Israel. Jezebel was a fanatical devotee of the Canaanite fertility cult of Baal and Astarte. She made it her life’s goal to establish the worship of Baal as the official religion of Israel. She was the nemesis of

the prophet Elijah and all who sought to remain faithful to the Lord. Jezebel was murdered by Jehu in the purge which followed the death of Ahab. To this day, her name personifies feminine wickedness and evil. (Cf. 1 Kings 16:29-33; 19:1-3; 2 Kings 9:30-37). The allusion to the notorious Old Testament queen would seem to suggest that the false teacher in Thyatira was a prominent woman of the congregation, perhaps the wife of one of the pastors or leaders of the church. Thus, like Jezebel of old, she was in a position to use her influence, based on her husband's position, to further her own false doctrine. This woman actually claimed to be a "**prophetess**," that is, an inspired

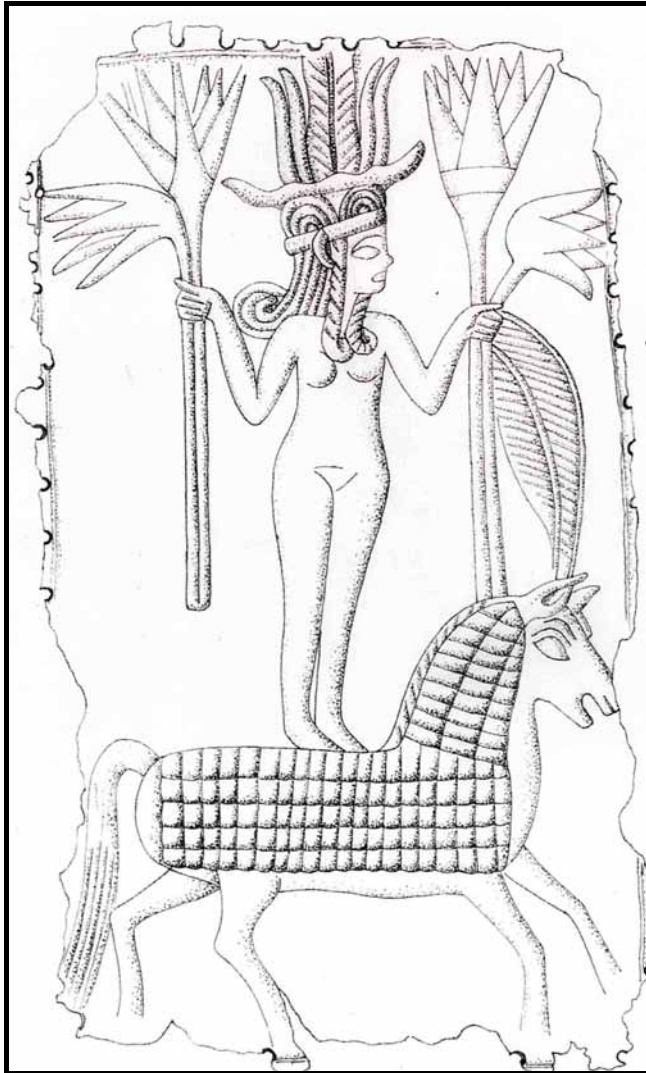


"The Death of Jezebel" by T. S. Rooke

spokesman of God. Female prophets were not unknown in the New Testament (i.e. Anna in Luke 2:36 and the daughters of Philip in Acts 21:9). In claiming the gift of special revelation from God, this evil woman assumed for herself a position of authority and power within the church. However, her claim to speak for God was false, and the doctrine she put forward misled the people into error and sin. The specific nature of the error involved "**sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols**," in a manner similar to the Nicolaitans and the Balaamites present in Ephesus and Pergamum. Given the prominence of the various trade guilds in Thyatira, it may well be that this false prophetess claim special revelation from God which authorized participation in the idolatrous rites and immoral ceremonies of the guilds. This would have been a most attractive and profitable teaching since those who refused to take part in the ceremonies were excluded from any participation in the work of the trade. The severity of the warning indicates how pervasive this falsehood had become within the congregation.

"I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling." - Christ's past dealings with this woman and her impending punishment are described in

unusual detail. This is a long standing error. Jezebel has been given ample time to repent but she has obstinately refused to do so. She has hardened her heart and is immovably set in the wicked course that she has chosen for herself and those foolish enough to follow her. Evidently the prophetess herself had indulged in the sexual immorality which she commended to others. The Greek text uses the word “*pornias*”



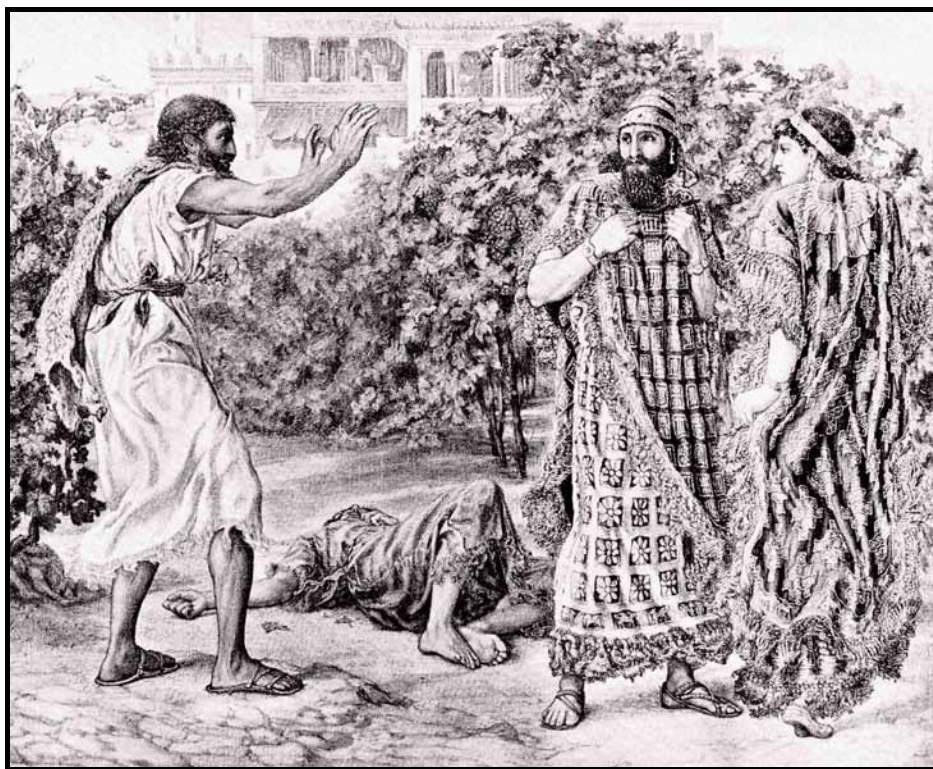
“Astarte” 13th Century B.C. Plaque

which refers specifically to illicit sexual activity. Now the time for punishment has come, and yet the hope remains that the punishment itself will drive her and her followers to repentance. **“I will cast her on a bed of suffering and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely...I will strike her children dead.”** The Baal/Astarte cult of Jezebel was notorious for the perverse sexual excesses which surrounded their worship of the god/goddess. Now that very place where she had reveled in her passion and pleasure will become for her and those who follow her a place of torment and suffering instead. Sickness, suffering, and ultimately death are the punishments which the Judge has prepared for this wanton, wicked temptress. The “*children*” of Jezebel are not physical offspring, but those who have followed her in her falsehood and shared in her immorality.

“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.” - Christ’s judgement upon Jezebel and her children will serve as a lesson to the whole church so that all may recognize His omniscience and His righteousness. He is the one God “*who searches hearts and minds.*” Nothing can be concealed or hidden from His gaze. Evil motives and false intent may often be concealed from other men, but no one will

ever evade or escape the judgement of God. God will not and cannot allow sin to go unpunished. Churches may grow indifferent and permissive, but the righteous judgement of God will stand nonetheless. That judgement will be absolutely fair and completely just - ***“I will repay each of you according to your deeds.”***

“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...” - A word of encouragement is offered to the godly remnant in this troubled congregation. The false teachers boasted of their knowledge of the *“deep secrets of God,”* a common slogan among the gnostic sects of the period. The Lord contemptuously dismisses such pretension for what it really is ***“Satan’s so-called deep secrets.”*** Not all have been taken in. Some still remain faithful - there are yet 7,000 in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. To this godly remnant come the comforting promise - ***“I will not impose any other burden on you.”*** They will be spared the judgement that is about to fall upon Jezebel and her followers. The Lord is coming soon. The day of deliverance is at hand - ***“Only hold on to what you have until I come.”*** ***“What you have”*** is the faith and that faith will sustain and strengthen the faithful until the end.

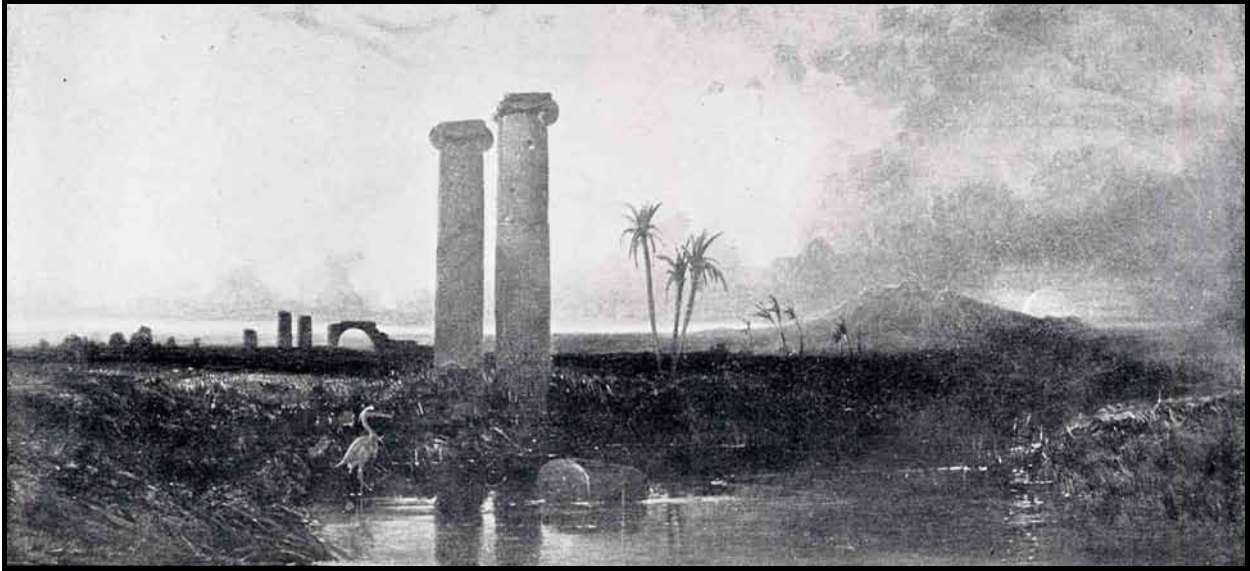


“Elijah Denounces Ahab and Jezebel” by T. M. Rooke

“To him who overcomes and does My will to the end, I will give authority over the nations...” - The sequence of the promise and the command to hear and heed is reversed in this letter and in the three that follow. Thyatira is the only church to receive a double promise - ***“authority over the nations,”*** and ***“the morning star.”*** The promise of ***“authority over the nations”*** is based on the messianic prophecy of Psalm 2:8-9 which is quoted in the text. The psalm predicts that the coming kingdom of the Messiah shall utterly destroy the kingdoms of this world. ***“As vessels of a potter are dashed to pieces.”*** Those who are now oppressed and persecuted by worldly kings and powers will reign one day with the Lord. As St. Paul promised in 2 Timothy 2:12 - ***“If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.”*** This glorious reign of the saints is promised on the authority of the Father Himself - ***“just as I have received authority from My Father.”***

The second blessing promised the Overcomer is ***“I will also give to him the morning star.”*** This colorful image reinforces the initial promise of a part for every believer in Christ’s celestial reign. The morning star is the star whose appearance in the heavens signals the end of the darkness and the coming of the light. Balaam had prophesied the rising of a star out of Jacob, a Messianic King whose scepter would crush the princes of the nations (Numbers 24:14-20). Daniel promised that after the end times the people of God ***“will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever.”*** (Daniel 12:3) Thus, to be given the morning star means to share in the imminent rule and reign of Christ, the Savior King. In the same way, the angels of heaven are called the ***“morning stars”*** who danced for joy at the unfolding wonder of divine creation (Job 38:7). That is the glorious title which the devil lost when he fell from heaven’s height: ***“How have you fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn!”*** (Isaiah 14:12). St. Peter describes the miracle of conversion in similar language: ***“Until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.”*** (2 Peter 1:19) Finally, in Revelation 22 the prophetic imagery comes to its triumphant conclusion as the Lord designates Himself as ***“the bright Morning Star.”*** (Revelation 22:16) The darkness of sin’s night is almost over. The dawn of heaven’s glorious light is drawing near. All who persevere and overcome share in glory of the Savior’s kingdom and will reign with him forever - ***“I give to him the morning star.”***

The letter concludes with the standard exhortation: ***“Let him who has an ear, hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”***



“Sardis” by Harry Johnston

The Letter to the Church in Sardis

The Dying Church

(Revelation 3:1-6)

To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God. 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. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write:” - Sardis was located about thirty-three miles south of Thyatira at the western end of the King’s Highway that ran from Susa the ancient capital of Persia. Sardis was situated on top of a high rocky plateau almost 1,500 feet high, a virtually impregnable fortress. It became the capital of the Greek Kingdom of Lydia and under the legendary king Croesus was renown throughout the ancient world for its abundant wealth. The phrase *“rich as Croesus”* became the proverbial way to describe someone who was immensely wealthy. The

theater in Sardis seated 20,000 people. By the Roman era in the First Century A.D. Sardis was past its prime, and lived, to a large extent on the reputation of its former glories. The major industry of the town was the production of woolen goods. The patron deity of Sardis was the Cybele (Artemis) the mother goddess. In conjunction with the worship of the goddess, a nearby group of hot springs were reputed to have not only healing powers but the capacity to raise the dead. There is no historical information about the founding of the Christian Church in Sardis. Archeologists have, however, determined that there was a Jewish Synagogue in the city during this period.



“Cybele, the Mother Goddess” by Jost Amman

“These are the words of Him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.” - This is the harshest and most negative of the letters thus far. The introduction is similar to that of the letter to the church in Ephesus. Jesus introduces Himself to the congregation in Sardis with reference to *“the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.”* The *“seven spirits of God”* were mentioned previously in 1:4 as the *“seven spirits before the throne.”* The Spirit of God is the source of life, that which is desperately needed by this dying church. This is the Spirit whose breath can rouse dead, dry bones to life again (Ezekiel 37:14). The life-giving Spirit is at Christ’s disposal, thus in the imagery of the text Christ *“holds the seven spirits of God.”* Christ is

the *“Living One”* (1:18) who bestows upon His people the *“Spirit of Life”* (Romans 8:2). Jesus had promised His disciples that He would send them the Holy Spirit as their *“Counselor”* who would truthfully testify about Him and empower their own testimony (John 15:26). At the same time, Christ also *“holds...the seven stars”*

which represent the angels of the seven churches, the pastors who proclaim the Word of God within the congregations. The Spirit conveys life by means of the Word and that Word has been entrusted to the office of the ministry which God has Himself established. Thus the conjunction of the “*stars*” and the “*spirits*” is most appropriate.

“I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” - Evidently, this congregation enjoyed a high reputation among the churches of the region. But the Lord knows better. He from whom no secrets are hidden sees beneath the outward appearance and the opinions of men to view things as they truly are. Despite the deceptive image of renown spiritual vitality this church is dead (Greek - “*nekros*”). A state of spiritual death permeated this congregation. Unlike her sister churches, Sardis is not threatened by enemies internal or external.

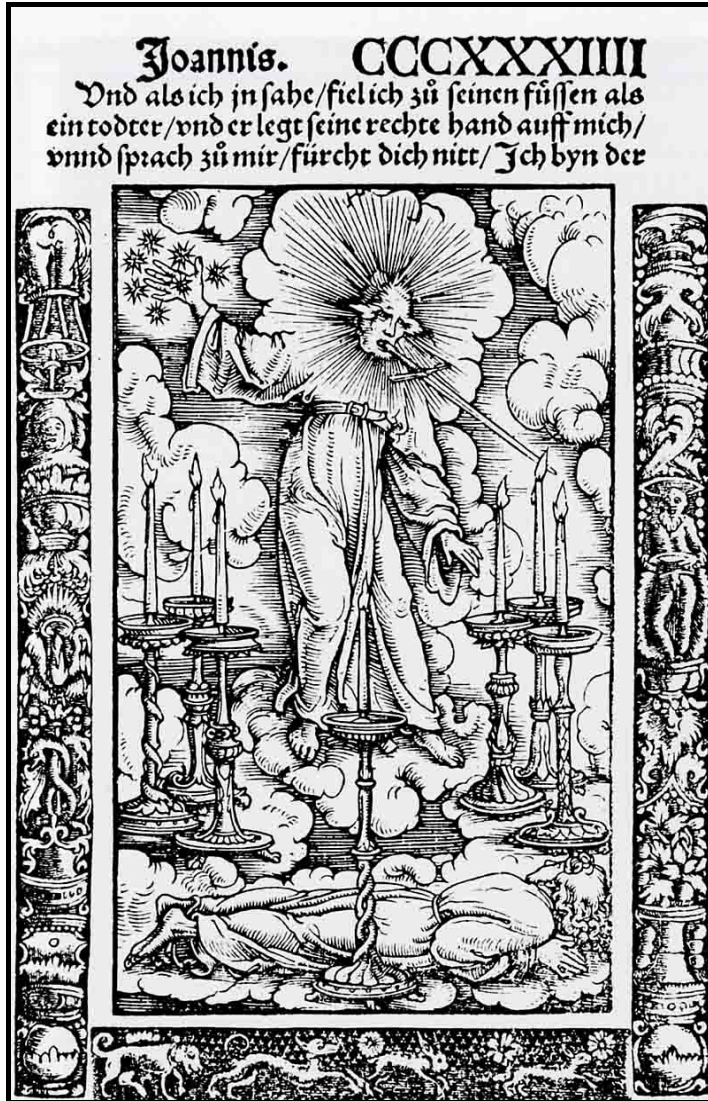
“Sardis had peace. We hear of no attack from the “synagogue of Satan” (2:9) in Sardis; no “throne of Satan” (2:13) was set up there to challenge the sole sovereignty of the throne of God; No “deep things of Satan” (2:24) lured them away with the seduction of Balaam (2:14) or a Jezebel (2:20) from the salubrious depths of God (1 Corinthians 2:10).” (Franzmann, p. 47)

The church in Sardis had peace, but it was a graveyard peace, the peace of death. This was a church complacently at ease resting upon the laurels of its glorious past. The church had taken on the character of its city. Ancient Sardis, as previously noted, was a virtually impregnable fortress, built on a high plateau which could only be approached on a narrow land bridge. And yet, the city had fallen twice, first in 540 B.C. to the Persian Cyrus, and then again in 218 B.C. to the Greek Antiochus the Great. In both cases, the citadel was unguarded because the inhabitants were convinced their city could not be taken. And so they slept securely while the enemy came upon them. So also the church in Sardis was complacent and at rest. They believed themselves to be secure. But this was a delusion. The sleep of the church of Sardis was the sleep of death from which only the voice of God could raise and rouse them.

“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God.” - This is a most urgent summons to be roused before it is too late, a last minute appeal to a congregation that is on the verge of death itself. ***“Wake up!”*** (Greek - “*ginou gregoron*”) literally means to be aroused from drowsiness and sleep to a state of alert watchfulness. The Lord wants the church in Sardis to recognize the peril in which they stand, to see the true state of

their church, before it is too late. *“Sardis is like a leaking, sinking ship, in which captain and crew are sunk in dull lethargy. They must wake up to the situation and thus must take measures to save the ship.”* (Lenski, p. 128) The last spark of life

remains and it must be immediately fanned into flame or it flickers and go out. Decisive action is called for - *“Strengthen what remains and is about to die.”* There are still a few surviving vestiges of the congregation’s former spiritual life, these must now be revived. The phrase *“I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God,”* provides the basis for this stern warning. The NIV’s translation is somewhat misleading. The problem in Sardis is not merely the quantity of their works but the nature of the works themselves. Genuine good works are, and can only be, the fruit of a living faith. The church in Sardis continued to go through the motions, and this was enough to maintain their status in the eyes of the world. But God’s assessment is infinitely more penetrating than man’s. He searches the innermost hearts of men. In His sight the deeds of Sardis are revealed as empty and incomplete, in the absence of true faith and love.



*“He Who Holds the Seven Stars”
by Hans Holbein*

“Persecution is dangerous - some turn apostate; heresy is worse- often many are deceived; worst of all is the dry rot from within- the whole church dying from the inside. Its membership may be large, it works may be great in number and in size, but the life is dying out or is already dead.” (Lenski, p. 129)

“Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard, obey it and repent.” - Now comes the threefold exhortation which provides God’s remedy for this nearly fatal crisis. First, **“Remember what you have received and heard.”** The verb is in the present tense, indicating ongoing action - *“keep on remembering.”* That which the church in Sardis had **“received and heard”** was the message of the Gospel, the Word of God by which their faith and their church had originally been called into being. To **“obey”** (Greek - *“terein”* - literally *“to keep”*) that Gospel and live according to it will require the total transformation of heart and life which is true repentance (Greek - *“metanoeson”*). Biblical repentance includes the following components: 1. Recognition of sin; 2. Contrition - sorrow for sin; 3. Faith in Christ’s forgiveness; 4. Willingness, wherever possible, to undo the damage of the sin; and, 5. Conscientious resolve not to repeat the sin in the future.

“But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know...” - The text warns of the dire consequences of failure to heed the Lord’s call to repentance. He who now addresses the church in Sardis as a loving Savior will return unexpectedly and without warning as a stern Judge. The coming of the judgment **“as a thief”** is a common simile in Scripture (cf. Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:15). Repentance may not be delayed because we never know when the hour of judgment will come for us or for the world. The Greek text is most emphatic on this point, using the strongest negative expression possible - *“ou me.”* The text could be translated *“There is absolutely no way for you to find out when I am coming.”* Those who delight in setting dates and establishing time tables would do well to note these words carefully.

“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes.” - There remains even in dying Sardis a small remnant - **“a few people”** - who are still alive in the faith. The Greek text literally says *“You have a few names in Sardis.”* This terminology conforms to the following verse which will refer to the removal of names from the Book of Life in heaven. The righteousness or unrighteousness of men is frequently symbolized by clothing in Scripture. For instance, Isaiah declares: **“All of us have become as one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”** (Isaiah 64:11; cf. also Isaiah 61:10). Later in Revelation, John describes the redeemed in heaven as **“those who have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.”** (Revelation 7:14; cf. also 22:14) Hence, those in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes are the justified, those to whom the righteousness of God in Christ has been imputed by faith. They have remained in the faith despite the apostasy of the majority and have not been defiled by the corruption of the sinful

culture in which they live. The Greek word “*emolynon*” (“*soiled*”) is an intense word which means “*to smear with filth,*” “*to befoul,*” or “*to pollute.*” It is often used in a moral context with particular application to sexual immorality. Some commentators further suggest that the use of this clothing imagery in reference to Sardis is the an allusion to the prominence of the wool industry in the city. The faithful who remain in this dying church are promised deliverance in the coming judgment - “*They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy.*” The garment imagery continues. The color white in Scripture is typically the color of holiness and purity - “*Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.*” (Isaiah 1:18) This is also generally the usage in Revelation (cf. 7:9,13). To walk with the Lord, dressed in white, is the promise of eternal life in heaven where we will dwell in the presence of God forever in perfect holiness and blessedness. They will receive this gift because “*they are worthy.*” That is to say, they have been counted worthy by God’s grace, and that grace within them has enabled them to persevere where so many others have fallen away. As St. Paul declares: “*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect.*”

“He who overcomes will like them be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life...” - In the letter to Sardis the promise to the overcomer is pronounced in the context of the faithful remnant. The majority who have fallen may still have a part in the blessing promised to the faithful if only they will repent. They too may “*be dressed in white,*” justified before God in the shed blood of Jesus. The verb is passive indicating that the person does not dress himself, but that God acts to throw the white robe of righteousness around him. Their names will be inscribed forever in the “*book of life.*” The “*book of life*” appears seven times in the imagery of Revelation (3:5; 13:8; 17:8;20:12, 15; 21:27), although the image is not unique to this book. Jesus urges His disciples to “*rejoice that your names are written in heaven.*” (Luke 10:20). St Paul describes his co-workers in the Gospel as people “*whose names are in the book of life.*” (Philippians 4:3). The “*book of life*” is a figurative way of expressing the doctrine of election (Romans 8:28-30; Ephesians 1:3-6). The book contains the names of those whom God has predestined for eternal life through faith in the Lord Jesus. It is the census book of the heavenly Jerusalem, written before history began. To have one’s name written in the book of life is to have the assurance of a salvation which has been accomplished not by human effort but by God Himself. When the Savior says He will not erase their names out of the book, He is emphasizing the certainty of the salvation which God has prepared for the

elect. The same thought is expressed in another way in John 10:28 when the Good Shepherd promises that no one shall pluck His sheep out of His hand. Finally, the Lord promises those who persevere in the faith and overcome that He will ***“acknowledge his name before My Father and His angels.”*** To be acknowledged by Christ is to be identified and claimed as one of His own. The language is similar to that of Matthew 10:32 where Christ declares: ***“Everyone, therefore, who will confess Me before men, I will confess him before My Father who is in heaven.”*** The letter concludes with the standard appeal to hear and heed the Spirit’s message to the churches.



“The Ruins of Philadelphia

The Letter to the Church in Philadelphia
The Church of the Open Door
(Revelation 3:7-13)

To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 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. 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. 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. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:” - The city of Philadelphia was located in a fertile valley about thirty miles southeast of Sardis. Philadelphia was the youngest of the seven cities, having been founded in the Second Century B.C. by the Greek King Eumenes II. It was named Philadelphia (Greek “*philia*” - love, “*adelphos*” - brother) in honor of the king’s brother, Attalus II, who was renowned for his love and loyalty to his royal sibling. The city was designed to be an outpost of

Greek culture and civilization in Asia. It’s position on an important East-West trade route and the imperial postal road resulted in prosperity and prominence. In ancient times Philadelphia was known as “*the gateway to the East*” and “*the keeper of the gateway.*” Hence Revelation’s designation of Philadelphia as the church of the open door was historically most appropriate. The city was situated on the edge of a geologically unstable region known as the “*Katakekaumene*” (from the Greek verb which means “*to burn down*”), so designated because of its frequent earthquakes and regular volcanic activity. The city of Philadelphia, along with the other



“Dionysius - The God of Wine and Ecstasy”

cities in the valley, was devastated by a major earthquake in A.D. 17, and had not yet been fully rebuilt when John wrote the Book of Revelation. The imperial government provided substantial aid for reconstruction and accordingly, the cult of the emperor flourished in the city. The city took on a new name “*Neokaiseria*,” the city of the new Caesar, as a demonstration of its gratitude for imperial patronage. The fertile volcanic soil of the region was well suited to the cultivation of vineyards and wine production was one of Philadelphia’s major industries. Dionysius (Roman - Bacchus) the Greek god of wine and the vine was the most prominent deity of the city.

“These are the words of Him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David.” - Christ’s self-description to the church of Philadelphia is not a verbatim development of material from Chapter 1 in the same way that those of previous letters have been.

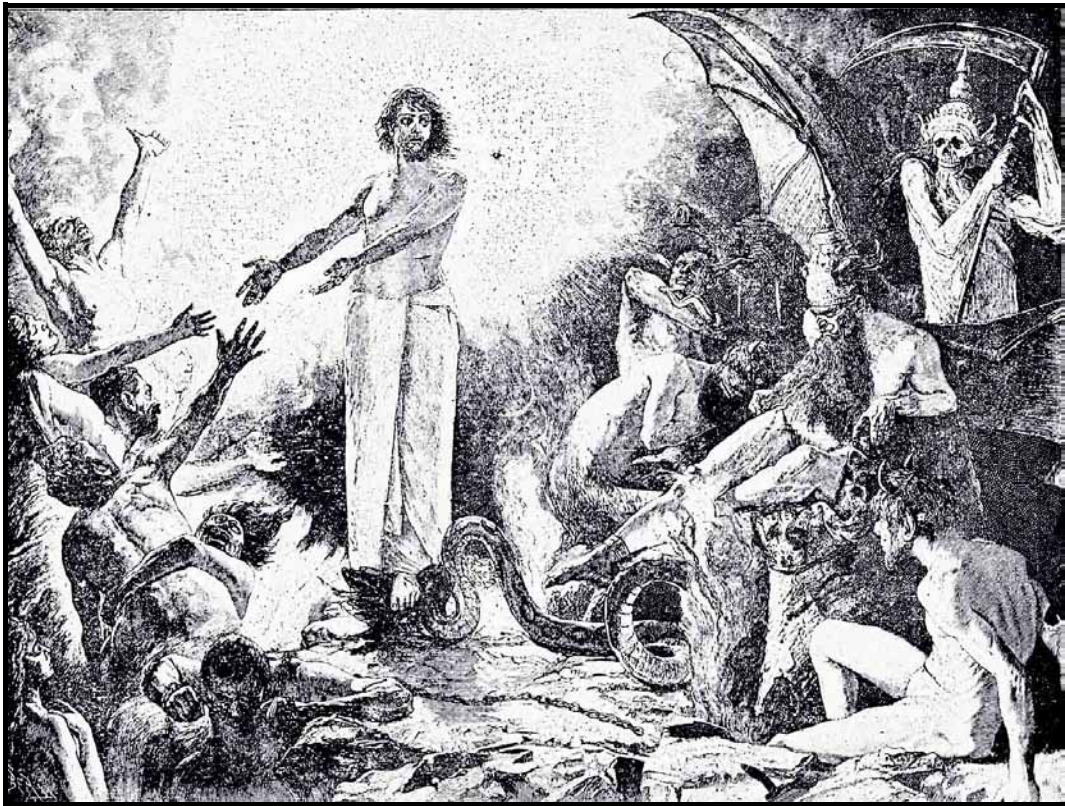
It is more a matter of allusion than quotation. Four identifying marks are cited. The designation of the Lord as ***“He who is holy and true”*** is evidently drawn from Chapter 1’s description of Jesus as ***“the faithful witness”*** (1:5). Jesus is ***“the holy One”*** (Greek - *“ho hagios”*). The

title is used elsewhere in Revelation in reference to God the Father (cf. 4:8; 6:10). Elsewhere in Scripture this is a common title for the divine Messiah (cf. Psalm 16:10; Habakkuk 3:3; Isaiah 40:25; Mark 1:24; Luke 1:35; 4:34; John 6:69; Acts 4:27; 1 John 2:20). To be holy, is not merely to be without sin, but also to be set apart as the divine Son of God, commissioned by Him to be the Savior of the world. Jesus is also ***“the true One”*** (Greek - *“ho alethinos”*). He is the Truth personified (cf. John 14:6). He is genuine and real in contrast to all the false Messiahs who sought to foist themselves upon Israel. In Revelation 1:18 Christ had asserted: ***“I hold the keys of***



“David the King” by Rudolf Schäfer

death and Hades.” The imagery of the keys now recurs as the Lord is identified as *“Him...who holds the key of David.”* The language is drawn from Isaiah 22:22 where a man named Eliakim is chosen by God as the treasurer of the royal house. Of this faithful servant it is said, *“I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; what he opens, no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”* Eliakim, as the Treasurer of the kingdom of Judah, had full control over all the resources of the kingdom with the authority to withhold or bestow the king’s treasure as he wished. In this sense, he was a type, a prefigure of the Messiah who was to come as a royal king of the House of David. In the case of Jesus, the treasure in question is not mere material wealth but the gift of life eternal for He *“holds the keys of death and Hades.”* He alone can open or close the door to heaven. His power and authority in this matter is absolute - *“What He opens no one can shut; and what He shuts no one can open.”*



“Christ - the Conqueror of Death and Hell” by Sasha Schneider

“I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.” - In each of the other letters, the Lord’s assertion of complete knowledge about the congregation’s situation is immediately followed by a detailed description of that situation. The letter to the church in Philadelphia, perhaps the most positive

of the seven letters, digresses from the typical pattern at this point in that a word of encouragement precedes the specification of the congregation's deeds. Jesus assures the church that He has set before them ***"an open door that no one can shut."*** The ***"open door"*** which Christ graciously sets before the church in Philadelphia is the promise of life eternal and access to the endless joy and blessedness of heaven. The promise of the open door assures them of the forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. None of their enemies or opponents can deprive them of this blessing. This is an open doorway ***"that no one can shut."*** There may also be a missionary connotation in this promise. Elsewhere in the New Testament, the open door terminology is used in connection with unusual evangelistic and ministry opportunities (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:9; 2 Corinthians 2:12; Colossians 4:3). What could be more fitting than for those who have been assured the promise of the open heaven, to also be given unique opportunities to share the wonderful Gospel of salvation?

"I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept My word and have not denied My name." - These three clauses explain the reason for the blessing of the open door. Unlike other larger and more powerful congregations in the region, the church in Philadelphia has only ***"little strength."*** This was evidently a small church with limited influence whose members probably came from the lower classes of society in contrast to the great wealth and influence of the church's Jewish enemies (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:26-27). The spiritual faithfulness of this congregation is in marked contrast to the church's small size and influence - ***"Yet you have kept My word and***



"Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word"
by Eduard Gebhardt

have not denied My name.” This is a church that has been faithful to Scripture, that has not tolerated false teaching, and has not yielded to the world’s relentless efforts



***“The Vision of the Golden Lamps”
from the Bamberg Apocalypse***

toward compromise and conformity. As Jesus declares in the Gospel of St. John: ***“If you continue in My Word, you are really My disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*** (John 8:31; cf. also John 14:23,24). Faithfulness to the Word has been consistently demonstrated in the congregation by a refusal to deny ***“My name.”*** The open, joyful confession of Jesus Christ as Lord, even in the face of determined opposition, has characterized the life of the church in Philadelphia.

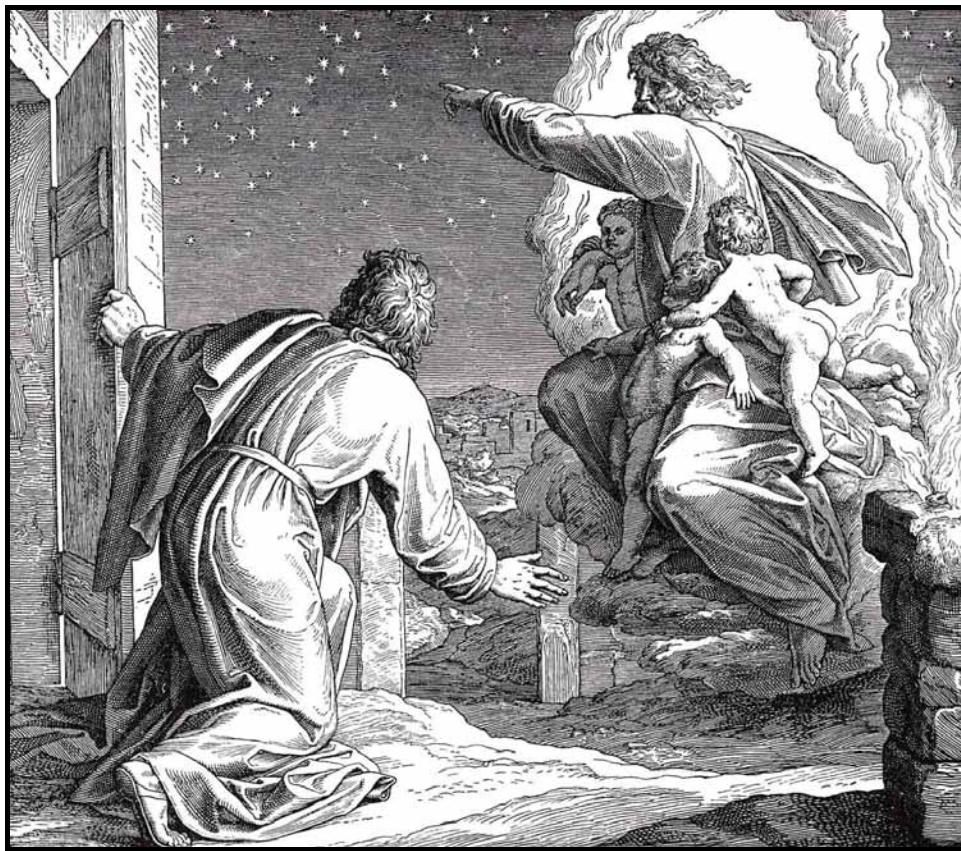
“I will make those who are the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars - I will make them come and fall down at your feet...”-

Like the church in Smyrna (cf. Revelation 2:9), Philadelphia was being persecuted by Jews who

rejected Jesus as the Messiah. St. Ignatius, writing to the church in Philadelphia a few decades later, indicates that this conflict with Judaism continued into the Second Century:

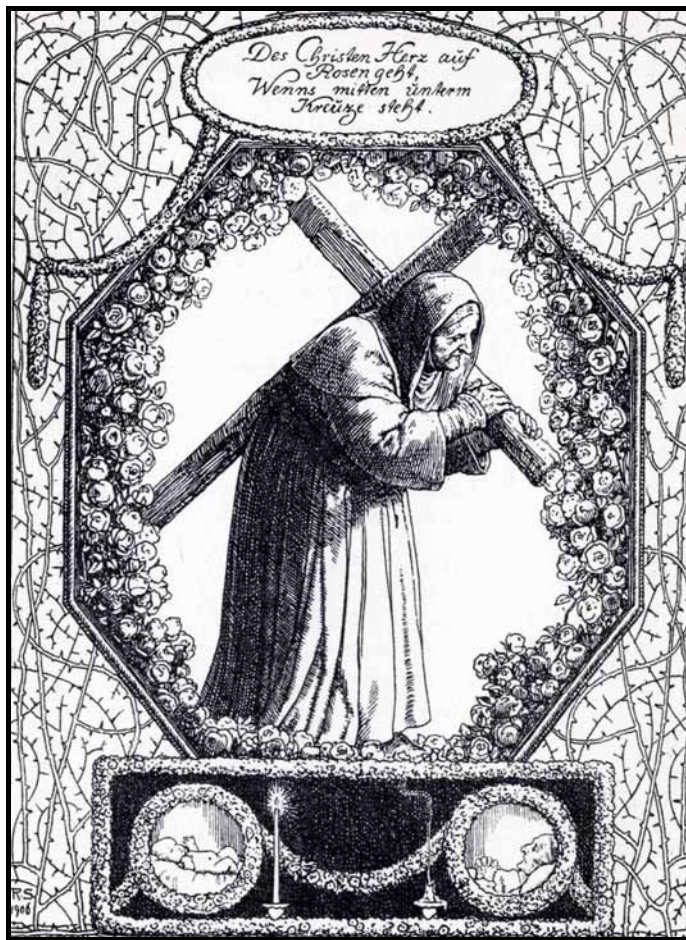
‘But if anyone preach the Jewish law unto you, listen not to him. For it is better to hearken to Christian doctrine from a man who has been circumcised, than to Judaism from one uncircumcised. But if either of such persons do not speak concerning Jesus Christ, they are in my judgment but as monuments and sepulchres of the dead, upon which are written only the names of men. Flee therefore the wicked devices and snares of the prince of this world, lest at any time, being conquered by his artifices ye grow weak in your love.’ (ANF, 1, p.82)

These people professed themselves to be the true Israel of God because of their physical descent from Abraham. They bitterly rejected Jesus and those who followed. In so doing, they have become *“the synagogue of Satan,”* and have forfeited the right to be called *“Jews.”* True descent from father Abraham is a matter of faith not blood (cf. Romans 2:28-29; 9:6-9). The Old Testament had promised that Gentiles from all across the world would one day come to bow down before the true Israel of God (cf. Isaiah 45:14; 49:23; 60:14; Psalm 86:9). Jesus now promises the beleaguered Christians in Philadelphia the fulfillment of those promises in a manner that confounds and contradicts all human expectation. The day will come when those who believe themselves to be Jews but who are not will be compelled to acknowledge that Jesus is, in fact, the promised Messiah, and that those who followed him are, in fact, the true Israel of God, those whom He has loved (cf. Isaiah 43:4). This text does not indicate the conversion of the Jews but the universal acknowledgment of the lordship of Jesus when He returns in might and majesty as the Judge of all mankind. In that sense, the passage is very similar to the prophecy of Revelation 1:7 (cf. also Philippians 2:10-11)



“God’s Promise to Abraham” - 19th Century Bible Illustration by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“Since you have kept My command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial...” - The NIV’s translation muddles the Greek text in the opening phrase of Verse 10. The Greek literally says, *“Because you have kept the word of My patience.”* There is nothing here about divine commands or obedience to them. To insert this thought into the text is to distort what is essentially a Gospel concept into Law. The Gospel tells us of Christ’s patient endurance as our suffering Savior. That is *“the word of My patience.”* In fact, it was that very patient endurance, Christ’s willingness to submit to humiliation and death, that caused most men to reject and scorn Him. Thus, St. Paul declares that the cross of Christ is an offense (Greek - *“skandalon”* - literally a deathtrap) to the Jews and silliness to the Gentiles (1 Corinthians 1:23). Our Lord’s own example, held before us in the Gospel, encourages and strengthens us to endure persecution and pain with patience, just as Jesus did for us. The Christian who endures as Jesus did, remaining with Christ crucified, has truly *“kept My word of patience.”*



“Bearing our Crosses” by Rudolf Schäfer

“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.” Those who have *“kept My word of patience”* are now promised that the Lord will keep them in the time of testing. Those who fantasize a secret rapture of the church at the beginning of an imagined seven year tribulation period preceding a millennial reign of Christ on earth would like to appropriate this verse in support of their outlandish theories. To do so renders this promise irrelevant to the congregation in Philadelphia to whom the promise is given. Furthermore, the words and grammar of the passage itself clearly contradict this view. Rapturists argue that to kept **“from the hour of trial”** (Greek - *“tereso*



“The Temptation of Jesus” by V. Leduc

ek”) necessitates physical evacuation from the point of danger. That assertion is explicitly contradicted by the only other New Testament combination of these two Greek words in John 17:15. Here Jesus specifically rejects a physical removal from temptation while praying for spiritual protection in the midst of that temptation: **“My prayer is not that you take them out of the world, but that you protect them from (Greek - *tereses autous ek*) the evil one.”** The church in Philadelphia was faithful to Christ in the time of trial and now Christ promises to be faithful to them in the greater trials to come. It is their preservation in trial that is promised, not their removal from it. They will be protected spiritually from any threats posed to their faith during the time of trial. The impending tribulation (Greek - *peirasmos*) is identified as **“the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.”** It is universal in scope in that it will come **“upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.”** This language is typically used in Revelation to refer negatively to unbelievers throughout the world (cf. Revelation 6:10; 8:13; 11:10;13:8, 14;17:8). The ongoing tribulation of the people of God throughout the New Testament era is to be one of the characteristic *“signs of the times,”* to serve as a constant reminder that we have entered upon the final era of human history, the end times. That tribulation will intensify in the period

immediately before the Lord returns in glory and power. This is the “**great tribulation**” of Revelation 7:14 (cf. Daniel 12:1; Matthew 24:15-31; Mark 13:7-20; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12). The promise to the Philadelphians, relevant in the first century and the twenty-first century is simply this:

“The church has kept her Lord’s Word, and has, in the strength of it, patiently endured; the Lord will keep this church; amid all those successive waves of preliminary judgments of God each more severe than the last, which shall sweep and sift the world, the church shall be safely kept.” (Franzmann, p. 49)



“The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins” by J. M. Strudwick

“I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown.” - This emphasis on the urgency and imminence of the coming of Christ is characteristic of Revelation (cf. Revelation 2:5,16; 22:7,12,20). Behind the trials and sufferings of these last days there looms the decisive reality of the final judgment. To faithful Philadelphia these are words of encouragement and comfort. This is not a mere chronological calculation. It is a summons to live in eager anticipation of the return of Christ. Two thousand years have passed since Jesus promised His imminent return. Although **“of that day and hour no one knows”** (Matthew 24:36) the time has been determined, the Lord is coming. Nothing will delay or divert His arrival. From a human perspective we are to live in a state of constant readiness eagerly awaiting His return. We are to leave the date, **“the times and the seasons”** (Acts 1:7)

to God and be constantly prepared so that we will not be caught unaware when Christ returns. It is as St. Peter wrote:

“First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this coming He promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes as it has since the beginning of creation. But they deliberately forget that long ago by God’s Word the heavens existed and the earth was formed out of water and with water...But do not forget this one thing, dear friends; With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.” (2 Peter 3:3-9)

In the face of Christ’s imminent return, the admonition to the congregation is to stand firm and *“Hold on to what you have.”* They had been given the Truth of the Word of God and the wonderful Gospel of Salvation. They had been blessed by the Spirit with gifts and abilities to be used in the service of the Lord. The enemies of Christ and of His Church were constantly seeking to deprive them of that which they had been given. Their own sinful nature and the complacent indifference which lulled them into a false sense of security would also have robbed them of these precious gifts. These enemies of God, both internal and external, must be steadfastly and continuously resisted lest they *“take your crown.”* The Greek term - *“ton stephanon sou”* indicates the victor’s crown of laurel leaves presented to the winning athlete rather than the royal crown of a king. In Chapter 2, Christ used the same terminology to promise



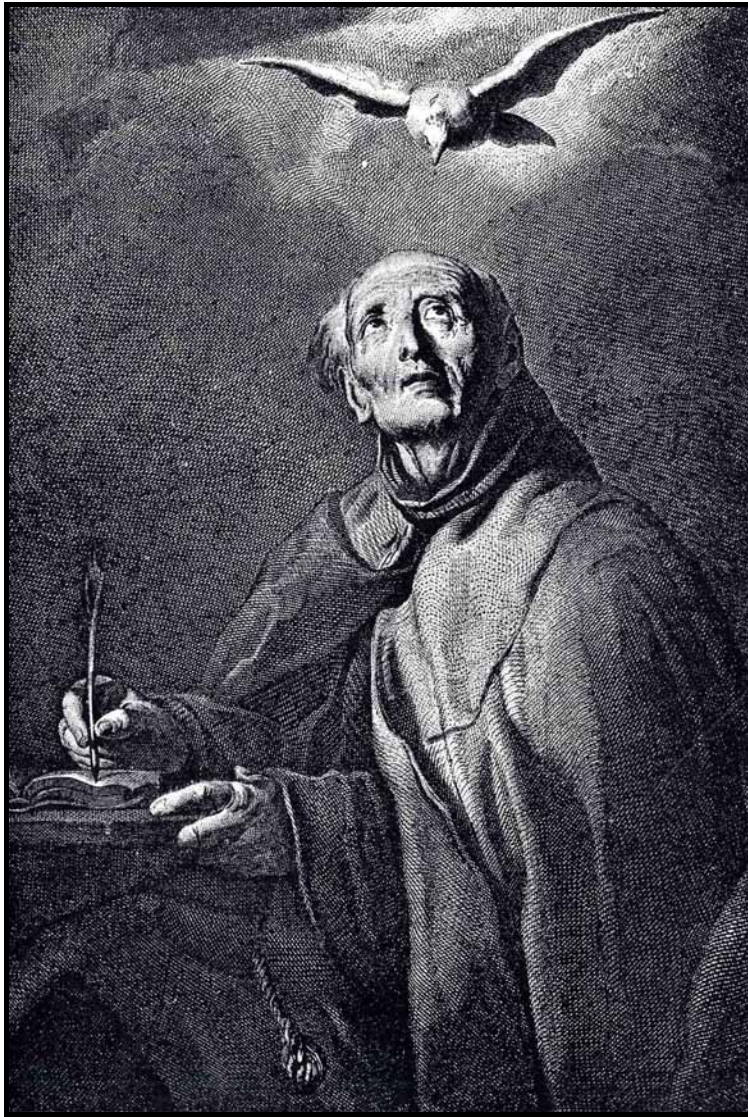
“The Crown of Life” by Rudolf Schäfer

“the crown of life” to those in Smyrna who were faithful unto death. Thus, to lose the crown means to lose life and eternal salvation, to be deprived of our place in the

kingdom. The robbers who seek to take the crown do not desire it for themselves. Their goal is to deprive the believer of the eternal life that Christ has won for him: to drag him down with them to perdition in the unending torment of hell.

“Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of My God. Never again will he leave it.” - The promise to the overcomer in this letter is shaped by the particular circumstances of the church in Philadelphia. To a city that had been shaken and destroyed by devastating earthquakes the assurance of salvation comes in the form of a promise of solid stability and permanence. They will stand forever (***“He will never leave it.”***) in the heavenly Jerusalem, the eternal temple of God as a mighty immovable pillar. They will remain in the blessed presence of God throughout all of eternity (cf. Ephesians 2:20-22). ***“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.”*** - Three most sacred names are to be inscribed upon this pillar, thus marking and sealing the believer as the permanent possession of God (cf. Ezekiel 48:35). The noun ***“name”*** (Greek - *“onoma”*) is repeated three times for special emphasis. To be marked with ***“the name of My God”*** signifies belonging to God and being endowed with the power of God. To be marked with ***“the name of the city of My God”*** is a guarantee of irrevocable citizenship in the new Jerusalem, the eternal dwelling place of God (cf. Revelation 21:10ff.). The name of Jesus is ***“the name above every name”*** before which every knee shall bow as all of humanity confesses the Lordship of Christ (Philippians 2:10-11). The Lord declares His name, written upon the believer will be ***“My new name.”*** In the Bible, the bestowal of a new name generally indicated a change in status or character (cf. Isaiah 62:2 where Israel is promised that in the Messianic age - ***“You shall be called by a new name which the mouth of the Lord will give.”***) The new name of the glorified Christ indicates His exaltation to the right hand of God and the inscription of that new name upon the believer is the promise that he who overcomes will share in the Lord’s glory and power.

“He who has an ear, let him hear...” - The letter concludes with the customary admonition to hear and heed the message to the churches.



“St John the Revelator” by Francis Zurbaran - 1662

**The Letter to the Church in Laodicea
The Lukewarm-Compromising Church
(Revelation 3:14-22)**

To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Ruler of God’s creation. 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. 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. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If any hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with Me. 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. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.



*“The Faithful and True Witness”
“Liber Floridus” - A.D. 1120*

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:” - Laodicea was on the southeast corner of the circuit of the seven churches about a hundred miles east of Ephesus. It was situated in the Lycus Valley at the junction of strategic east - west and north - south highways. The town of Colosse, to which St. Paul addressed his New Testament letter to the Colossians, was at the opposite, upper end of the same valley. The city was founded in the third century B.C. by the Greek King Antiochus II and named for his wife Laodice. Because of its location it was a major commercial and financial center. Laodicea was renowned for the manufacture of a particularly soft black woolen cloth. The Greek historian Strabo reports: *“Laodicea produces sheep that are excellent, not only for the softness of their wool, but also for its raven black color, so that the*

Laodiceans derive splendid revenue from it.” A major medical center was also located in Laodicea which specialized in the preparation of a salve for the treatment of diseases of the eye. There was a renowned cluster of hot springs within a few miles at Hieropolis, attracting visitors from around the world who came to bathe in their

steamy soothing waters. The boiling mineral water that bubbled up from these thermal vents created crystal columns and cliffs that had the appearance of frozen white waterfalls. The hot water flowed over a 300 foot high cliff near the city, gradually cooling and growing tepid - lukewarm - as it came closer to Laodicea. The city was noted for its architecture with massive walls and towering gates. The triple arches of the “*Ephesus Gate*” still stand today. The great stadium of Laodicea was 900 feet long. Laodicea was a prosperous and economically well established community. It became a world center of banking and money lending. The Seleucid kings resettled about 2,000 Jews in this region after deporting them from Babylon. The Jewish community in the town was prominent and influential. They shared in the wealth of their city. The paramount god of Laodicea with a native Phrygian deity named “*Men Karou*”



*“Jesus the Amen”
Westminster Psalter - 12th Century*

identified in the minds of the people with Zeus, the father of the Greek gods. St. Paul had a hand in the foundation of the congregation in Laodicea (Colossians 1:6-7; 2:1). Tradition indicates that the congregation was established under the leadership of Archippus (Colossians 4:17), the son of Philemon. The church remained active in the city throughout the Roman era. Its bishop was martyred for the faith in 166 A.D. The city was abandoned early in the 14 century after having been repeatedly conquered by the Turks. Its ruins remain largely unexcavated today.

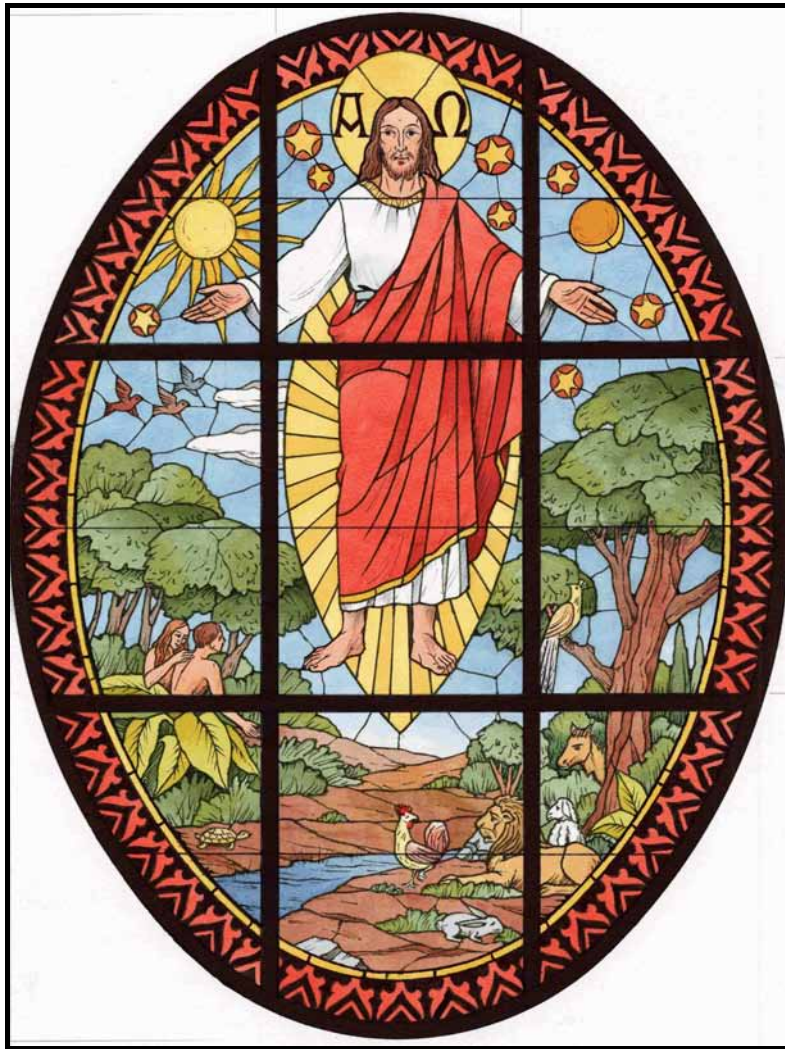
“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Ruler of God’s creation.” - The threefold designation of Christ emphasizes his complete



“Christ the Divine Judge” - Jacobello Albergno

truthfulness and absolute authority. This is the only instance in Scripture where the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew term “*Amen*” is used as a personal name for Christ. The Hebrew word literally means “*to be firm*” and is used to signify that which is fixed, true, and unchangeable. In the liturgical worship of Israel the “*Amen*” was used as both an affirmation (“*Thus it is!*”) and a prayer (“*So let it be.*”). At times, the word is simply translated as “*truth*” in the Old Testament. To name Christ “*the Amen*” is to designate Him as the personification of Truth. All that which He says must most certainly be accomplished. This emphasis is continued in the second title, “*the faithful and true Witness.*” The Greek word “*martys*” was originally used in reference to one who offered testimony in the courtroom. In the

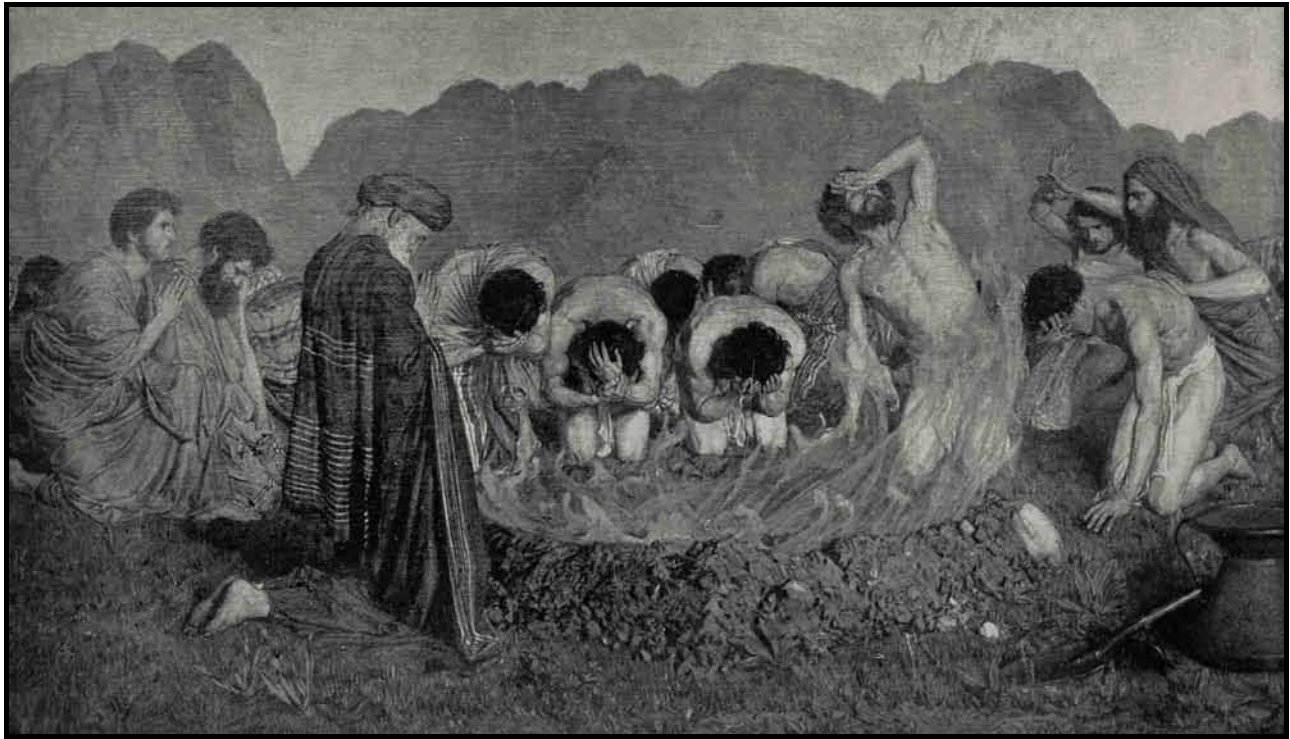
history of the church it came to refer particularly to those who gave their lives because of their testimony for Christ, thus the English word “*martyr.*” Jesus is “*the true and faithful Witness*” in that His testimony in revealing the will and purpose of God is totally true and reliable. The text repeats and expands the reference of Revelation 1:5 which described Jesus as “*the faithful Witness.*” The third title adopted by Christ in the letter to Laodicea is “*the Ruler of God’s creation.*” In his letter to the nearby Colossians, thirty five years earlier, St. Paul had found it necessary to rebuke those who downgraded the divinity of Christ and rejected His identity as the eternal Son of God through whom all things were made (cf. Colossians 1:15-20). The use of this title suggests that a similar problem may also have existed in Laodicea. The language in this instance is strongly reminiscent of the opening words of John’s Gospel: “*In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with*



“Christ the Creator” - Our Savior Lutheran Church

God and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made which was made.” (John 1:1-3) In a very similar way, the original text of the phrase here in Revelation literally says *“the Beginning of the creation of God.”* In this case the Greek noun *“he arche”* might be personified to read *“the Beginner of the creation of God.”* The Lord who now addresses the lukewarm church of Laodicea is not only the personification of all truth, He is the Source of all existence, the Beginning of all that is. The Arian heretics of the early centuries who denied the deity of Jesus twisted this phrase to conform to their error, rendering the text, *“the One begun at creation,”* thus reducing our Lord to the status of the first created being. This view is contrary to the language of this text and the overwhelming evidence of Scripture as a whole which emphatically asserts the deity of Christ.

“I know your deeds, that you are neither hot nor cold . I wish that you were either



“Elijah on Mt. Carmel ‘ How long halt ye between two opinions?’” by Albert Moore

one or the other.” - Christ’s declaration of knowledge about this church is blunt and directly to the point. In the other letters if there was good to be commended, that commendation came first. There is no commendation here. He who is ***“the faithful and true witness”*** knows all there is to know about this tepid congregation and He will mince no words in asserting the truth. The condemnation of the church in Laodicea is the most scathing of any in the seven letters. The Lord not only knows external actions but His gaze penetrates into the innermost recesses of the heart to discern motivation and attitude. This is a church that has settled comfortably into the middle, indifferent and apathetic, avoiding a decisive stand in any direction. Like complacent Israel of old they are ***“limping along between two different opinions.”*** (1 Kings 18:21). To exist in such a state, satisfied with the semblance of faith without its substance, relying upon a false assurance of salvation, represents a condition of greater spiritual peril than outright unbelief. As Peter warns: ***“It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness than to have known it and then to turn their back on the sacred command that was passed on to them.”*** (2 Peter 2:21) Thus the Lord asserts - ***“I wish you were either one or the other!”*** The unbeliever may be more readily warned of his spiritual jeopardy, than one who wrongly believes that his outward acquaintance with the facts of Christianity will earn him salvation. The half and half position of the church in Laodicea is one of deadly danger.

The imagery of “**hot**,” “**cold**,” and “**lukewarm**” water is effectively drawn from local conditions in Laodicea.. As noted above (p. 66) the hot spring of Hieropolis, six miles to the north, were renown throughout the ancient world for their medicinal qualities. In the other direction lay the nearby city of Colossae, which was well supplied with pure cold water from deep subterranean wells. Laodicea had neither hot healing water nor cold refreshing water. It was in the middle - its water supply tepid and revolting. The Greek historian Strabo reports that the water of Laodicea had a distinct odor because of its high mineral content and was therefore barely drinkable. Robert Mounce describes Laodicea’s hydrological predicament in this way:

“Six miles north across the Lycus River was the city of Hieropolis, famous for its hot springs which, rising within the city, flowed across a wide plateau and spilled over a broad escarpment directly opposite Laodicea. The cliff was some 300 feet high and about a mile wide. Covered with a white incrustation of calcium carbonate, it formed a spectacular natural phenomenon, As the hot, mineral laden water traveled across the plateau, it gradually became lukewarm before cascading over the edge...As the letter was read to the congregation in Laodicea, did the eyes of the listeners seek through door and window the distant view of the lime and sulfur encrusted cliffs under Hieropolis, where the plumes of steam told of hot pools and sickly insipid water seeping over slimy rock, water rough with alum which the unsuspecting visitor drank only to spit out upon the ground in disgust?” (Mounce , p. 125)

Such was the Christianity of the church in Laodicea. They stood for nothing. They were willing to go along with anything. Easy, indifferent tolerance characterized this congregation. They had come to the self-serving conclusion that it was unnecessary to choose between truth and error, right and wrong. They would remain comfortably ensconced in the middle, neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. Sadly, the allure of lukewarm religion has been a consistent problem in the history of God’s people despite constant warnings that it is impossible to have it both ways. Joshua had urged the children of Israel:

“Now fear the Lord and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve the Lord. But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” (Joshua 24 14-15)



*“Elijah on Mt. Carmel”
by Frederic Shields*

On the summit of Mount Carmel, in dramatic confrontation with the heathen prophets of Baal, Elijah called the people of Israel to decision and reminded them that if the Lord is God, then He is God alone: ***“How long will you waver between two opinions? If the Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal is God follow him.”*** (1 Kings 18:21) Our Lord Himself declared that compromise and co-existence between the way of God and the way of the world was impossible: ***“No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.”*** (Luke 16:13)

“So because you are lukewarm - neither hot nor cold - I am about to spit you out of My mouth.” - The metaphor continues as Christ warns of impending judgment upon this church. The Lord threatens the lukewarm church with total and utter rejection. The Greek verb *“emesei”* literally means *“to vomit,”* the drastic physical response of the body to that which is nauseating, corrupt, or poisonous. The image serves here to describe the moral nausea provoked by tepid, stand for nothing religion. The same coarse imagery is used in the Old Testament to depict God’s judgment upon the Canaanites who are to be ***“vomited out”*** of the land of Palistine because of their corruption and their wickedness. God warns Israel that the same fate awaits them, if they allow themselves to be corrupted: ***“And if you defile the land, it will vomit you out like it vomited out the nations that were before you.”*** (Leviticus 18:28) Even this drastic warning is a call to

repentance. Judgment is very near but it has not yet come. Time is running out but there is still time - ***“I am about to spit you out of My mouth.”***



“Elijah on Mt. Carmel” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“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 of Laodicea is self-deluded. They are complacent, comfortable, and self-satisfied. Their assessment of their spiritual state has no basis in fact. It is a most dangerous illusion. The language of the text refers to spiritual conditions, not material wealth. Lenski aptly applies these attitudes to our contemporary church:

“In the church today, thousands are satisfied with their empty moralism, their arid rationalism, their pleasurable worldliness. This they have accumulated until they think, “I have need of nothing.” They pity other churches. They have vastly improved the Christianity of their fathers. They have gone to the very top.” (Lenski, p. 156)

Their pretentious claim was not only that they were abundantly rich in the things of the Spirit but that they had achieved this status on their own - ***“I have acquired***

wealth and do not need a thing.” The reality of the situation, however, is exactly the opposite. In the Greek text, the pronoun **“you”** is positioned for particular emphasis like the pointing finger of the accusing Judge - *“It is you, the boastful one, who is...”*. Five adjectives are listed which detail the true situation - **“wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.”** The first two are more general. **“Wretched”** (Greek - *“talaiporos”*) is the same word used by St. Paul to describe the anguish of his inability to live by the will of God: **“O wretched man that I am...”** (Romans 7:24). **“Pitiful”** (Greek - *“eleeinos”*) pictures one who is worthy of extreme pity because he stands in peril of eternal death and damnation. The last three adjectives, **“poor, blind, and naked,”** are more specific and may well be an allusion to the specific conditions which prevailed in Laodicea.

“It is often noted that Laodicea prided itself on three things; financial wealth, an extensive textile industry, and a popular eye salve which was exported around the world. It is hard not to see here a direct allusion to Laodicea’s banking establishments, medical school, and textile industry.” (Mounce, p. 126)

The heart of Laodicea’s peril was that they **“do not realize”** this grim reality. They prefer to remain comfortably ensconced in their delusions. As the hymn reminds us, we must come to God as we truly are if we are to come to Him at all:

*“Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come, I come.”*
(TLH, # 388)

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich;” - In the face of the Laodiceans smug self-confidence the Lord offers sobering advice. These words constitute an invitation rather than a demand, and yet this is more than casual, take it or leave it, advice. There is a sense of life and death urgency involved here. The ironic sarcasm of Christ’s invitation is powerful and profound. You think that you have everything, but you have nothing. You confidently believe that you have provided for all of your own needs, but you must be completely dependent upon Me. Jesus urges the self-deluded church to cast aside the counterfeits upon which they have relied, and receive instead the reality that He alone can provide. The Lord highlights the folly of this city noted of its riches buy inviting them to buy that which cannot be purchased for money: **“I counsel you to buy from Me...”** The caustic sarcasm of the proposed transaction would not have been lost on the Laodiceans who were famous for their business acumen. The language is strongly reminiscent of the

invitation of Isaiah 55: *“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy?”* (Isaiah 55:1-2) The text is most emphatic in its assertion that only Christ can provide that which is needed - *“buy from Me.”* The three suggested purchases - *“gold,”* *“white clothes,”* and *“salve”* reflect the threefold description of the Laodiceans’ actual condition in the previous phrase - *“poor,”* *“naked,”* and *“blind.”* In each instance the proposed item is infinitely more valuable than its counterfeit counterpart which the people had provided for themselves.

“Only one who has God’s creative omnipotence can offer the advice which He offers; to “buy without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1) finer gold of greater value than wealthy Laodicea ever had, coin of God’s own realm; white clothing of the celestial, blessed ones, able to cover the evil nakedness which shames them in the sight of God; an eye salve more effective than the one compounded by the famous medics of Laodicea, to give men eyes for both the severity and the kindness of God. Their Creator Lord can give what He demands; His Spirit can make fervent men of these lukewarm saints (cf. Romans 12:11). As in the Old Testament, so in the New: the Lord can turn the hearts of His people back (cf. 1 Kings 18:37).” (Franzmann, p. 51)



“Luther Standing With the Word Alone Against the Arrayed Might of Church and State” - 15th Century Woodcut

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent!” - Lest the congregation misunderstand the purpose for these harsh words of rebuke, the Lord now adds an explanation and an invitation. ***“Rebuke and discipline”*** are demonstrations of love, the concrete applications of loving concern and compassion. This is tough, real love, not the superficial, permissive sentimentalism that most often passes for love among us. As wise Solomon advised centuries earlier in the Book of Proverbs: ***“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resent His rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those He loves, as a father the son he delights in.”*** (Proverbs 3:11-12; cf. Hebrews 12:5-13). The Lord is no soft Eli (1 Samuel 2:22-36) to the children whom He loves. The stern admonition addressed to Laodicea demonstrates how much He loves them as He now summons them to turn and repent. The new attitude which God urges upon the Laodiceans is the exact opposite of their lukewarm, apathetic indifference. ***“Be earnest”*** - the Greek text literally says *“be zealous”* (*“zeuleue”*). The verb is related to the adjective *“zestos”* (*“hot”*), used in verses 15 and 16 to condemn the congregation’s lukewarmness.

“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.” - This is one of the best known texts in the Book of Revelation, immortalized by the classic William Holman Hunt painting, *“The Light of the World.”* While the imagery of Christ waiting at the door is often used in the Bible in the context of the imminence of the Final Judgment (cf. Matthew 24:33; Mark 13:29; Luke 12:36; James 5:9), the emphasis here appears to be more personal and immediate. This gentle, loving invitation represents the call of the Gospel to every sinner through the metaphor of the Savior standing at the door to each man’s heart. In the most incredible role reversal imaginable, the Almighty King comes down from His exalted throne (vs. 21) and patiently asks the beggar who has nothing (vs.17) to receive Him. ***“Here I am!”*** the Lord declares, focusing the reader’s attention immediately upon the person of the Savior. The verb tenses indicate continuous, ongoing action, thus highlighting the patience of the Lord. He not only knocks upon the door but also calls out to identify Himself, as was the custom in the ancient Near East - ***“if anyone hears My voice and opens the door.”*** This is the call of the Gospel. This often overlooked detail reveals the error of those who would misuse this text in support of *“synergism,”* the view that man must participate in his own conversion. Faith is always a free gift of God. It is never a work of man, the result of human decision or will. If any man opens the door to his heart, it is only because through the means of grace, the Gospel in Word and Sacrament, God has moved and enabled him to do so. Since the fall of our first father

Adam, the will of mankind is in bondage to sin. In the terms of this image, the doors to our hearts are barred and bolted . We cannot open those door nor do we have any desire to do so. Sinful man can and most often does spurn and reject the Gospel call, but he cannot accept it. That must be the work of God and of God alone (cf. Genesis 8:21; Jeremiah 17:9; 1 Corinthians 2:14; 12:3; 2 Corinthians 4:1-4; Ephesians 2:1-5; Romans 5:6-10; 7:14-23; Galatians 5:17). In Acts 16:14, Luke describes the conversion of Lydia in this way: ***“And the Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.”*** This is the experience of each and every believer. Lenski offers this careful summary:

“The truth is that the King comes to the door, stands there, knocks, calls with His voice. In this lies the power that moves the will to open the door. The Lord’s power of love and grace in and by His Word, which is the power of God to save (Romans 1:16), reaches into the heart and moves it to open and to receive. This is the picture here presented.” (Lenski, p. 163)

“I will come in and eat with him and he with Me.” - The intimacy of the relationship between the believer and His Lord is presented in the image of table fellowship.

In the culture of the ancient Near East to share a meal together indicated a strong bond of companionship and affection. Thus the eternal celebration of heaven is often depicted in Scripture as a sumptuous banquet (cf.



***“Christ the Light of the World”
by William Holeman Hunt***



***“Christ Upon His Throne”
From the Ghent Altarpiece
Jan and Hubert van Eyck***

Matthew 26:29; Revelation 19:9).

“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.” - The overcomer’s promise directs our attention beyond time toward the eternity that God has prepared in Christ for those who are His own. Note that the right to reign with Christ upon His throne is not earned - it is given. The exaltation of the believer was made possible and foreshadowed by the exaltation of our Lord Himself. As the hymn rejoices: *“To him that overcometh, the crown of life shall be. He with the King of Glory shall reign eternally.”*

“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” - The last of the seven letters concludes with the now familiar call to hear and heed.



“The Vision of the Seven Seals” by Lucas Cranach

The Second Vision - The Seven Seals (Revelation 4:1-7:17)

Introduction - The Vision of the Seven Seals

The letters to the seven churches are now complete. They form the indispensable, practical background for all which follows in the remainder of the Book. The Christians of Asia Minor have been presented with a personal message from the risen and glorified Lord of the Church. Through these seven churches that message goes out to the people of God in every place and time. While correction and

commendation have varied with the different congregations every letter included the challenge to persevere and overcome. The time of testing is at hand, for we have entered upon the last days and the intensifying conflict between good and evil which signals the onset of the final era of human history. The grim words of the angel's warning in Revelation 12:12 characterize these times: ***“Woe for the earth and for the sea; because the devil is gone down unto you, having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time.”*** John is



“The Vision of the Seven Seals” by Hans Burgkmair

now swept up in the Spirit to the very gates of heaven so that he may convey to us a great word of consolation and courage for the coming tribulation. He is presented with a magnificent vision of the sovereign God upon His eternal throne in full command of all of the shifting tides of human events as they surge toward the fulfillment that He has designed for them. From where we stand evil appears to be triumphant and evil men seem to have the power to control the destinies of other men and nations. God's people appear to be helpless pawns in the hands of mighty forces beyond their control. But John's vision assures us that these appearances are deceiving. God upon His throne remains in absolute control of history. The seven sealed scroll of the future is in His hand, and only the Lamb has the power to open those seals and unfold that which is yet to be. Nothing is left to chance. There is no room for uncertainty here. The Lord reigns. As dark clouds of impending persecution gather on the horizon, the mighty song of the elders, angels, and saints reverberates across the vast reaches of heaven to remind us that our all powerful and all knowing God is still in control.

John is now swept up in the Spirit to the very gates of heaven so that he may convey to us a great word of consolation and courage for the coming tribulation. He is presented with a magnificent vision of the sovereign God upon His eternal throne in full command of all of the shifting tides of human events as they surge toward the fulfillment that He has designed for them. From where we stand evil appears to be triumphant and evil men seem to have the power to control the destinies of other men and nations. God's people appear to be helpless pawns in the hands of mighty forces beyond their control. But John's vision assures us that these appearances are deceiving. God upon His throne remains in absolute control of history. The



"The Vision of the Seven Seals" by Albrecht Dürer

The Throne of God in Heaven (Revelation 4:1-11)

After this I looked, and before me there was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." 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. 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. 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. 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 Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." 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 forever 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."

"And after this I looked, and before me there was a door standing open in heaven."

- The words "*and after this*" indicate that the Vision of the Seven Seals follows upon the completion of the initial vision of Christ amid the golden lamps and the dictation of the seven letters. This phrase does not refer to the events within the visions but to the sequence of the visions themselves. There is no indication in the text as to the duration of the time interval between the first and second visions. This introduction is a formula often used by John to mark a vision of particular solemnity and significance (cf. 7:1; 7:9; 15:5; 18:1). The NIV's translation, which omits the Greek particle "*idou*" ("*Behold!*"), lacks the dramatic force of the original. The text literally says: "*After this I saw and behold...*". This is not mere physical sight. It is rather the prophetic vision of divine revelation. The prophet sees a doorway, standing



"The Vision of the Seven Seals" by Gerard van Groeningen

open before him, which leads to heaven. The Greek verb is a passive perfect participle - "*a door was opened in heaven*" thus indicating that John did not open the door himself, nor did he see it opened. It is God who has opened this door and who provides St. John with the unique access which the open door represents. The door is said to be "*in heaven*" the dwelling place of God.

"And the voice I had heard speaking to me like a trumpet said..." - The voices that emanates from within the doorway is the same voice which he had heard earlier from the golden lampstands - literally "*I heard the first voice.*" (Cf. 1:10). Once again it is the voice of power and authority - "*speaking to me like a trumpet*". The mighty voice of Christ invites the Revelator to enter heaven - "***Come up here.***" The Lord promises to disclose to John "***what must take place after this.***" Having described the present situation of the church in the seven letters, Jesus now prepares to unveil the future, as the imagery of the sealed scroll will further indicate. This is not merely the far distant future of dispensationalist fantasies. The language of the text closely parallels that of Daniel 2:28-29,45 and indicates that the scope of that which is to be revealed pertains to the entire New Testament era, the last days which began with the death and resurrection of Jesus and which will continue until the Lord returns in judgment (cf. Mark 1:15; Acts 2:17; Galatians 4:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11; 2 Corinthians 6:2; 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; 1 Peter 1:20; 2 Peter 3:3; Hebrews 1:2; 9:26; James 5:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 18). Thus, the encouragement and the warning of this book of prophecy are relevant not only for the first century Christians of Asia Minor but also for the twentieth century Christians of today's world for we both live in the last days.

Note the verb "***must.***" Jesus promise John a revelation of "***what must take place after this.***" The events and conditions of the future are already determined in the plan and purpose of God. The Sovereign Lord not only knows what will happen in the future, He controls and directs all things. In 1:10 we were told that John had been "***in the Spirit.***" Evidently, John had returned to his normal senses at the conclusion of the first vision. Now, in the aftermath of the Christ's invitation, that condition of heightened spiritual receptivity is abruptly restored: "***At once, I was in the Spirit.***"

"And there before me was a throne in heaven and someone sitting on it." - A second dramatic "*idou*" ("*Behold!*") marks the beginning of the new vision in the Greek text. Unfortunately, once again the NIV omits this highlight. At the center of John's vista there stands "***a throne in heaven.***" This is one of only four Biblical texts

which describe visions of God's heavenly throne. The other three are in Isaiah 6:1-8; Ezekiel 1:4-28; and Daniel 7:9-10. The divergences in these descriptions serve to remind us that the details of each vision are imagery which must not be confused with literal descriptions of physical places and historical events. R.C.H. Lenski offers this most important word of caution as we prepare to pass with John thru the doorway to heaven:

“When we speak thus we are quite right in not pressing the spatial terms and thinking of an elevated dais with a grand seat for a king, with space at its right and at its left and a great room in front of it. As in the other world time does not exist, so also space does not exist there. Yet we are unable to think in terms of timelessness and spacelessness. Revelation condescends and speaks as it does by employing imagery of space and time. There is a door, someone has opened it; John sees through the door; in spirit he is inside; there is a marvelous throne, also twenty-four other thrones, etc. Make all this as tremendous as you will when reading the words but do not stress our conceptions of space and time in order to draw deductions from them, for they would be picayunely, childishly false. The reality of heaven is inconceivable to us now; so is all that is in heaven, especially the One sitting on the throne. Symbols can alone “show” the ineffable realities to us to a degree that is possible for beings that are still of the earth.” (Lenski, p. 170)



*“God the Father Enthroned”
by Luca Signorelli*

A **“throne”** is the official seat of a king, the place from which he exercises the royal prerogative of judgement (cf. Psalm 9:4) . It is a prominent symbol for God's power and authority exercised in judgment throughout Revelation, occurring thirty-seven times in the Book. The throne of God is placed at the center of a vast throne room of indescribable beauty around which everything else in this vision of heaven is oriented. In this way John emphasizes the universal sovereignty of God and His absolute control over all reality. The Old Testament declares that the heavens themselves are the throne of God and that the earth is His footstool (Isaiah 66:1). The Lord is typically described as being enthroned in heaven (i.e. 1 Kings 22:19; Psalm

11:4; 47:8; Isaiah 6:1; Ezekiel 1:26; Daniel 7:9) in a manner fully consistent with the imagery of Revelation 4. The throne of John’s vision was set in place before he passed thru the open doorway to heaven - the text literally reads: *“a throne was standing in heaven.”* With the characteristic Hebrew reluctance toward the utterance of the holy name of God by mortal men, John simply designates the throne occupant as *“someone sitting on it.”* This is without doubt God the Father as He is later distinguished both from the Lamb (5:5,7; 6:16; 7:10) and from the Spirit (4:5; 19:4). To be seated upon the throne carries the connotation of reigning as Judge and King throughout the Book of Revelation.



“Ezekiel’s Wheels” by William Blake

“And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne.” - In Psalm 22:4, God is designated as *“the enthroned one.”* The Greek word *“ho kathemenos”* (literally - *“the seated one”*) which begins this verse, is the New Testament equivalent of that divine title. The NIV’s translation, *“the one who sat there”* muddles the recognition of the term as a title for God. The majesty of the divine presence is expressed by reference to three precious jewels, jasper, carnelian, and emerald. The use of glittering gem stones to symbolize the unapproachable brightness of God’s glory is drawn from the Old Testament prophecy of Ezekiel:

“Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was

the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.” (Ezekiel 1:26-28)

“I looked, and I saw the likeness of a throne of sapphire above the expanse that was over the heads of the cherubim...Then the glory of the Lord rose from above the cherubim and moved to the threshold of the temple. The cloud filled the temple and the court was full of the radiance of the glory of the Lord. The sound of the wings of the cherubim could be heard as far away as the outer court, like the voice of God Almighty when He speaks...I looked, and I saw beside the cherubim four wheels, one beside each of the cherubim; the wheels sparkled like chrysolite.” (Ezekiel 10: 1,4-5,9)



“Satan in His Original Glory” by William Blake

“You were in Eden, the Garden of God, every precious stone adorned you: ruby, topaz and emerald, chrysolite, onyx and jasper, sapphire, turquoise and beryl. Your settings and mountings were made of gold, on the day you were created they were prepared. You were anointed as a guardian cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the holy mount of God; you walked among the fiery stones.” (Ezekiel 28:13-14)



Aaron Presenting the Sin Offering Upon the Golden Altar Wearing the Jeweled Breastplate of the High Priest

The same symbolism is reflected in the jeweled breastplate of the High Priest in which a particular gemstone represents each of the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:15-21). The same imagery is applied to the New Jerusalem, the heavenly dwelling place of God in Revelation 21:11-21. The ***“jasper”*** was a glittering, diamond-like crystal, whose pure white light would serve well to symbolize the holiness of God. In sharp contrast, ***“carnelian”*** is a fiery red stone that appears to flicker with the blaze of consuming flames. Fire is often utilized in Scripture as the symbol for God’s judgment (i.e. the blazing eyes of Christ in 1:14). The ***“rainbow,”*** on the other hand, is the emblem of God’s mercy, the sign of His gracious promise after the flood that the world would never again be destroyed by water (Genesis 9:8-17). Thus, the third symbol tends to temper the fearful majesty of the image with a reminder of the Lord forgiveness and love. In the face of the impending message of judgment the rainbow reminds us that even in the midst of His righteous wrath He remains a God

of compassion. The dominant color of this rainbow is “*emerald*,” the rich green of earth and life. This rainbow “*encircled the throne*,” the first in a series of concentric circles surrounding the throne of God.



“The Twenty-four Elders Around the Throne of God” - Cologne, 1460

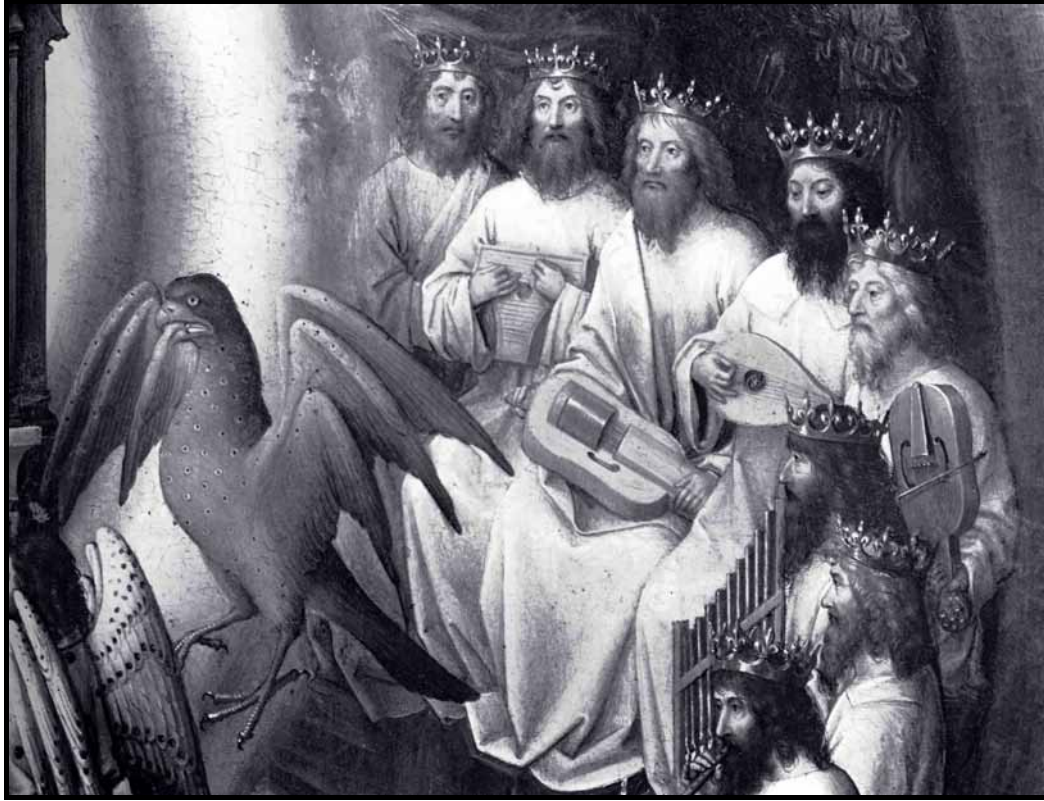
“Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders.” - Now the heavenly entourage around the throne of God is described. The first group to be mentioned consists of twenty-four elder/thrones. Twelve in Scripture is the representative number of the people of God, the Church, derived from the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Our Lord deliberately selected twelve apostles to reflect and balance the Old Testament number. Hence, when the suicide of Judas reduced the number of apostles to eleven, it was necessary to promptly select a replacement so that the Twelve might be restored (cf. Acts 1:12-26). The twenty-four elder/thrones which encircle the throne of God thus represent the entire people of God from both the Old and the New Testament eras. The fact that “*thrones*” are designated as the elder’s seats is reminiscent of Christ’s promise to His disciples that

in the coming day of judgment they would be seated on “*twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.*” (Matthew 19:28). While there is general consensus as to the significance of the twenty-four thrones, the specific identity of the twenty-four elders seated upon them has been the subject of widespread debate. The occupants of the thrones are identified as “*elders in white garments, and upon their heads were crowns of gold.*” Are these elders men, or are they angels? The preponderance of the evidence seems to support the view that the elders (Greek - “*presbyterous*”) in this text are a special rank or category of angels - heavenly beings of high authority that belong to the court of God in heaven. In John’s vision these angels are the heavenly representatives of the church on earth. St. Paul may be alluding to this exalted rank of angels in his reference to “*thrones*” in Colossians 1:16. Within the

traditional nine ranks of angels the Thrones occupy the third level, beneath the seraphim and the cherubim. While the title “*elder*” is typically applied to human beings in Scripture, the prophet Isaiah does use the term in reference to the members of God’s angelic court in Isaiah 24:23 - “*The moon will be abashed and the sun ashamed; for the Lord Almighty will reign on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem, and before His elders gloriously.*” (Cf also 1 Kings 22:19; Psalm 89:7). Whenever these elders appear in Revelation they are always grouped with angels rather than men (cf. Revelation 7:9-11; 19:1-4). The elders of Revelation carry out tasks characteristically assigned to angels: offering the incense which represents the prayers of the saints before the Lord (5:8; 8:3), interpreting the details of the visions and conveying divine revelation (5:5; 7:13). In Daniel 7:9-18, which closely parallels this text, the heavenly beings seated upon the thrones that surround the throne of God are angels.



“The Twenty-four Elders Before God’s Throne” - 15th Century Woodcut



“The Elders Before God’s Throne” by Hans Memling - 1475

The elders’ song of praise (5:9-10) refers to humanity in the third person - *“them,” “they”* - thus distinctly differentiating between the singers and the subject of the song. The elders are also consistently distinguished from the host of saints before the throne (i.e. 7:9-11) but are grouped with other categories of angels (i.e. the four living beings). These elders are *“dressed in white and had crowns of gold upon their heads.”* White is the color of purity and holiness. Accordingly white apparel is the customary dress of the angels of God in Scripture (cf. Matthew 28:3; Mark 16:5; John 20:12; Acts 1:10). The elders wear golden crowns (Greek- *“stephanous chrysous”*). The crown, like the thrones upon which the elders are seated, is the symbol of royal authority and power.

“From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder.” - The thunder and lightning which rumbles and flashes across the scene of John’s vision comes *“from the throne.”* They are the physical manifestations of God’s majesty and power. When God presented the Law to Israel at Sinai, His appearance upon the crest of the mountain was indicated by these same fearsome signs. *“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over*

the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.” (Exodus 19:16) Similar phenomena accompanied the presence of God in the vision of Ezekiel. *“The appearance of the living creatures was like burning coals of fire or like torches. Fire moved back and forth among the creatures; it was bright and lightning flashed out of it. The creatures sped back and forth like flashes of lightning.”* (Cf. also Exodus 9:23,28; 1 Samuel 2:10; 7:10; 12:17-18; Job 37:2-12; Psalm 18:13-15) Throughout the balance of the Book the flash of lightning and the rumble of thunder are used to signal the appearance of God and the imminence of His judgment (cf. Revelation 8:5; 11:19; 16:18).



*The “Menorah”
The Seven Branched Lampstand of the Temple*

“Before the throne seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God.” - Once again (cf. 1:4) the Holy Spirit is presented as *“the seven spirits of God.”* In this instance, His presence is indicated by seven brightly burning lamps. The image is drawn from the prophecy of Zechariah where the ministry of the Holy Spirit is also represented by a seven branched lampstand (cf. Zechariah 4:1-6). The picture is similar to the golden menorah which burned perpetually in the tabernacle and the temple (Exodus 37:17-24). The text uses the Greek word *“lampades”* which specifically means *“torches”* in distinction to *“lychniai”* which refers to candlesticks or lampstands. *“Lampades”* were typically used outside because their larger flames were less likely to blow out than the wicks of a lamp or candle. Furthermore we are told that these torches are



“The Elders Before God’s Throne” by William Blake

“blazing,” again emphasizing the bright, fierce nature of this fire. Fire in Revelation represents judgment and these blazing torches signal the coming of God’s wrath upon sinful humanity.

“Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.” - John appears to have some difficulty describing the next feature of the vision. That difficulty is indicated by the phrase *“what looked like.”* Words can hardly describe it because he had seen nothing exactly like it on earth. He can only draw a limited comparison between that which is seen in the vision and its earthly description. It reminded him of an ocean made out of glass. The image is adapted, as is so often the case in Revelation, from Ezekiel’s prophecy. John’s dependence on Ezekiel is consistent but the Revelator is also consistently willing to adjust and embellish the earlier prophecy. In Ezekiel, the crystal sea is placed above, not before the throne of God - *“Spread out above the heads of the living creatures was what looked like an*

expanse, sparkling like ice and awesome.” (Ezekiel 1:22) To the Hebrew, the sea represented chaos and disorder. The surging waves of the sea became the image for men and nations in endless conflict with one another. The prophet Isaiah declares: **“But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud. There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.”** (Isaiah 57:20-21). Later, John informs us that in the new heaven and the new earth **“there was no longer any sea.”** (Revelation 21:1). The glassy sea before the throne of God signifies the perfect peace and order which must exist in the presence of the Holy God. Before Him there is no conflict or disorder. The fact that this remarkable sea of glass is **“clear as crystal”** further emphasizes the purity and holiness of God.



“Ezekiel’s Vision” by Raphael

“In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes in front and in back.”

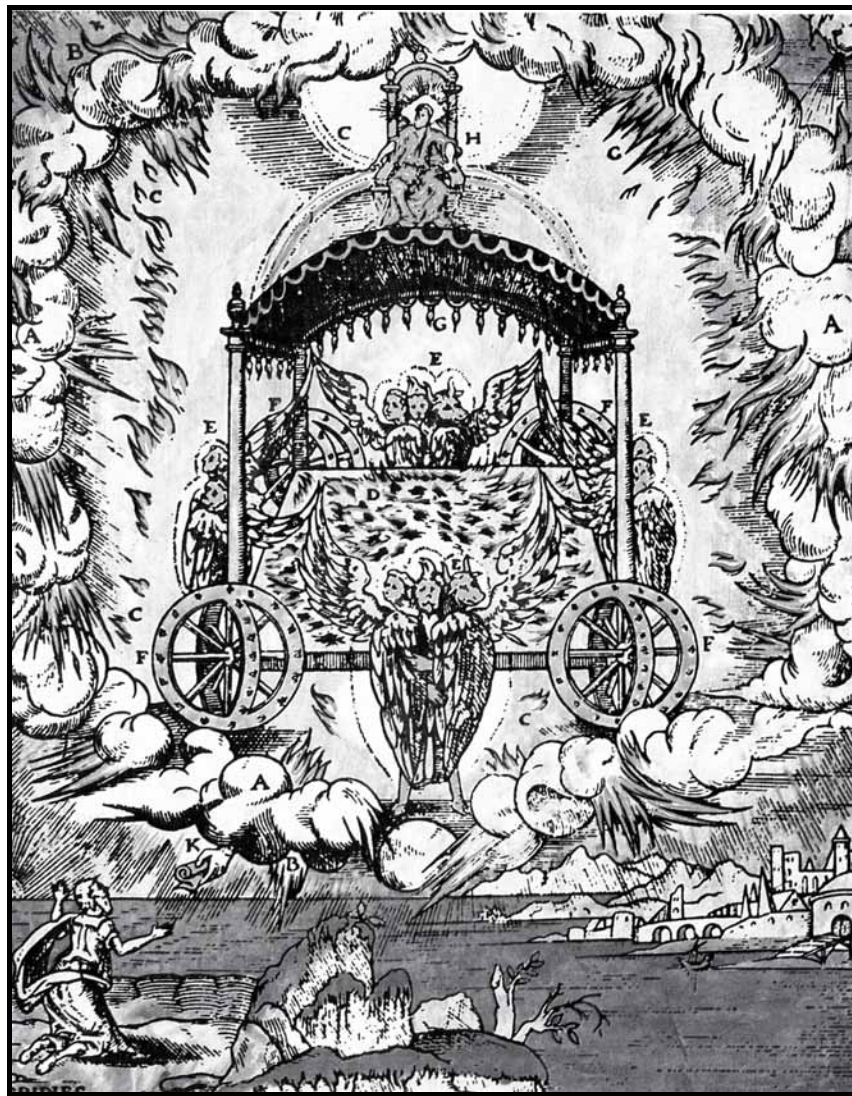
- At the center of the vision, in immediate proximity to the throne of God and encircling it, are the four living beings. They are the creatures closest to God’s royal seat, just beyond the green band of the rainbow, forming the second of the concentric circles around God’s throne. They are simply called “zoa” from the Greek verb which means “to live” (as in the English word “zoology” - the study of living things). The NIV inaccurately translates this noun as “living creatures,” and the KJV wanders even farther from the original with its “beasts.” These are simply “living beings.” Four is the earth number in the numerological symbolism of the Bible, evidently derived from the four points of the compass, the

four directions. The fact that there are “*four living creatures*” thus serves to link these magnificent beings to the animate creation, all the life forms fashioned by the Creator God. It is clearly evident that these beings are an exalted order of angels, both from their proximity to the throne of God, and their detailed similarity to the earlier visions of Ezekiel and Isaiah. Like the cherubim of Ezekiel they are four in number (Ezekiel 1:5); they are associated with the lion, the ox, a man, and an eagle (Ezekiel 1:10); and they are covered with eyes (Ezekiel 1:12). Like the seraphim of Isaiah, they have six wings (Isaiah 6:2) and sing virtually the same song of praise and glory to God (Isaiah 6:3). The “*four living creatures*” of Revelation present us with an amalgamation of the characteristics of the Old Testament’s seraphim and cherubim and thus within the symbolism of this grand vision may represent both of these exalted ranks of angelic beings.



“Isaiah Before the Seraphim” - 19th Century Engraving

The first characteristic of the “*four living creatures*” is expressed in the words “*they were covered with eyes, in front and in back.*” As noted above, this detail is adapted from the imagery of Ezekiel in which the cherubim are full of eyes on “*their whole body, and their backs, and their hands, and their wings.*” (Ezekiel 1:12) The spinning wheels upon which they ride are also covered with all-seeing eyes in Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 1:18). The point of this imagery is the watchful and comprehensive knowledge which has been granted to these remarkable angels.



“Ezekiel’s Vision” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

Nothing escapes their gaze nor takes place without their knowledge. This is certainly not to attribute to an angel the absolute omniscience of God, which is in a category by itself but rather to state that God has created these beings with unique capacities to carry out the role which the Creator has assigned to them.

Next, the distinct characteristics of each of the four living beings is carefully noted. In Ezekiel’s vision, each cherub has four faces, a lion, an ox, a man, and an eagle. John uses the same four animals but divides them among the four beings, assigning only one to each angel. The four animals were probably selected as being representative of basic forms of animal life: the lion - wild animals; the ox - domesticated animals; the man - humankind; and, the eagle - the birds. Thus the

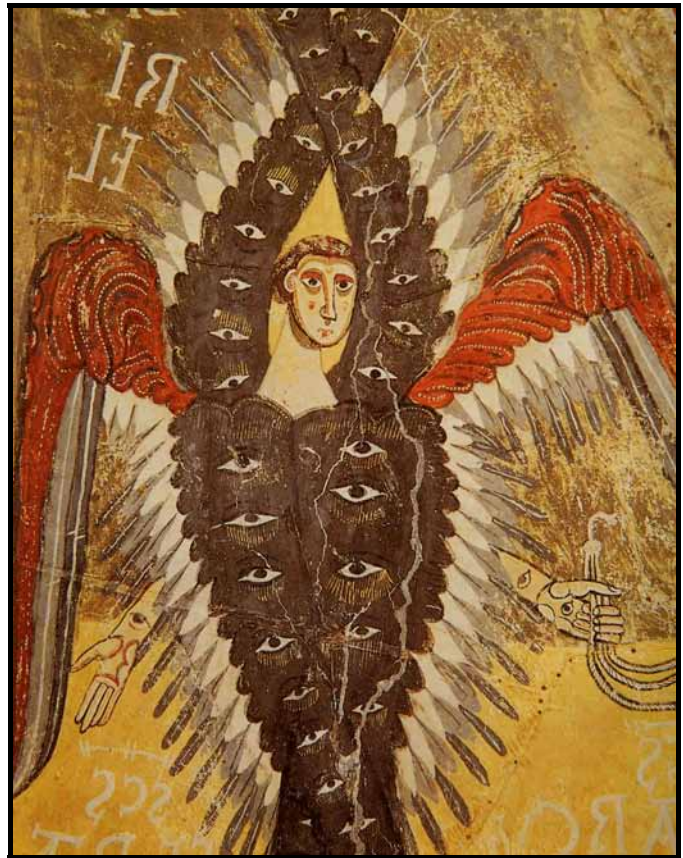
responsibility of these angels for the entirety of animate creation is stressed. In Christian symbolism, since the days of the early church, these four creatures have come to represent the four Gospels of the New Testament: Matthew as man; Mark as the lion; Luke as the ox; and John as the eagle.

“Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings.” - The

six wings of Isaiah’s seraphim are added to the already impressive appearance of the living beings. The multiple wings serve to emphasize the swiftness and speed with which these angels carry out the will and command of God. In the Old Testament passage the functions of the three pairs of wings were described in this way: ***“With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying.”*** (Isaiah 6:2) The

significance of the six wings may be explained in this way. The two wings that cover the face suggest the reverent awe of the seraphim who are unwilling to gaze directly upon the face of God. The two wings that cover the feet denote humility as these blessed angels stand in the divine presence. The two wings with which they fly represent obedience, the readiness of these ministering spirits to instantly carry out the commands of God. The emphasis on the angels’ all seeing eyes is reiterated and expanded in the phrase - ***“was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings.”*** These remarkable creatures exercise unceasing vigilance as they serve and obey the will of their Creator.

“Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.” - The four living beings exist to sing the praises of God. As the representatives of creation, they perform the function that creation was meant to fulfill. They do so without pause or interruption - ***“day and night they never stop saying.”*** This incessant praise does not preclude other



“A Seraph” - 8th Century Spain

activities on their part. In fact, they are depicted carrying out a variety of duties at functions at the command of God (i.e. Revelation 6:1,3,5,7). Each of those tasks becomes yet another expression of the continuous praise of God. The song of the four living beings echoes the glorious anthem of Isaiah’s serephim: **“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of His glory!”** (Isaiah 6:3). This is the *“Trisagion”* (Greek), the *“Tersanctus”* (Latin), the threefold affirmation of the essential holiness of God. Triple repetition in Biblical numerology intensifies the thought to its greatest, ultimate extent. These words constitute the most exalted expression of praise to God in all of Scripture. Their sublime substance go as far as human thought and expression can go in ascribing to God the glory due His Name. Through the balance of the hymn, the *“trisagion”* is reflected in three divine names and three divine attributes so that three segments of threes provide the exquisite structure of the heavenly song.

Holy	Holy	Holy
Lord	God	Almighty
Who Was	Who Is	Who Is To Come

In effect, the hymn defines the nature of God. He is the essence of Holiness, set apart from that which He has made by His perfection and purity. The three divine names, **“Lord God Almighty,”** are the Greek equivalent of the ancient Hebrew title *“Yahweh Sebaoth,”* (*“the Lord of Hosts”*) which appears in Isaiah 6. The title emphasizes the omnipotence of the divine Judge who descends in wrath upon those who dare to disregard or defy His standards of righteousness. The four living beings conclude their song with reference to the eternity of God - **“Who was, and is, and is to come.”** The Lord is transcendent - above and beyond this universe of time and space. He has no source, or point of origin. He is the Source and the Beginning of all that is. Therein lies the basic difference between the Creator and the creature. This is the great God of power and might. This vision is bestowed upon His faithful people for their consolation and encouragement: *“This is no abstract theology of God. Through John, the readers are being given information from the heavenly, secret council room of the Lord...This is to enable the suffering readers to perceive His eternal purpose and so motivate them to persevere faithfully through tribulation.”* (Beale, p. 333)

This heavenly anthem is perhaps best reflected in classic Christian hymnody in Martin Luther’s magnificent *“Isaiah Mighty Seer in Days of Old.”* This chorale is

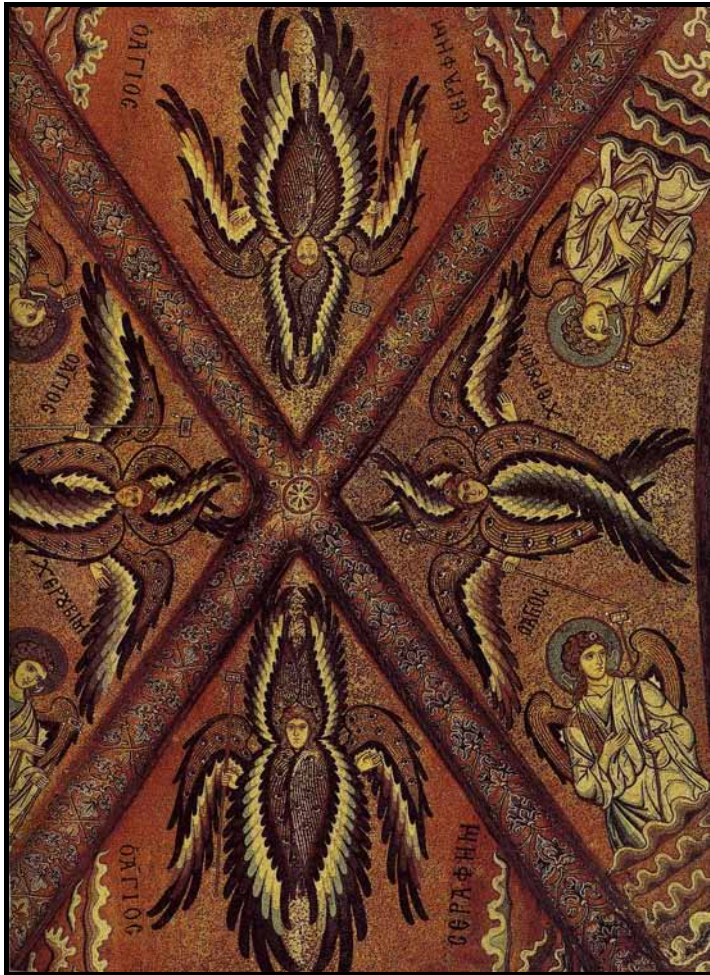


"The Call of Isaiah" by Rudolf Schäfer

often referred to as the "*German Sanctus*" because it was originally composed for use in the liturgy of Holy Communion as an alternative to the traditional Latin "*Sanctus*," the chant which celebrates the sacramental presence of Christ, about to occur through the Words of Institution.

*"Isaiah, mighty seer in days of old the Lord of all in spirit did behold
High on a lofty throne in splendor bright,
With flowing train that filled the temple quite.
Above the throne were stately seraphim;
Six wings had they, these messengers of Him.
With twain they veiled their faces, as was meet,
With twain in rev'rent awe they hid their feet,
And with the other twain aloft they soared,
One to the other called and praised the Lord:
"Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth! Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth!"*

*Holy is God, the Lord of Sabaoth! Behold His glory filleth all the earth!"
The beams and lintels trembled at the cry,
And clouds of smoke enwrapped the throne on high.*

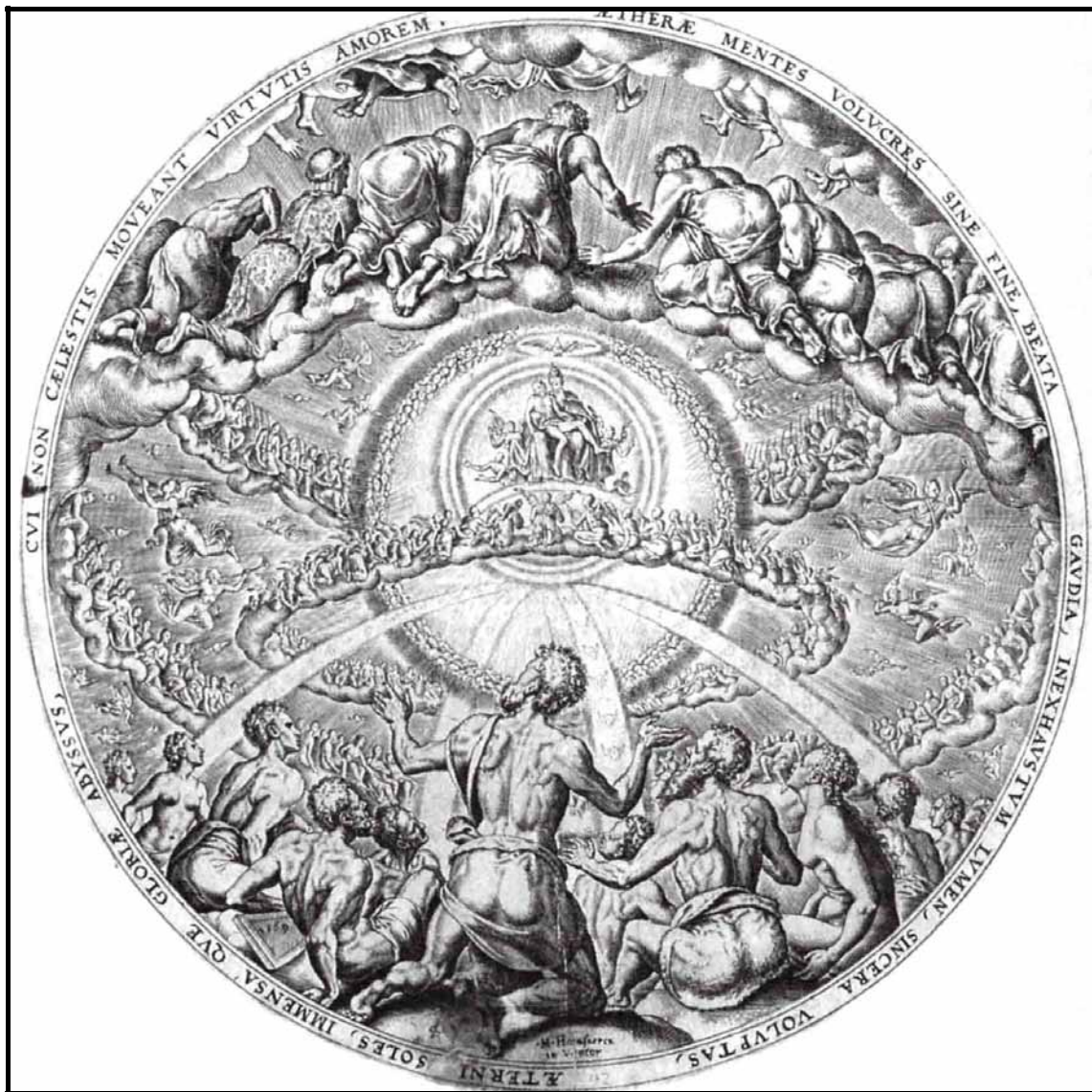


“Serephim” - Byzantine Mosaic

“Whenever the living creatures gave 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 forever and ever.” - The next phrase details the response of the twenty-four elders to the four living beings’ great song of praise. Praise leads to praise. One song reverberates in another as ever widening circles of worship resound throughout the heavens. The same pattern of antiphonal song will be seen in subsequent chapters as the hosts of angels and saints add their voices to the mighty chorus (cf. Revelation 5:8-14; 7:9-17). The song of the four living beings is characterized as giving **“glory, honor, and thanks”** (Greek - *“doxan kai timen kai eucharistian”*). All that

is expressed about God by those whom He has created ought to be *“doxology,”* an uninterrupted song that ascribes to God the glory (Greek - *“doxa”*) due His Name. **“Honor”** (Greek - *“timen”*) refers to the reverent awe of the creature in the presence of the Creator. *“Eucharistian,”* from which the English word *“eucharist”* is derived, is the creature’s natural and appropriate desire to give thanks to God and to express a sense of gratitude for that which God has made and done. The song of praise is directed to **“Him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever.”** This apt description of the eternity of God is based on Daniel 4:34 and 12:7. Earthly rulers rise and fall, but the reign of the Sovereign Lord endures forever. This is the first of

six times in Revelation when the twenty-four elders prostrate themselves before either God or the Lamb (cf. Revelation 5:8,14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:4). The elders' spontaneous response to the living being's song of praise is to fall down upon their faces in worship before the Lord. These two terms ***“fall down”*** and ***“worship”*** are consistently combined in Revelation as two stages in a single act of adoration (cf. Revelation 5:14; 7:11; 11:16; 19:10; 22:8). This combination is not unique to Revelation (cf. Psalm 72:11; Daniel 3:5,6, 10,11,15; Matthew 2:11; 4:9; 18:26; Acts 10:25; 1 Corinthians 14:25).



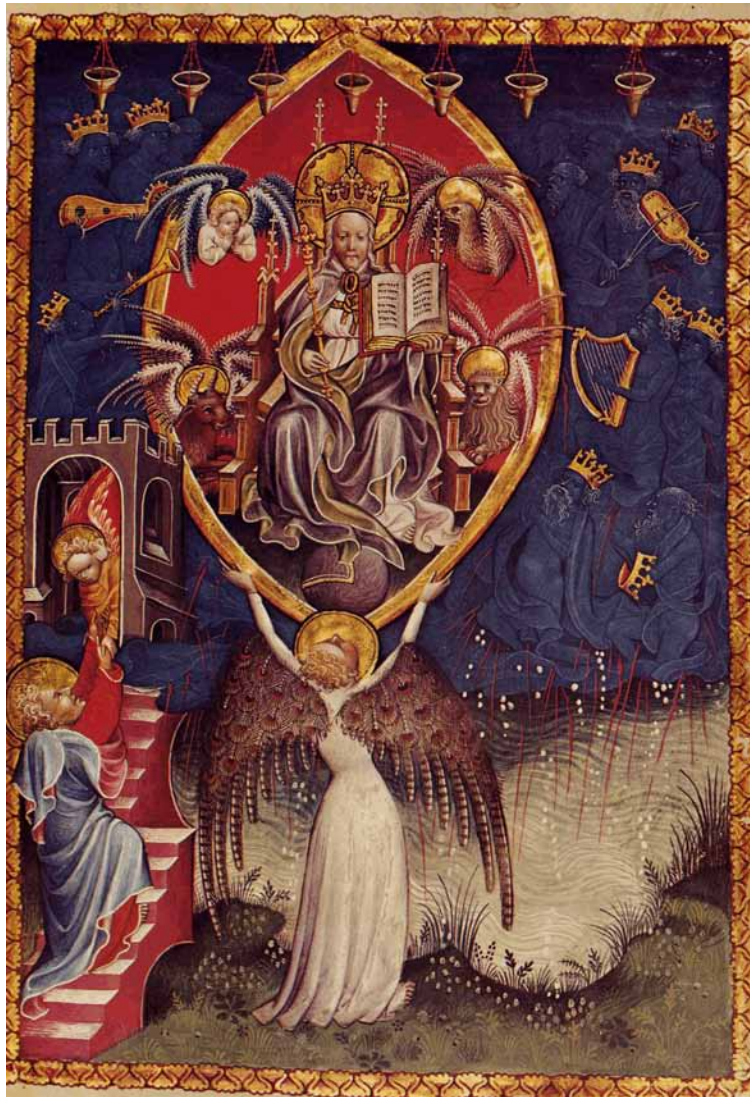
*“The Heavenly Adoration of the Divine Trinity”
Maerten van Heemskerck*

“They lay their crowns before the throne...” - The elders’ action in casting down their golden crowns before God’s throne signifies their homage before God and their subordination to Him. By removing their crowns and placing them at His feet they acknowledge that the victory and power which the crowns represent are not their doing, but the work of God. The classic hymn *“Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!”* is based on this text.

*“Holy, holy, holy! All the saints adore Thee,
Casting down their golden crowns around the glassy sea;
Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Thee,
Which wert and art, and evermore shall be.”*

The elders’ song of praise is similar to and yet distinct from the song of the four living beings. It opens with an affirmation of the worthiness of God - ***“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.”*** The wording is slightly altered in the song of the elders. ***“Power”*** replaces ***“thanksgiving,”*** the third component in the song of the living beings. This is consistent with the elders’ focus on the role of God as almighty Creator. The identification of the deity with the title ***“our Lord and God”*** in Revelation may be a deliberate rejection of the Roman senate’s blasphemous presumption in assigning that title (Latin - *“dominus et deus noster”*) to the emperor. The Roman historian Suetonius reports that Domitian, the occupant of the imperial throne at the time Revelation was written, was one of the few emperors arrogant enough to claim the designation during his own lifetime. In most cases, the title was bestowed posthumously.

The basis for the exclamation of God’s worthiness to receive glory, honor, and power is identified in the phrase which follows - ***“for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.”*** The joyful celebration of God’s identity as the Creator of all things is a regular theme in Scripture (cf. Psalm 33:6-9; 102:25; 136:5-9). The threefold repetition of the text - ***“You created all things”*** - ***“by Your will they were created”*** - ***“and have their being”*** - emphasizes the reality that everything that exists has its origin in God. *“He, and He alone is the one and only source of creation.”* (Thomas, p. 367) As the opening scene of the vision surges to its triumphant conclusion, the throne of God - majestic symbol of His eternal, sovereign power - stands supreme, exalted, and serene forever. John’s message for struggling believers is unmistakably clear: Stand firm! Do not despair! The Lord God reigns omnipotent!



*“The Vision of the Seven Seals”
15th Century Bible Illumination*

The Book of the Seven Seals

(Revelation 5:1-5)

“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 with 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. 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 in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll...” - The opening formula *“Then I saw”* signal the transition to the next scene of the vision. The focus shifts from the throne and its divine occupant to the mysterious, seven-sealed document held in His hand. The Greek text literally says that the scroll is *“on”* God’s right hand. Thus, the image is that of an outstretched hand, perhaps

slightly cupped, with the sealed scroll resting upon it. The fact that the scroll is in God’s *“right hand,”* which represents His majestic power, indicates His ownership of the scroll and His control over that which the scroll contains. The object in hand is a *“biblion,”* that is, a scroll made up of papyrus or vellum sheets connected to one another and then rolled up, often around a wooden handle. The scene is reminiscent of a number of Old Testament passages in which scrolls figure prominently (cf. Isaiah 29:11-12; Jeremiah 36:10-25; Ezekiel 2:9-10; Daniel 12:4).



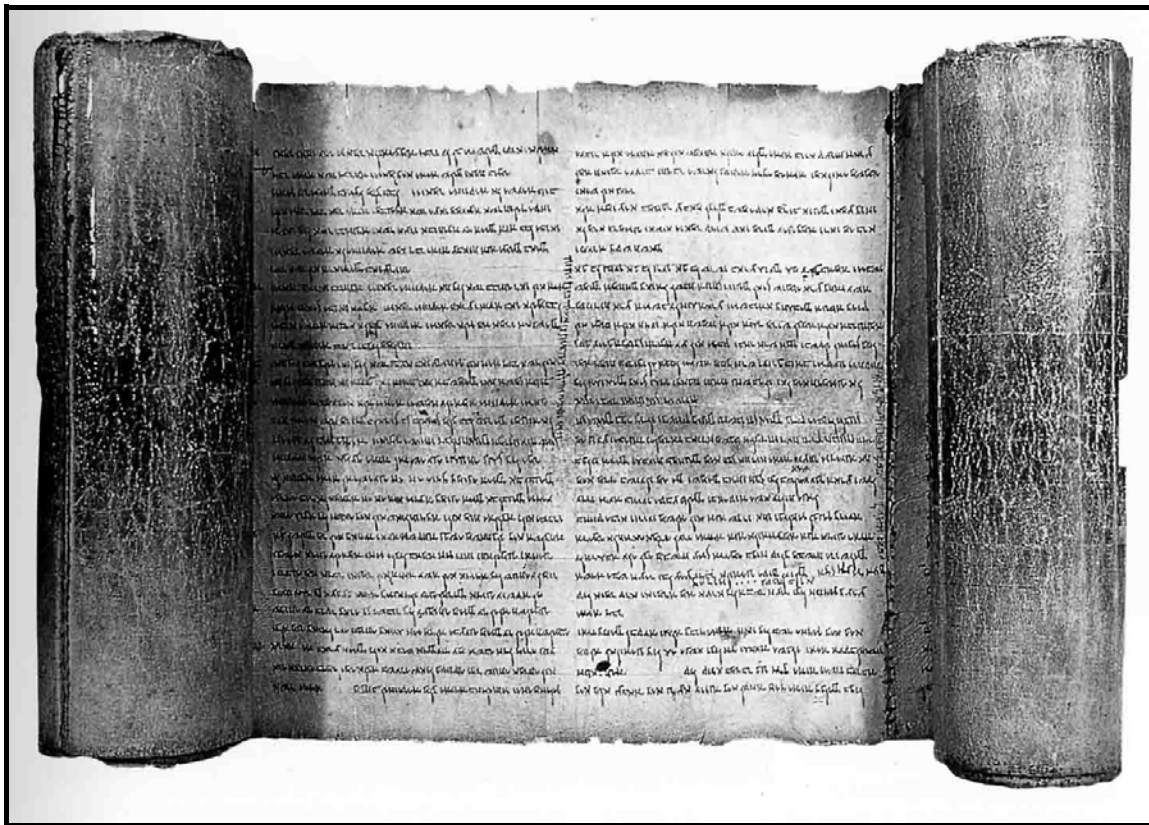
*“Jeremiah with the Scroll of his Prophecy”
by Raphael*

“With writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.” - Two details about the scroll are carefully noted. First, the scroll is opisthographic, that is, written on both front and back (Greek - *“gegrammenon esother kai opisthen”* - literally - *“written upon inside and on the back”*).

This is unusual. Typically scrolls are only written on one side, and the text is then rolled up on the inside. The fact that this scroll has writing on both sides indicates the large amount of information it contains and the completeness or comprehensive nature of that information. Secondly, this scroll is *“sealed with seven seals.”* In ancient times, documents of particular importance were closed with a wax or clay seal into which the signet or sign of the author was impressed before the wax or clay was allowed to harden. The scroll could not be opened without breaking the seal, thus preventing access to its contents by

unauthorized persons. This scroll is sealed not once but seven times. The use of the perfect seven indicates that the scroll's contents are completely, absolutely sealed, a mystery most profound.

The significance of the scroll and its contents is revealed both by its Old Testament precedents and First Century Roman custom. In Old Testament prophecy the image of a sealed scroll represented the unknown future with special reference to God's future plan for judgment and redemption. In Daniel 7:10, the opening of the books describes the judgment of God before the court of heaven. Later in Daniel 12:8-9, the prophet asks how these prophecies will be fulfilled. He is told that in the last days that which is now ***"closed up and sealed"*** will be opened (cf. Isaiah 29:18; Ezekiel 2:8-3:3). The prophecies of the Old Testament, incomplete and often only dimly understood, were fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. As John observes the opening of the seals in Revelation 5, the latter days have begun. All that remains until Christ comes again will now be revealed. Thus, in the vision of the seven seals, the long awaited answer to Daniel's question finally comes. The fulfillment of the ancient prophecies has begun and will continue to unfold until the Day of Judgment in the manner now to be disclosed.



"The Isaiah Scroll from the Dead Sea Collection"

The document in John's vision also bears a striking similarity to a Roman last will and testament. In First Century Roman practice, the will itself was written on the inside of the scroll while its contents were briefly summarized on the outside, hence the scroll was opisthographic. A Roman will had to be witnessed and personally sealed by seven witnesses. The will could only be opened upon the death of the testator and its provisions implemented. The opening of the will was carried out by a trustworthy executor who was then given the responsibility to execute the terms of the will. Thus it may well be that John's seven-sealed scroll signifies a most solemn and official document, possibly the last will and testament of God (cf. Hebrews 9:15 - ***“that those who are called may receive the promised inheritance.”***). G.K. Beale provides a helpful summary of the theological implications of this insight according to which Christ is both the executor and the heir of God's testament:

“The “book” in chapter 5 should be seen as the covenantal promise of an inheritance in the broader theological context of the Apocalypse concerning Paradise lost and regained. God promised to Adam that he would reign over the earth. Although Adam forfeited this promise, Christ, the last Adam, was to inherit it. A human person had to open the book, because the promise had been made to humanity. But no person was found worthy to open it because all are sinners and stand under the judgment contained in the book. Nevertheless, Christ was found worthy because He suffered the final judgment as an innocent sacrificial victim on behalf of His people, whom He represented and consequently redeemed. No doubt, He was also considered worthy because He also overcame the final judgment imposed on Him by redeeming a people and by being raised from death. Therefore Christ was able to inherit the promises of the book as do all those who are represented by Him.”
(Beale, p. 341)

“And I saw a mighty angel, proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” - A strong angel now comes forth as the herald of God's court seeking someone capable of and qualified to open the sealed scroll. The angel's name is not provided. He is simply described as ***“mighty.”*** Many commentators conclude that this is ***“Gabriel,”*** whose Hebrew name means ***“the strong one of God.”*** Gabriel frequently serves as God's messenger in Scripture (cf. Luke 1:19,26). In fact, in the Daniel texts so closely associated with this passage, it is Gabriel who instructs the prophet to close and seal the book (Daniel 8:16; 9:21). The angel's proclamation goes forth ***“in a loud voice.”*** This is a phrase which occurs twenty times in Revelation to designate a message of special importance which resounds throughout the universe. The mighty angel is looking for the man who can reveal and carry out the hidden counsel of God. The adjective ***“worthy”*** (Greek - ***“axiotes”*** - literally - ***“of proper weight”***) refers to a combination of proper rank and

qualification, moral purity and competence, and ability, power, and capacity. He who would ***“break the seals and open the scroll”*** must be one who is capable of serving as the executor of God’s testament, not only uncovering but also carrying out God’s plan for the future of His creation.

“But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.” - The answer to the angel’s question is vast silence throughout the universe. No one responds to the challenge. The threefold division ***“in heaven, on earth, or under the earth”*** is the standard Greek idiom for the cosmos, the entire universe (cf. Philippians 2:10). ***“No one in the whole universe had the ability. No one in the heaven, not even among the greatest angels; no one on the earth among living men; no one beneath the earth among all who had died.”*** (Lenski, p. 194)

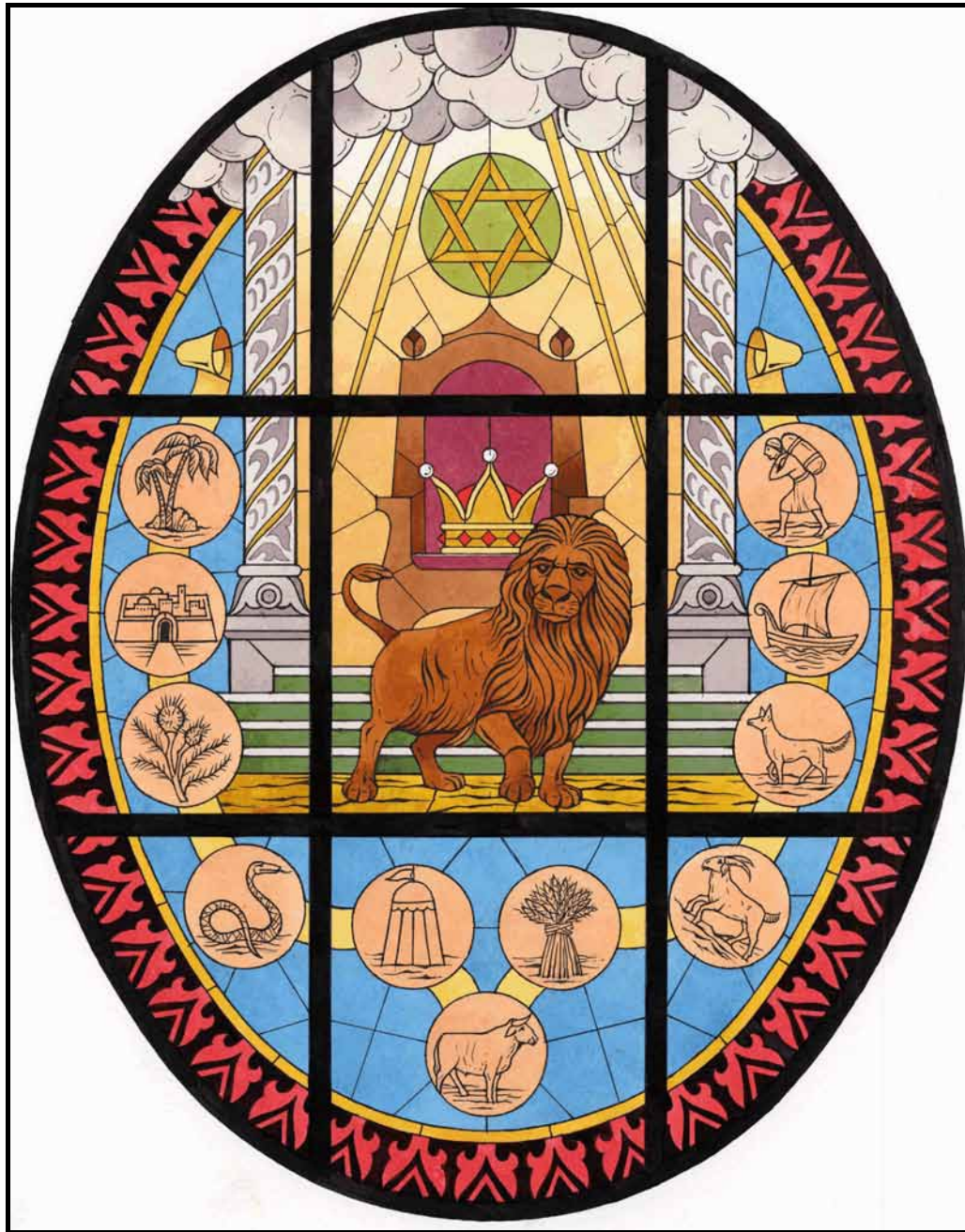
The dramatic device of the angel’s cosmic challenge and the complete absence of response emphasizes the uniqueness of Christ and our absolute dependence upon Him and that which He has done for us and for our salvation. There is not anyone else. Jesus is the one and only hope of humanity.

“I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.” - No one is found and John’s reaction is the bitter weeping of despair. The seals cannot be broken, God’s glorious plan for the future will not be carried out. At that grim moment, in the face of deafening silence, John must have wondered why the Lord had not stepped forward. Could it be that Christ Himself is not worthy to carry out the plan of God? If that were true then there would be no hope whatsoever.



“The Archangel Gabriel” by Guariento di Arpo

“The prophet weeps as it is borne in on him how powerless all human wisdom and power is over against the unknown and unknowable future. If no one be found to answer the angel’s challenge, mankind, and mankind’s world would have no future and no hope. The bright world into which the prophet had been allowed to gaze will remain forever hidden and remote, a place which a man may dream of perhaps, but cannot ever attain.” (Franzmann, p. 56,57)



*“The Lion of the Tribe of Judah”
Our Savior Lutheran Church*

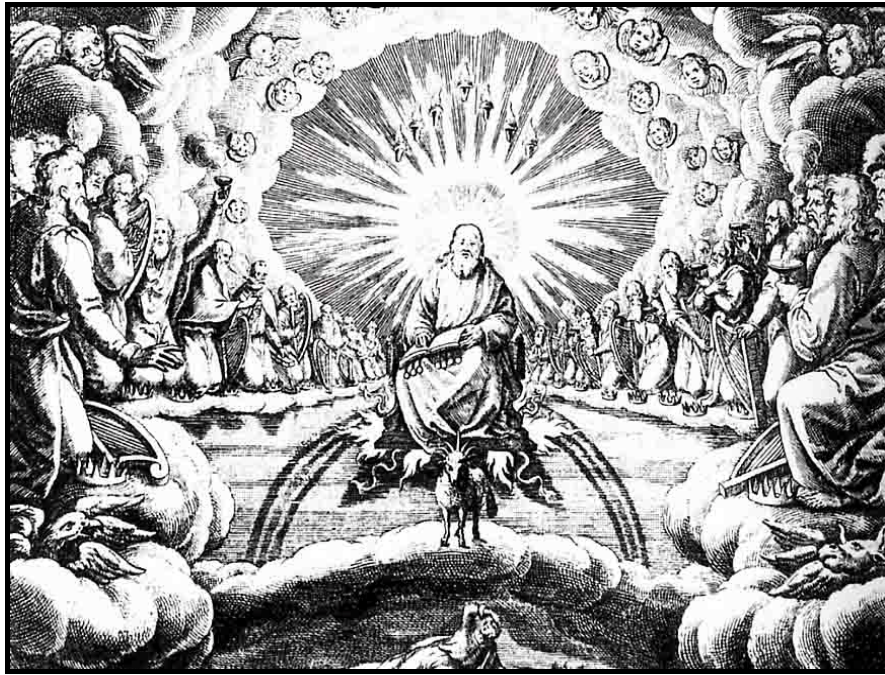
“Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” - One of the twenty-four elders who surround the throne comes forward to put an end to the prophet’s despair. The elder commands John to stop crying. Jesus used virtually the same words on two occasions: first, when He raised the widow’s son at Nain (Luke 7:13) and again when He raised the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:52). In both cases this was the bitter cry of the mourner in the face of death.

Christ put an end to their weeping by removing its cause and raising their loved one from the dead. So also in this instance, the command to stop crying is based on the fact that Christ has removed the basis for despair - ***“He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.”*** The language of the text is most dramatic. The command is followed by the Greek *“idou”* (*“Behold”*). The verb ***“has triumphed”*** is placed at the beginning of the next phrase for particular emphasis. Christ controls the future and will execute God’s plan of salvation because he has overcome sin, death, and the power of the devil. This is the same Greek verb, *“nikao”* (*“to triumph,” “to overcome”*), which concluded each of the seven letters to the churches with a promise to those who would persevere and overcome. The Lord can and will fulfill His promises to His faithful people because He has Himself overcome. Christ is identified with two Messianic titles from the Old Testament, ***“the Lion of the Tribe of Judah”*** (Genesis 49:9) and ***“the Root of David”*** (Isaiah 11:1,10).

Both designations highlight the role of the Promised Savior as the victorious King from the royal tribe of Judah and a descendant of the line of the great warrior King David who will defeat and destroy His enemies.



“Isaiah’s Vision of the Root of David”
13th Century Bible Illumination



“The Lamb Before the Throne” - 16th Century Bible Woodcut

The Lamb Before the Throne

(Revelation 5:6-14)

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. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne. And when 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 for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” 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 forever and ever!” The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.

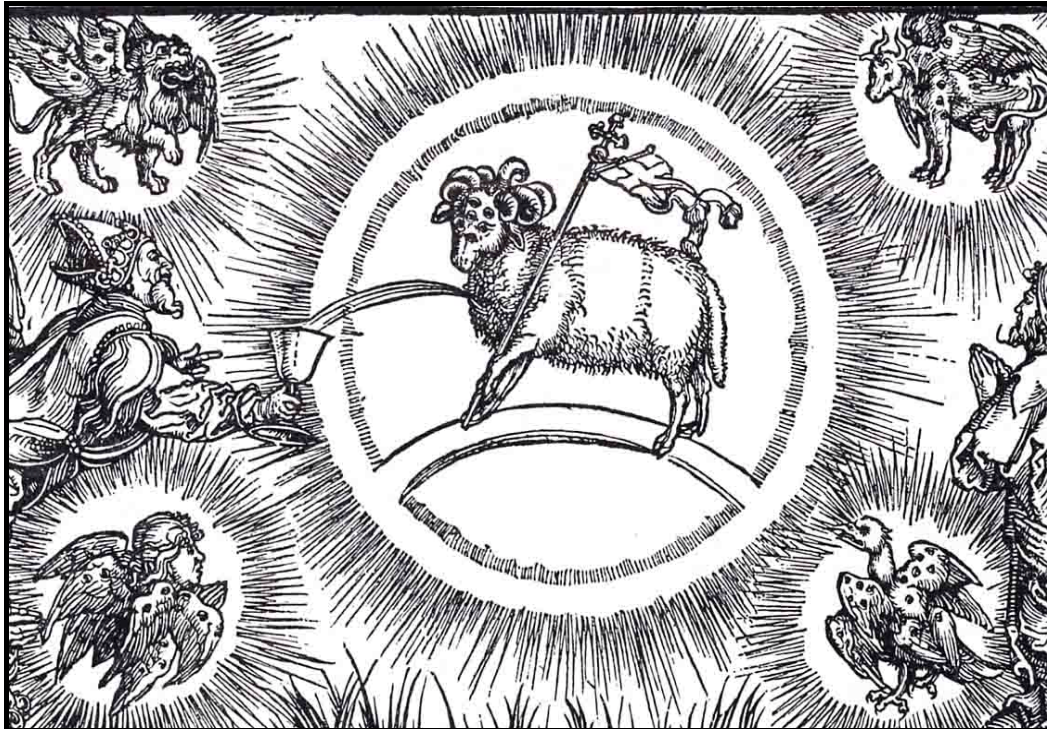
“Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if It had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.” - The figure which becomes the focus of the next scene in the vision is not a mighty lion or a majestic warrior, as might have been expected. Instead, the humble figure of a helpless Lamb stands at the center of the scene before the throne of God. The image of a lamb introduces the concept of sacrifice, particularly the sacrifice of the Passover lamb whose blood adorned the doorposts of Israel in Goshen (Exodus 12:1-30). Isaiah had foretold that the Messianic Suffering Servant would be ***“led like a lamb to the slaughter”*** (Isaiah 53:7). When Jesus came to the Jordan to be baptized by John, the Forerunner hailed Him as ***“the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.”*** (John 1:29). The sacrificial focus is sharpened by the fact that this is a lamb ***“looking as if It had been slain.”***



“The Sacrifice of the Passover Lamb”
by Rudolf Schäfer

as if It had been slain.” The Greek word ***“esphagmenon”*** (***“slain”***) is the technical term for the slaughter of an animal in preparation for sacrifice. The Lamb should be dead. Its body bears the vicious marks of slaughter. And yet it is alive. It is ***“standing in the center of the throne.”*** The victorious power which Christ has achieved is the result of His sacrificial death. That power was conclusively demonstrated in the resurrection. The shadow of the cross and the reality of the empty tomb looms over this imagery. Like the risen Christ who continued to bear the wounds of His crucifixion in His glorified body, this resurrected Lamb continues to exist as one that has been slaughtered, thus indicating the means by which His victory has been won. The text uses the Greek word ***“arnion”*** which is the diminutive form of the noun

“*aren*” (“*lamb*”) to further heighten the contrast between the massive lion and the tiny lamb. This word becomes the characteristic designation for Christ through the balance of the Book of Revelation. The Lamb is placed “*in the center of the throne*” in the NIV’s translation. “*In the center at the throne*” or “*before the throne*” probably be a more accurate rendering of the Greek. The Lamb stands at the center, directly in front of God’s throne “*encircled by the four living creatures and the elders.*”



“*The Lamb with Seven Horns and Seven Eyes*” by Albrecht Dürer

“*He had seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*” - This is no ordinary lamb. The paradox of an evidently helpless creature which holds the greatest power in the universe is not heightened by the unique features of this Lamb with “*seven horns and seven eyes.*” In the Old Testament, the horn represents power (cf. Numbers 23:22; Deuteronomy 33:17; 1 Kings 22:11; Psalm 89:17; Daniel 7:7-8:24). That the Lamb has “*seven horns*” signifies that His power is complete and absolute. The Lamb also bears “*seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.*” As the seven horns represent the omnipotence of the Lamb, so the seven eyes signify His omniscience. He sees and knows all things. The text explains that the seven eyes “*are the seven*

spirits of God sent out into all the earth.” This is Revelation’s fourth reference to the *“seven spirits of God”* (cf. Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5). As previously noted this imagery for the Holy Spirit is drawn from Zechariah 4:10 which notes: *“These seven lamps are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth.”* Christ had promised that after His exaltation He would send the Holy Spirit (John 15:26). This text uses the same verb to describe the sending of the spirits throughout the world. Within the inner working of the Holy Trinity, God the Holy Spirit, becomes the means through which the omniscience of the Father and the Son are exercised throughout creation.



“The Holy Trinity” by Michael Kirmer - 1552

“He came and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat upon the throne.” - Having fulfilled the will of His Father and having accomplished the plan of salvation by His death and resurrection, the exalted Christ steps forward and receives the sealed scroll from God’s right hand. The transfer of the scroll represents the exaltation and empowerment of Christ to exercise the sovereign authority of God. The God/Man, Jesus of Nazareth, born of the Virgin Mary, reclaims all the power and majesty that He had possessed as the Son of God from eternity. Daniel describes the same scene in his own inspired imagery:

“In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into His presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations, and men of

every language worshiped Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, that will not pass away, and His kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.” (Daniel 7:13-14)

It is exactly as St. Paul declares in Philippians chapter 2:

“Therefore God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” (Philippians 2:9-11)

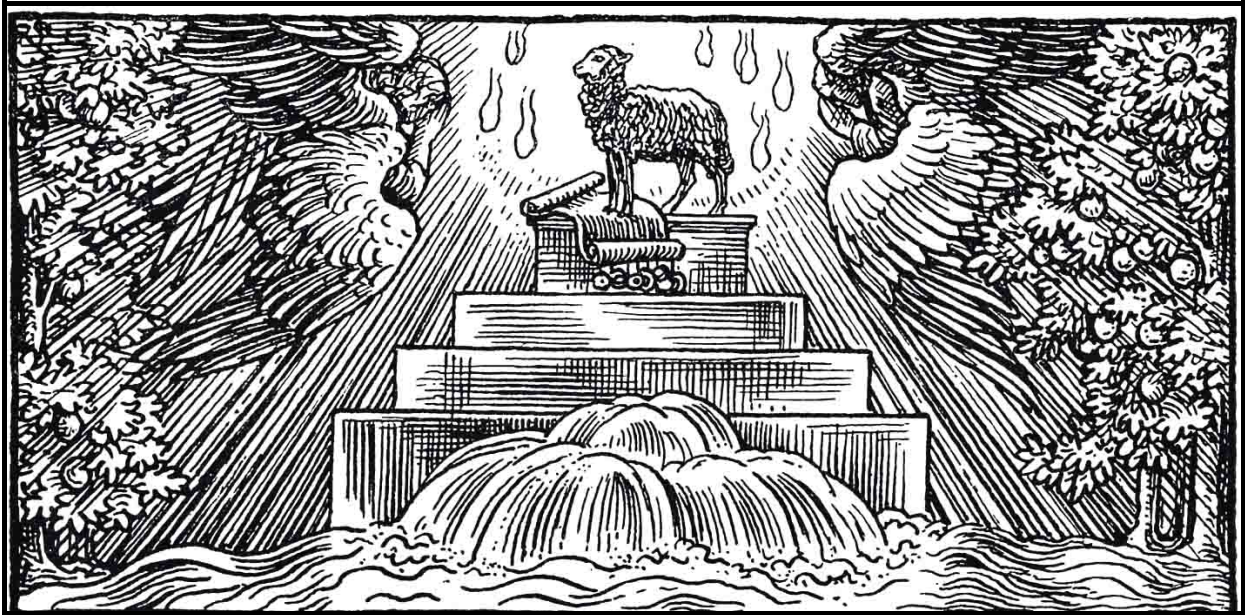
“And when He had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense which are the prayers of the saints.” - As the Lamb receives the seven sealed scroll from God’s right hand we enter upon one of the greatest scenes of universal adoration anywhere recorded. The living creatures and the elders fall down on their faces in worship and awe before the Lamb and their spontaneous song of exuberant praise resounds throughout heaven. In Revelation 4:10 the elders had fallen down before God upon His throne. As that action is now repeated, the living beings and the elders are acknowledging Jesus, the Lamb, as true God, the second member of the divine Trinity. The elders are holding harps in their hands. The harp, or lyre, is the traditional instrument used in the singing of the Psalms. It is associated with the praise of God - ***“Praise the Lord with the lyre, make melody to Him with the harp of ten strings.”*** (Psalm 33:2). Golden bowls of incense also play a role in the elders’ worship. These flat, saucer-like vessels, were part of the golden utensils of the temple. The use of incense was a typical feature of Hebrew worship. The sweet smelling smoke of the incense rising toward heaven represented the God-pleasing sacrifices and prayers of the faithful. Psalm 141:2 declares: ***“May my prayer be set forth before You like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.”*** John notes the meaning of the incense - ***“which are the prayers of the saints.”*** The image of angels bearing the prayers of men to God is common in first century Judaism. We see the same view reflected in Revelation 8:3-5. Given the context, the prayers in this instance are probably for the coming of God’s kingdom and the vindication of His people who have endured the world’s persecution and opposition. ***“Their prayer was the age-long prayer of the church, “Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”*** (Mounce, p. 147)

“And they sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its



"The Vision of the Seven Seals by Lucas Cranach

seals, because You were slain and with Your blood You purchased men for God...” - The “*new song*” (Greek - “*oden kainen*”) of the living beings and the elders is a celebration of the great salvation which God has accomplished through the blood of His Son . This is the second of three hymns in Revelation which begin with the Greek adjective “*axios*” (“*worthy*”). (Revelation 4:11; 5:9, 12) The Lamb is hailed because He is “*worthy to take the scroll and open its seals.*” The adjective “*worthy*” (Greek - “*axios*”) was applied to God the Father in the preceding chapter - “*You are*



“*Worthy Is the Lamb Who Was Slain*” by Rudolf Schäfer

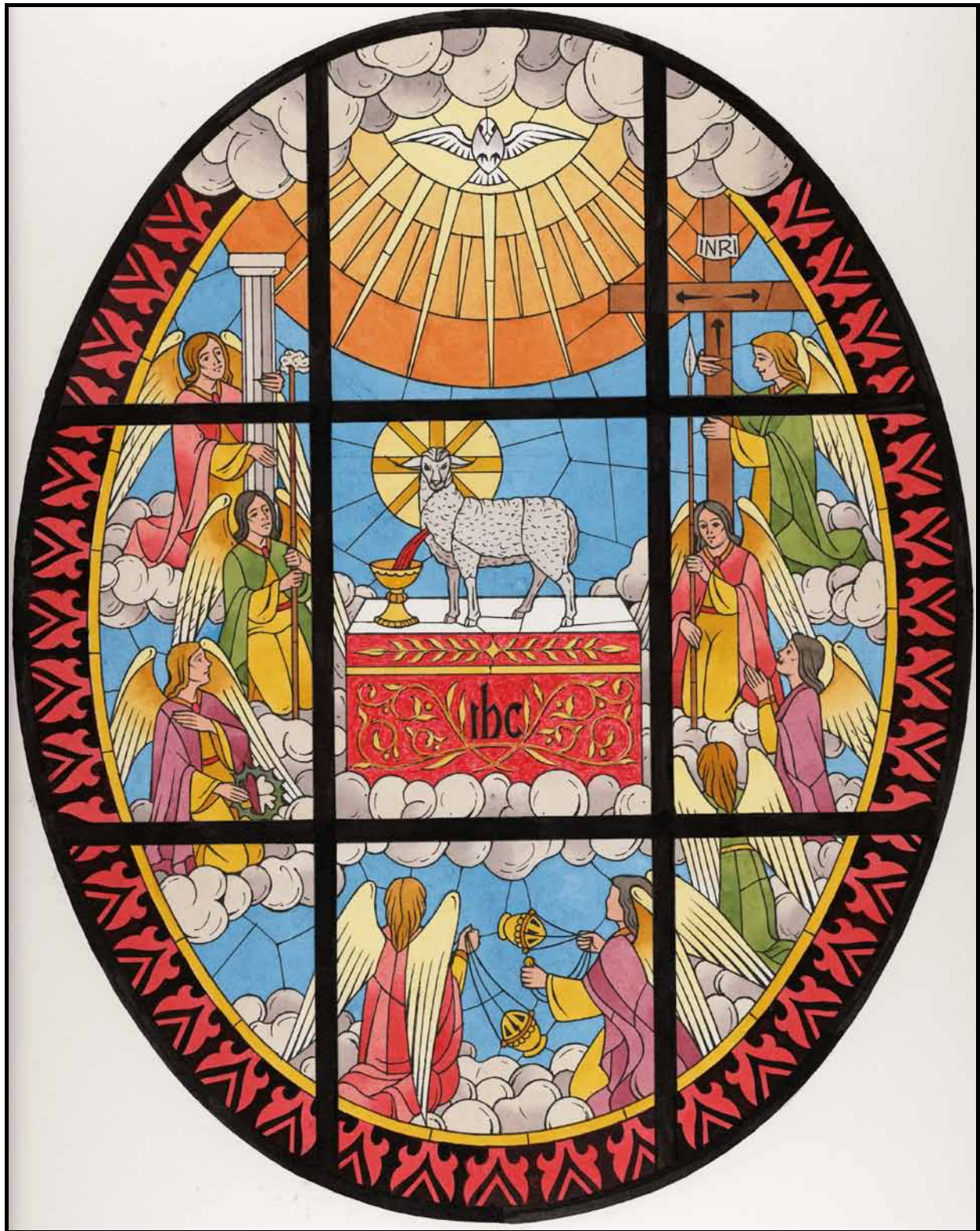
worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power.” (Revelation 4:11). The deity of Christ is clearly indicated by the parallel. As previously noted (Revelation 5:2, p. 98f.), the concept of worthiness to unroll the scroll and break its seven seals signifies the qualification and the capacity to reveal and to implement God’s plan of salvation. He who opens the book not only knows the future, but controls the future. The text explains the basis for the worthiness of the Lamb in terms of His identity as the Redeemer of the world - “*because You were slain and with Your blood You purchased men for God.*” The tenses of the verbs - “*were slain*” “*purchased*” - are aorist, indicating past actions that have been fully completed. John uses the Greek word “*esphages*” (“*were slain*”) which specifically refers to the ritual slaughter of the Passover lamb to describe the death of Christ. In this way the sacrificial nature of Christ’s death on the cross is emphasized. The second verb, “*egorasas*” (“*You purchased*”) deals with the payment of the ransom

or redemption price. The background of this term pertains to the purchase and release of slaves in the marketplace. The sacrificial emphasis continues as the the elders declare that the price of our redemption is the blood of Jesus, the Lamb - ***“with Your blood You purchased.”*** As Martin Luther declares in his classic explanation to the Second Article of the Apostles Creed : *“He has purchased and won me, not with gold or silver but with His holy precious blood and with His innocent sufferings and death.”* We have been redeemed ***“for God.”*** The grammarians describe this as a dative of interest or advantage. Through the purchase price of Jesus’ blood we belong to God; we have become His possession. The scope of Christ’s redemption is universal, reaching out to include all of mankind ***“from every tribe and language and people and nation.”*** Four is the earth number in Revelation. Variations of this fourfold division occurs seven times in the Book (cf. Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15) It is broadly inclusive of every part of humanity. The terminology is drawn from the Book of Daniel (cf. Daniel 3:4,7,29; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14).

“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth.” - The second portion of the basis for Christ’s worthiness to open the scroll pertains to that which He has done for those whom He has redeemed. By His death in our place upon the cross the Lord has constituted us as His priestly kingdom. The royal priesthood of believers is a theme repeated three times in Revelation (cf. 1:6; 20:6). The kingdom language of Revelation echoes that of Daniel 7:27: ***“Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey Him.”*** Israel had been called by God to be His own kingdom of priests, set apart among all the nations



“The Adoration of the Lamb” - 9th Century Illumination



"The Adoration of the Lamb" - Our Savior Lutheran Church

(cf. Exodus 19:6). Now God has set apart His own people in Christ, through whom we have direct access to the Father. In Christ we already participate in His glorious reign as it is celebrated in the elders' magnificent song of praise (cf. 1 Peter 2:9). It is significant to note that this celebration is present reality.

“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand.” - The doxology of the four living beings and the elders is echoed and amplified by the countless hosts of angels. The description of the countless host of angels ***‘numbering thousands upon thousands and ten thousand time ten thousand’*** is again reminiscent of the earlier prophecy of Daniel where the angels before the throne of God are described in virtually identical language - ***“Thousands upon thousands attended Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.”*** (Daniel 7:10). The endless ranks of angels appear to continue the series of concentric circles that radiate out from God's throne. ***“They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders.”*** This arrangement serves to emphasize the fact that God is the center, the focal point, of all reality. Everything that exists owes its being to Him and only continues to exist through Him.

“In a loud voice they sang: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain...” - The myriad angels take up the song of exaltation and praise. They too affirm and celebrate the worthiness of the Lamb to unveil and implement God's purpose for the future. Like the living beings and the elders, they base their assertion of the Lamb's worthiness upon the fact of His sacrificial death and resurrection. Once again, it is ***“the Lamb who was slain”*** that is declared to be worthy. In the vision of the Revelator, the Lamb bears in His living body the horrific, fatal wounds which brought about His death. He was dead but still He lives! These are the wondrous marks of which the hymn writer sings:

*“Crown Him with many crowns, the Lamb upon His throne;
Hark how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake my soul and sing of Him who died for thee,
And hail Him as thy matchless King through all eternity.*

*Crown Him the Lord of love, behold His hands and side,
Rich wounds yet visible above in beauty glorified.
No angel in the sky can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends his wondering eyes at mysteries so bright.*

*Crown Him the Lord of Heaven, enthroned in worlds above,
 Crown Him the King to whom is given the wondrous name of Love.
 Crown Him with many crowns as thrones before Him fall;
 Crown Him ye kings with many crowns for He is King of all!*



“The Vision of the Seven Seals” - 16th Century Woodcut

The song of the angels’ celebrates the Victim/Victor whose death has redeemed a lost and fallen creation. It is a song that is vibrant and robust - **“In a loud voice they sang.”** The substance of the angels’ doxology is an affirmation of the worthiness of Christ in terms of seven characteristics or qualities. Christ is worthy to receive adoration for these things which He already possesses. The use of the perfect seven is deliberate reflecting the absolute perfection of the Son of God to whom the hymn is directed. The repetition of the conjunction **“and”** (Greek - *“kai”*) between each of the seven nouns serves to highlight and emphasize each individual quality while linking them all together as a powerful expression of divine majesty. **“Power”** (Greek - *“dynamis”* - hence the English *“dynamite”*) denotes the omnipotent power of Christ in contrast to **“strength”** (Greek - *“kratos”* - hence the English *“democracy”*) the ability to do things through the use of force. On the Mount of Ascension Jesus declared: ***All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.***

(Matthew 28:20) **“Wealth”** (Greek - *“pluton”* hence the English *“plutocrat”*) indicates the endless resources of the all-sufficient Creator God, both spiritual and material (cf. 2 Corinthians 8:9; Ephesians 3:8). The ascription of perfect **“wisdom”** (Greek - *“sophia”* - hence the English *“philosophy”*) is of long standing precedent throughout Scripture. St. Paul declares that Christ is the ultimate embodiment of the **“wisdom of God”** (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). **“Honor”** (Greek - *“timen”*) indicates the recognition and respect accorded one whose personal characteristics and actions have rightly earned such recognition. **“Glory”** (Greek - *“doxa”* hence the English *“doxology”*) is a very powerful term closely associated with the divine majesty of God. It is used to describe the brightness and radiance of God’s heavenly presence. **“Praise”** (Greek - *“eulogian”* hence the English *“eulogy”*) is a declaration of blessing in response to the Lord for benefits received. Dr. Siegbert Becker observes:

“The last word “blessing” is especially significant. Countless Hebrew prayers, the kind of prayers John had known from his childhood, begin with the words, “Blessed art Thou, O Lord, King of the universe.” Such prayers are properly addressed to the exalted Son of Mary.” (Becker, p. 102)



“Worthy Is The Lamb!”

“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



*“The Adoration of the Lamb”
15th Century Bible Illumination*

Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, forever and ever!” - The majestic song of the angel hosts is answered and carried on by the entire creation. The cosmos joins in a universal celebration and anthem of praise. When the challenge for someone worthy to open the scroll and break its seven seals had gone forth no one in all of creation was able to respond. That impotent silence is now replaced by the reverberation of joyful song. God’s plan and purpose will be carried out. All of the prophecies shall be fulfilled, for the Lamb of God has come. He who offered up His own life upon the cross is worthy. The future is secure. The text stresses the fact that the response from creation is universal. One phrase follows upon another so that there can be no doubt - *“every creature in heaven and on earth and under*

the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them.” No living creature fails to join in this climactic hymn of praise (cf. Philippians 2:10-11). Four is the earth number in revelation. Thus it is fitting that creation’s doxology is expressed in four of the seven ascriptions from the hymn of the angels.

“The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped.” - As the hymn began with the four living beings around the throne, so it now concludes and is confirmed with their final *“Amen.”* The verb *“said”* is imperfect which suggests ongoing continuous action. Thus the tremendous *“Amen”* of the cherubim and seraphim may well have been repeated four times, after each of creation’s four ascriptions. As the living beings cry out, the twenty-four elders once again fall down in abject worship before the awesome presence of God and of the Lamb.



“Death on a Pale Horse” by William Blake

The Second Vision - The Seven Seals

Revelation 6:1-8:1

Introduction

The awesome vision of God’s heavenly throne, the exaltation of the Lamb, and the triumphant anthems of saints and angels have set the stage for the opening of the seals. The Lamb who was slain has begun His reign! But to hard pressed believers, struggling to survive in the face of bitter persecution, the evidence of God’s coming kingdom must have been difficult to discern.

“Riders of ruin go forth, four of them, the despairing cry of slain martyrs is heard, and a convulsed and tottering universe seems to cut off forever all human hope for a better day. Things are as they have been; war and dearth and death are rampant as heretofore; indeed, things are to be worse than they have been.” (Franzmann, p. 60)

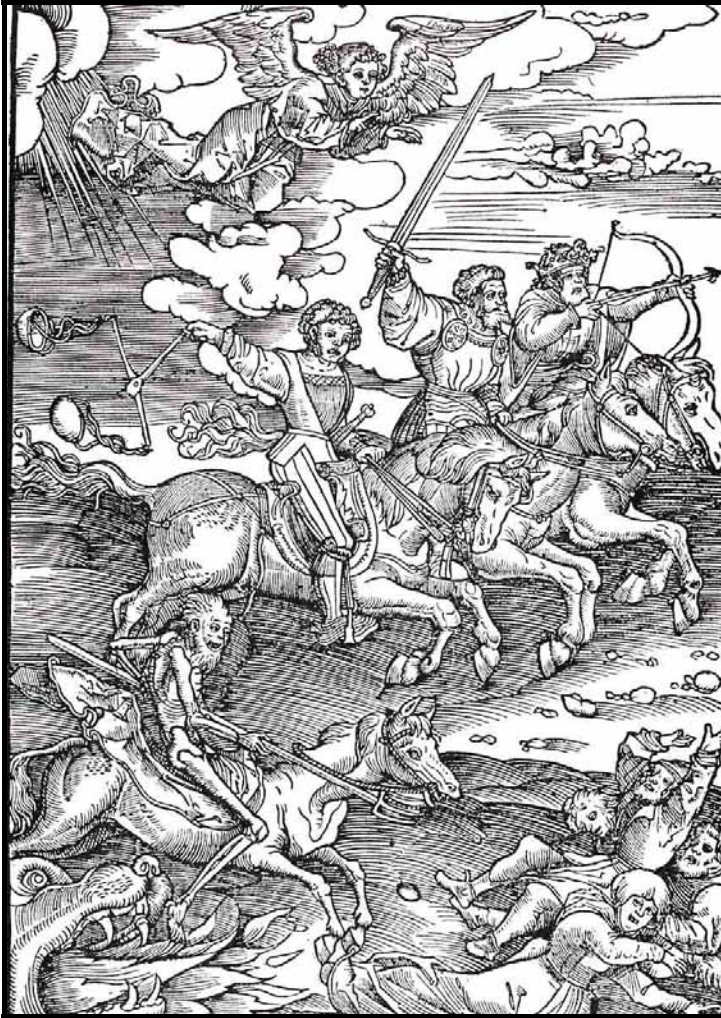
The message of the seven seals, and indeed of the trumpets and bowls which will follow from them, is that Christ reigns even in the apparent chaos and confusion of this world. The preliminary judgments depicted here are the signs of the times which herald the great day when Christ will return in glory to judge the living and the dead. In the meantime, disaster and suffering do not take place at random or by chance but serve both the redemptive and judicial purposes of the Lord. The horsemen ride forth only upon the thunderous command of the cherubim. The Lord reigns! Even those who persecute His church and oppress His people help to accomplish His purpose and usher in the Day of Judgment.

<u><i>Matthew 24</i></u>	<u><i>Revelation 6</i></u>
<u><i>false Christs (v.5)</i></u>	<u><i>the white horse(Anti-Christ) (vs. 1-2)</i></u>
<u><i>wars and rumors of war (v. 7)</i></u>	<u><i>the red horse (war) (vs. 3-4)</i></u>
<u><i>famines (v.7)</i></u>	<u><i>the black horse (famine) (vs. 5-6)</i></u>
<u><i>pestilences (v. 7; cf. Luke 21:11)</i></u>	<u><i>the pale horse (death) (vs. 7-8)</i></u>
<u><i>earthquakes (v.7)</i></u>	<u><i>earthquake (vs. 12)</i></u>
<u><i>persecutions (v.9)</i></u>	<u><i>the souls under the altar (9-11)</i></u>
<u><i>“Then the end shall come.” (V. 14)</i></u>	<u><i>the end (vs. 12-17)</i></u>

The events described in this segment bear a striking resemblance to the “*Little Apocalypse*” of Matthew 24 where Jesus details the signs of the times which will characterize the last days. The parallel between the two chapters includes not only the signs themselves, but even the sequence in which they are presented. The signs of the times, in Matthew and in Revelation, are warnings and foreshadowings of the end of the world; recurring patterns of events intended to remind those with the insight to see the signs that the Day of Judgment is coming.



"The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse" by Albrecht Dürer



“The Four Horsemen” - 16th Century Woodcut

The First Seal

Revelation 6:1-2

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

“I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals” - Everything thus far in the vision from the two preceding chapters has anticipated this moment. The characteristic phrase *“I watched”* (literally - *“And I looked”*) marks the shift to a new scene within the vision. The prophet is an observer, an eyewitness to that which occurs as the events of the future are dramatized. The Lamb proceeds to

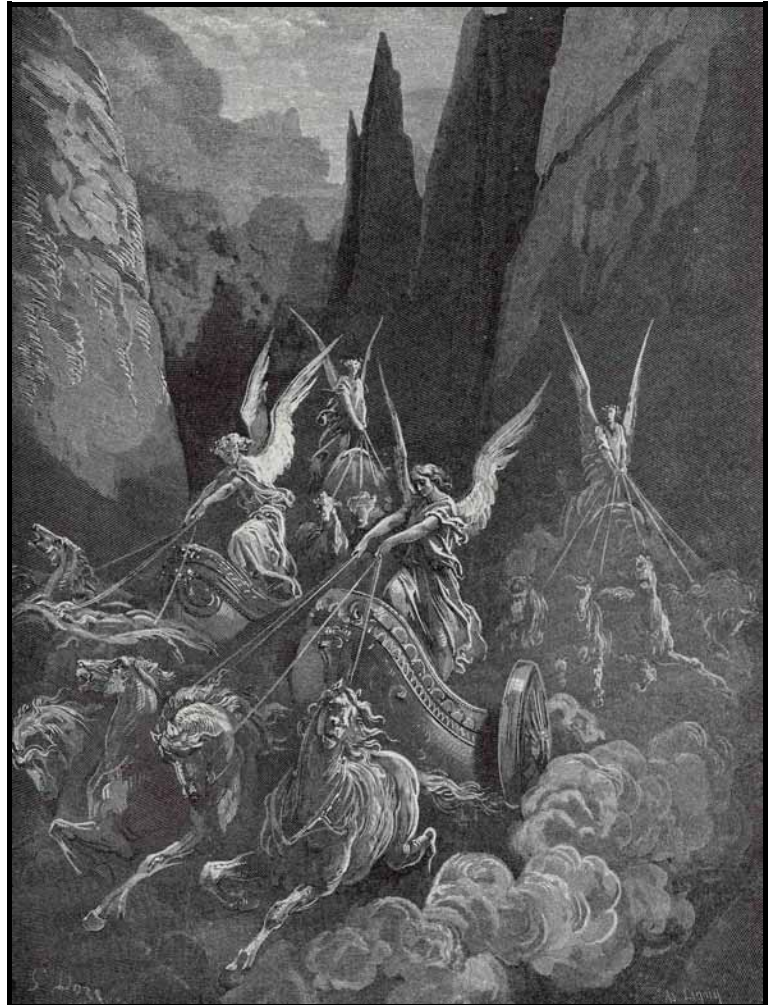
unseal the first of the seven seals which close and conceal the scroll. By this symbolic action Christ reveals and sets in motion the events contained in the scroll.

The opening of the first four seals present one of Revelation’s most familiar images, the famous Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. In the ancient Near East, donkeys and camels were used for transportation in contrast to horses which were connected with warfare and conquest. Hence the four horsemen bring a message of war and the calamities which accompany the waging of war. The image of horse and rider as a symbol of the powers that patrol the earth to carry out God’s purposes is drawn from the Old Testament book of Zechariah.

“During the night I had a vision - and there before me was a man,

riding a red horse! He was standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown, and white horses. Then the man standing among the myrtle trees explained: "These are the ones the Lord has sent to go throughout the earth...I looked up again - and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains - mountains of bronze! The first chariot had red horses, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled - all of them powerful. I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my Lord?" The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world"...When the powerful horses went out, they were straining to go throughout the earth. And he said, "Go throughout the earth!" So they went throughout the earth." (Zechariah 1:8-10; 6:1-5,7)

While John makes effective use of the Old Testament image, he freely modifies the prophetic symbolism. The colored horses and chariots of Zechariah are the agents through which God inflicts punishment on the nations that have afflicted Israel, thus demonstrating His faithful love for His people. So also in Revelation, the horsemen represent the judgment of God upon a rebellious and sinful world which continues to persecute the people of God. The agents of God's judgement in Revelation, conquest, warfare, famine, and death, closely parallel Ezekiel 14:12-23 where sword, famine, plague, and wild

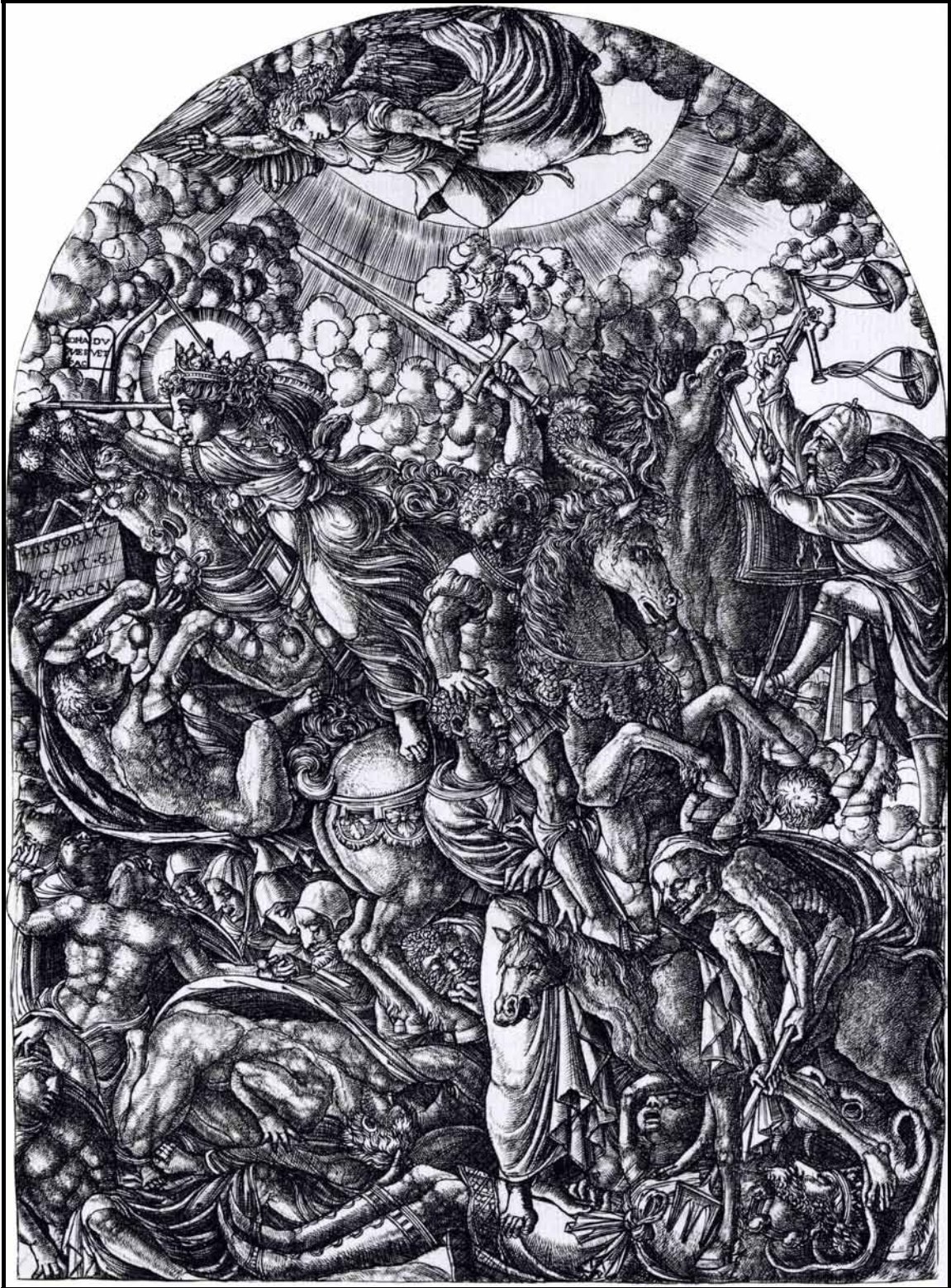


*"Zechariah's Vision of the Four Chariots"
by Gustav Dore*

beasts are the dreadful judgments poured out upon apostate Jerusalem. Thus both the world and the church must endure the visitation of the horsemen. These judgments come upon the sinful majority as punishment while for the faithful remnant they are the chastening of God intended to strengthen and purify believers. As believers recognize this dual purpose they are enabled to accept God's painful chastening as a positive means of sanctification. The horsemen are four in number thus emphasizing their impact upon all the earth. They do not correspond to specific events but represent ongoing, endlessly repeated patterns of events which will recur throughout the New Testament era - not a particular conquest, war, famine, or pestilence but each of these grim realities in general in all of their specific occurrences as they are repeated over and over again until the Lord returns. *"Just as the four living creatures represent the entire creation, so the plagues of the four horsemen symbolize the suffering of many throughout the earth, which will continue until the parousia."* (Beale, p. 385)

"Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, 'Come!'" - The first of the horsemen is summoned by a thunderous voice from the throne - ***"Come!"*** The command might more aptly be translated ***"Come forth!"*** Lenski suggests the translation ***"Be on thy way!"*** In any case, the crucial point is that the horsemen ride out only at the command of God. They are His messengers. The four living beings who surround God's throne serve as the agents through whom His will is carried out. As the Lamb opens the first seal the mighty command is issued by one of the living beings. The reference to thunder serves to identify the angel's voice with the divine throne from which had come ***"flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder."*** (Revelation 4:5) The ominous rumble of the thunder warns of the coming judgment storm. The sound of impending judgment is associated with the sound of thunder on two other occasions in Revelation (cf. Revelation 14:2; 19:6).

"I looked, and there before me was a white horse! It's rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest." - The first rider sits astride a white horse wearing the pure white robes of holiness and righteousness. The image is strongly reminiscent of John's portrayal of Christ as the victorious champion on a white horse who is ***"Faithful and True."*** (Revelation 19:11). But the Christ, the Son of God and Captain of the hosts of Heaven has no place in this sinister company. This horseman is not Christ but an antichrist ***"who will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts."*** (Daniel 11:38) The white rider glories in power



“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” by Jean Duvet



"The Antichrist" by Luca Signorelli

and wealth. He is conquest personified, the very antithesis of Christ. Nonetheless, he is carefully disguised to conceal his true satanic identity. Satan is the Imitator, the Counterfeit, who masquerades as the Lord whom he seeks to replace. Our enemy is the master of disguise and deception (2 Corinthians 11:14). This hellish horseman rides out not to *"judge and make war with justice"* (19:11) as did our Lord, but *"as a conqueror*

bent on conquest." The repetition in the phrase serves both to emphasize conquest as the rider's sole and only purpose and to state the certainty that he will achieve that which he sets out to do. He not only intends to conquer but he will. The white rider is in every way a parody and a perversion of the victorious Christ. He personifies the lust for glory and power that leads to conquest. This is the burning desire of which great empires are born: the insatiable beast which swallows up countries and cultures - depriving men of their dignity and their liberty as all are reduced to the status of mere pawns in the endless search for new worlds to conquer. Dr. Louis Brighton says it well: *"The picture represented by this rider on the white horse symbolizes and represents every form of tyranny which is won and acquired by power and force, usually warfare or forms of it, and which then by dictatorial rule exploits, enslaves, dominates, and terrorizes."* (Brighton, p. 165) The image describes the great empires of antiquity and the totalitarian dictatorships of the modern world equally well. The weapon of conquest's warfare is not the *"sharp sword"* of the Spirit (19:15) but the battle bow which is never used in Scripture as a symbol of God's judgment. This is instead, the weapon of *"Gog of the land of Magog"* (Ezekiel 38-39) who is the captain of the hosts of Hell. The imagery of Ezekiel is borrowed from the terrifying reality of the Scythian hordes that swept down across the civilizations of the ancient Near East from the steppes of Russia in the 8th Century B.C. like

demons from Hell leaving devastation and death in their wake. These fierce barbarian horsemen, much like the Huns and the Mongols of later European history, were mounted bowmen who launched storms of arrows upon their foes and then swiftly rode away, invincible and irresistible. No conventional army was able to stand against them. The Scythian hosts penetrated as far as lower Egypt before withdrawing back into the vastness of the steppes. The terror of their coming left an indelible impression on the people of the Fertile Crescent for generations to come. Hence the effectiveness of the prophet's image. The false Christ wears the victor's crown by God's consent - note the passive verb - ***“he was given a crown.”*** He is, to use Luther's phrase, *“Gottes Teufel”* (*“God's Devil”*) used by the Lord to carry out His own purposes. This enemy of the Lord will meet with widespread success, moving from triumph to triumph.



“The Onslaught of the Huns” 19th Century Engraving



*“The Four Horsemen”
Woodcut from the First Complete Luther Bible -1534*

The Second Seal

Revelation 6: 3-4

When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

“When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, “Come!” - The pattern which introduced the opening of the first seal is now repeated. The white rider disappears from the scene only to be replaced by another even more ominous figure. As the second of the seven seals is broken by the Lamb, the divine summons is issued again, in this instance by the second of the four living beings. In a sense, the first horseman, the conqueror, represented warfare and conflict in general terms while the three riders who now follow after detail the havoc and destruction characteristic of war.

“Then another horse came out, a fiery red one.” - The second horseman rides out to ravage mankind. John refers to this harbinger of doom as *“another horse”* thus

emphasizing the similarities between the horsemen. The first four seals comprise a unit, different dimensions of the same dire warning. His color is bright red (Greek - “*pyrros*”) of blood and fire, symbolic of the calamitous mission upon which he is sent forth. This is the grim reality of warfare. *“Victory, white horsed and crowned, wears another aspect when viewed in the lurid light of the battlefield. Triumph spells much bloodshed in the past and the maintenance of an empire based on conquest demands more in the future.”* (Swete, p.86) Again the text stresses the fact that the horseman is a messenger of God’s judgment, carrying out the sentence of His righteous wrath upon rebellious mankind. His power and his sword are “*given*” to him by God. His power is *“to take peace from the earth and to make men slay one another.”* In the Little Apocalypse, Jesus had warned of *“wars and rumors of war”* throughout the latter days (Matthew 24:6). He had foretold that *“nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom,”* (Matthew 24:7) and so it has been.

“Throughout the time period covered by the prophetic message of Revelation, from the victory of the Lord Christ up to His second coming, peace and tranquillity will be the exception. The general rule will be wars and rumors of war, violence, murders, insurrections, and the like (Mark 13:7-9). (Brighton, p. 166)

The horseman is empowered to deprive the world of peace and to endlessly incite men to violent conflict with one another. To carry out this judgment, he is given *“a large sword”* (Greek - *“machaira megale”*). This is the short stabbing sword which was the standard weapon of the Roman legions. Through the centuries of Roman dominance it proved to be a most effective instrument of death and destruction. It is described as *“large”* not because of its unusual size but because of *“the constant and terrific slaughter it symbolizes.”* (Lenski, p. 225) The image of the sword is often used elsewhere in Scripture to symbolize bloodshed and violent death (i.e, Matthew 26:52).



“The Second Horseman” - 13th Century



"The Four Horsemen" 16th Century Woodcut

The Third Seal

(Revelation 6:5-6)

When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine."

"When the Lamb had opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" - The now familiar pattern recurs: the seal is broken, the command is given, and the horseman appears. The color of this horse is "ill-omened black" (Franzmann, p. 61), the color of death, calamity, and mourning. The black rider represents famine and starvation, for he bears in his hand the measuring

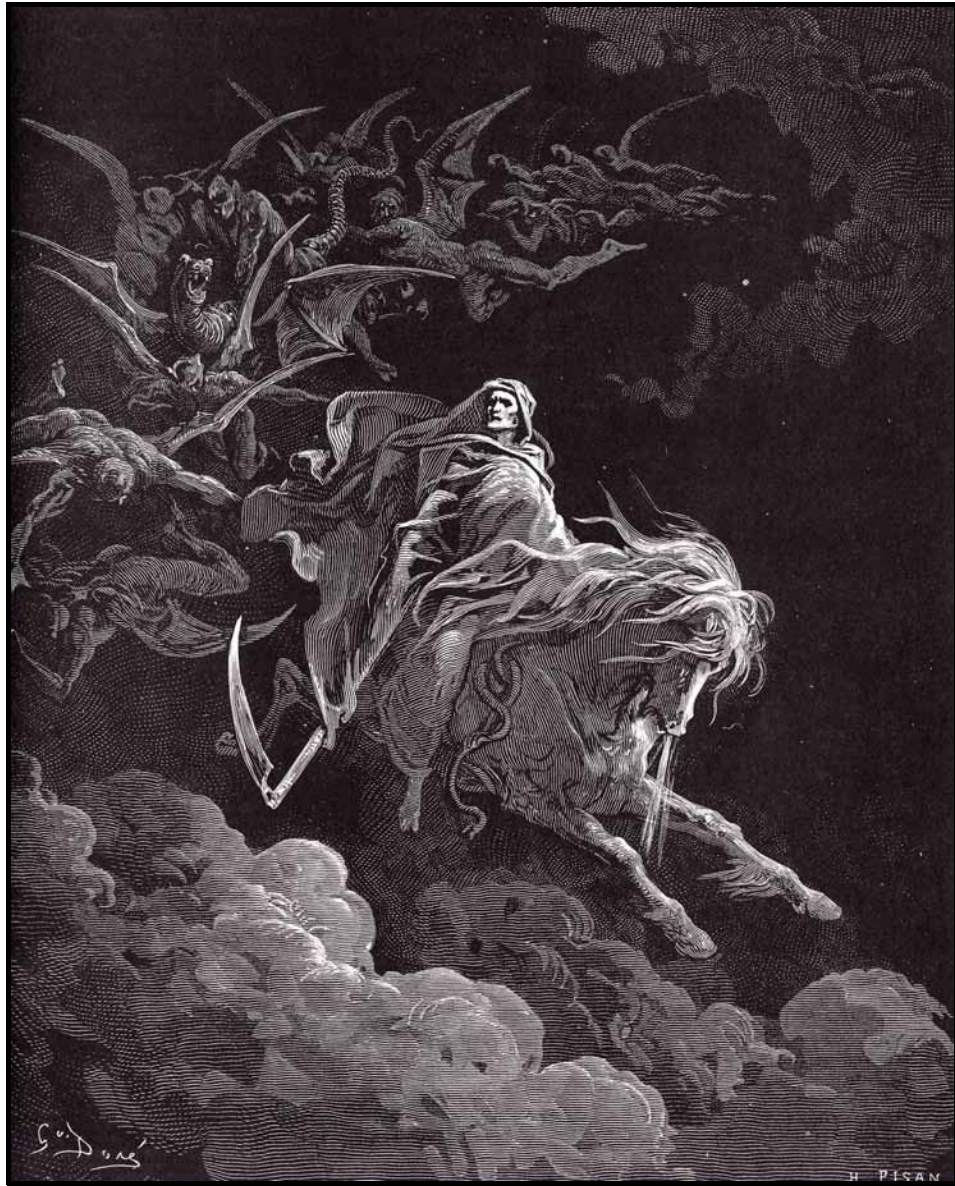
scale used in the sale of food. The scale is literally described in Greek as a *"balance"* or *"yoke."* It consisted of a bar with pans suspended from both ends. Weights would be placed in the pan on one end and the commodity being measured on the other. The amount of that commodity would then be adjusted until it balanced with the weight on the other end of the scale. As the rider appears something *"like a voice"* is heard speaking from *"among the four living beings."* The vague description suggests that this voice was unlike any other that John had ever heard. Unidentified voices are heard thirteen times in Revelation (cf. Revelation 6:6; 9:13; 10:4,8; 11:12,15; 12:10; 14:13; 16:1,17; 18:4; 19:5; 21:3). At times the voice is that of an angel speaking for God and at times it is the voice of God Himself. The source of the voice *"among the four living beings"* in this instance seems to suggest that the voice is that of God or the Lamb. The voice announces and explains the impact of

the third horseman's visitation. *"A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine."* Exorbitant prices for food signal scarcity and hunger. A full day's wage would barely suffice to purchase enough grain for the family to survive, even resorting to the use of less expensive and less nutritious barley (cf. Joel 1:10-11). These prices are about 16 times the average cost of these items in the Roman Empire during the First Century. Most commentators see the reference to sparing *"the oil and the wine"* as an allusion to the economic disparity which is exaggerated in times of famine. Luxury products remain available, but only the rich can afford to buy them. While most people struggle to provide the bare necessities of life, the wealthy revel in their excess. The plight of the starving poor is thoughtlessly dismissed - *"Let them eat cake!"* That disparity only adds to the tension of the explosive situation and increases the potential for violence and disorder. Dr. Brighton summarizes the significance of the third horseman:

"The overall picture presented is a condition of both scarcity and plenty, that is, an economic imbalance in the supply of food and the daily necessities of life...The horseman on the black horse, then, suggests that throughout the entire period from the Lord's ascension until the End, there will always be present, at various times and places, hunger and famine." (Brighton, p. 168)



"The Third Horseman" - 15th Century Belgian Apocalypse



“The Fourth Horseman”: by Gustav Dore

The Fourth Seal

Revelation 7-8

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine, and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

“When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living

being say, "Come!" - For the fourth and final time the pattern recurs. The Lamb breaks open the fourth seal. The voice of the fourth living being calls out the summons, and the fourth horseman rides out.

"I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close after him." - The color of this horse in the Greek text is "*chlorus*," the ghastly greenish white complexion of a decaying corpse. This is the color of death itself. Brighton suggests the apt translation "*ghostly green*." The grim reaper, death personified, rides out upon this hideous horse - ***"Its rider was named Death."*** Death (Greek - "*thanatos*") is accompanied by his inseparable comrade the grave. The Greek term "*hades*," transliterated here in the NIV text, literally means "*the place that is not seen*." It is the equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew word "*Sheol*." These words are often used in Scripture to refer to Hell, the place of the damned. In this instance, as consistently in Revelation (cf. Revelation 1:18; 20:13,14) it is used in a neutral sense to simply describe the place of the dead, the grave. As Death's attendant, the grave follows closely along behind, its gaping jaws opened wide, prepared to swallow up and consume Death's victims. The fourth horseman both intensifies and summarizes the consequences wrought by his three predecessors. Conquest, warfare, and famine all result in death, hence Death itself is the last and decisive horseman. The vast extent of their devastation is expressed by the phrase - ***"They***



"The Triumph of Death" by Nicholas le Rouge 14th Century Woodcut

were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.” Like their counterparts, Death and the Grave operate only by divine consent - *“They were given power.”* The Lamb who has broken the seal remains in complete control, as He implements God’s plan for the future. Millions will die, but Death is not permitted to completely annihilate mankind. The scope of his activity is limited by God. Only *“a fourth of the earth”* is allowed to perish. The fraction is quantitative not literal. It signifies that a major portion but not all of mankind is effected (cf. 8:7) The four ravages through which Death accomplishes His task - *“sword”*” *“famine,”* *“plague,”* and *“the wild beasts of the earth”* are drawn from Ezekiel 14:12-21. They summarize violent and catastrophic death in every form. The grim history of mankind throughout the New Testament era provides ample evidence of the accuracy of John’s vision. Again and again the horsemen have gone forth leaving death, devastation, and destruction in their wake. Every one of their fatal visitations should serve to remind us of God’s righteous judgment upon sin and prepare us for the day when He will come again to judge the living and the dead.



“The Harvest of Death” by J. James Tissot



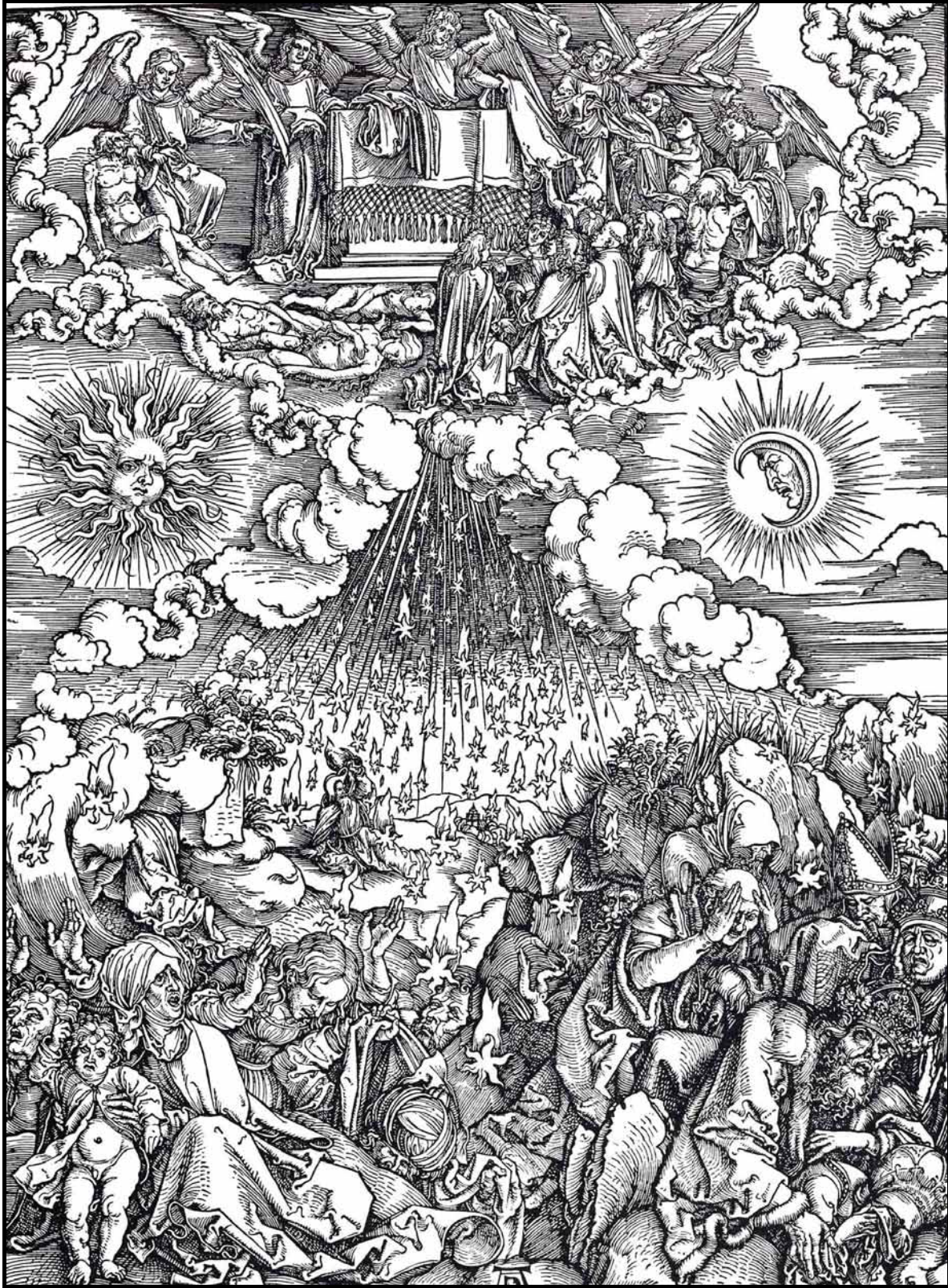
“The Fifth Seal” by Hans Burgkmair

The Fifth Seal

Revelation 6: 9-11

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain...” - The pattern changes with the opening of the fifth seal. There is no



“The Fifth and Sixth Seals” by Albrecht Dürer

summons from one of the four living beings and no messenger of God's judgment appears. The fearful scenes of horsemen sent out to ravage the earth now give way to a vision of the souls of the martyrs crying out for vindication. The fifth seal addresses the issue of persecution and places the ongoing suffering of God's people in its proper perspective. "With the fifth seal the Church comes into sight, in its persecuted suffering state." (Swete, p. 89) The Revelator sees ***"the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained."*** The Bible

teaches that man consists of body and soul. The "soul" (Hebrew - "nephesh" - Greek - "psyche") is the immaterial part of man, the self or ego, our sense of individual identity and personality. Physical death is the separation of the body and the soul. The body dies and decays, returning to the dust from which man was created in the beginning, there to await the resurrection of all flesh on the Last Day. The soul survives death. Unlike the body, the soul does not cease to exist. At the moment of physical death the soul of the believer is with Christ in heaven while the souls of the damned are condemned immediately to the torments of hell (cf. Genesis 2:7; 3:19; Job 19:25-27; Ecclesiastes 12:1-7; Isaiah 14:9-11,17; 26:19; 66:24; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 10:28; 22:31-32; Luke 12:19-



"The Souls of the Martyrs Given White Robes"
by Lucas Cranach

31; 23:43; John 11:25-27; 14:1-4; 19:30; Acts 7:59-60; 2 Corinthians 5:1-10; Philippians 1:20-26; James 2:26; 1 Peter 3:18-20; 2 Peter 2:9-10; Revelation 14:13). The “souls” here depicted are in what has been called the “*Intermediate State*,” that is, the time between individual death and the Final Day of Judgment. While recognizing that this is a vision, the details of which are not designed to convey literal reality, it is also true that the framework of the vision, like that of our Lord’s parables, does not deceive. It is therefore significant to note, that these souls in the Intermediate State are fully aware of their presence before God in heaven and equally cognizant of the fact that the Judgment has not yet come and that evil continues to run rampant upon the earth. These are the souls “*of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained.*” These are the believers of every age who have given their lives for the faith and sealed their witness



*“The Soul of Lazarus Carried to Heaven”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

with the martyr’s blood. They have stood for the truth of the Word of God and have fearlessly and faithfully testified (Greek - “*martyrian*”) to that truth despite the opposition of all the world. The consistency of that witness is indicated by the imperfect tense of the verb which might better be translated “*the testimony they had maintained over and over again.*” These brave souls willingly followed in the footsteps of the Lamb that was slain, giving up their lives without protest or resistance, led like lambs to the slaughter (Isaiah 53:7). The sacrificial nature of their martyrdom is emphasized by the use of the verb “*slain*” (Greek - “*esphagmenon*”) which was used earlier in reference to Lamb upon the throne (Revelation 5:6) and specifically describes the slaughter of a sacrificial animal. John sees the souls of the martyrs “*under the altar.*” The Greek noun is “*tou thysiasteriou*” which may refer either to the altar of



“Christian Martyrs in the Coliseum in Rome” 19th Century Engraving

burnt offering or the golden altar of incense. The once for all sacrifice of Christ on the cross rendered the entire sacrificial system of the Old Testament obsolete (cf. Hebrew 9:11-14; 10:11-18). Hence in the imagery of Revelation there is only one altar in heaven, the golden altar of incense. This understanding would also appear to be consistent with the fact that the souls beneath the altar are praying, given the Biblical symbolism of the prayers of God’s people rising like incense before the heavenly throne (Revelation 6:8; 8:3). Their presence *“under the altar”* signifies the intimacy and the immediacy of their heavenly relationship to God. The golden altar of incense stood in the holy place of the temple, directly in front of the holy of holies. So also the martyrs in heaven stand before the throne in the presence of the God for whom their lives were given.

“In the OT the priest would pray and offer up incense on the altar in the temple for the people of God as they stood outside and also prayed (Exodus 30:7-8; 40:26-28; cf. Luke 1:8-10). So now, the souls of God’s saints, as His priests (Revelation 1:6; 5:10; 20:6) in God’s heavenly temple, pray while God’s people on earth (1:6), who are also priests are still in their suffering and are praying for deliverance. (15:2-4)”
(Brighton, p.170)



“The Fifth and Sixth Seals” by Jean Duvet



“The Souls Beneath the Altar” - 16th Century Luther Bible Illustration

“They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” - The urgency of the martyrs’ prayer is indicated by the words *“they called out with a loud voice.”* The verb *“to call out”* (Greek - *“krazo”*) is a strong word which means to cry out in anguish during the hour of most urgent need. Their plea is not softly stated. They cry out *“in a loud voice”* (Greek - *“phone megale”*) in a manner consistent with the urgency of their petition. The prayer takes the form of a question *“How long?”*. *“This perplexing question has been on the lips of the righteous almost since the beginning of the human race.”* (Thomas, p. 445) The martyrs pray for divine intervention in the face of rampant and apparently triumphant evil. They plead for the vindication of God and the demonstration of His justice before all the world. They pray for the coming of the judgment and the end of sinful mankind’s defiant rebellion against the Creator. This is not a matter of personal vengeance or vindictiveness. The souls beneath the altar are not merely asking for the punishment of those who murdered them. Instead they cry out for judgment upon all of *“the inhabitants of the earth,”* a phrase which is consistently used in Revelation to describe sinful mankind in its opposition to God and His will. Their only concern is for the honor and glory of the Christ for whom their lives were given. Their

impatience is motivated by a holy zeal for the accomplishment of God's purpose and plan. *"These martyrs do not cry for vengeance upon the wicked who slew them; their cry involves something that is far greater. They cry to have their blood avenged upon those dwelling on the earth." They cry to God to send the final judgment.*" (Lenski, p. 253) When the martyrs pray that their blood may be avenged, they are asking God to vindicate His cause, the cause for which they died. Some would object that such a prayer is improper, given our Lord's repeated commands to forgive those who sin against us. This objection fails to recognize both the nature of the prayer and the circumstances in which it is offered. An unwillingness to recognize the necessity of punishment for sin also reflects a confusion of law and gospel. Lutheran theologian Siegbert Becker notes:

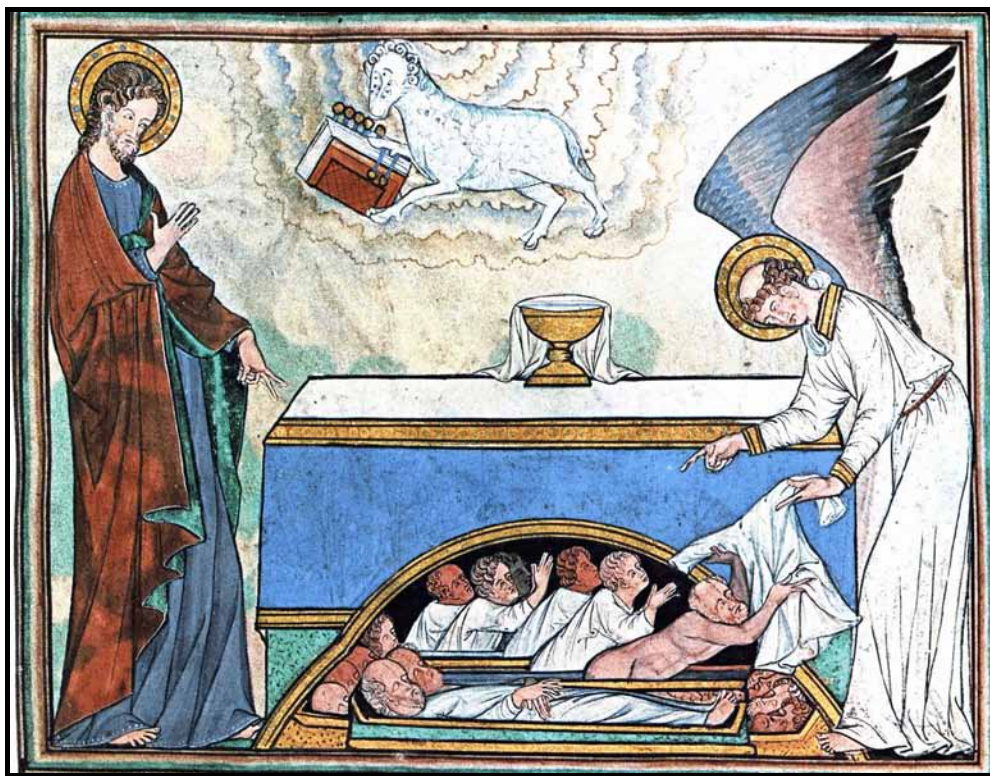
"At first glance the prayer of these martyrs may seem to be in conflict with the spirit of Jesus who calls upon us to forgive those who sin against us and to pray for those who persecute us. In this respect, this prayer of the martyrs is reminiscent of the imprecatory psalms, in which the psalmist prays for vengeance on his enemies. Neither the prayer of these martyrs nor the imprecatory psalms, however, are unworthy prayers. The difficulty which many people and even many theologians see in them stems from a failure to understand the biblical distinction between law and gospel. The law, which is an expression of God's holy, immutable will, calls for the punishment of evildoers. This prayer of the sainted martyrs as well as the imprecatory psalms are to remind God's enemies that their sins will surely be punished if they continue in their impenitence. It is the will of the just God that those who sin against Him and His people should be punished, and the prayer of these martyrs is in accord with this holy will of God. The prayer can therefore be made with a loud voice. It is a prayer of which they need not be ashamed and which they can pray with confidence." (Becker, p. 112)

The martyrs address God as the **"Sovereign Lord, holy and true."** The title **"Sovereign Lord"** (Greek - *"ho despotes"* - literally *"absolute ruler"*) emphasizes the power, majesty, and authority of God. This is the only instance in the New Testament where the term is used in reference to God. The two divine attributes cited (**"holy and true"**) are most appropriate given the nature of the prayer. The holy God is unalterably opposed to evil and cannot tolerate sin. As the God of truth, the Lord may be relied upon to fulfill the promises of His Word.

"Then each of them was given a white robe and they were told to wait a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed." - God's response to the martyrs' appeal is a combination of symbolic action and spoken word. First, ***"each of them was given a white robe."***

The “*white robe*” (Greek - “*stole leuke*”) is a flowing, floor length, robe of state (cf. Revelation 7:9,14). To receive such a robe was a mark of honor and recognition. In this context, the bestowal of the white robes upon the martyrs is a vindication of their faithfulness to God and a reaffirmation of His faithfulness to them. That reaffirmation also includes the promise of certain judgment upon those who have oppressed and murdered God’s witnesses. G.K. Beale correctly notes:

“The robes are not given as a reward for purity of faith but as a heavenly declaration of the saints purity or righteousness and as an annulment of the guilty verdict rendered against them by the world. Therefore, receiving the robes is an assurance to the petitioning saints that the unbelieving “earth dwellers” will be declared guilty and punished for persecuting them.” (Beale, p. 394)



“The White Robes of the Martyrs” - Medieval Bible Illumination

The white robes in which Revelation consistently depicts the saints in heaven symbolize the righteousness of Christ which is God’s gracious gift to every believer. The robes are “*white*” to symbolize the fact that those who have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:14) stand before God in purity and holiness (cf.

Isaiah 1:18 - *“though your sins be like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson they shall be like wool.”*). This imagery is not unique to Revelation. St Paul declares: *“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ.”* (Galatians 26-27; cf. also Isaiah 61:10; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10,24).



*“The White Robes of the Martyrs”
16th Century bible Woodcut*

The explicit response to the prayer of the martyrs is the instruction *“to wait a little while longer, until the number of the fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.”* The comfort of the original is somewhat muddled in the English translation. The Greek literally reads *“rest yet a little time.”* (Greek - *“anapausontai”*). The verb means *“to be at peace”* without worry or concern. In this context the phrase might better be translated *“enjoy your peaceful rest a little while longer.”* To these blest souls, already in heaven, these words should not be construed as an admonition to put aside their impatience, for there can be no impatience in heaven. Rather, God here offers the martyrs the assurance that they may rest in the enjoyment of their blessedness. *“The delay is itself a part of the reward; to the church on earth it*

may be irksome, to the martyrs themselves it is a peaceful rest.” (Swete, p. 91) To the church militant on earth the assurance that the evil world will certainly receive its just punishment becomes an encouragement for Christians to persevere in their witness through suffering. To the church triumphant in heaven that same assurance

constitutes a basis for their enjoyment of peaceful rest until the time comes for God's punishment to be carried out. The period of their waiting is *"a little while longer."* *"The "short time" during which the martyrs are to wait patiently for God's avenging justice is evidently the whole New Testament period."* (Becker, p. 113) The Creator God's perspective on time is different than ours. Remember St. Peter's admonition:

"But do not forget this one thing, dear friends; with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:8-9)



"The Souls Beneath the Altar and the Four Horsemen" - 15th Century Bible Illumination

God's plan and purpose must be fully accomplished before the end can come. The full number of the elect must be saved and all those whom God has appointed to be his witnesses before the world must be given the opportunity to offer their witness - *"Until the number of the fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed."* The language of the phrase appears to broaden at this point to include all believers, not only those who have actually given up their lives for the faith. *"The fellow servants"* are all Christians (cf. Romans 1:1; Colossians 1:7; Revelation 1:1,6) while the *"brothers"* are those who share the honor of actual martyrdom. The mission of all the witnesses, those who live for Christ and those who die for Him, must be completed before the coming of the final judgment. The number set in God's predetermined plan had not yet been reached (cf. Matthew 23:32). There is a striking parallel to this text in the apocryphal Fourth Book of Ezra, written only a few years

after Revelation. Many scholars conclude that the 4 Ezra text is a direct reference to Revelation 6:9-11.

“Did not the souls of the righteous in their chambers ask about these matters, saying, “How long are we to remain here? And when will come the harvest of our reward?” And Jeremiel the archangel answered them and said, “When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for He has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and He will not move or arouse them until that number is fulfilled.” (4 Ezra 4:35-30)



“Blessed Are the Dead” by Rudolf Schäfer

The closing verse of Henry Alford’s classic hymn *“Ten Thousand Times Ten Thousand”* is based upon this text. The poet gives eloquent expression to the heartfelt longing of God’s people for His speedy return:

*“Bring near Thy great salvation, Thou
Lamb for sinners slain;
Fill up the roll of Thine elect, then take Thy
power and reign.
Appear, Desire of Nations; Thine exiles
long for home.
Show in the heavens Thy promised sign;
Thou Prince and Savior Come!”*

The vision of the fifth seal presents the Church, the people of God in heaven and on earth, in the midst of a sinful world rushing headlong toward destruction. As the marauding horsemen of God’s judgment ride relentlessly back and forth, leaving chaos and confusion in their wake, the people of God are called to offer a

faithful witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to patiently endure - even unto death - the persecution that will be the world’s inevitable response to that witness. We long for the day of the Lord’s glorious return and the vindication which that day will bring.



*“The Opening of the Sixth Seal”
Luther Bible Woodcut - 1530*

The Sixth Seal Revelation 6:12-17

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to the earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. The kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall upon us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”



“The Prophet Haggai” by J. James Tissot

“I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake...” - The martyrs beneath the altar had prayed for the coming of the judgement and now, as if in response to their prayer, the opening of the sixth seal depicts the end of the world and the cosmic disturbances which will accompany our Lord’s return. Centuries earlier God had spoken through His prophet Haggai:

“This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘In a little while, I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all the nations, and the Desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory’ says the Lord Almighty.”
(Haggai 2:6-7)

The New Testament writer to the Hebrews cites the prophecy of Haggai in order to remind his readers that when all created things have been shaken only the unshakeable things of God will remain:

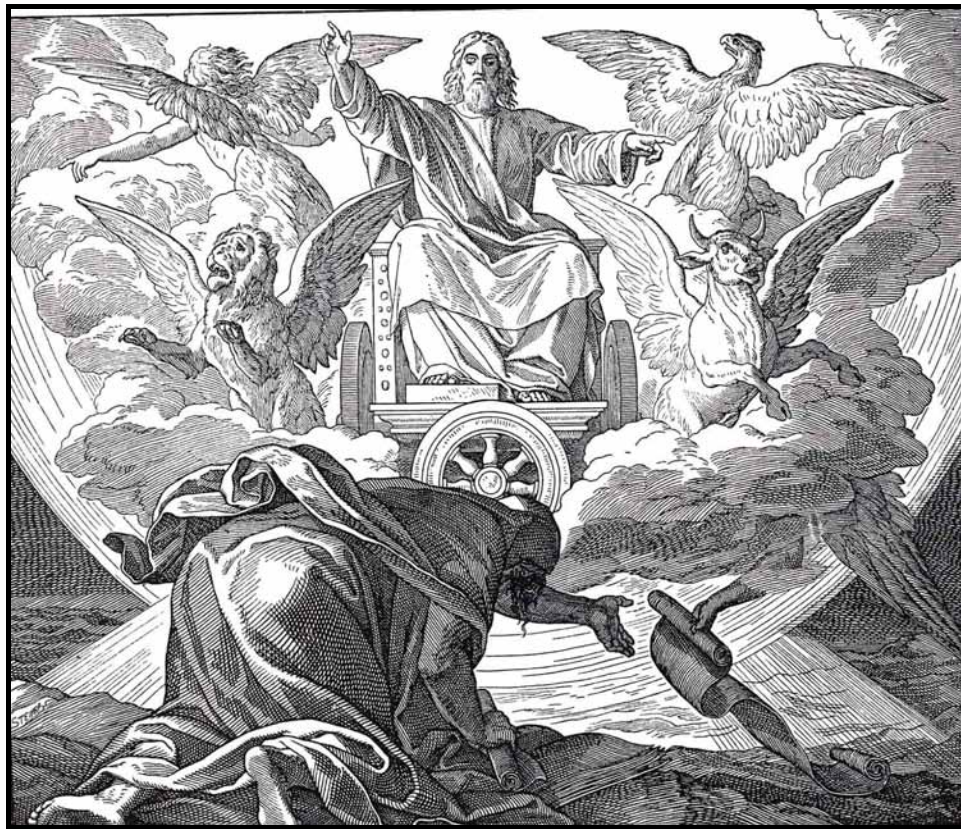
“At that time His voice shook the earth, but now He has promised, ‘Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ The words ‘once more’ indicate the removing of what can be shaken - that is, created things - so that what cannot be shaken can remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and so worship God

acceptably with reverence and awe for our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews

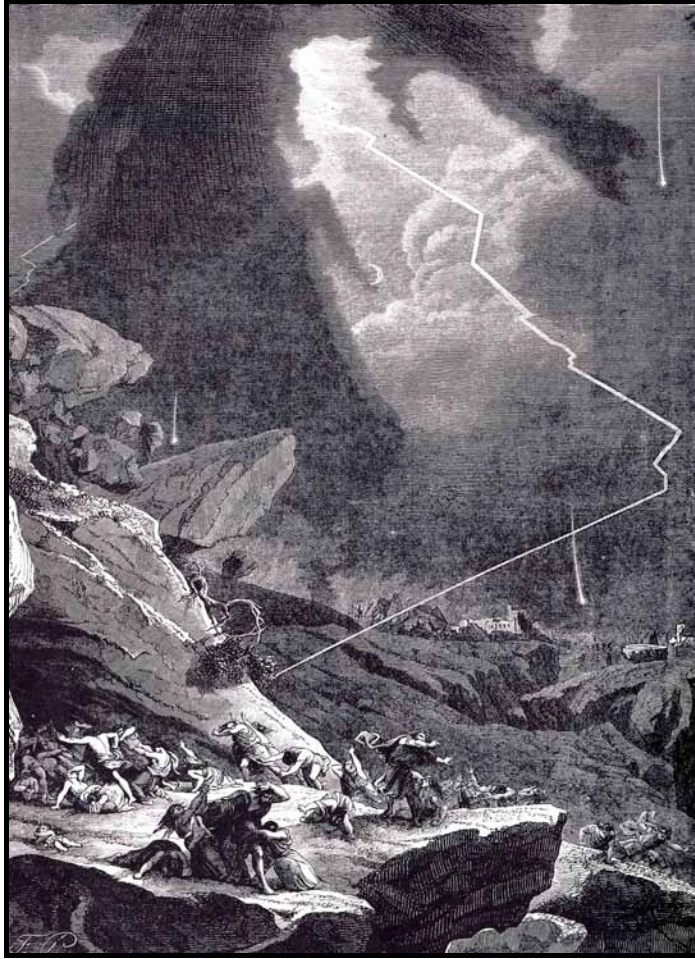
12:26-29)

The language of John’s vision is also strongly reminiscent of Haggai’s prophecy. In fact, the imagery of the sixth seal employs a great many of the Old Testament’s most popular judgment images.

“The judgement of the world is depicted with stock in trade OT imagery for the dissolution of the cosmos. This portrayal is based on a mosaic of OT passages that are brought together because of the cosmic metaphors of judgment they have in common. The quarry of texts from which the description has been drawn is composed primarily of Isaiah 13:10-13; 24:1-6, 19-23; 34:4; Ezekiel 32:6-8; Joel 2:10, 30-31; 3:15-16; Habbakuk 3:6-11. The same OT texts are also influential in Matthew 24:29; Mark 13:24-25 and Acts 2:19-20 which themselves likewise form part of the apocalyptic quarry influencing the dramatic portrayal in Revelation 6:12-14. All these passages mention at least four of the following elements, which are found here in Revelation; the shaking of the earth or the mountains; the darkening or shaking of the moon, stars, sun and/or heaven; and the pouring out of blood.”
(Beale, p. 396)



“Ezekiel’s Vision of God’s Throne in Heaven” by Carolsfeld



“The Opening of the Sixth Seal” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

Revelation mentions earthquakes (Greek - “*seismos*”) seven times (Revelation 6:12; 8:5; 11:13 (twice); 11:19; 16:18 (twice)). Elsewhere in Scripture earthquakes often accompany and attest God’s mighty acts. (Cf. Ezekiel 38:19-20; Haggai 2:6-9; Zechariah 14:1-5; Matthew 27:5; 28:2) The shaking of the earth serves to represent the tenuous and transitory nature of the physical world. But this is no ordinary earthquake! It is a shaking of cosmic proportions, effecting not merely one nation or region, but all of the universe - “*a great earthquake*” (Greek - “*seismos megas*”) indeed! Siegbert Becker stresses the significance of every earthquake in history in relation to this ultimate final shaking: “*Every earthquake throughout history is but a foreshadow of this great earthquake which moves every mountain and island from its place.*

Not only the earth, but the whole universe undergoes radical change.” (Becker, p. 114)

The earth quake is accompanied by four occurrences in the heavens, that which Luke the Evangelist had described as “*fearful and great signs from heaven*” (Luke 21:11). First, “*the sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair.*” The darkening of the sun is a common feature of apocalyptic imagery. Here the eclipse like blackness which will overtake the basic light source is compared to a rough black cloth typically woven from the thick black hair of a goat. This was the cloth of mourning and despair (Isaiah 50:3) as if the sun itself is grieving the death of the universe. Then “*The whole moon turned blood red.*” The pale light of the moon is transformed into the ghastly red of blood, another terrifying indication of doom and destruction (cf.

Joel 2:31; Matthew 24:29). Next, ***“And the stars in the sky fell to the earth as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind.”*** That which is depicted here is not merely the appearance of unprecedented numbers of meteors and comets but the total collapse of the universe (cf. 2 Peter 3:10 - ***“the heavens will disappear with a roar.”***) This is the disintegration of the vast reaches of the entire universe. The imagery of stars falling like figs from a tree is drawn from Isaiah 34:4 - ***“All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.”*** Jesus also speaks of the lesson of the fig tree in urging His people to carefully read the signs of the times (Matthew 24:32-35). The specific reference in this text to ***“late figs”*** refers to ***“figs which grow during the winter under the shelter of the leaves but ripen as seldom as the untimely figs of spring and thus dry up and drop during a wind.”*** (Lenski, p. 241) Finally, the vision declares that ***“The sky receded like a scroll rolling up.”*** The vast expanse of the heavens will appear to split and roll back in opposite directions, shriveling and curling up like paper burned in a fire. This graphic imagery is drawn, once again from Isaiah 34 and the prophet’s description of the collapse of the physical universe. The catastrophic transformation of the constellations and the heavenly bodies will also be reflected in a comprehensive reordering of the surface of planet earth itself - ***“and every mountain and island was removed from its place.”*** Even the massive upheavals which surrounded the world destroying flood in the days of Noah will pale into insignificance



“The Opening of the Sixth Seal” by Lucas Cranach

in comparison to the events which will accompany the coming of the great Day of the Lord.

“Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains.” - Sinful humanity’s response to the cosmic cataclysm is consternation and dread. The comprehensive nature of the event is emphasized by the sevenfold categorization of fallen mankind. The message is clear. The panic of this decisive moment will include every unbeliever on the face of the earth.

“Men, great and small, who have presumed upon His longsuffering (Romans 2:4) are only driven to mad desperation by the sight of the sure, dependable universe now being shaken into huge uncertainty; they attempt to hide themselves from Him whose eye searches everywhere, in dark caves and under the shelter of the enduring hills; they cry for extinction under the collapsing rocks rather than face the wrath of the enthroned Judge whose patience they have despised, the wrath of the Lamb whose redeeming sacrifice they have refused (5:7-9). On that great day of wrath the strutting kings and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong will strut no more.” (Franzmann, p. 63)



“The Opening of the Sixth Seal” - Luther Bible Woodcut - 1534



“The Sixth Seal” by Hans Burgmair - 1522

The **“kings of the earth”** (Greek - *“hoi basileis tes ges”*) are rulers of the highest rank, those whose authority and power has commanded the nations. The **“princes”** (Greek - *“hoi megistanes”*) are the nobility of the royal court, the officials who implement and carry out the will of the king. The **“generals”** (Greek - *“hoi chiliarchoi”*) are designated with the technical term which refers to a tribune in the Roman army, the commander of 1,000 men. These were the officers at whose command the invincible legions had marched forth to conquer the world. The **“rich”** (Greek - *“hoi plousioi”*) and the **“mighty”** (Greek - *“hoi ischyroi”*) are those who used their wealth and influence to control and direct the lives of other men. These are the **“strutters”** of whom Dr. Franzmann spoke, who have always had it their own way; the movers and shakers who have made things happen according to their own will. Now all that is past and done, for the Lord has returned. The great mass of



“The Great Day of His Wrath” John Martin - 1789

humanity is included in the final two categories, *“every slave and every free man,”* which describe the two basic conditions of ordinary people in Roman culture. The language is comprehensive. No one is forgotten or left out.

That which sinful mankind fears at this awful moment is not merely death, but judgment. It is death for which they pray as they cry to the mountains and to the rocks: *“Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the Lamb!”* Like our first parents Adam and Eve in the aftermath of their disobedience, mankind does not dare to stand before the Creator.

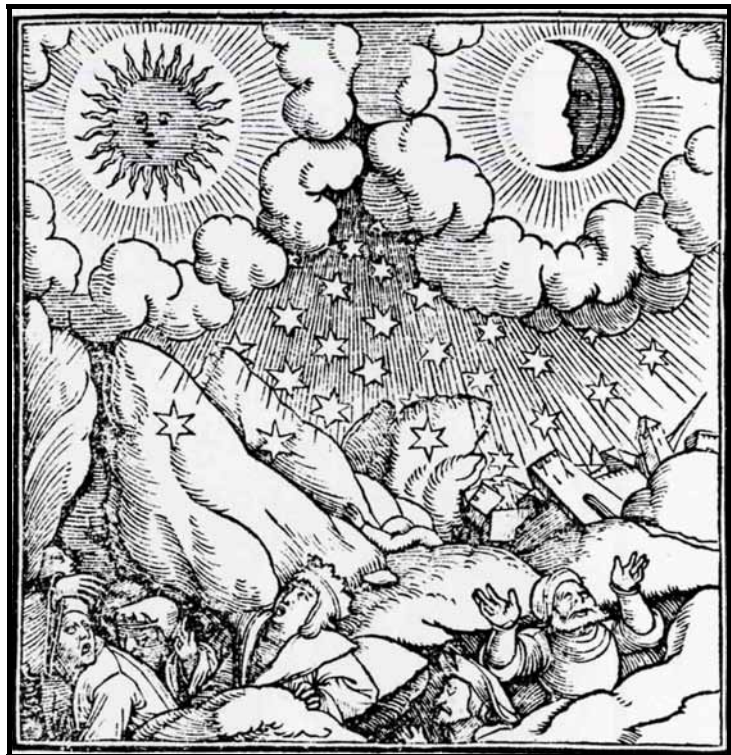
“When the cosmic, earthquake-like shaking hits the earth as the mountains begin to move and disappear, the peoples of the earth will be struck with a terror and a hopelessness that staggers the imagination and surpasses any horror yet experienced by humanity.” (Brighton, p. 173)

Mankind flees in total fear from *“the face of Him who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb.”* This combination is of profound theological significance.

“The face of Him who sits upon the throne” signifies the holy and righteous presence of God the Father before whom no sinner may stand. But at His side as the Judge of mankind stands the *“Lamb.”* The juxtaposition is unusual. When Christ is linked to the judgement elsewhere He is ordinarily entitled the *“Son of Man”* (cf. Matthew 26:64; John 5:27). The gentle figure of the *“Lamb”* is typically used to convey the thought of God’s grace and mercy in the sacrifice of His Son. But here it is joined to the fearsome concept of the *“wrath”* of God to indicate that the judgement of God the Father will be executed by His Son who is both Savior and Judge. The Son alone has the right and the authority to carry out God’s judgement because of His innocent suffering and atoning death for the sins of humanity.

“For the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand?” - “The great day” is a characteristic Old Testament designation for the end of time and the judgement of the human race (cf. Joel 2:11; Zephaniah 1:14; Malachi 4:5). Judgement is depicted as both a great day of vindication and deliverance for the people of God (Malachi 4:4-6), and a day of fearful retribution and wrath for the unbelieving world (Zephaniah 1:15,18); 2:3). The New Testament makes use of the same language to speak of the coming day of judgement. Thus, for example, Jude warns that the angels who rebelled against God: *“He has kept in darkness bound in everlasting chains for judgement on the great Day.”* (Jude 6)

All of mankind will recognize its accountability before God on that day and will tremble when confronted by His righteous anger - *“who can stand?”* The language recalls the words of Nahum 1:6 - *“Who can withstand His indignation? Who can endure His fierce anger? His wrath is poured out like fire; the rocks are shattered*



“The Great Day of His Wrath” - 16th Century Bible Woodcut

before Him.” The prophet Malachi sounds the same theme - *“But who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears? For He will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap.”* Our Lord Himself provides the only possible answer to these awful questions: *“Be always on the watch, and pray, that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man.”* (Luke 24:36)

Christian composers and poets down through the centuries have been moved to produce some of the world’s most powerful music on the basis of this scene. The magnificent *“Dies Irae”* (*“The Day of Wrath”*) written by 13th Century Franciscan monk Thomas de Celano is a notable example of such compositions. De Celano composed the piece for the Requiem Mass of All Souls Day. The text of *“Dies Irae”*



“The Final Judgement” by William Blake

has been set to music hundreds of times in scores of languages. Virtually every major classical composer has produced a version of this great text. Its every word is a thunderclap of judgement. The enduring power of the hymn can be seen from the fact that seven hundred years after its original composition, the text is still included in the vast majority of Christian hymnals today.

Dies Irae” (“*The Day of Wrath*”)
by Thomas de Celano

*Day of wrath, O day of mourning! See fulfilled the prophet’s warning:
Heaven and earth in ashes burning.*

*Wondrous sound the trumpet flingeth, Through earth’s sepulchers it ringeth
All before the throne it bringeth.
O, what fear man’s bosom rendeth
When from heav’n the Judge
descendeth
On whose sentence all dependeth*



*Death is struck and nature quaking;
All creation is awaking,
To its Judge an answer making.
Lo, the book, exactly worded, Wherein
all hath been recorded;
Thence shall judgment be awarded.
When the Judge His seat attaineth,
And each hidden deed arraigneth
Nothing unavenged remaineth.*

*What shall I, frail man, be pleading,
Who for me be interceding
When the just are mercy needing?
King of majesty tremendous, Who
dost free salvation send us ,
Fount of pity, then befriend us!
Righteous Judge, for sin’s pollution
Grant Thy gift of absolution
Ere the day of retribution.*

“*The Downfall of the Damned*” by Hans Memling

*Bows my heart in meek
 submission Strewn with ashes of
 contrition;
 Help me in my last condition!
 Worthless are my prayers and
 sighing; Yet, Good Lord, in
 grace complying
 Rescue me from fires undying.
 Thou the sinful woman savedst;
 Thou the dying thief forgavest;
 Thus to me true hope
 vouchsafest!*

*Faint and weary Thou hast sought
 me, On the cross of suffering
 bought me.*

*Shall such grace be vainly brought
 me?*

*Think, good Jesus, my salvation
 Caused Thy wondrous
 incarnation;
 Leave me not to sin's
 damnation!*

*Guilty now I pour my moaning,
 All my shame with anguish
 owning;*

*Hear, O Christ, Thy servant's
 groaning.*



"The Homecoming of the Redeemed" by Hans Memling

With Thy favored sheep then

*place me Nor among the goats abase me,
 But to Thy right hand upraise me.*

*While the wicked are confounded, Doomed to flames of woe unbounded,
 Call me, with Thy saints surrounded,*

*To the rest Thou didst prepare me On Thy cross; O Christ, upbear me!
 Spare, O God, in mercy spare me!*



“The Sealing of the Saints” by Lucas Cranach

The Servants of God

Revelation 7:1-17

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 Zebulon 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000. 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 around 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 forever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes - who are they, and where do 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.

"After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth..." - An interlude now occurs in the apocalyptic message of judgment and doom upon the earth. Two beautiful scenes of comfort and hope are offered the people of God before the fearful message of judgment continues in the vision of the seven seals. In a sense, these scenes are the Revelator's response to the desperate question which concluded the opening of the sixth seal: ***"For the great day of their wrath has come and who can stand?"*** (Revelation 6:17) The calm assurance of those whom God has numbered, sealed and arrayed in white stand in stark contrast to the world's panic and fear.

"What John sees in this interlude comforts him. After the horrifying scenes introduced by the first six seals, scenes that could have melted John's heart like wax in awe and terror, he is now lifted up by what he sees next. The two scenes, the church militant and the church triumphant, would at any time and place appear



“The Sealing of the Elect” by Albrecht Dürer

beautiful, instilling peace and hope in the Christian heart. But here, in this setting, in sharp contrast to the horrors of suffering and despair and darkness and death depicted by the first six seals, these scenes appear even more beautiful to John.”
(Brighton, p. 180)

The customary phrase “***After this I saw***” signals the change in scene and sets up the contrast between the turbulent events of the sixth seal and the vision which is to follow. The phrase does not indicate a chronological sequence between the events described in the two scenes which are in fact synchronous.

“I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth...” - A triplet of fours - four angels, four corners, and four winds - opens the scene. The threefold repetition of the earth number effectively emphasizes that the whole world is involved in that which is here depicted. The reference to the “***four corners of the earth***” does not imply a particular view of the shape or form of the planet. The writer’s concern is symbolism, not cosmology. We continue to use the same kind of language today. The “***four angels***” of the text are not further identified. They are evidently angels of a rank lower than that of the four living beings or the elders. In the rabbinic traditions of the Jews, angels are the agents of God’s providence in control of the forces of nature. The apocryphal Book of Jubilees reports that on the first day of creation the Lord God created -

“the angels of the presence, and the angels of sanctification, and the angels of the spirit of fire, and the angels of the spirit of the winds, and the angels of the spirit of the clouds and darkness and snow and hail and frost, and the angels of resoundings and thunder and lightning, and the angels of the spirits of cold and heat and winter and springtime and harvest and summer and all the spirits of His creatures which are in heaven and on earth.” (Jubilees 2:2)

Revelation 16:5 makes a similar reference to “***the angel in charge of the waters.***” Hence the concept of angels as custodians or guardians of the forces of nature would be a familiar idea to John’s readers.

The four angels are portrayed as “***holding back the four winds of the earth.***” The verb “***holding back***” (Greek - “*krateo*”) literally means to restrain by force. The concept is that of a wild beast struggling with great power to break free from the restraint that holds it firmly in place. The implication of the verb is that if the beast is unleashed, the result will be terrible destruction. The four winds are to be



“The Sealing of the Elect” by Jean Duvet

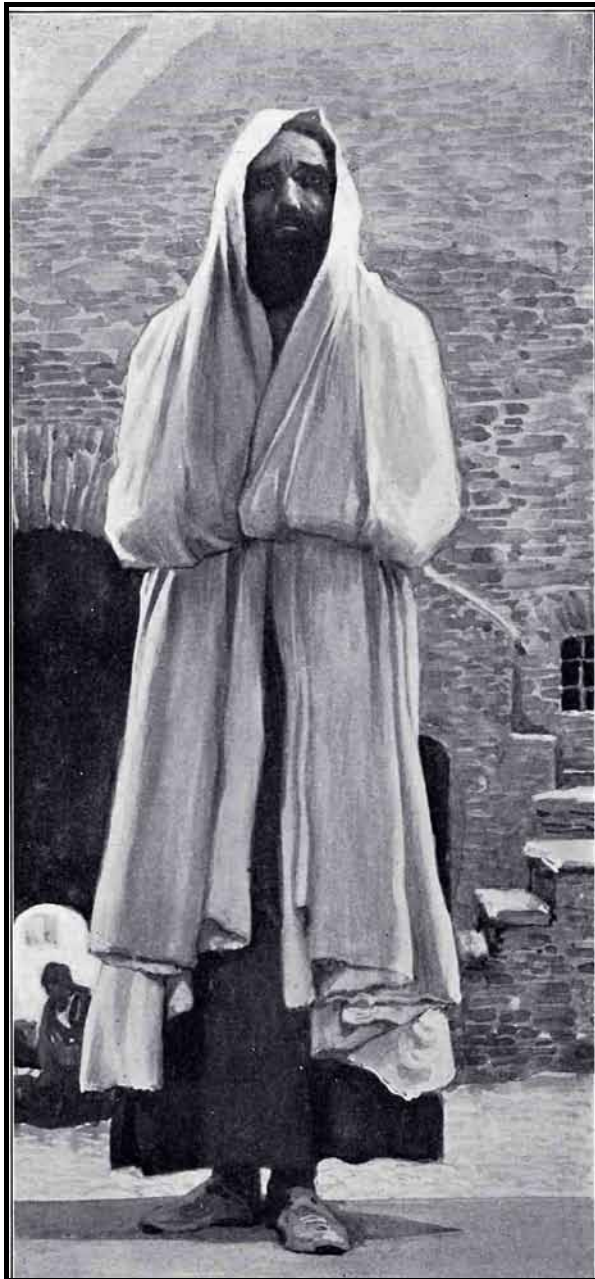
identified with the four horsemen of Revelation 6 as the agents of God's judgment upon the earth. This connection with the winds is fully consistent with the Old Testament precedents from which the horsemen themselves were drawn. It was previously noted that the imagery of horsemen in the first four seals (Revelation 6:1-8) was largely based upon Zechariah 6:1-8. There the prophet identifies the horses



“The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse” by Jacob von Steinle

with these words: ***“These are the four winds of heaven going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world.”*** (Zechariah 6:5) Daniel also speaks of ***“the four winds of heaven”*** which take the form of four great beasts coming forth from the churning sea (Daniel 7:2-3). Jeremiah uses the destructive power of the four winds as an image of God's judgment upon Elam: ***“I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of the heavens; I will scatter them to the four winds, and there will not be a nation where Elam's exiles do not go.”*** (Jeremiah 49:36). It is thus quite clear that the four winds here restrained by the angels are the four horsemen of the preceding vision. The implementation of their mission of judgment upon the earth is delayed - ***“to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.”*** The repetition again stresses the worldwide nature of the impending judgment upon all the earth and its inhabitants. Trees are specifically mentioned in keeping with the wind imagery because they are the part of the natural

world most susceptible to the destructive power of the wind. The purpose of the delay is to enable God to provide for the protection of His people. The identification of the four winds with the horsemen means that the sealing of believers now described must actually precede the unleashing of the four horsemen described in the preceding vision.



“Malachi” by J. James Tissot

“Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God.” - Ezekiel had foretold the coming of the glory of God upon Israel *“from the east.”* (Ezekiel 43:2). Judaism traditionally associated the blessings of God as originating in the east, the place of the rising of the sun. The rabbis taught that the Messiah, *“the Sun of righteousness,”* who will arise *“with healing in His wings”* (Malachi 4:2) would enter the temple through the eastern gate. Thus the coming of this angel from the east would suggest that he brings a blessing from God. The angel bears *“the seal of the living God.”* The identity of the seal is unspecified. Some suggest a signet ring which bore the mark or crest of the monarch (cf. Genesis 41:41-42) while others prefer a branding iron of some sort like those used to place the mark of ownership upon slaves. The text does not settle the debate. Both elements seem to be present: the possession of God’s seal marks this angel as one who functions with the authority and the power of God Himself and the seal will be used to place the mark of God’s ownership and protection upon the saints. The angel with the seal



*“The Sealing of the Elect” - 16th Century Bible
Woodcut*

commands the four angels restraining the winds : *“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.”* The image of a protective seal on the foreheads of God’s own in the face of impending disaster is derived from Ezekiel 9:1-6. The people of Jerusalem are about to be slaughtered because of their idolatry and unbelief. But before the massacre begins God commands His messenger to place His mark upon the foreheads of those *“who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done.”* (Ezekiel 9:4) All those who did not bear the mark of God were killed. It is interesting to note that the mark placed upon the foreheads of God’s own in Ezekiel 9 is the last letter of the Hebrew alphabet, *“taw,”* which at that time was drawn in the shape of a cross. Hence those who were sealed with the mark of

the cross were saved from destruction. The incident is reminiscent of the first Passover and the marking of the doorways in Goshen with the blood of the Passover lamb (cf. Exodus 12:7,13,22-28). The sealing of the foreheads of God’s people on earth is also mentioned in Revelation 9:1-6 where the seal serves to protect them from the scorpions-demons that arise from the abyss. In two other similar texts, Revelation 14:1,3 and 22:4, the people of God are designated as having the Name of God upon their foreheads.

The imagery of God’s seal upon the foreheads of His servants is a promise of preservation in the faith amid all of the trials and tribulations still to come. God’s people will not escape the suffering that comes upon the world as the result of sin but

they will be empowered to persevere through all adversity. The winds of judgment about to be unleashed will serve to refine and strengthen the faith of the believer. Dr. Brighton summarizes:

“The sealing here in Revelation 7 refers to the ongoing work of the Spirit through God’s Word and Sacraments by which the Christian is kept in faith and protected in godly hope through all the tribulations and sufferings and persecutions illustrated by the four horsemen. No matter how dire the dangers become for the Christian, God will not permit His people to be lost.” (Brighton, p. 187)

“Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel...” - The number 144,000, like nearly all the other numbers in the Book of Revelation, is a symbol with figurative significance. It represents the entire people of God on earth, the whole church, the full number of the elect. In the numerology of Scripture, twelve is the number of the church, based upon the number of the twelve tribes of Israel. Christ’s deliberate selection of twelve apostles was designed to mirror and reflect the tribes of the Old Testament. Thus, when a vacancy was created by the suicide of Judas, it was necessary to select a replacement so that the twelve might be restored. Twelve as the number of the church was illustrated earlier in Revelation by the twenty-four elders who surround the throne of God in heaven



“Jacob Blesses His Sons” by J. James Tissot

(Revelation 4:4). This same symbolism is reflected later in Revelation in the twelve gates and the twelve foundations of the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:12-14). The names of the twelve tribes are written upon the twelve gates and the names of the twelve apostles are written upon the twelve foundations. The twelve imagery continues in the New Jerusalem as angel called to measure the city finds that it is a perfect square of 12,000 stadia and that its walls are 144 cubits thick. (Revelation 21:16-17). The number/symbol 144,000 is obtained by squaring twelve ($12 \times 12 = 144$), thus representing both the church of the Old Testament (the twelve tribes) and the church of the New Testament (the twelve apostles). This number is then multiplied by the ordinal number 10 - upon which our system of enumeration is based



“The Sealing of the Elect” - 16th Century Luther Bible Woodcut

- cubed ($10 \times 10 \times 10 = 1,000$). This is done to signify absolute completeness. Each and every one of God’s people on earth is included in this number. The symbolic nature of the number 144,000 is further indicated by the fact that exactly 12,000 are sealed from each of the twelve tribes listed in the text. Thus the seal of God upon the foreheads of the 144,000 is a sign of assurance and promise. As the winds of tribulation blow throughout the earth, God will protect His own. None of those whom

God has chosen will be lost.

“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.” - John indicates

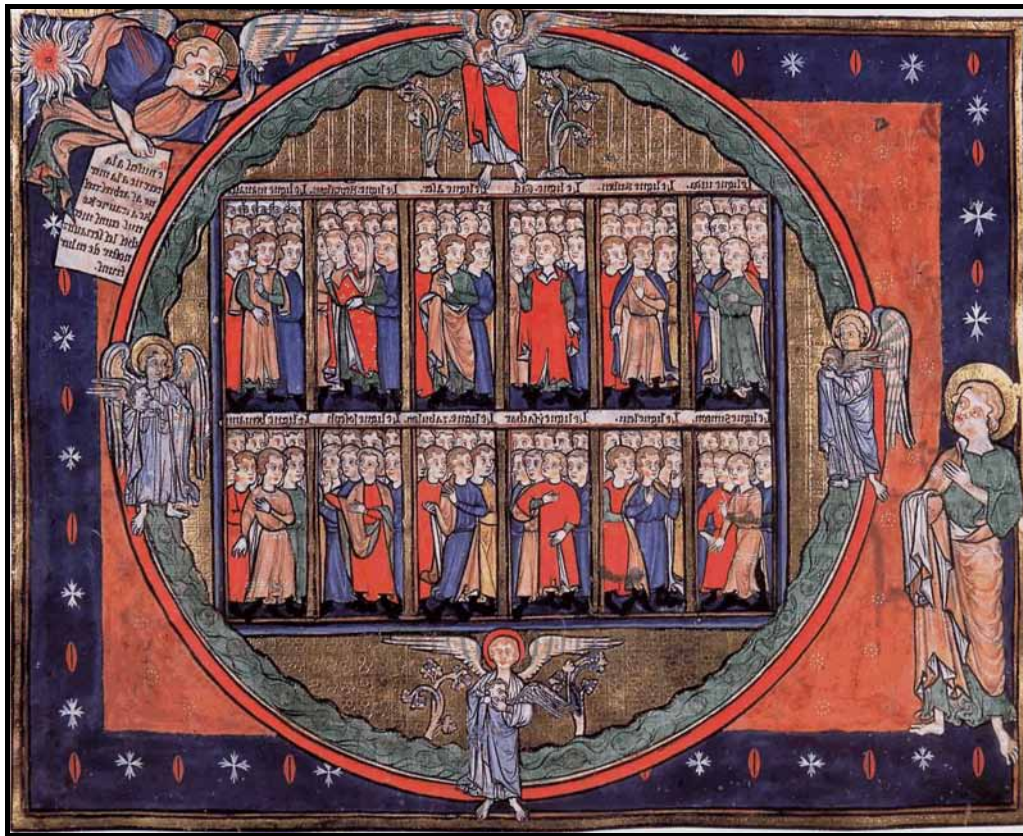
that the 144,000 will be drawn with precise symmetry from the twelve tribes of Israel. It is not uncommon for the New Testament to refer to the church, both Jews and Gentiles using the Old Testament terminology of the Children of Israel. In the Epistles of Romans and Galatians St. Paul explicitly and emphatically teaches that membership in the Israel of God is a matter of faith not blood or ethnic descent. To be a true descendant of Abraham is to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. (cf. Romans 4:1-12;

9:6-8; 11:11-27; Galatians 3:26-29). Earlier in Revelation (Revelation 2:9; 3:9) Jesus had strongly condemned those of the ***“synagogue of Satan” “who say they are Jews and are not.”*** Accordingly, the reference here is not to ethnic Israel but to all the people of God, both Jews and Gentiles. The list of tribal names and their sequence in Revelation 7 is unique in Scripture. The Old Testament includes almost twenty variations and combinations of tribes. The tribes of Dan and Ephraim are omitted in this listing. This may be the result of their traditional association with the idolatry of the Northern Kingdom in the days of Jeroboam (cf. 1 Kings 12:25-33). The tribe of Judah is listed first, although Judah was fourth in birth order (Genesis 35:23-26). But Judah is the tribe of the Messiah from which Jesus came, and thus receives the



“Judah” by J. James Tissot

position of honor in John’s list. Manasseh and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph, were both blessed by Jacob and included in the allotment of land. Manasseh, is included in the list here while Ephraim, his brother is not. The priestly tribe of Levi, which did not receive a land allotment, is included in this list. By removing Dan and Ephraim and including Levi and Manasseh, John maintains the symbolically significant twelve.



“The Sealing of the Elect” - 13th Century Bible Illumination

The enumeration of the ranks from each tribe clearly carries a military connotation. The Revelator intends to remind his audience that the church on earth must always remain the “*Church Militant*,” constantly at war with the sinful world in which it must survive. In the Old Testament, the purpose of a census was always to determine the military strength of the nation (cf. Numbers 1:3,18,20; 2 Samuel 24:1-9; 1 Chronicles 27:23). The encampment of Israel in the wilderness was arranged by God in such a way that the tabernacle was surrounded by three tribes on each side (Numbers 2:1-34). It was, in effect, a military camp as the nation moved toward the conquest of the



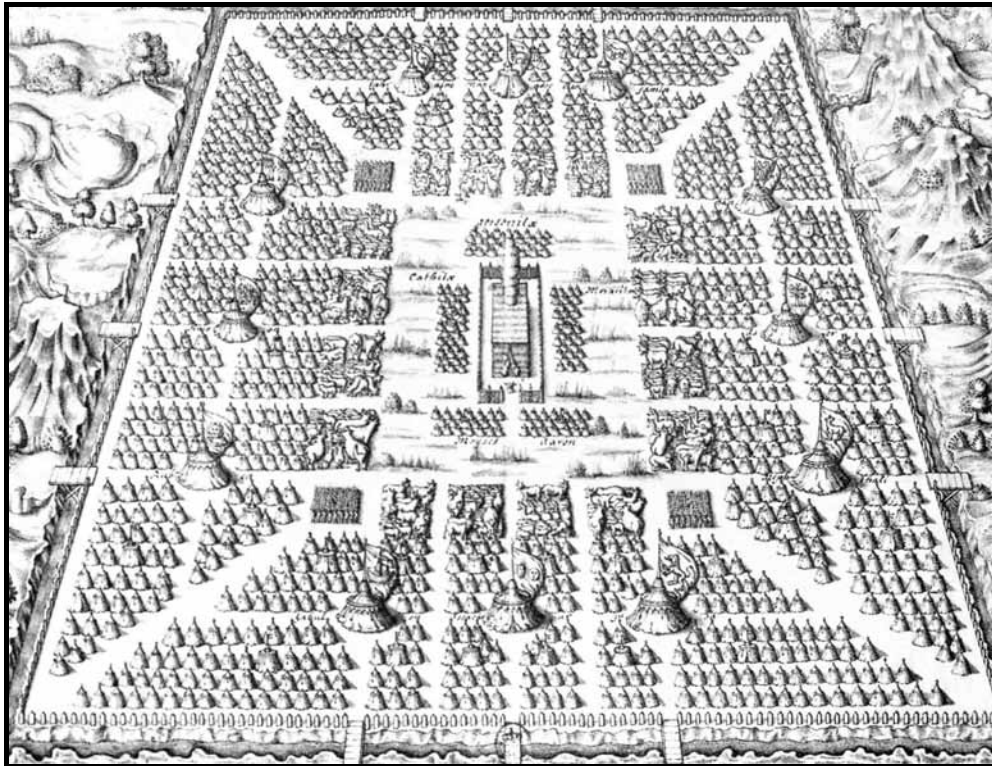
“Israel On the March Before Jericho” by J. James Tissot

promised land. This same pattern served as the order of march during the journey and the order of battle when the army of Israel went to war. Brighton concludes:

“It gives a numerical picture of God’s people on earth in perfect marching order, in perfect step. It suggests that God’s Israel, the church of Jesus Christ, as it advances to battle in the mission given it, is a perfect and complete army, fully equipped and ready to do God’s work.” (Brighton, p. 190)

“After this I looked and there was before me 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.” - The characteristic phrase ***“After this I looked”*** signals the shift to the next scene in the vision. It is important to note, once again, that the phrase does not indicate a chronological sequence of events, but the movement from one scene in the vision to the next. In this instance, the scene which now follows is simultaneous to that which preceded it. The vision of the 144,000 depicted the church militant on earth poised for battle, every rank in its proper place, sealed and protected by the mark of the Almighty God. The glorious sight of the church triumphant in heaven is now presented before our eyes. The great host stands ***“before the throne and in front of the Lamb.”*** Thus the elders, the four living beings, and

the ranks of angels which surround God's heavenly throne are now joined by the innumerable multitude of the redeemed. This unprecedented glimpse of heavenly glory is intended to strengthen and encourage God's people on earth, still locked in desperate conflict with sin and evil. The message is clear - Do not despair! Do not grow weary in the struggle! Evil has already been defeated! The victory celebration is already taking place in heaven.

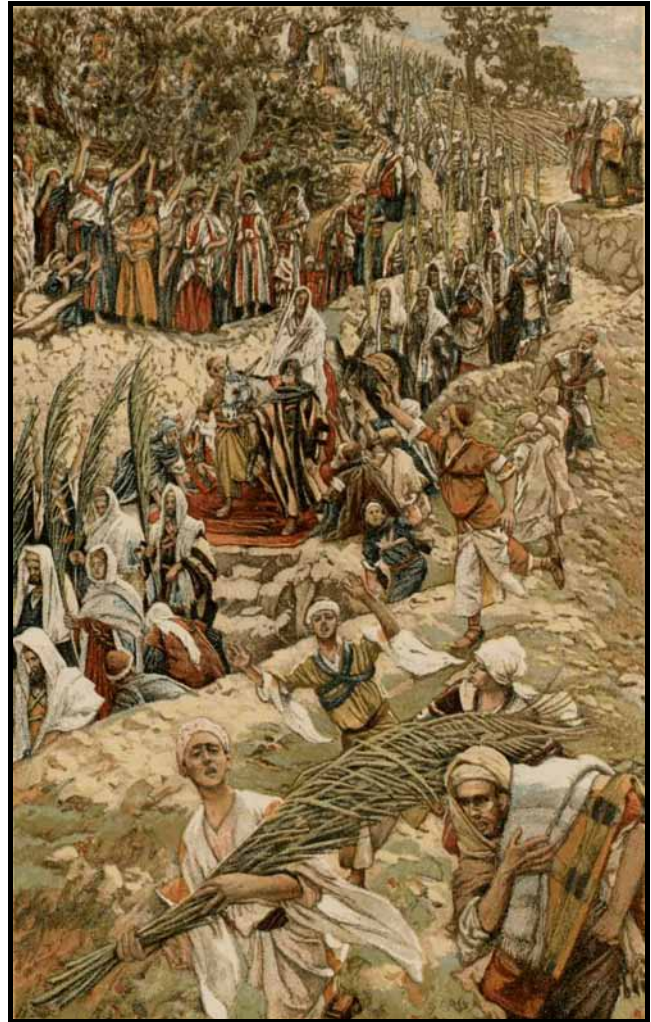


“The Encampment of Israel in the Wilderness” - 17th Century Engraving

The vast throng is described as **“a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people, and language.”** God had promised the patriarchs that their descendants would be as countless as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; 26:4; 32:12). That promise is now fulfilled as a host beyond counting fills the halls of heaven. The phrase **“from every nation, tribe, people, and language”** emphasizes the universal nature of the group. The grace of God transcends all of the petty boundaries that divide the children of Adam from one another to embrace all of humanity. The specific language is drawn from the Book of Daniel (Daniel 3-7). The magnitude of this multitude contrasts with the 144,000 who were counted in the preceding scene. This appears to be a much larger group

including all the saints now in glory from the beginning of time.

The nature of this gathering is indicated by the phrase *“They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.”* This is the victory celebration of the redeemed. This is the fifth reference in Revelation to *“white robes.”* They are worn by the 24 elders around God’s throne (Revelation 4:4) and the martyrs beneath the altar (Revelation 6:11). In the letters to the seven churches those who remain steadfast and faithful are also arrayed in white (Revelation 3:4-5, 18). The pure white robe represents the righteousness of God bestowed upon His people by virtue of the redemption accomplished in His blood (cf. v.14). Palm branches occur only twice in the New Testament, here in Revelation 7, and in the account of Christ’s triumphant entry into Jerusalem (John 12:13). The use of palms figured prominently in the Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles which commemorated Israel’s 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Leviticus 23:40; Nehemiah 8:13-17). During the intertestamental period palms were used in the celebration of the deliverance of Jerusalem and the purification of the temple under Simon Maccabaeus (2 Maccabees 10:5-8). G. K. Beale explains their significance:



*“Hosanna to the Son of David”
by J. James Tissot*

“Palm branches is an allusion to the Festival of Tabernacles. In the OT this was both an occasion of national thanksgiving for the fruitfulness of crops and a commemoration of Israel’s dwelling in tents under divine protection during the journey out of Egypt and thus a reminder that Israel’s continued existence as a nation was traceable ultimately to God’s redemption at the Red Sea and victory over the Egyptians. In 1 Macc. 13:51 and 2 Macc 10:7 palm branches signify victory over an enemy...John now applies this imagery to people of all nations, who rejoice in

their latter day exodus redemption, in their victory over their persecutors, and God's protection of them during their wilderness pilgrimage through the great tribulation." (Beale, p. 428)

The prophet Zechariah had promised that the day would come when all the nations would join with Israel in the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles, rejoicing together in the deliverance accomplished by God (Zechariah 8:18-23). This glorious vision is the fulfillment of that promise. When the crowds hailed Jesus on the road outside Jerusalem they were celebrating the triumphal entry of a king, the promised Son of David who had come to restore the kingdom and cleanse the temple. The palm branches in the hands of the countless host before the throne designate this gathering as a triumphant celebration of the victory of the Lamb in which every believer is a participant.



"Palm Sunday" by E. Deger

"And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, Who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." - The magnificent heavenly hymn of praise which began with the four living beings in chapter 4 is continued by the saints. Brighton aptly



“The Heavenly Praise of the Saints” by Albrecht Dürer

describes this ongoing doxology as “*the great Te Deum of Revelation*”. Dr. Brighton argues that this hymn provides a liturgical structure which continues throughout the Book.

“The great Te Deum of Revelation is a hymn of praise to God for his creation of all life and for his salvation of his people through the victory of the Lamb. Its stanzas are sung at various times and places throughout the Book. It begins with the singing of “holy, holy, holy,” (4:8) in the vision of God’s heavenly glory and of the ascension, coronation, and enthronement of the Lamb (4:1-5:14). It concludes with the Hallelujah Chorus in the vision of the bride of Christ at the end (19:1-10). This Te Deum presents a liturgical context which attends the prophetic message of Revelation as a response, a response from both the saints of God and the angelic hosts. It is an act of worship by which the heavenly choirs of saints and angels,

joined also by the suffering church on earth, laud and magnify God and his Christ. The lasting impression is given that this is the greatest activity and work of God's saints and angels; the voicing and singing of his praises...The picture presented in Revelation is that of one grand service of worship whose participants include the saints on earth, still suffering in warfare, as well as the saints and angels in glory. This worship also has a timeless quality, as though all who participate are engaged in the eternal service of God, regardless of whether they are, for the moment, still on earth, or whether they are in heaven. Striking too is the unity of this corporate worship; all participating voices blend in perfect harmony." (Brighton, p. 527)

Stanzas are added throughout the book by the various groups before and around the throne of God. In this verse of the song, the great multitude of the redeemed joyfully acknowledges God and the Lamb as the only source and basis of their salvation. The Greek text literally says - *"They kept on powerfully crying out with a great voice..."* The forceful language emphasizes not only the duration but also the intensity and the enthusiasm of this song of praise. **"Salvation"** (Greek - *"soteria"*) is used here in the comprehensive sense of complete deliverance from sin and all of its consequences. John adds the dimension of victory more prominent in the classical Greek use of the term to denote *"victorious deliverance from a desperate situation."* (Franzmann, p. 65) That deliverance is God's doing, not ours, as the saint jubilantly proclaim. The phrase **"Salvation belongs to our God..."** is what the grammarians call a *"dative of source"* which could be translated *"salvation is from our God..."* Their praise and gratitude is directed both to **"God Who sits on the throne and to the Lamb,"** to God the Father as the instigator of salvation and to God the Son as the agent through whom salvation was accomplished.

"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..." - The praise of the saints provokes a worshipful response from the angels, the elders, and the four living beings around the throne as the great Te Deum continues. The angels now rejoice in the mighty acts of God, as they did on the night of Christ's birth, although they themselves are not the beneficiaries of those actions. Like the 24 elders (cf. Revelation 4:10; 11:16), the angels demonstrate their reverence and awe by falling down upon their faces before the Lord. This is the proper posture of the creature in the majestic presence of the Creator.

"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!" - The angels endorse and affirm

the tribute of the multitude while adding a tribute of their own. Their song opens with a mighty **“Amen!”** Their first Amen is a declaration of agreement with that which the countless host has already proclaimed. The Greek transliteration of the Old Testament Hebrew term literally means *“This is most certainly true!”* The substance of the doxology which follows is a thundering series of seven attributions of greatness to God. **“Praise”** (Greek - *“eulogia”*) literally means *“to speak well of,”* hence, *“a word of blessing or praise.”* **“Glory”** (Greek - *“doxa”*) is the honor derived from having earned a good reputation. **“Wisdom”** (Greek - *“sophia”*) is the divine knowledge of God demonstrated in His plan of salvation. **“Thanks”** (Greek - *“eucharistia”*) denotes gratitude based on the words *“well”* and *“to give freely.”* **“Honor”**



“The Angel’s Praise” - 19th Century Engraving

(Greek - *“time”*) is the recognition and esteem due one who has accomplished an important work. **“Power”** (Greek - *“dynamis”*) is the irresistible strength, the omnipotence which pertains to God alone and which overcomes any and all opposition. **“Strength”** (Greek - *“ischys”*) refers to innate ability demonstrated in great acts of heroism and deliverance. The final Amen affirms the truthfulness and validity of all that which has been declared about God.

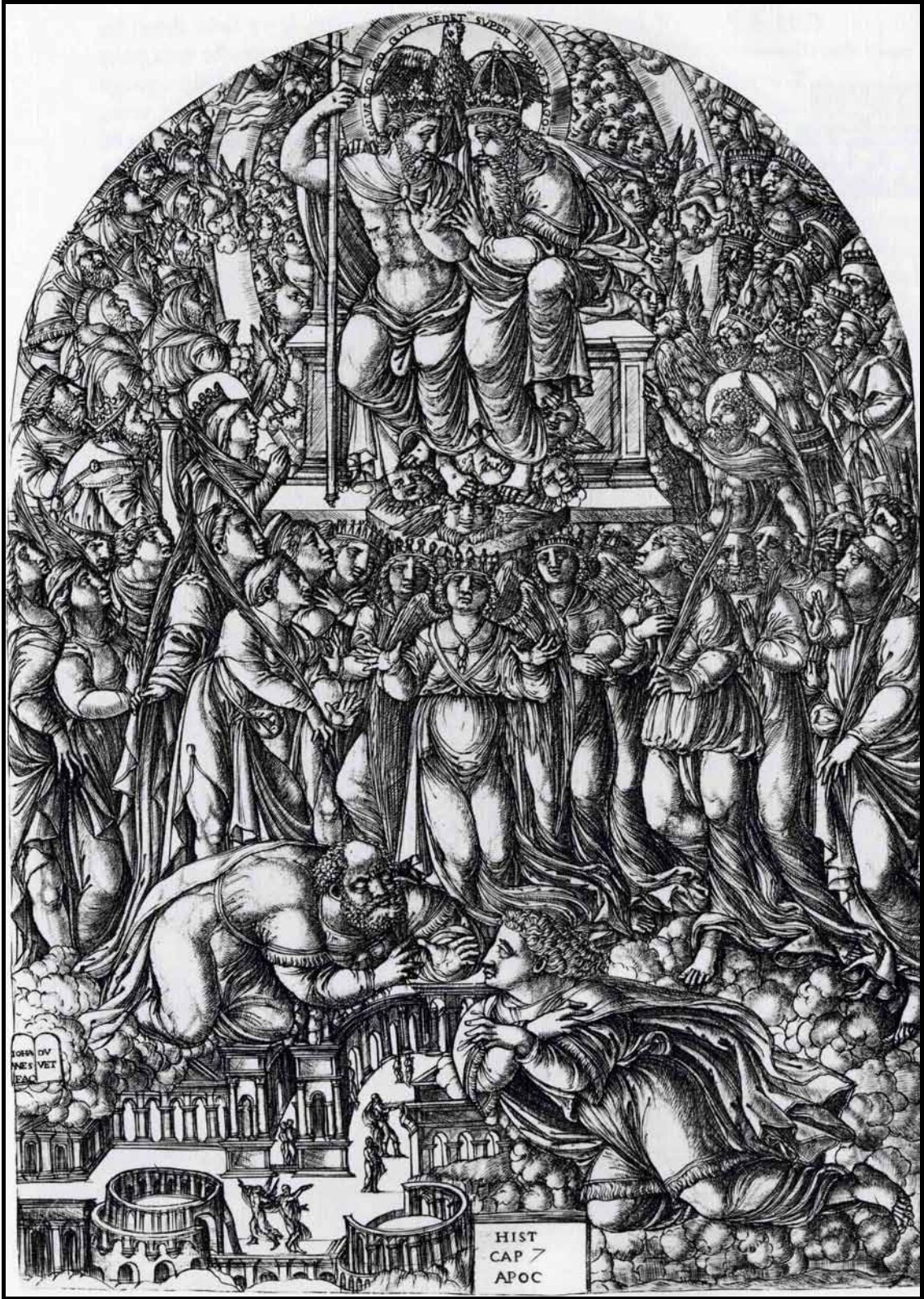
“Then one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes, who are they and where did they come from?” - An elder steps forward to pose a question to John. This is a common device in Old Testament prophecy to offer an explanation of the meaning of the vision (cf. Jeremiah 1:11,13; Amos 7:8; 8:2; Zechariah 4:2,5). Only two of the visions of Revelation receive a detailed explanation, the white robed multitude here in Revelation 7 and the judgment of the harlot of Babylon in Revelation 17. No identification of the elder is provided. He asks John about the identity and the origin of the people in this great host. John’s response indicates deference and respect. He



"The Adoration of the Lamb" by Albrecht Dürer

does not know the answer to the question and refers it back to the elder: ***“I answered, “Sir, you know.”*** John’s response is identical to that of the prophet Ezekiel in the vision of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37:3). The prophet’s inability to answer the question validates the need for an explanation of the vision. In effect John is saying, *“You will have to answer that question for me.”* The elder then proceeds to answer his own inquiry, thus providing the information for the reader.

“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.” - The Bible teaches that constant, ongoing, tribulation will characterize the entire New Testament era. St Paul warns Timothy: ***“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days...In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted while evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*** (2 Timothy 3:1,12-13) Scripture warns that the tribulation of God’s people will grow ever more intense as the world moves closer to judgment, culminating in a last desperate outburst of bitter opposition and persecution on the eve of the Last Day. ***“There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people - everyone whose name is written in the book - will be delivered.”*** (Daniel 12:1) Our Lord also refers to Daniel’s prophecy (Matthew 24:15) and warns of ***“the great tribulation”*** (Matthew 24: 21) that is coming during the evil days immediately preceding the Judgment. The bitter intensity of that ultimate tribulation will be such that ***“If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect, those days will be shortened.”*** (Matthew 24:22) It is crucial to note, however, that the great tribulation that is to come in the future is but a continuation of what has already begun. Jesus tells us that the distress surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem, God’s judgment upon apostate Israel in 70 AD, will serve as a preview of His judgment upon all of mankind at the end of time. In the same way, all of the opposition and tribulation that believers will experience throughout the New Testament era are a part of and point forward to ***“the great tribulation”*** which has already begun and is still to come. John, along with other inspired New Testament writers, argues that the fulfillment of the end times prophecies of the Old Testament began with the first coming of Christ and will continue until the day of His second coming (John 5:24-29; cf. also Colossians 1:24; 1 Peter 4:1-7,12-13) The language of the text in Revelation 7 strongly suggests that the tribulation in question here is not to be equated with or limited to the ultimate tribulation just before the End. Rather, this is the ongoing tribulation which will characterize the entire New Testament



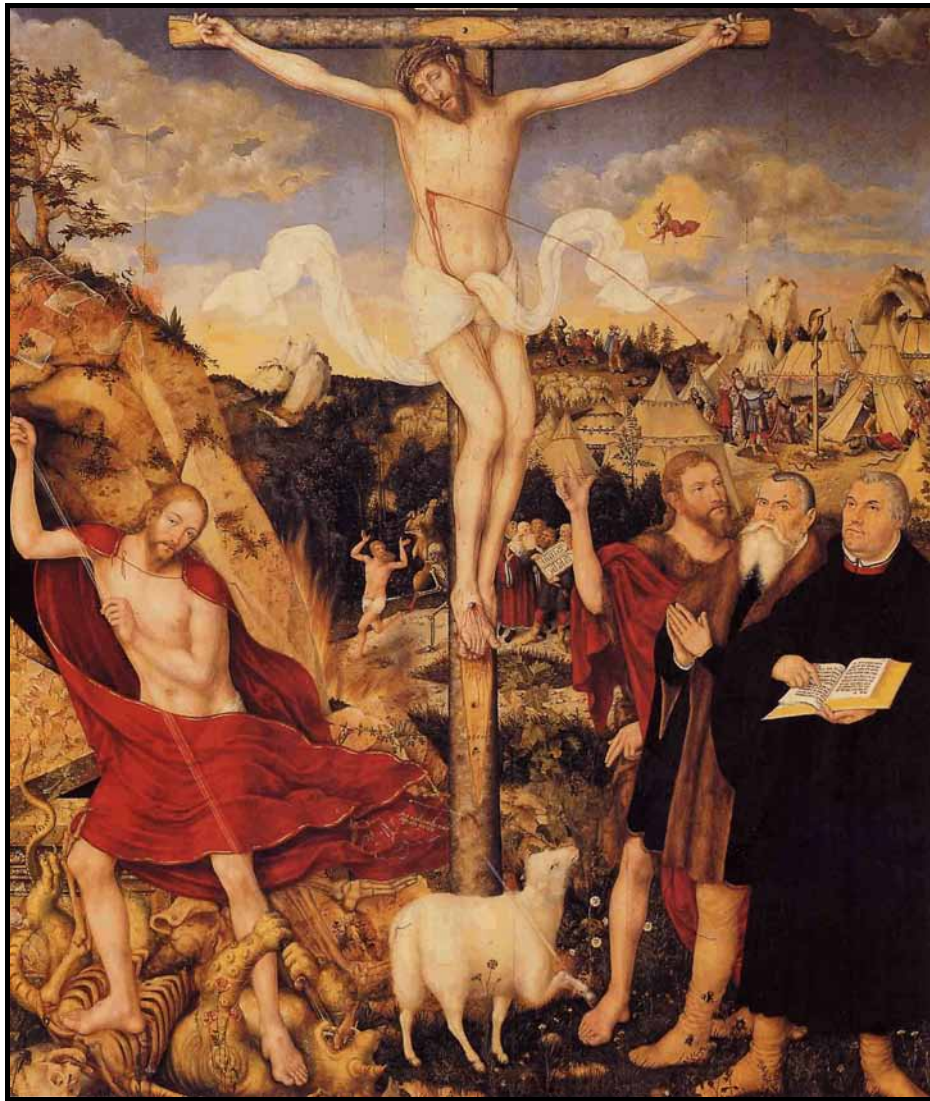
“The Adoration of the Lamb” by Jean Duvet

period. That includes the Great Tribulation immediately preceding the Last Day but is not restricted to it. The NIV translation - ***“they who have come out of the great tribulation”*** - fails to accurately reflect the present participle in the original text (Greek *“erchomenoi”*). The present participle denotes continuous ongoing action. Thus, the Greek text literally says - *“they who are coming out of the great tribulation.”* This is a continuous process which describes the deliverance of all of the saints throughout the New Testament era. The number included in this countless host before the heavenly throne is constantly changing as faithful saints are called home to glory, emerging from the struggles of the church militant to the celebration of the church triumphant. Note also the preposition ***“out of”*** (Greek - *“ek”*) which indicates that the saints who are being delivered were in the great tribulation. This contradicts notions of a secret rapture designed to enable the church to evade the tribulation period. In order to have come ***“out of the great tribulation”*** you must first have been in it. Millennialist fantasies about a seven year tribulation period preceded by a secret rapture of the saints and followed by a 1,000 year reign of Christ on earth find no support in this passage nor elsewhere in Scripture.



“The Sealing of the Elect” - The Brussels Tapestry

“They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.” - The victory of those who now stand before the throne was accomplished ***“in the blood of the Lamb.”*** Through the sacrificial death of Christ, they have received the forgiveness of their sins and are able to stand before God in the righteousness of Christ. The imagery, as always in Revelation, is drawn from the Old Testament. The prophet Isaiah had confessed - ***“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags, we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our***



*“Christ the Lamb of God Who Takes Away the Sin of the World”
by Lucas Cranach*

sins sweep us away.” (Isaiah 64:6) And yet the prophet rejoiced in the pure robe of righteousness that God had provided for His people - *“I delight greatly in the Lord, my soul rejoices in me God. For He has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness.”* (Isaiah 61:10) God’s gracious promise of forgiveness is also conveyed in the vivid imagery of color - *“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool.”* (Isaiah 1:18) John indicates that the cleansing agent in the transformation of filthy rags into pure white robes is *“the blood of the Lamb.”* As the apostle declares in his first Epistle: *“The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, purifies us from every sin.”* (1 John 1:7) The active verb - *“they have washed their robes”* presupposes the gracious activity of God.



*“The Twenty-four Elders and the Elect Kneeling Before A Vision of the Holy Lamb”
by Jan Sadeler - 1550*



“Jan Huss Burned at the Stake” by Hellquist Pinxit

“The active Greek verbs ‘washed’ and ‘made white’ (7:14) with the people as the subject suggest that the saints did the washing. They were the recipients of God’s grace, with the result that as they held to Christ in repentance and faith they washed their garments and made them white in His blood by means of Word and Sacrament. Yet there is no contradiction between passages which speak of Christians washing their robes and those that refer to Christians washing themselves or being washed. Since salvation is by grace alone, it is impossible for a person to wash himself or his clothes so as to actively achieve the forgiveness of sins (e.g. Jeremiah 2:22; Job 9:30-31). God alone can turn scarlet sins to white (Isaiah 1:18). God must wash the sinner clean from sin (e.g. Psalm 51:2,7; Isaiah 4:4)...Therefore, when God calls the people to wash themselves clean from sin (Isaiah 1:16) or “to be baptized and wash away your sins (Acts 22:16), and when Christians are described as having washed their robes (Revelation 7:14; 22:14), it is always with the theological understanding that God is the one who instills the desire, prompts the action (Philippians 2:13) and accomplishes the result: forgiven sins and eternal glory.” (Brighton, pp. 200-201)

The cleansing agent that renders these robes pure white is *“the blood of the Lamb.”* This phrase signifies the blood of Christ poured out upon the cross, that is, the redemptive death of Jesus for the sins of mankind. This may be an allusion to the prophecy of Jacob who in blessing his fourth son Judah, the father of the messianic tribe declares: *“He will wash his robes in wine, his garments in the blood of the grapes.”* (Genesis 49:11) This theme is carried though later in Revelation 19:13 where John says of Jesus: *“He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood and His Name is the Word of God.”*

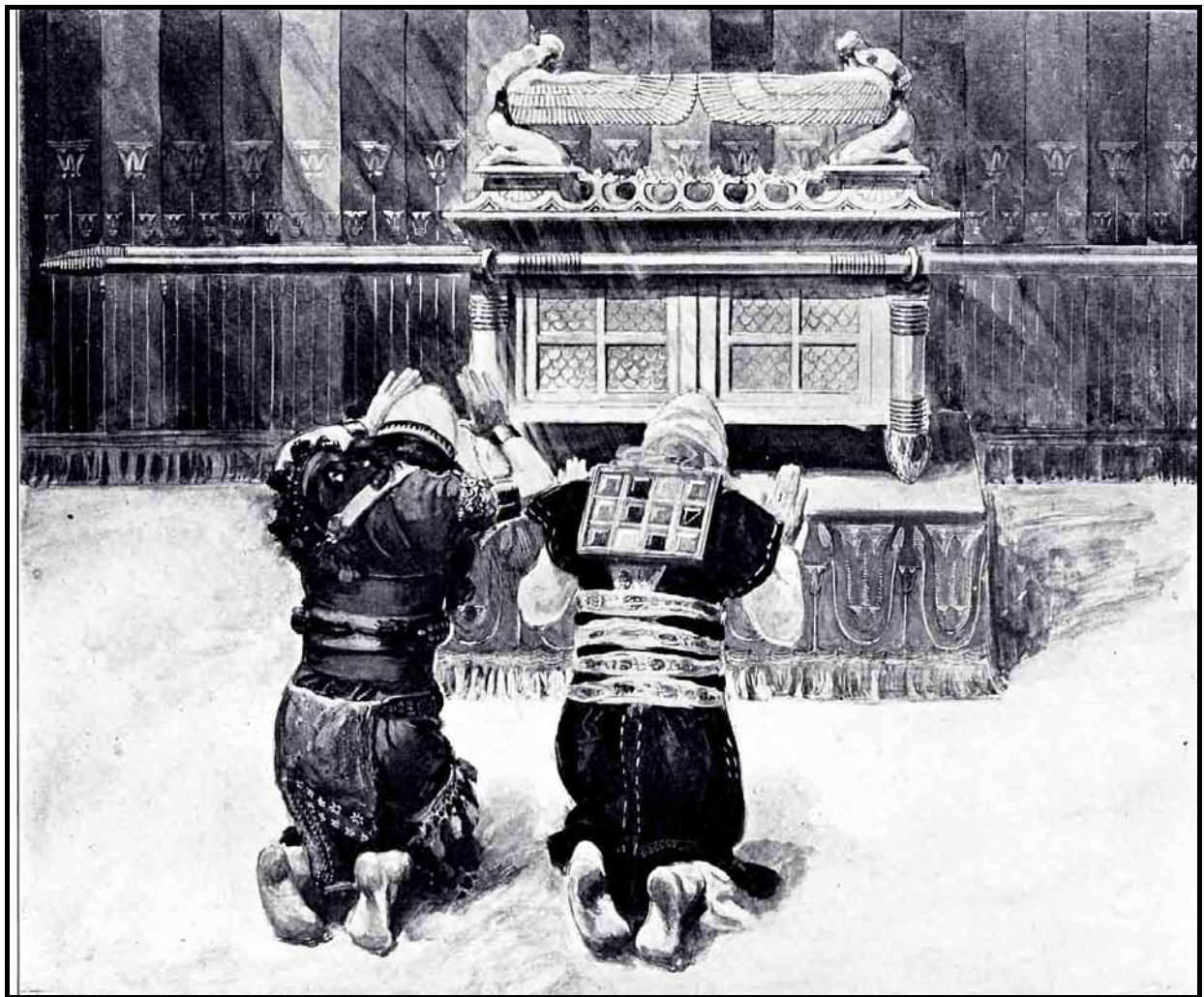
“Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them.” - A breathtaking series of ten phrases describes the bliss of the saints in heaven. This description is introduced with the conjunction *“therefore”* (Greek - *“dia touto”* - *“for this reason”*) which indicates that the blessings which the saint enjoy in heaven are the result of their having been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. The price of our entry into the heavenly realms is the death of Jesus. Through His death we receive the gift of eternal life. The first three



*“Vision of the Lamb”
10th Century Spanish Apocalypse*

phrases emphasize that which the theologians call the *“beatific vision”* (the sight which brings joy). To be in heaven is to be in the immediate presence of God, restored to the harmony and intimacy with the Creator for which we were fashioned in the beginning. Like the most exalted ranks of angels, the glorified saints are *“before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple.”* Heaven is presented as a great temple, the dwelling place of God, and all of the saints are the priests of God who worship and adore Him. Their experience of God is permanent -

it will go on throughout all of eternity. Here on earth our time is measured and affected by the passage of day and night. In heaven that will no longer be true. The phrase *“And He who sits on the throne will spread His tent over them”* is reminiscent of the language of John 1:14 - *“The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us.”* In both verses the verb *“skenoō”* (*“to pitch a tent”*) is used to express the love and intimacy which binds God to His people. The term means to live together as a family. It carries a clear physical connotation. In John 1:14 it presents the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of the divine presence which ancient Israel had once experienced in the Tabernacle, the Tent of Meeting. There, God deigned to dwell between the cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant within the Holy of Holies. Now God dwells among us in the person of His Son who is the Word of God made flesh.



“Moses and Aaron Before the Ark Within the Tabernacle” by J. James Tissot



“The Adoration of the Divine Lamb” - 17th Century German Bible Engraving

In the heavenly temple we will live forever in the immediate presence of the Father, as beloved members of His own family - He will *“spread His tent”* over us. The future tense of the verb in this phrase points forward to the Last Day and the reunification of the souls and bodies of the redeemed.

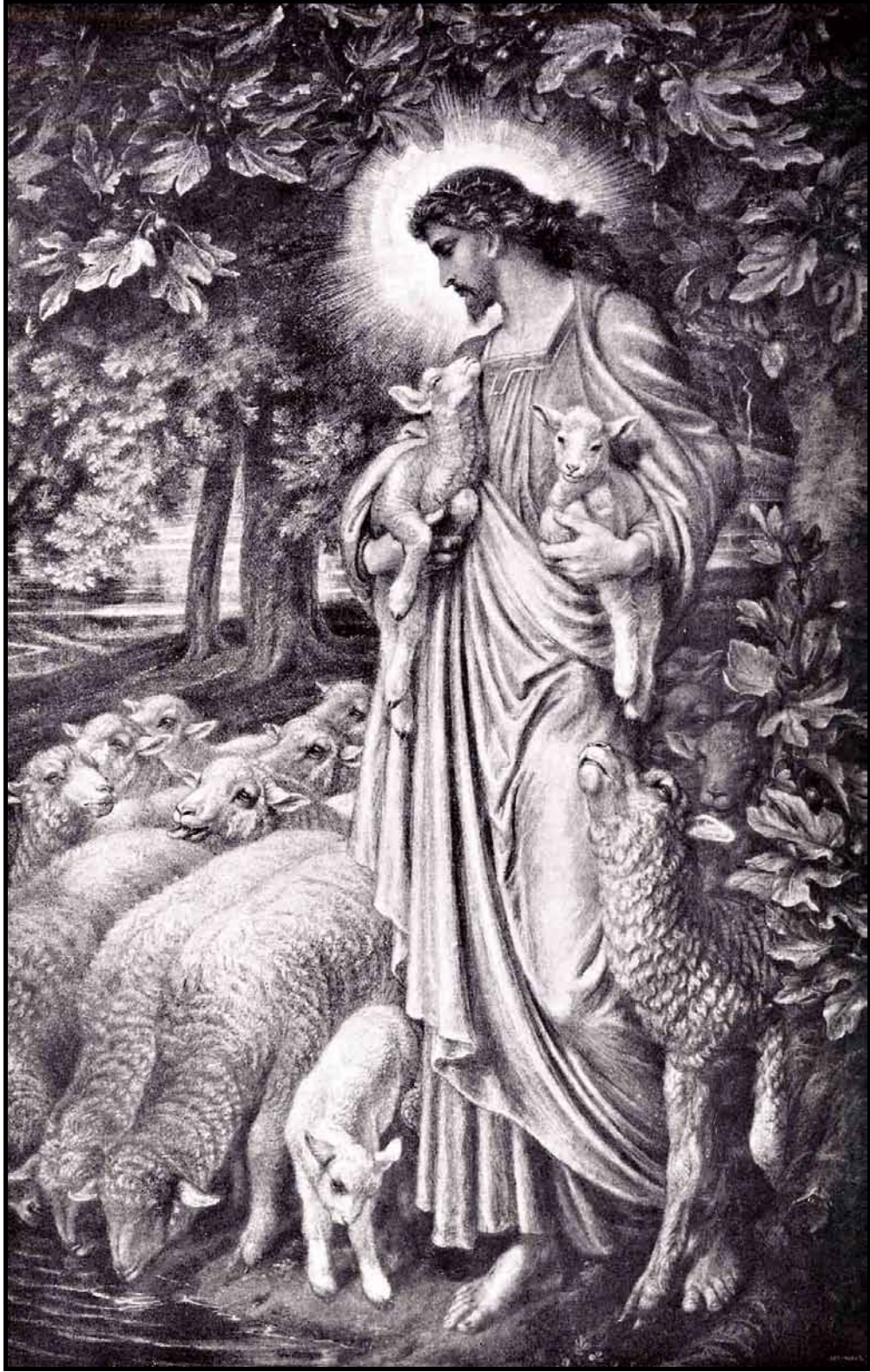
“Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat.” - The next four phrases present the bliss of heaven in terms of freedom from the effects and consequences of sin. The particular applications in the text are drawn from the reality of life in the desert like climate of Palestine. The struggle for the basic necessities of life which has characterized human existence since the Fall into sin (Genesis 3:17-19) will be over. The painful results of that struggle in hunger, thirst, and the burning heat of the sun will be no

more, the human environment having been restored to the perfection which was God's original intent for the crown of His creation. Behind the physical language of the text is the more fundamental reality of the perfect satisfaction of all man's needs, both spiritual and physical, in Christ. As Jesus declared after the feeding of the five thousand: ***"I am the Bread of Life. He who comes to Me will never grow hungry and he who believes in Me will never be thirsty...I am the Bread that came down from heaven."*** (John 6:35,41) The language of Revelation 7 is drawn from Isaiah's promise of restoration to Israel:

"Say to the captives, "Come out", and to those in darkness, "Be free!" They will feed beside the roads and find pasture on every barren hill. They will neither hunger nor thirst nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside the springs of water." (Isaiah 49:9-10)



"Safe at Home" by Reginald Knowles



“Christ the Good Shepherd Tenderly Cares for His Flock” by Frederic Shields

“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.” -

In the final verse of the chapter, John explains how God will provide for His people in this marvelous way. The explanation is introduced with the conjunction ***“For”*** (Greek - *“hoti”*). God opens the gates of heaven to His people through the ministry of His Son. The Old Testament had promised that God would care for His people as a loving shepherd protects and provides for his flock (Psalm 23; 28:8-9; 78:52; 80:1; Jeremiah 31:10-11; Ezekiel 34:11-16; Micah 7:14) The image of Christ as the fulfillment of those promises, the Good Shepherd of His people the Church, is a familiar one in the New Testament (cf. John 10:11,14; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25; 5:2-4). To be the Shepherd is to accept responsibility for the life and well-being of the sheep. ***“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep...I am the good shepherd. I know My sheep and My sheep know Me - just as the Father knows Me and I know the Father - I lay down My life for the sheep.”*** (John 10:11,14) John here adjusts the imagery in an intriguing way as the Lamb becomes the Shepherd of the sheep. The compassionate care of the Shepherd is indicated by His ability to lead the flock ***“to springs of living water.”*** In His conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well Jesus declares: ***“Whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*** (John 4:14) To live with God in heaven under the care of the Good Shepherd is to be liberated from all



“The Lamb of God” by Francisco de Zurbaran - 1630

sorrow and care - ***“And God will wipe every tear from their eyes.”*** This poignant image comes from Isaiah 25:7-8 where the prophet foretells the abolition of death and the final vindication of the people of God: ***“On this mountain He will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all the nations; He will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; He will remove the disgrace of His people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.”***

The classic Norwegian Lutheran hymn *“Behold A Host Arrayed in White”* by Hans A. Brorson captures the scene perfectly, including even the harvest imagery of the Feast of Tabernacles:

*Behold a host arrayed in white, like thousand snow-clad mountains bright;
With palms they stand. Who is this band before the throne of light?
Lo, these are they, of glorious fame, who from the great affliction came
And in the flood of Jesus’ blood are cleansed from guilt and blame.
Now gathered in the holy place, their voices they in worship raise;
Their anthems swell where God doth dwell mid angels’ songs of praise.*

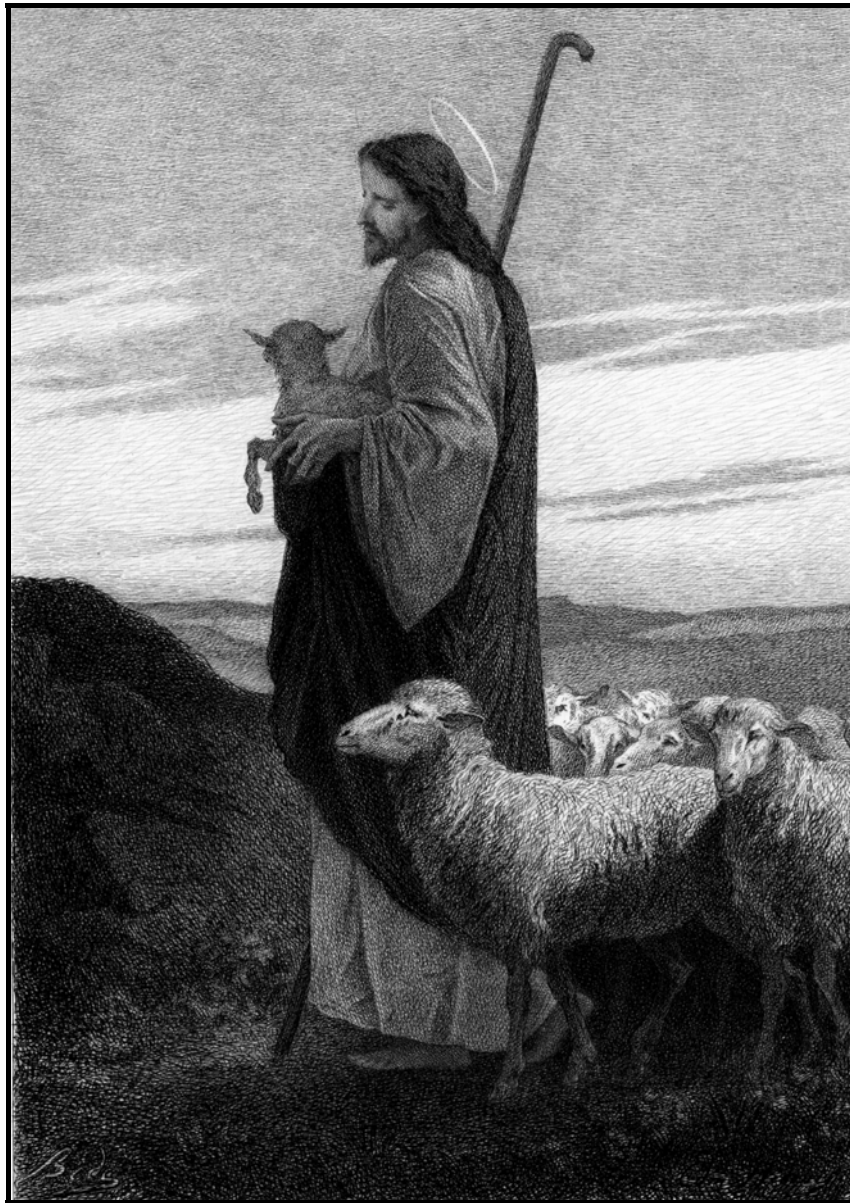
*Despised and scorned, they sojourned here; but now, how glorious they appear!
Those martyrs stand, a priestly band, God’s throne forever near.
So oft in troubled days gone by, in anguish they would weep and sigh;
At home above, the God of love for aye their tears shall dry.*



“The Homecoming of the Elect” by Hans Memling

*They now enjoy their Sabbath rest, the pascal banquet of the blest;
The Lamb, their Lord, at festal board, Himself is Host and Guest.*

*Then hail! Ye mighty legions yea, All hail! now safe and blessed for aye;
And praise the Lord who with His Word sustained you on the way.
Ye did the joys of earth disdain, ye toiled and sowed in tears and pain;
Farewell, now bring your sheaves and sing salvation's glad refrain.
Swing high your palms, lift up your song, yea make it myriad voices strong;
Eternally shall praise to Thee, God and the Lamb belong.*



“Christ the Good Shepherd” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

The Third Vision - The Seven Trumpets

Revelation 8:1 - 11:19



“The Vision of the Seven Trumpets” by Lucas Cranach

Introduction - The Vision of the Seven Trumpets

The core of the Book of Revelation is a series of three visions, each with seven parts, which depict the history of mankind throughout the New Testament era. Each of the sevens - seals, trumpets, and bowls - show the hand of God at work in history and call humanity to repentance before the end. The number (3) and the structure (7) of the visions is consistent with the numerological design of the Book as a whole and serve to affirm the sovereign control of God over all of history.

The vision of the seven seals confronted us with the harsh reality of a sinful world reeling beneath the righteous judgment of God throughout the interval between the first and second comings of our Lord. The successive opening of each of the seals upon the Lamb's command assured believers that the sovereign God remains firmly in control of earth's apparently tumultuous and chaotic events. While saints and angels sing the triumph song before the throne in heaven, God's judgement upon rebellious mankind unfolds according to His plan and purpose. The interlude after the opening of the sixth seal offered the assurance to saints still in tribulation on earth that all those who have "***washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb***" (7:14) will share in the victory already being celebrated in the heavenly courts. The opening of the final, the seventh seal, serves as the link to the vision which follows. The vision of the seven trumpets reiterates and reinforces the message of the seven seals. It pertains to the same time period - the interval between the first and second comings of Christ. Once again, it does not focus on particular individuals or historical events but presents recurring patterns, conditions, and circumstances. The point of the three visions, and the seven scenes within each of them, is not chronological sequence, but the reinforcement and development of consistent themes. The vivid symbolism of the vision is designed to strike fear into the hearts of the impenitent while offering comfort and reassurance to the believer. The progression from scene to scene in each of the three visions drives home the dual message over and over again. Judgement is at hand. The evidence of its imminence is all around us. Sinner repent! Believer persevere!



"Angel Heralds" - 19th Century Engraving



“The Vision of the Seven Trumpets” by Matthias Merian

The Opening of the Seventh Seal and the Golden Censer

Revelation 8:1-5

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.

“When He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.” - The act of the Lamb in opening the seventh seal serves both to conclude the preceding vision and introduce that which follows. The significance of the transition is indicated by the “great hush and breathless silence” (Mounce, p. 178) which falls



"The Vision of the Seven Trumpets" by Albrecht Dürer

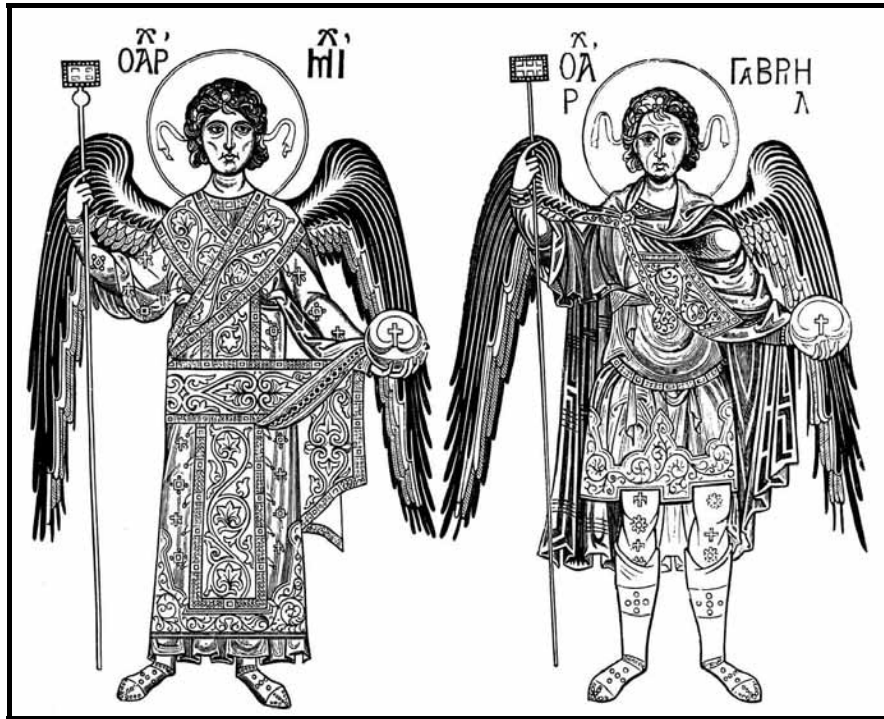
over heaven. The reverberation of the vast multitudes' song of praise is replaced by a tense and expectant quiet. This dramatic pause has the effect of building suspense and focusing the attention of all on the next scene. In the Old Testament, reverent silence was the appropriate response of the creature in the presence of the holy God. ***“But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him.”*** (Habakkuk 2:20) ***“Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling.”*** (Zechariah 2:20) ***“Be silent before the Sovereign Lord, for the day of the Lord is near.”*** (Zephaniah 1:7) ***“Be still and know that I am God.”*** (Psalm 46:10) Dr. Brighton summarizes:

“The silence enjoined upon God’s people of the Old Testament was an act of faith and worship before the awful majesty of God’s action of judgment toward their enemies, which actions would also save His people. The judgment and salvation brought about in the great day of Jahweh moves God’s saints to a fearful and awe-inspired silence before the mighty God as He acts for his people.” (Brighton, p. 213)

The silence persists ***“for about a half an hour.”*** This approximate time measure does not indicate precise temporal duration but simply a relatively brief span of time. The Old Testament Book of Daniel uses similar language to describe the prophet’s reaction to impending doom of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel stands in troubled silence ***“amazed for about one hour”*** (Daniel 4:19). This brief period of silence underscores the gravity of the impending crisis.

“And I saw the seven angels who stand before God and to them were given the seven trumpets.” - The identity of these seven angels has elicited considerable discussion. The use of the definite article, ***“the seven angels,”*** implies that they are well-known or familiar figures. This would suggest a connection to the prominent Hebrew tradition of seven archangels who stood before the throne of God in heaven. The apocryphal book of I Enoch speaks of these seven mighty angels and defines each of their roles:

“Then Uriel said to me...So I Enoch saw the vision of the end of everything alone; and none among human beings will see as I have seen...And these are the names of the holy angels who watch: Suru’el, one of the holy angels - for he is of eternity and of trembling. Raphael, one of the holy angels, for he is of the spirits of man. Raguel, one of the holy angels who take vengeance for the world and for the luminaries. Michael, one of the holy angels, for he is obedient in his benevolence over the people and over the nations. Saraqa’el, one of the holy angels, who are set over the spirits of mankind who sin in the spirit. Gabriel, one of the holy angels who oversee the Garden of Eden, and the serpents and the cherubim.” (I Enoch 19:1, 20:1-7)

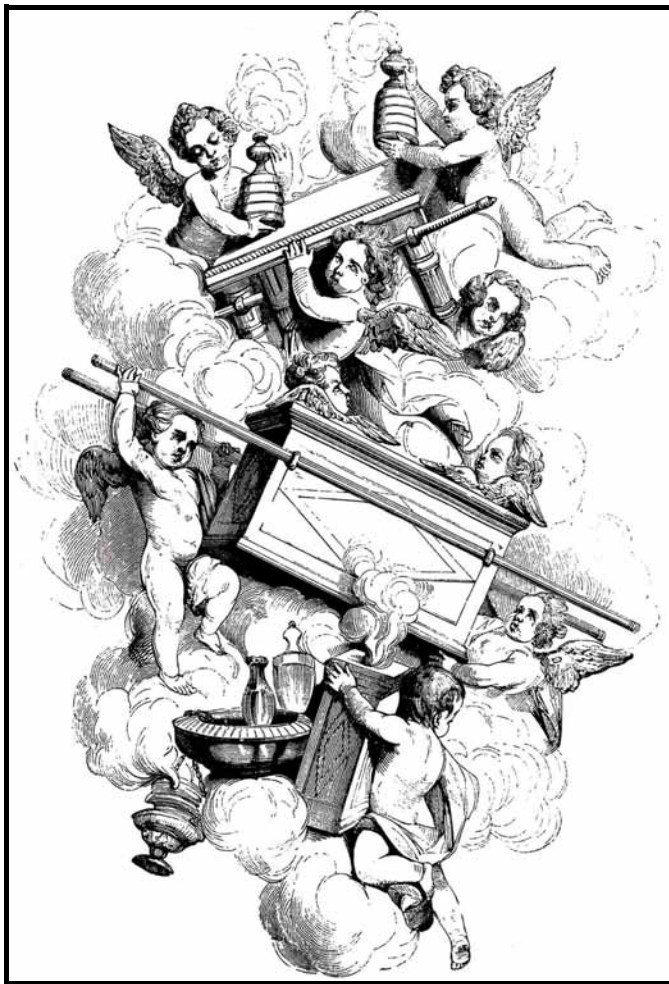


“The Archangels Michael and Gabriel” - Byzantine Mosaic

This view occurs in a variety of forms in other apocryphal books of the period. In the Book of Tobit, for example, the angel Raphael identifies himself as one of seven holy angels who enter into the presence of God and offer up the prayers of God’s people (Tobit 12:12-15). Only two of the seven - Michael (Daniel 10:13,21; 12:1; Jude 9; Revelation 12:7) and Gabriel (Daniel 8:6; 9:21; Luke 1:19,26) are mentioned in the Bible. Neither the Old Testament nor the Apocrypha use the term “*archangel*.” Nor does the term occur in Jewish apocalyptic writing until nearly the end of the first century. It does occur twice in the New Testament: in 1 Thessalonians 4:6 - “*the voice of the archangel;*” and Jude 9 - “*the archangel Michael.*” Thus, the explicit witness of Scripture identifies only one archangel - Michael. Contrary to popular opinion, the Bible does not use the term archangel in reference to Gabriel whom Scripture identifies - in language very similar to that of this verse - as “*the one who stands before God.*” (Luke 1:19) John does not indulge in the speculation or elaboration characteristic of rabbinic tradition. He simply refers to “*the seven angels who stand before God.*” These magnificent creatures are now called upon to play a role in the unfolding drama of redemption and judgment - “*to them were given seven trumpets.*”

Trumpets were used in the Old Testament to summon the people for worship and for war. They signaled both triumph and catastrophe, warning and celebration. In a

positive context, the call of the trumpet gathered the people at the tabernacle and later the temple (Numbers 10:3,10) and heralded the coronation of a king (1 Kings 1:34,39; 2 Kings 9:13). But most prominently the blast of the trumpet sounded the alarm in time of war and warned of impending danger. Hence the prophet Amos declares: ***“When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble?”*** (Amos 3:6) The clear clarion call of the trumpet signaled the movement of troops upon the field of battle (1 Corinthians 14:8). Trumpets brought down the walls of Jericho (Joshua 6:1-20). Trumpets came to be associated with the impending judgment of God and the destruction of His enemies (Judges 7:16-22; Jeremiah 4:5-21; 42:14; 51:27; Ezekiel 7:14; Hosea 8:1; Joel 2:1; Zephaniah 1:16). Ultimately, the sound of the trumpet will signal the coming of the final judgment (1 Thessalonians 4:16). Accordingly, the seven trumpets given to the angels before the throne reinforce the impression of impending judgement and heighten the silent tension of the moment.



“Let My Prayers Be Set Forth before Thee As Incense” - 19th Century Lithograph

“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar.” - The appearance of ***“another angel,”*** in addition to the seven before the throne, precedes the sounding of the judgment trumpets. This interlude serves to provide an introduction to and set the tone for the trumpet vision which follows. The angel is carrying ***“a golden censer.”*** The Greek term ***“libanoton”*** literally means frankincense. In this instance the adjective ***“golden”*** tells us that the term refers to the implement which held the incense, not the incense itself. In the furnishings of the tabernacle and the temple fire-pans, and vessels of brass, silver and gold were used in the offering of sacrifices upon the altar of incense (Exodus 27:3; 1 Kings 7:50; 2 Chronicles 4:22; 2 Kings 25:15). On the day of Atonement, the High

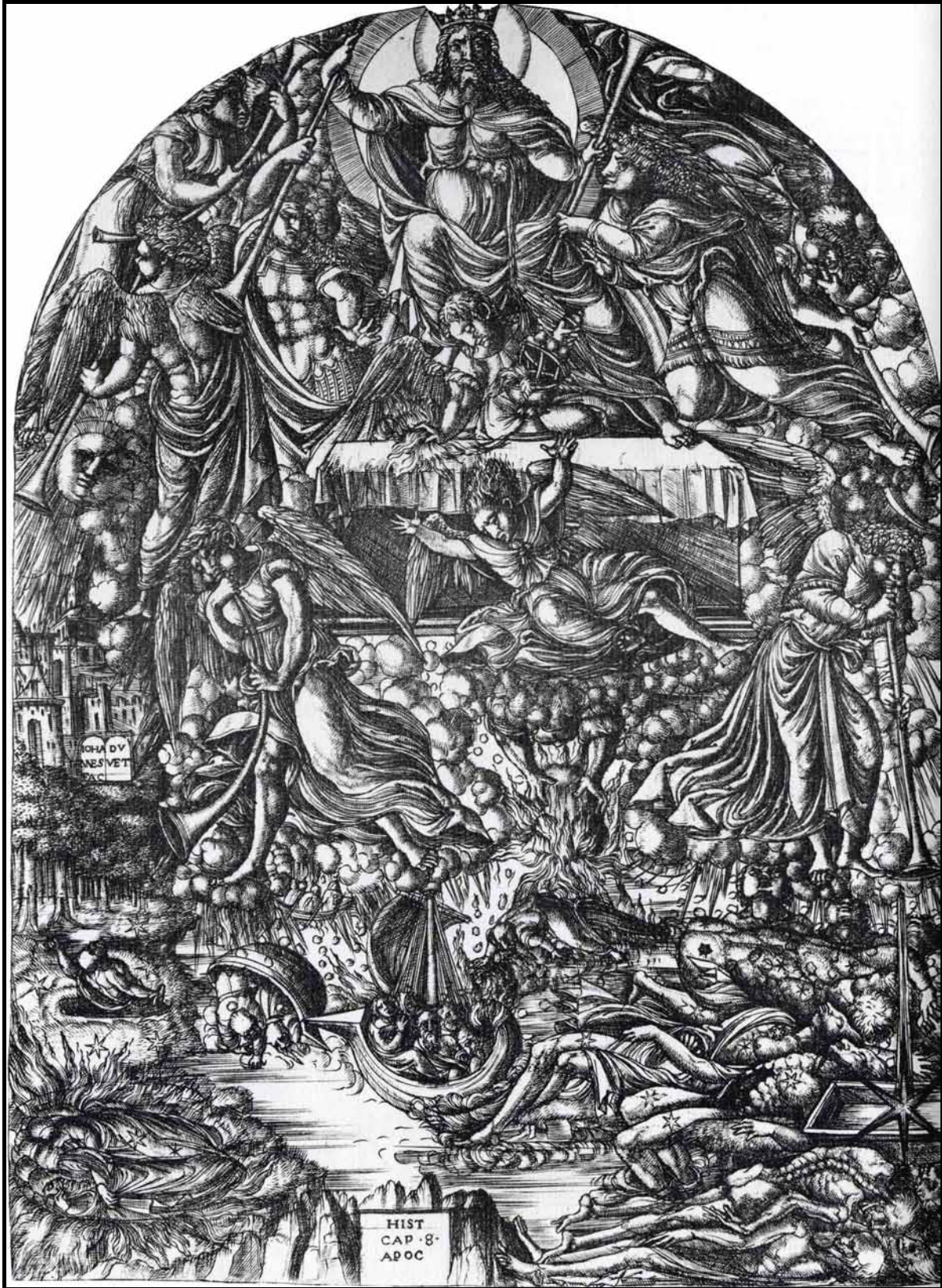


*“The High Priest With the Golden Censer”
19th Century Illustration*

Priest would enter the Holy of Holies with a censer full of burning coals from the altar upon which the incense would be burned before the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant (Leviticus 16:11-14). Incense played a significant role in the worship of Israel. In the imagery of the Old Testament, the sweet smell of the burning incense ascending toward heaven represented divine acceptance of the prayers and offerings of the people (Genesis 8:21; Leviticus 2:1,2; Philippians 4:18). Thus the plea of the psalmist which has been incorporated into the evening liturgy of Vespers: *“Let my prayers rise before Thee as incense; and the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice.”* (Psalm 141:2) John utilized this ancient image in his description of the twenty-four elders surrounding the throne of God: *“They were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”* (Revelation 5:8)

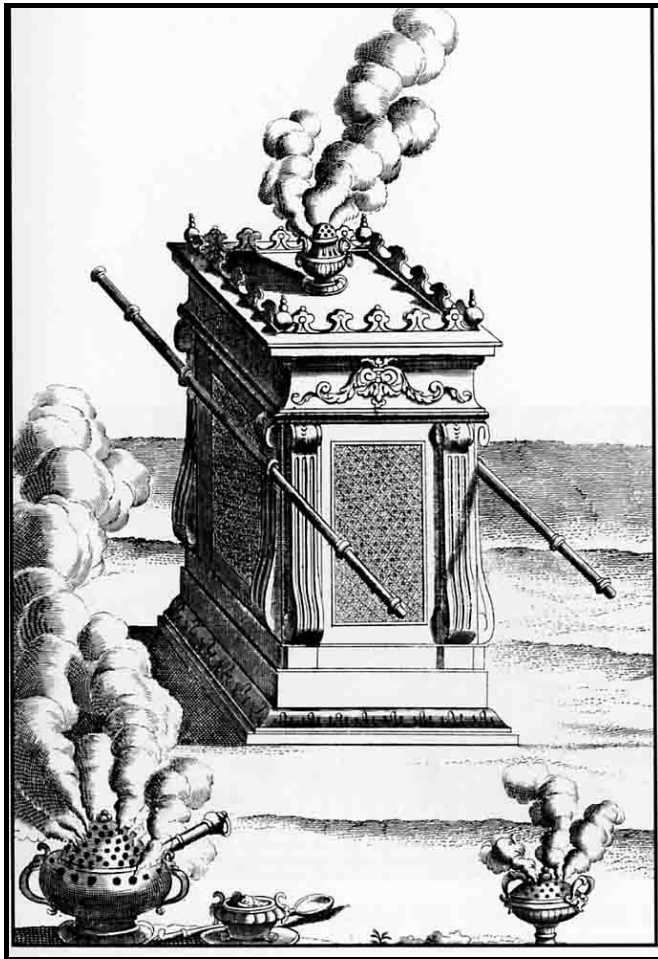
The angel with the golden censer takes his place before the altar. In tabernacle and temple there were two altars, the altar of sacrifice and the incense altar. In the imagery of Revelation only one altar, the incense altar is mentioned. Dr Brighton offers this compelling explanation for the absence of the altar of sacrifice:

“There does seem to be only one altar before God in heaven (cf. Isaiah 6:6), and even though this one altar could refer to both a sacrificial and an incense altar, most



“The Vision of the Seven Trumpets” by Jean Duvet

probably it refers to an incense altar. A chief argument for this is that Jesus, the Lamb, has already been sacrificed, and is Himself a constant reminder of the sacrificial altar, namely His cross. There thus would be no need for a sacrificial altar in heaven (see Hebrews 9:11-14; 10:11-18). But there would still be a need for an incense altar, because the prayers of saints in heaven and on earth are continually rising to God as incense.” (Brighton, p. 158)



“The Incense Altar and Its Vessels”

“He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne.” - The angel does not act of his own volition or power. The abundant incense which he offers upon the altar **“was given”** to him. Although in this instance the giver is unidentified, we may assume that God is the source of the incense. This term occurs frequently in Revelation and whenever it is used elsewhere in Revelation, God is the source of the gift. The adjective **“much”** emphasizes that the gift provides all that is needed and more to accomplish its task. There is no shortage here! The angel is given **“much incense”** so that it may be added to the prayers of the saints empowering those prayers and rendering them effectual before God and acceptable to Him. That point is clearly shown in the sentence which follows: **“The smoke of the incense,**

together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel’s hands.” The fact that the sweet smelling smoke of the incense **“went up before God”** indicates His acceptance of those prayers which are combined with the incense. That which renders the prayers of God’s people effectual and acceptable is the atoning merit of Jesus Christ.

“There can be no doubt that this incense is the merit of Christ...His atoning merit

*makes our prayers, tainted with sin as they are, acceptable to God...When John here speaks of incense that is offered up **with** our prayers, he is teaching us in symbolic language the same truth which Jesus expressed when He said, “**My Father will give you whatever you ask in My Name.**” (John 16:23) (Becker, pp.135-136)*

The incense interlude offers encouragement to the people of God in the face of impending judgment. Don't be afraid. Do not despair. God will hear and answer your prayers in the Name of Jesus. No matter how difficult your tribulation becomes God is with you and will enable you to persevere and overcome.

“Then the angel took the censer, filled it fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.” - The message of reassurance abruptly gives way to that of judgement.

Earlier, the martyrs beneath the altar had prayed for the vindication of the holiness and righteousness of God in the judgement of the wicked - *“How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”* (Revelation 6: 10). The dreadful imagery which follows is God's answer to their prayer. The golden censer is refilled with fire from the altar and that fire is cast down upon the earth. While saints may take comfort from the knowledge that God hears their prayers, the unbelieving world remains subject to the terror of His wrath. The fire on the altar is now the consuming flame of God's judgement (cf. Ezekiel 10:2). The verb *“hurled”* (Greek - *“ebalen”*) indicates the violent intensity and the sudden swiftness of this judgement. This judgement fire does not gently waft it way to earth - it is flung down upon unsuspecting and impenitent mankind with lightning speed. Ominous silence is replaced with the cacophony of cosmic chaos - *“and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake.”* These are the signs which accompanied the coming of God upon Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19). Throughout Revelation they signal the awe and majesty of God and warn of the arrival of His judgement (cf. Revelation 4:5; 11:19; 16:18).



“The Seven Trumpets” - Luther Bible Woodcut



“The Vision of the Seven Trumpets” - 15th Century Bible Illumination

The Sounding of the First Four Trumpets

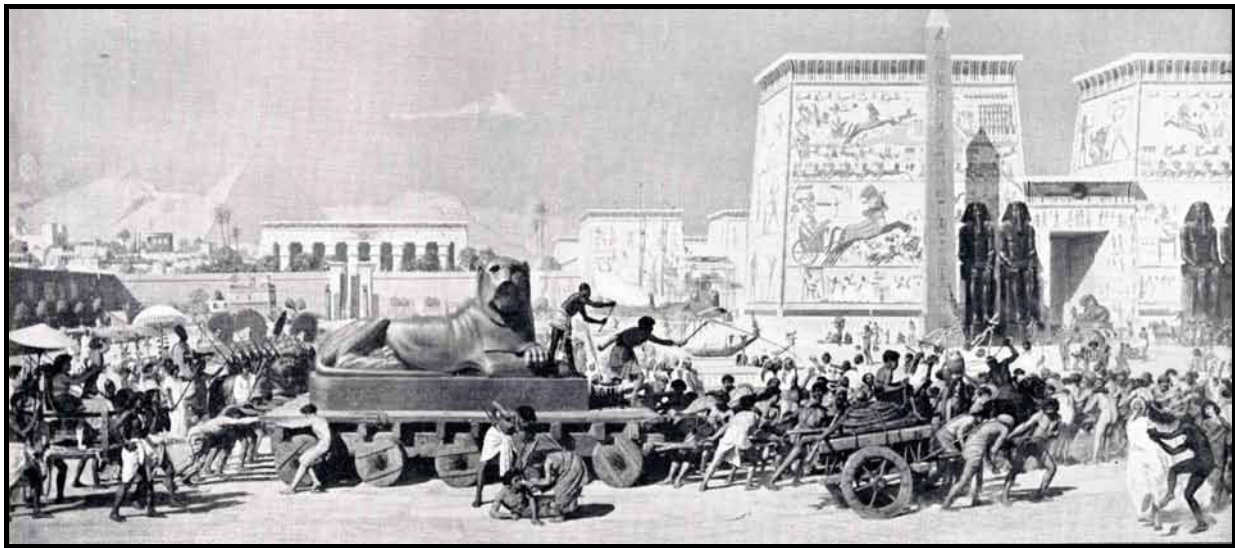
Revelation 8: 6-12

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. 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. 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. 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..

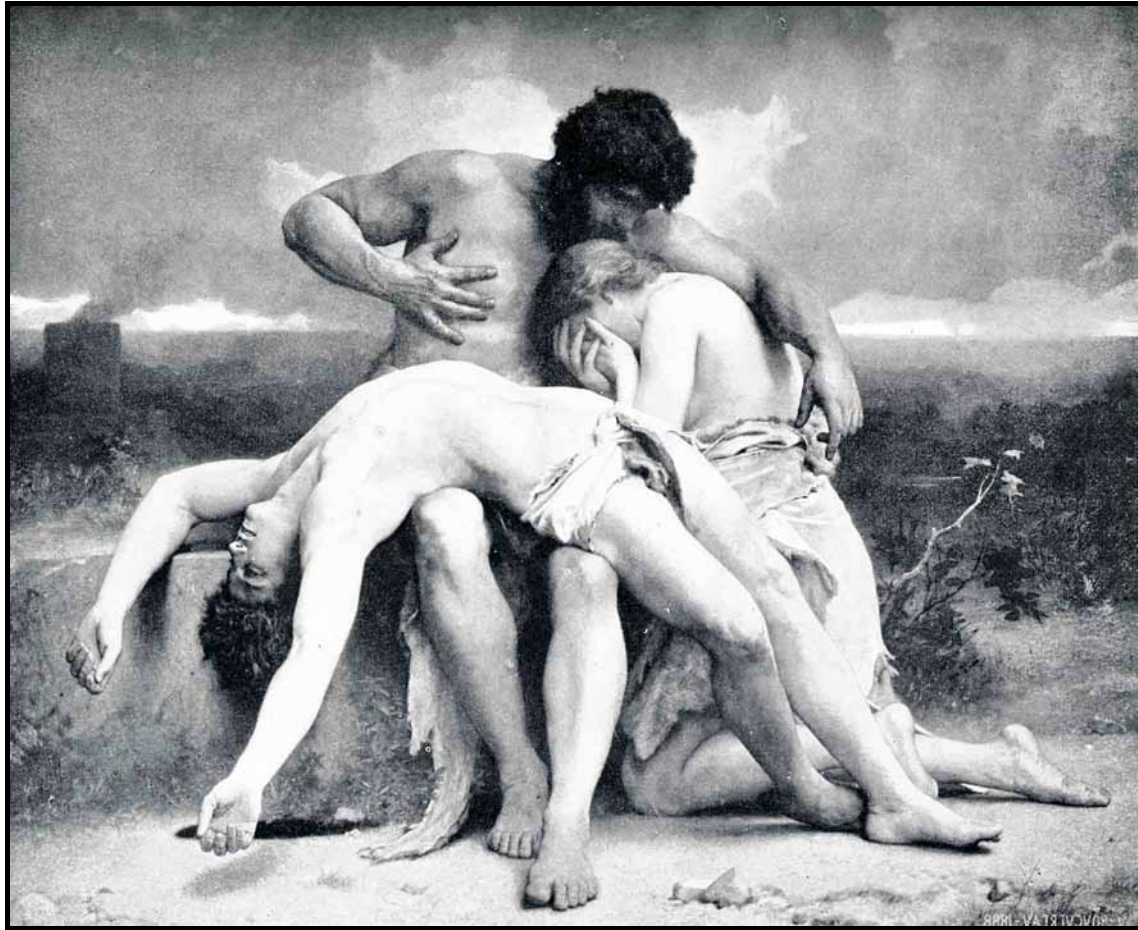
“Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.” - With the conclusion of the golden censer interlude, the text returns to the angels with the seven trumpets. The stage has been carefully set - now the trumpets will finally sound. The commentators note the similarity between the first five trumpet judgements and the plagues which God sent upon the land of Egypt:

the first trumpet (8:7) — Exodus 9:22-25
the second and third trumpets — Exodus 7:20-25
the fourth trumpet — Exodus 10:21-23
the fifth trumpet — Exodus 10:12-15



“Israel in Bondage in Egypt” by Frederic Leighton

As the plagues of Egypt were not designed to destroy the land, but to lead pharaoh to repentance and change of heart so also the trumpet judgements of this vision are “warning judgements” designed to lead sinful mankind to repentance. The plagues of Egypt did not harm the Israelites and resulted in their deliverance. So also the trumpet judgements will not harm the people of God but are a sign of the imminence of their salvation. These judgements, so painful and devastating for the sinful world should serve to constantly remind Christians that Jesus is coming again soon and spur



“The First Death” by Adolphe Bourguereau

us on to constant readiness..

The first four trumpets, like the first four seals in the previous vision, are linked together thematically and structurally. They focus on the judgements of God as they are manifested by the upheavals and disasters in the world of nature. Man’s fall into sin cursed the entire universe. The physical world had been designed by a loving Creator as the perfect environment for man, the crown of His creation. The disruption of mankind’s relationship with the Creator had dire consequences for the natural world. In Romans chapter 8, St. Paul declares:

“The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought

into the glorious freedom of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth, right up to the present time.” (Romans 8:20-22)

The physical world is unraveling under the impact of sin. That disintegration continues to complicate man’s struggle to survive, just as God had warned father Adam that it would in the immediate aftermath of the fall (cf. Genesis 3:17-19). Fallen man’s selfishness and sin only serves to hasten the destruction of the natural world. Jesus also urged his disciples to discern the hand of God’s judgement in the devastation and death of natural disasters. He warned them to pay careful attention to the *“signs of the times”* so that they might be ever prepared for the day when He would come again. Natural disasters are prominent among the signs promised by our Lord. The chaos and upheaval of the world of nature throughout the New Testament era should serve as a constant reminder that this world is passing away and that Jesus is coming again.

“There will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences in various places and fearful events and great signs from heaven. There will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars. On the earth, nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea. Men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world, for the heavenly bodies will be shaken.” (Luke 21:11,25-28)

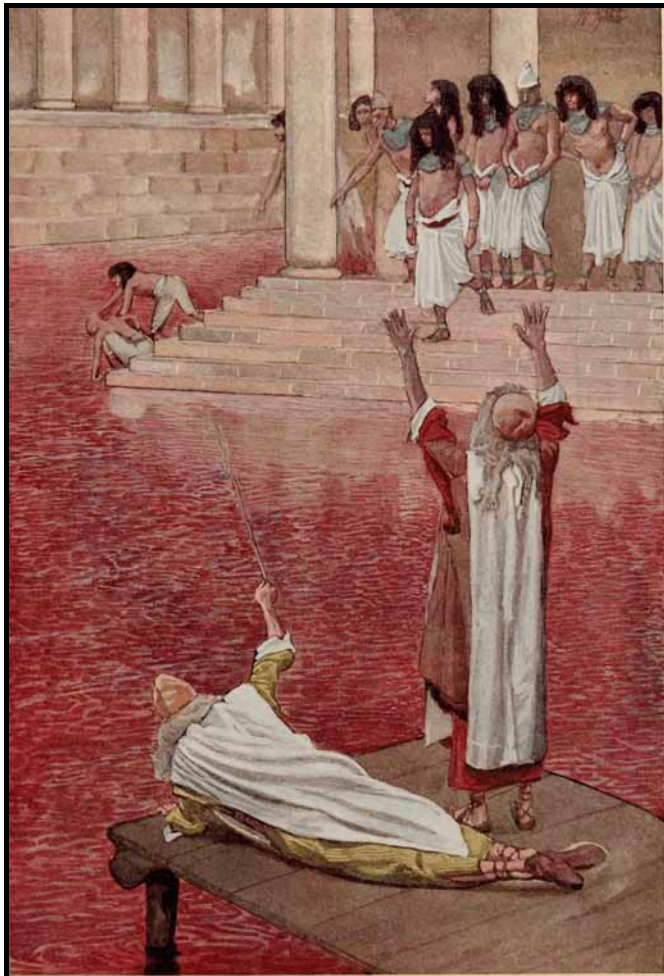
The judgements sounded by the first four trumpets each impact different components of the created order - the land and its vegetation; the sea and its creatures; the rivers and springs of waters; and the light of the heavenly bodies. The result is a pattern that one commentator calls *“de-creation,”* (Beale, p. 486) - the



“The Plague of Hail” by J. James Tissot

deliberate undoing of that which God did in the beginning.

“The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth.” - Without further delay, the sound of the trumpets begin. Unlike the preceding vision, where each seal was opened upon command, the trumpets do not await further instruction. The call of the first trumpet summons a devastating deluge of ***“hail and fire mixed with blood.”*** The clear allusion is to the seventh plague of Egypt, that of fiery hail, with the blood as an added horror (Exodus 9:23-27). The addition of the blood heightens the impression of destructiveness and death. It also serves as a link to the final judgement and the destruction of the present universe. The prophet Joel had warned: ***“I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The***



“The Nile Turned to Blood” by J. James Tissot

sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord.” (Joel 2:30-31; cf. Acts 2:17-21). The same image of a fiery rain of blood as the herald of the last days occurs in the Sibylline Oracles, a series of apocalyptic works which originated during the intertestamental period and were prominent in both Hebrew and Christian circles: ***“For fire will rain on men from the floors of heaven, fire and blood, water, lightning bolt, darkness, heavenly night, and destruction in war.”*** (5:375) The violent destructiveness of this outpouring of judgement is emphasized by the verb ***“it was hurled down”*** (Greek - *“eblethe”*). The fiery hail of this storm does not merely fall. It is cast down, as it were, by the hand of the Almighty, to crush and destroy all in its path. This is not a natural phenomenon, to be categorized and explained through

the ordinary patterns of nature. One need not look for historical instances of literal ***“hail and fire mixed with blood”*** as the fulfillment of these grim words. This terrifying image encompasses all of God’s acts of judgement throughout history - wherever, whenever, and by whatever means the Lord has brought about the destruction of the earth and that which grows upon it.

The object of the rain of destruction is the land and its vegetation. Its result is that ***“a third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.”*** The devastation is not complete but preliminary and partial. Even so, it is massive in its scope. The construct of one third destruction is drawn from Ezekiel 5:1-4, 12, where God’s judgement upon His apostate people is illustrated and apportioned in the same way. The significance of the destruction of ***“all the green grass”*** in contrast to the third of the earth and the trees is unclear and may simply reflect the relative fragility of this particular object of destruction.



“The Second Trumpet” by Jean Blondel - 1373

“The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea.” - The sounding of the second judgement trumpet follows in rapid succession. In the first plague of Egypt, the Nile and all the waters of the land were turned to blood. (Exodus 7: 14-25). Now in the second trumpet a



*“A Huge Mountain All Ablaze Was Thrown Into the Sea”
Illumination from a 14th Century Norman Apocalypse*

similar fate befalls the world’s oceans and seas. The awesome sight which John beholds is so far beyond his experience and comprehension that he is unable to offer a precise description. He resorts to simile and tells us of *“a huge mountain, all ablaze.”* Some understand this to be a reference to volcanic eruption like that of Mount Vesuvius which destroyed Pompeii in 79 A.D. However, John’s language seems more comprehensive. R.C.H. Lenski notes: *“This is not a volcano hurling lava into the sea but a mountain that is all ablaze with fire, that is hurled into the ocean by an invisible hand, a mountain that is so great as to cause the effect described.”* (Lenski, p. 279) The image of a massive meteor, hurtling down from the heavens, blazing with fire is perhaps a more adequate. But again, in any case, this is no ordinary phenomenon, whose cause or counter-part can be found in the world of nature. This awful image depicts the righteous judgement of an angry God exercising His wrath upon the earth’s oceans and seas. Once more, the language of one third destruction indicates that the scope of this devastation is preliminary and partial - *“a third of the sea turned to blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea*

died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.” This vision of maritime destruction impacts not only the sea itself, but the marine creatures that dwell within it and the ships that travel upon it.

“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.” - The scene produced by the third trumpet is very similar to its predecessor. In this instance, instead of a fiery mountain it is *“a great star, blazing like a torch”* which is cast down from the heavens. The difference between them may simply be one of size, the falling mountain, aimed at the great mass of the world’s oceans and seas, appearing larger than the blazing star whose target is the rivers and springs of water. Again, the image of a fiery meteor or comet blazing through the earth’s atmosphere comes to mind. The target now is the earth’s fresh water, *“the rivers and the springs of water.”* Under the onslaught of this divine judgement one third of the planet’s drinking water turns bitter and deadly. The blazing star is given a name descriptive of its effect - *“the name of the star is Wormwood.”* (Greek - *“Apsinthos”*). Wormwood is an herb renowned for its bitterness. David Aune provides the botanical background:



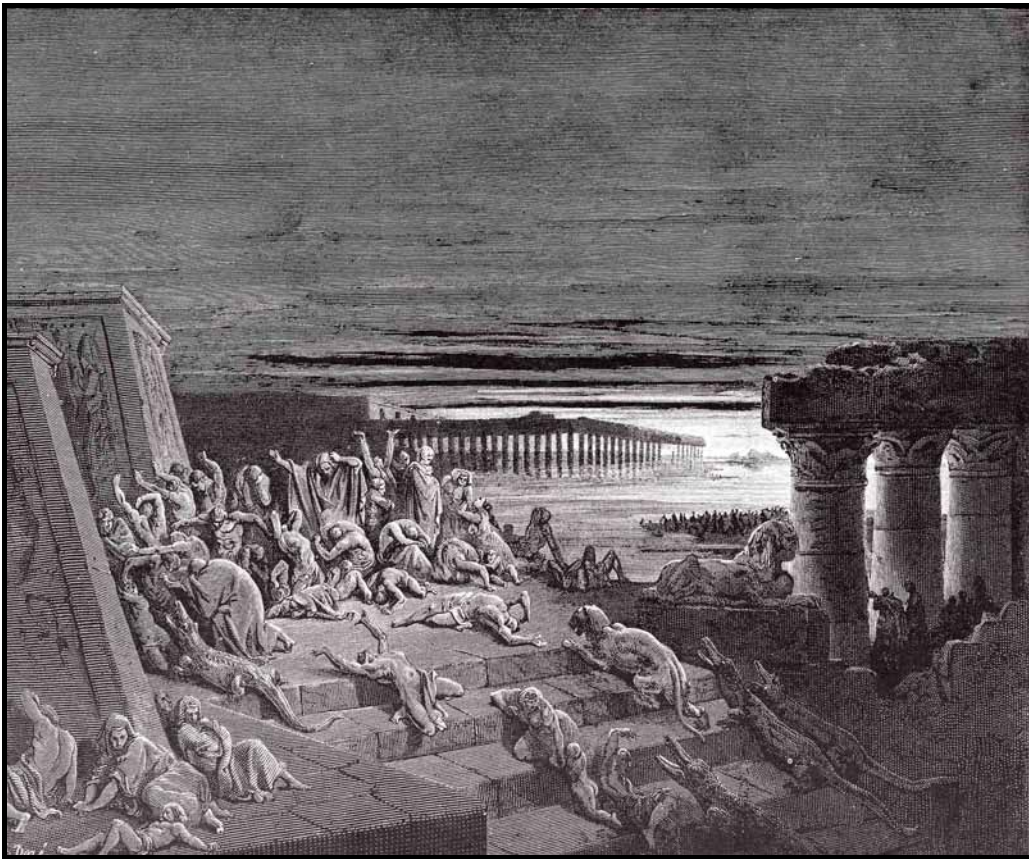
“The First Four Trumpets” by Hans Burgmair

The target now is the earth’s fresh water, *“the rivers and the springs of water.”* Under the onslaught of this divine judgement one third of the planet’s drinking water turns bitter and deadly. The blazing star is given a name descriptive of its effect - *“the name of the star is Wormwood.”* (Greek - *“Apsinthos”*). Wormwood is an herb renowned for its bitterness. David Aune provides the botanical background:

“The plant genus Artemisia to which Absinthe or Wormwood belongs is the type associated with the constellation of Scorpio which has a stinging poisonous tail. Wormwood belongs to the Daisy family and is native to central and southern Europe, Northern Africa, Siberia, and northwestern India. It is also found in North, South, and Central America. The spice tarragon and the plant sagebrush belong to the

same genus. ..The bitterness of wormwood was proverbial throughout the ancient world...Its name is derived from its medicinal use in expelling worms from the intestines...The German term for Wormwood, Wermut , is related to Vermouth, a wine containing an extract from Wormwood.” (Aune, p. 522)

John’s use of the term here seems to be drawn from the prophecy of Jeremiah where Wormwood is specifically linked to the poisoning of drinking water. ***“Therefore this is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says: “Behold, I will feed this people with wormwood and give them poisonous water to drink.”*** (Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15; cf. Proverbs 5:3-4; Lamentations 3:19). The blazing, bitter star causes the contamination of ***“a third of the waters”*** and ***“many people died from drinking the waters that had become bitter.”***



“The Plague of Darkness” by Gustav Dore

“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



“The Fall of Wormwood” - 16th Century Luther Bible Engraving

of the day was without light and also a third of the night.” - The ninth plague of Egypt was the coming of thick darkness upon the land for three days (Exodus 10:21-23). As God struck down His enemies in the days of Moses, so He will act again and again to inflict His judgement upon those who dare to stand against Him. Now the sun, moon, and stars are under attack. The fractional one third again indicates that this judgement is not final or complete. The interruption of the normal reliable course of the heavenly bodies and the light which they provide is often presented in Scripture as a precursor of divine judgement. **“On that day, says the Lord God, I will make the sun go down at noon, and darken the earth at broad daylight.”** (Amos 8:9) The imagery of the fourth trumpet is reminiscent of the darkness that fell upon the land for three hours during Christ’s final agony and death. Dr. Brighton provides this helpful summary of the meaning of the fourth trumpet:

“It is difficult to relate this partial darkness to human experience... Partial or total eclipses of the sun or moon are, of course, common. However, eclipses of the sun or moon do not seem to correspond completely to this inability of the heavenly bodies to produce their full light for the benefit of life on earth. Could it be that, throughout the time period that Revelation covers, clouds and smog and pollution will so cover the earth that it will be increasingly difficult for the light of the heavenly bodies to penetrate?...Whatever this plague of the heavenly bodies implies and entails, it is a part of the total picture which the first four trumpet angels introduce. All through the time period covered by the message of Revelation, nature and its components are being physically struck, and as a result, humanity is being made to suffer.” (Brighton, p. 228)



“The Call of Woe” - Luther Bible Woodcut

The Sounding of the Fifth Trumpet

Revelation 8:13-9:12

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. 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 the sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. 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 upon 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 lion’s 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. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

“As I watched, I heard and eagle that was flying in midair...” - This brief interlude signals a shift in the significance of the trumpet and a severe intensification of the judgements which they summon. The first four dealt with natural disasters, and horrendous though they may have been, they are not nearly as terrifying as the demonic judgements which are now revealed in the sounding of the final three trumpets.

A bird of prey (Greek - “*aetos*”) appears directly overhead, in the middle of the heavens. The Greek noun can refer either to an eagle or a vulture depending on the context. In any case, the appearance of this carrion eater is an ominous indicator of things to come (cf. Matthew 24:28 - *“Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.”*). This is the only instance in Revelation where an animal is used as God’s messenger (cf. Numbers 22:28).

The image appears to have been chosen because of the bird’s association with warfare, death, and judgement (i.e. *“Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the Lord because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my Law.”* Hosea 8:1; cf. also Deuteronomy 28:49; Jeremiah 4:13; 48:40; 49:22; Lamentations 4:19; Ezekiel 17:3;



“The Fifth Trumpet” by Lucas Cranach



“The Fifth Trumpet” - Luther Bible Woodcut

Habbakuk 1:8). The message of doom which the raptor proclaims immediately confirms our sense of impending disaster. **“Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”** The core of the message is the triple repetition of **“Woe!”** (Greek - “ouai”). The term may be used as an interjection meaning *“How horrible, how terrible!”* As a noun, “ouai” describes *“disaster,” “catastrophe,”* or *“horror.”*

“In the NT “ouai” appears forty-six times: thirty in the speech of Jesus in the synoptic gospels; fourteen times in Revelation, and only twice elsewhere, 1 Corinthians 9:16 and Jude 11. In the mouth of Jesus, the woes pronounced against people and cities indicate a final warning (often widely unheeded) before judgement and eternal ruin in hell.” (Brighton, p. 224)

It is used in double repetition in the Old Testament to warn of the most dire judgements of God (cf. Ezekiel 16:15-22; Zechariah 2:10). Its triple repetition here forms a kind of superlative denoting the most grievous doom imaginable and corresponds to the three remaining trumpets (**“because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels.”**). The same usage of triple repetition to

express the superlative can be seen in the trishagion of Isaiah 6:1-5.

“The fifth angel sounded his trumpet and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth.” - The sounding of the fifth trumpet immediately follows the warning cry. The first four trumpet judgments were briefly described in just a few phrases. The relative significance and seriousness of the last three trumpet judgements is indicated by their extended descriptions. The imagery becomes more elaborate and other-worldly and is presented in much greater detail.

The Revelator beholds ***“a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth.”*** The use of the perfect tense (***“had fallen”***) indicates that John did not actually witness the fall of this star. That fall had already occurred when the scene is revealed to him. Unlike ***“Wormwood,”*** the bitter, blazing star of the preceding trumpet (8:10-11), the text



“The Downfall of Satan” by Gustav Dore



*“The Devil Rousing the Fallen Angels in Hell”
by William Blake*

indicates that this star represents a mighty fallen angel who **“holds the key to the shaft of the abyss.”** Further identification is provided in Verse 11: **“They had as a king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek Apollyon.”** The symbolic identification of the angels with the stars is common in Hebrew thought. In Job 38:7 the Creator asks the presumptuous patriarch: **“Where were you when I laid the earth’s foundation...while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy?”** The image of stars fallen from the heaven’s to represent those angels who followed Satan in his revolt and were cast out of heaven appears in Daniel 8:10; **“It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on**

them.” John uses the same imagery later in Revelation as he tells of the Satanic red dragon whose massive tail **“swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.”** (Revelation 12:4). Jude describes the fallen angels as **“wandering stars for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever.”** (Jude 13). The prophet Isaiah derisively hails the Prince of Darkness: **“How have you fallen from heaven, O morning star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, “I will ascend to heaven, I will raise my throne above the stars of God...”** (Isaiah 14:12-13) Jesus celebrated the first preaching of the Gospel by the seventy-two disciples using similar language: **“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”** (Luke 10:18). The imagery of fallen angels as fallen stars is also prevalent in 1 Enoch, a popular Jewish apocalyptic work from this period. 1 Enoch 21 tells of **“seven stars of heaven bound together...like great mountains and burning with fire,”** **“stars of heaven which have transgressed the commands of the Lord and are bound in this place...the prison house**

of the angels.”(1 Enoch 21:3,6,10) Later one of those fallen angel/stars is bound hand and foot and thrown into the “*deep, empty, dark abyss.*” (1 Enoch 88:1) Thus the fallen angel, fallen star, abyss imagery which John uses here would have been very familiar to his original audience.

This mighty fallen angel is “*given the key to the shaft of the abyss.*” Note that the key is “*given,*” implicitly by God, thereby indicating once again the absolute divine control which remains a predominant theme throughout the Book of Revelation. Everything that takes place is a part of God’s plan and under his sovereign control. The devil and his minions are not free agents. They too serve the Lord and accomplish His will. The possession of the key represents command and rule. It is bestowed by God through Christ who “*holds the keys of death and Hades.*” (Revelation 1:18). “*Neither Satan nor his evil servants can any longer unleash the forces of hell on earth unless they are given power to do so by the resurrected Christ.*” (Beale, p. 493)

The angel is identified as the “*king*” of the monstrous horde of demonic locusts and “*the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.*” Both the Hebrew and Greek titles are based upon the verb “*to destroy.*” The name thus becomes the personification of the action. Abaddon/Apollyon is “*the Destroyer - He Who Brings About Ruin and Death.*” With this grimly accurate designation of his nature and role, our ancient enemy, the devil, makes his first appearance in the dramatic visions of Revelation. The dual mention of both Hebrew and Greek names may reflect the mixed Jewish - Gentile



“*The Angel With the Key to the Abyss*”
by Hans Schaufelein



“The Greek God Apollo as Depicted on the East Frieze of the Parthenon”

composition of the congregations in Asia Minor to which the letter was originally addressed. The Greek title may also have been used as an allusion to the popular Greco-Roman god Apollo, so named because his origin as the god of pestilence and destruction. It is surely no mere co-incidence that demon horde is here depicted as a swarm of locusts for the locust was one of the symbols of this prominent pagan deity. Domitian, the emperor of Rome at this moment in history, fancied himself the incarnation of Apollo. By designating the ruler of the Abyss as Apollyon, John subtly indicates that the emperor who styles himself a god is no more than a servant of hell.

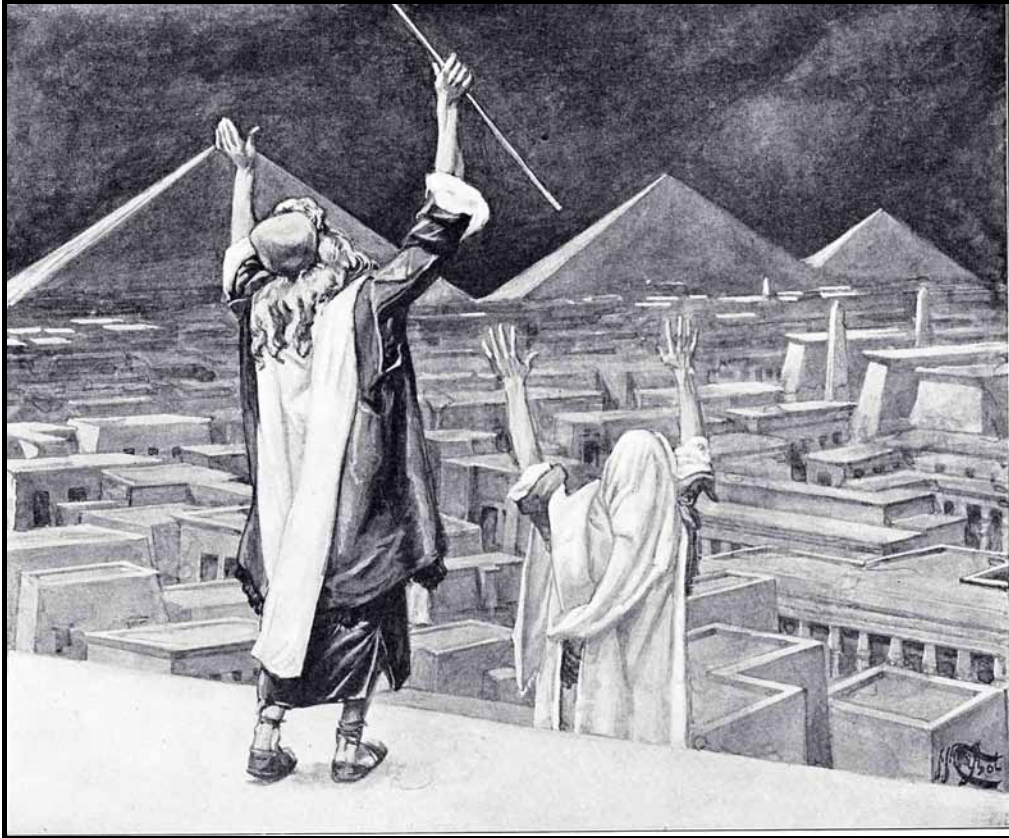
The realm of Abaddon is the **“Abyss.”** The Greek word literally refers to a bottomless pit (“a” - “no” “byssus” - “bottom”). In Revelation this term refers to Hell, the prison house of the demons and the damned. The word only occurs twice in the New Testament outside of Revelation: in Luke 8:31 in connection with the legion of demons cast out by Christ; and in Romans 10:7 where Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:13 in reference to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. John uses the word seven times in Revelation, always in reference to the place of the devil, demons, and the damned (Revelation 9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3). 1 Enoch offers this grim description of the Abyss:

“And I saw a deep pit with heavenly fire on its pillars; I saw inside them descending pillars of fire that were immeasurable in respect to both altitude and depth. And on top of that pit I saw a place without the heavenly firmament above it or earthly foundation underneath it or water. There was nothing on it - not even birds - but it was a desolate and terrible place. And I saw there the seven stars which were like great burning mountains. Then the angel said to me; “This place is the ultimate end of heaven and earth; it is the prison house for the stars and the powers of heaven. And the stars which roll over upon the fire, they are the ones which transgressed the commandments of God from the beginning of their rising...” (1 Enoch 18:11-16)

“When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like smoke from a gigantic furnace...” - The *“key to the shaft of the Abyss”* is used by *“the One Who Brings Destruction”* to throw open the gates of hell and from its depths a massive cloud of smoke and fire pours forth. The magnitude and density of this billowing smoke is *“like smoke from a gigantic furnace.”* This is the same phrase that is used in the book of Genesis to describe the smoke that rose from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah beneath the fire of God’s judgement (cf. Genesis 19:27-28). The magnitude of this massive cloud of smoke is such that *“the sun and the sky were*



“Abraham Looks Upon the Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah” by J. James Tissot



“The Plague of Locusts” by J. James Tissot

darkened by the smoke from the Abyss.” This unnatural darkness warns of impending judgement - *“Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.”* (Joel 2:1,2). Lutheran commentators tend to view this reference to worldwide darkness caused by the dense smoke of the Abyss as a image of the spiritual darkness that has descended upon mankind as a result and consequence of sin. The Bible consistently uses light/darkness imagery in this context. Isaiah depicted the coming of the Messiah as the appearance of a great light in a world shrouded in darkness: *“The people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned.”* (Isaiah 8:14) Christ declares Himself to be *“the Light of the World”* (John 8:12) and declares that those who follow Him are also to be *“the light of the world.”* (Matthew 5:14) In the prologue of his Gospel, John uses this same imagery to describe Christ’s coming into the world: *“In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.”* (John 1:4-5) The truth of

God's Word is like *"a light shining in a dark place"* (2 Peter 1:19) that repudiates the darkness of unbelief and error for *"What fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?"* (2 Corinthians 6:14). That darkness is, of course, endlessly perpetuated by the devil and the demons which serve him through the instigation of wickedness and corruption and the promulgation of false doctrine, error, and unbelief. In this way, the darkening of the sun and the sky at the opening of the vision establishes the context and sets the tone for that which follows. But the ominous darkness is only the beginning - the horrific imagery continues to unfold and develop.

A plague of demonic locusts from hell emerges from the clouds of smoke. Locusts were the eighth plague upon the land of Egypt (Exodus 10:1-20). God's prophet Joel used the devastation of the land of Israel by locusts as a warning sign of the coming day of the Lord's judgement (Joel 1-2) to call the people to repentance. Throughout the Old Testament the locust is a symbol of devastation and destruction (Deuteronomy 28:42; 1 Kings 8:37; Psalm 78:46). Vast swarms of millions of these voracious insects could strip the land bare of all vegetation leaving starvation and death in their wake. But this is not a vision of natural disaster. These are not ordinary locusts and vegetation is not their target - *"They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree."* They have been sent to wreak their havoc upon unbelieving mankind, *"those people who did not have the seal of God upon their foreheads."* The reference is to the sealing of the 144,000 in Revelation 7:1-8.



*"The Locusts from the Pit"
16th Century Luther Bible Woodcut*

The torment inflicted by these denizens of hell is graphically illustrated by scorpion-like powers which they are given: ***“They were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.”*** The sting of the scorpion brings agonizing pain but it is normally not fatal. So also the affliction represented here brings torment and suffering but not death - ***“They were not given the power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of the scorpion when it strikes a man.”*** The verb used in this phrase - ***“torture”*** - Greek - ***“basanismos”*** - clearly signals the intent of the image. The term does not refer primarily to physical pain but to spiritual, psychological, and emotional torment and distress. That is its consistent application elsewhere in Revelation.



“The Locusts from the Abyss” - 15th Century Belgian Apocalypse

The torment inflicted is of limited duration - ***“for five months.”*** In this context, the image of a five month period may have been chosen simply because it corresponds to the typical life span of the locust. In any case the number five (one half of the ordinal number ten) in Biblical numerology often represents that which is brief or limited. This torment is not continuous. It is periodic. Brighton expresses the sense of the time concept effectively:



“The Demon Locusts from the Abyss” - 13th Century French Apocalypse

“This period of time suggests an on-again, off-again ordeal to which these demons subject their victims. Like a cat playing with a terrified and helpless mouse, so the human victims of these hordes from hell are playthings of their craft and cunning. For a period of time they may break free from their torture, only to succumb again later. But all the while fear stalks every moment of the unbelievers’ lives, to a greater or lesser extent.” (Brighton, pp. 239-240)

The intensity of the torment inflicted by the locust/scorpions is such that they will long for death to bring an end to their suffering. ***“During those days, men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.”*** Job describes the intolerable anguish of such a man, for whom life has become an unbearable burden and death is seen as the only deliverance: ***“Why is light given to those in misery and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave?”*** (Job 3:20-22) For the tormented unbelievers of this vision, the prolonging of life provides the opportunity for the repentance which their suffering was designed by God to produce.

“The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. ..” - The text provides a graphic and grotesque description of the locust/scorpion horde. Each of the details given serves to emphasize the overall impression of unnatural and awesome cruelty and destructive power. This is a host designed to destroy, as one might expect from the legions of Abaddon. The Revelator repeatedly finds himself unable to offer a precise description of these bizarre creatures. He is compelled to resort to simile, comparing their features to other things that we have seen and can comprehend. The locust swarm ***“looked like horses prepared for battle.”*** The prophets of the Old Testament frequently used the image of locust swarms to describe the size and destructive power of human armies. The Book of Judges uses the image of a swarm of locusts to emphasize the vast numbers of the Midianites and the devastation they caused in the days of Gideon:

“They camped on the land and ruined the crops all the way to Gaza and did not spare a living thing for Israel, neither sheep, nor cattle, nor donkeys. They came up with their livestock and their tents like swarms of locusts. It was impossible to count the men and their camels; they invaded the land to ravage it.” (Judges 6:4-5)

The prophet Jeremiah warns that the cavalry of the Medes and the Persians will sweep over the city of Babylon ***“like a swarm of locusts.”*** (Jeremiah 51:27) Nahum foretells the day when mighty Nineveh will be cut down by the sword ***“consumed as by grasshoppers.”*** (Nahum 3:15-17) John reverses this popular Old Testament image that the locust swarm from the Abyss resembled a horde of cavalry arrayed and ready for battle. The language is very similar to that of Joel - ***“They have the appearance of horses, they gallop along like cavalry...”*** (Joel 2:4) The image is one of menace and fearful power. Imagine the thunder of tens of thousands of horses crashing across a battlefield, bringing a wave of death and destruction that causes the very earth to tremble, smashing all that stand before it.

“On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces.” - The power of this vast horde appears to be invincible and irresistible. They wear upon their heads ***“something like crowns of gold.”*** The Greek term is *“stephanos”* which refers not to the royal crown of a king (Greek - *“diadema”*), but to the golden wreath of the victor. This crown is the unmistakable emblem of victory. This army intends to win and gives every appearance of the inevitability of its victory. The human faces of these dreadful creatures signify their



*“The Demon Locusts from the Abyss”
Detail from the Brussels Tapestry - 1540*

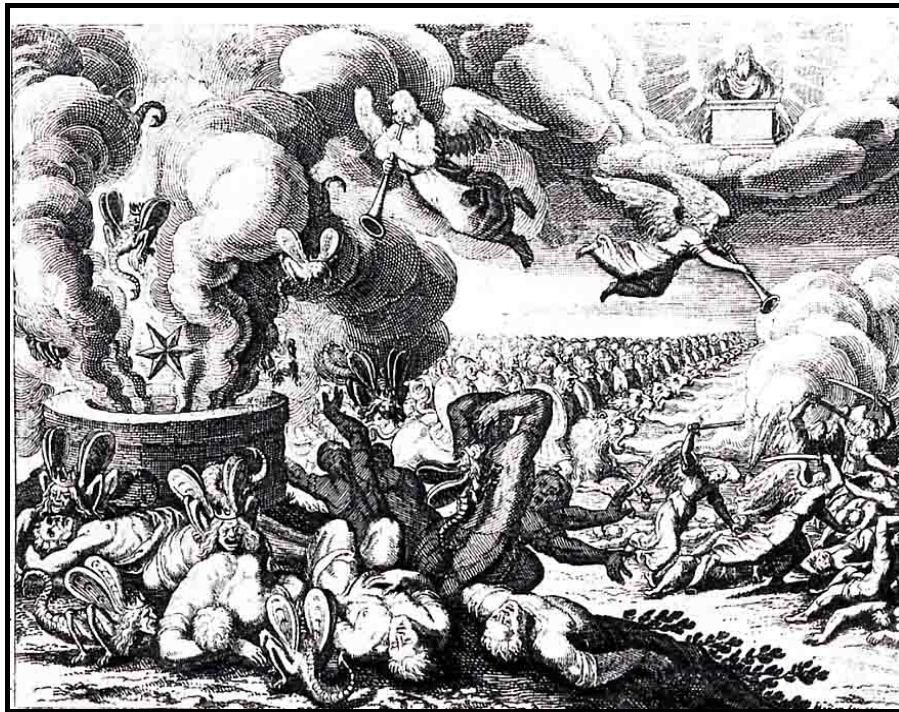
craft and cunning. These are not dumb beasts. They are animated by demonic cleverness and devilish design. Their actions are carefully calculated, each part of a plan devised in malicious hatred from the beginning. Their goal is nothing less than the damnation and destruction of the human race.

“Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth was like lion’s teeth.” - The teeth of the lion are clearly a symbol of destructive power and might. *“Like the teeth of a lion is a proverbial expression for something irresistibly and fatally destructive.”* (Aune, p. 532) Joel uses a similar phrase in Joel 1:6 - *“A nation has invaded my land, powerful and without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness.”* The reference to long hair like that of a woman in this context may simply allude to the long hair of a lion’s mane. In this way, the two details serve to reinforce and strengthen one another. The comparison of the long hair of a woman with the lion’s mane in this phrase as an image of fearful destructiveness is reminiscent of a description of Satan included in a 1st Century Jewish work entitled *“The Apocalypse of Zephaniah.”*

“That same instant I stood up and I saw a great angel before me. His hair was spread out like that of a lion. His teeth were outside of his mouth like a bear. His hair was spread out like that of a woman. His body was like the serpent’s...Then I asked, Who is the great angel who stands thus, whom I saw? He said, this is the one who accuses men in the presence of the Lord.” (Apocalypse of Zephaniah, 6:8,16)

“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.” - John’s language in this phrase appears to have been influenced by a description of the war horse as one of the marvels of God’s creation from Job 39:

“Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him leap like a locust, clad in perfect armor, his breast glorious with courage? He paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength, and charges into the fray. He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; he does not shy away from the sword. The quiver rattles against his side, along with the flashing spear and lance. In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground; he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds.” (Job 39:19-24)



“The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets” by Matthias Merian

The iron breastplates of these demonic locust/scorpions render them indestructible and irresistible. The whirr of their millions of wings is like the sound of a mighty host of horsemen and chariots hurtling across the field of battle. The heavy cavalry of ancient times, in which both horse and rider were protected by metal armor, were virtually unstoppable. The speed and momentum of their onslaught struck terror into their opponents. That is precisely the image John intends to convey in these phrases.

“They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months.” - The image of locusts with the poisonous stingers of scorpions from vss. 3-5 is re-introduced and expanded. The five month limitation is also re-affirmed, indicating the temporary and periodic nature of this demonic oppression. The torment inflicted by this demonic horde is designed to drive sinful men to repentance.

The imagery of the fifth trumpet - the demonic locust/scorpion horde of Abaddon - sets before us the activity of the devil and his demons throughout the New Testament era in harassing and oppressing unbelieving mankind. Howard Hendrickson is correct when he categorizes the subject of this vision as *“the operation of the powers of darkness upon the souls of the wicked throughout the present age.”* (Hendrickson, p. 147) There is more at work in the events of human history than that which can be sensed or seen. The ancient conflict between good and evil rages on not only in the physical, but also in the spiritual realm: ***“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”***(Ephesians 6:12)

“The first woe is past. Two woes are yet to come!” - The horror and terror have only begun. The first woe has come and gone. The other two still remain to be seen. Let the reader beware!



“The Final Trumpets” by Lucas Cranach

The Sounding of the Sixth Trumpet Revelation 9:13-21

The sixth angel blew 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. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke, and

sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of their horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. 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.

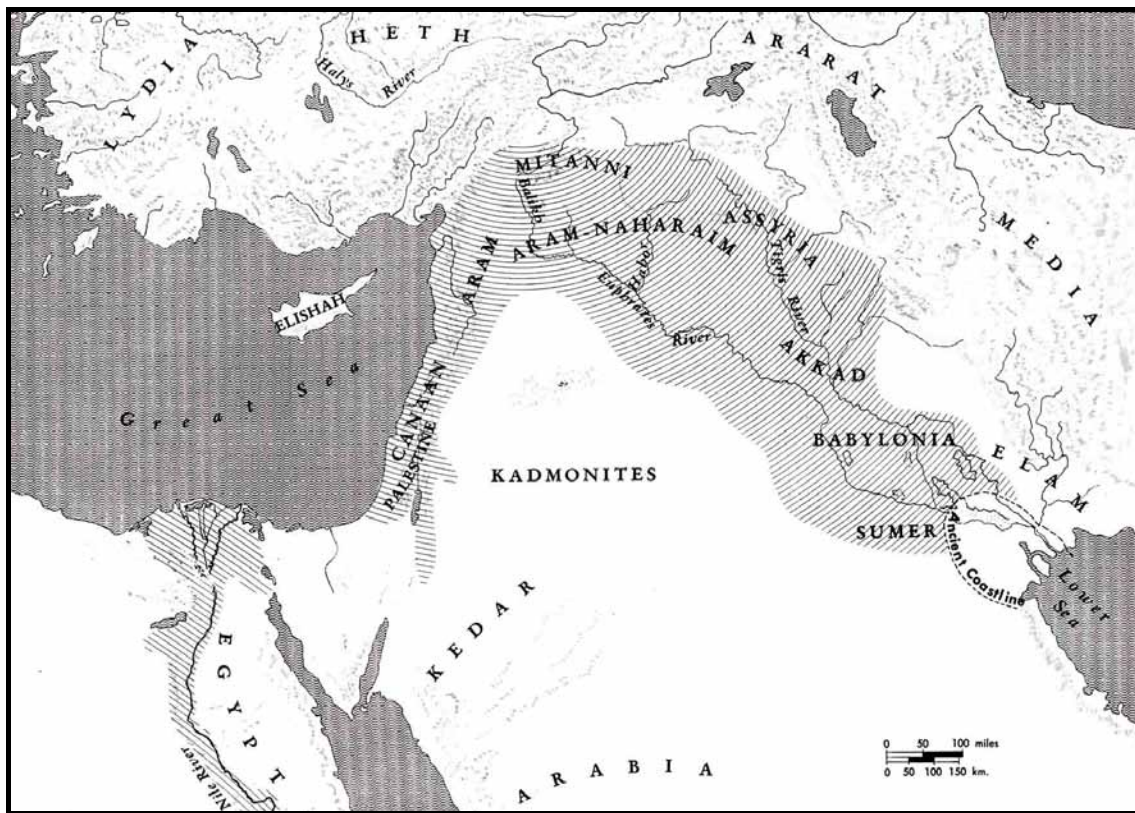


“The Sixth Trumpet” - Luther Bible Woodcut

“The sixth angel blew his trumpet and I heard a voice...” - The sixth trumpet sounds and in response a commanding voice is heard. The speaker is unidentified. John tells us where the voice originates - *“from the horns of the golden altar that is before God”* - and what the voice says - *“Release the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates.”* - but he does not identify the speaker. Since the voice originates at the center of the golden altar of incense, it seems probable that the speaker is the angel with the golden censer from the opening scene of this segment (Revelation 8:3-5). The strong identification of that angel with the altar of incense and with the prayers of the saints who are calling for the vindication of God in the

judgement of the wicked reinforces this view. In any case, the voice speaks on behalf of God and with His authority. The phrase “*the horns of the golden altar*” reflects the Old Testament practice of symbolizing the power of the God to be worshiped by constructing horns, which represent power and strength, at each of the altar’s four corners (cf. Exodus 30:1-10 for a description of the Incense Altar and its horns). On occasion in ancient Israel, the horns of the altar became a literal place of refuge for those who sought the protection of God (cf. 1 Kings 1:50-51; 2:28-34).

The command from the altar orders the release of “*the four angels bound at the great river Euphrates.*” Four, in the numerology of Revelation is the earth number, derived from the four points of the compass, and the proverbial four corners of the earth. The fact that there are four angels here indicates that the woe about to be unleashed will be of world-wide proportion. The language recalls the four angels whom we observed in Revelation 7:1, who were called upon to restrain the four winds of divine judgement until the protective sealing of God’s people on earth had been completed. In both instances, the four angels are depicted as holding back the impending judgement of God upon the earth. However, unlike the four angels in



“*The Fertile Crescent*”

chapter 7, these angels are not merely restraining the judgement, they are themselves the judgement and are under restraint. These four mighty angels are “**bound**” (Greek - “*dedemenous*”) that is, held in confinement, chained or tied down. This is a term that is used in Scripture only in reference to evil angels (cf. Jude 6; Revelation 20:2).

The four angels are held in confinement “***at the great river Euphrates.***” The Euphrates is the longest river in Western Asia, 1,700 miles in length. It flows down from the highlands of Armenia in Asia Minor and ends in the Persian Gulf. It is characteristically referred to in Scripture simply as “***the great river***” (Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 1:7; Joshua 1:4; 1 Chronicles 5:7-9). The Euphrates constituted the northern boundary of the original land promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:18; Deuteronomy 11:22-25; Joshua 1:1-5; 1 Chronicles 5:7-9). Along with its smaller counterpart, the Tigris River, the Euphrates defined ancient Mesopotamia (Latin - “*the Land Between the Rivers*”). From this region rose the great enemies of Israel, Assyria, Babylon, and Persia. The two rivers formed the northern and western boundaries of the Fertile Crescent which was the cradle of civilization in the ancient Near East. Beyond them lay fierce barbarian tribes, invincible horsemen like the Scythians and the Parthians, who periodically swept down to devastate the civilized and settled lands whose people lived in dread of their coming. In the prophecies of the Old Testament, the lands beyond the rivers in the far north came to signify the abode of evil, a threatening and ominous place from which the enemies of God’s people would arise (Isaiah 8:7-8; Jeremiah 47:2). In his grim prophecies of Gog and Magog, Ezekiel warned of hordes that would come from the far north to spread across the land like a dark cloud (Ezekiel 38). Thus the Great River Euphrates and the northern boundary which it constituted came to be a powerful symbol of impending judgement. By unleashing these four angels of judgement “***at the great river Euphrates***” John makes effective use of that symbol and signals the severity of the judgement that is to come.

“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 precision with which the moment of the angels’ release is defined emphasizes the absolute of control of God over these incredible events. “*All the forces of history are under the sovereign control of God. He is the Almighty One (1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 19:15; etc.)*” (Mounce, p. 201) The sixth century Latin commentator Primasius suggests that this sequence represents the passage of time throughout the New Testament era as each of these happenings occur at precisely the time and in exactly the way that God has



"The Final Trumpets" by Albrecht Dürer

predetermined. *“Step by step days are filled with hours, and months with days, and year certainly with months.”* (Brighton, p. 245) There will be no surprises or coincidences here. God’s timetable will unfold without the slightest variation. The intensification of the judgement, in comparison to that of the fifth trumpet, is indicated by the death of *“a third of mankind.”* Where previously the purpose of the plagues was to torment but not to kill, now death races forward to seize its hapless prey. The *“one third fraction”* used in the earlier trumpets to signify partial destruction (Revelation 8:7-12) is called upon once again to tell us that we have not yet come to the extinction of mankind. The death caused by this trumpet judgement will be massive but partial.

“The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.” - The legions of godless spiritual forces deployed by the four judgement angels is depicted as a massive horde of grotesque cavalry (Greek - *“tou hippikou”*). No earthly origin is specified. These are not the armed forces of an earthly king or nation. This is the demon army of hell! It marshals not for mere physical war on a literal battlefield, but to wage spiritual warfare for the souls of men. The massacres and mayhem of all men’s wars serve their demonic purpose but do not exhaust it. These demons wage their warfare through falsehood and error, corruption and sin, as well as through physical violence. The end result for all those who are not signed with the seal of Christ is always the same in any case, death in time and in eternity. The unimaginable magnitude of this host is *“two hundred million”* (Greek - *“dismyriadon myriadon”* literally *“twice ten thousand times ten thousand.”*) The number represents incalculable immensity. The image recalls the demon’s defiant response to Christ: *“My name is legion, for we are many!”* (Mark 5:9). The number is also reminiscent of the angel throngs that surrounded the Lord upon Sinai (Psalm 68:17; Deuteronomy 33:2; Daniel 3:10). However, lest the reader imagine that John is guilty of exaggeration, he carefully affirms that he received this number by revelation - *“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...” - A detailed description of the hellish cavalry in a manner similar to that of the locust/scorpions in the preceding vision, now ensues. *“Here again, the piling up of monstrous metaphors emphasizes that the demons are ferocious and dreadful beings that afflict people in a fierce, appalling, and devastating manner.”* (Beale, p. 510) John specifically emphasizes that these are scenes in a vision - *“I saw in my vision”* - so that their symbolic nature can not



“The Final Trumpets” by Jean Duvet

be misconstrued. The armor of this demonic cavalry -“*fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur*” - corresponds to the “*fire, smoke, and sulfur*” which billows out of the horses’ mouths. “*Fiery red*” (Greek - “*purinous*”) is the bright red of burning flames. “*Dark blue*” (Greek - “*hyakinthinos*”) is the deep blue color of sulfurous smoke. “*Yellow as sulfur*” (Greek - “*theiodeis*” - traditionally - “*brimstone*”) is the pale yellow color of sulfur. The association of these three colors with the undying fires of hell is of longstanding in Scripture (cf. Genesis 19:24-28 - the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah). They are to be consistently associated in Revelation with final and decisive judgment upon the devil and all those who follow him (cf. Revelation 14:10; 21:8; 19:20; 20:10). If the infernal place of damnation were ever to commission a flag, these would be its colors.



“The Attack of the Huns” by Checa

“The heads of the horses resembled lions...” - This image conveys a sense of fearsome destructiveness - the speed and mobility of the horse combined with the rage and killing power of the lion. Long ago Habakkuk the prophet had warned of the deadly onslaught of Babylonian cavalry: *“Their horses are swifter than leopards, fiercer than wolves at dusk. Their cavalry gallops headlong; their horsemen come from afar. They fly like a vulture swooping to devour; they come all bent on violence.”* (Habakkuk 1:8) But these grotesque horsemen from hell far surpass the terror of any human assault. *“A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths.”* The imagery of judgement



*“The Sixth and Seventh Trumpets”
15th Century Bible Illumination*

fire from the mouth of God is familiar in the Old Testament (i.e. Psalm 18:8). John’s use of the term “*plagues*” to describe the “*fire, smoke, and sulfur*” which devastates humanity reinforces the link between the trumpet visions and the plagues of Egypt. The destructive power of these fearsome beasts is further represented by their tails which are like venomous serpents: “*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.*” The language is similar to the description of the scorpion stingers in the previous vision (Revelation 9:10). The mention of poisonous snakes also serves to link these demons to their Satanic master, “*the ancient serpent*” who brought death to the whole world. Many commentators see the reference

to the deadly tails of these creatures as an allusion to a tactic developed by the horsemen of central Asia, the Scythians and the Parthians who proven to be Rome’s most fearsome enemies in the East. These skilled bowmen would attack their foes in a terrifying charge that would literally darken the sky with clouds of arrows. Then, before a counter-attack could come, they would turn and wheel away on their speeding horses; as they did, each horseman would reverse himself on the back of his mount and continue firing while the host retreated. The tactic struck terror into the hearts of their enemies. The Parthians, it is said, even braided the tails of their horses to make them look like writhing serpents. The Huns and the Mongols would later use this same tactic with devastating effectiveness.

The fire-breathing monsters of John's vision are reminiscent of the fearsome "*Leviathan*" of the Book of Job - "*Firebrands stream from his mouth; sparks of fire shoot out. Smoke pours from his nostrils...His breath sets coals ablaze and flames dart from his mouth.*" (Job 41:19-20) or the dreaded Chimera of Greek mythology who breathed fire with the head of a lion, the body of a ram and the tail of a dragon.

"A third of mankind was killed..." - The devastation wrought upon humanity is massive in scope.

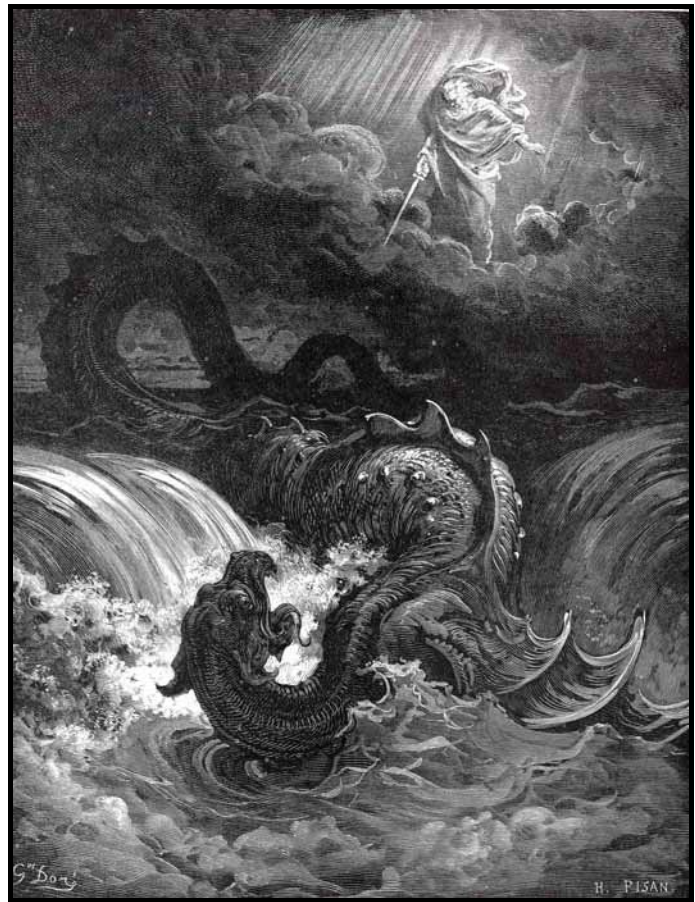
"They kill the whole person, both physically and spiritually. They carry out not the final judgement, but one that is linked to it and that prepares for it. They cause the physical death of idolaters, compromisers, and persecutors of the church who are already spiritually dead. This plague of death includes all the forms of death that the ungodly undergo (from illness, tragedy, etc.). The death stroke against their bodies makes certain their spiritual death for eternity, since those who physically die in an unbelieving state remain in that condition forever. In this sense, it can be said that death here is both spiritual and physical." (Beale, p. 512)

"The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands..."

- Despite the fearful devastation and death brought about by the onslaught of the demonic horde, the surviving portion of unbelieving mankind remains steadfast in its impenitence.

"The work of their hands" is an expression typically used in Scripture to denote idolatry, dismissing the idol as a false god which man has concocted for himself. The Psalmist derides such idiocy:

"Our God is in heaven, He does whatever pleases Him. But their gods are silver and gold, made by the hands of men. They have mouths, but



"The Destruction of Leviathan" by Gustave Doré

cannot speak, eyes but they cannot see; they have ears but they cannot hear, noses but they cannot smell, they have hands but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk; nor can they utter a sound with their throats. Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.” (Psalm 115:3-8; cf. also Deuteronomy 4:28; 27:15; 31:29; 2 Kings 19:18; 22:17; 2 Chronicles 32:19; 34:25; Psalm 135:15; Isaiah 2:8; 17:8; 37:19; Jeremiah 1:16; 10:3,9; 25:6,7,14; 32:30; 44:8; Hosea 14:3; Micah 5:13; Haggai 2:14; Acts 7:41).



“Pazuzu - Sumerian Lord of the North Wind, Pestilence and Plague”

In this context the phrase *“did not repent of the work of their hands”* indicates a refusal to turn away from the worship of idols. *“Repent”* (Greek - *“metanoeo ek”*) refers to a change of mind or of heart that results in the rejection of someone or something - in this instance, the worship of idols. Mankind’s defiant idolatry continues as in place of the one true God they choose to worship *“demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk.”* While Scripture derides and ridicules the worship of idols as foolishness, the Bible also clearly recognizes the role of the demonic (Greek - *“ta daimonia”*) in idol worship. Whatever real spiritual power these man-made gods may have is simply that of the demon, masquerading behind the face of the idol (cf. Deuteronomy 32:15-18; Psalm 106:37; John 8:39-44; 1 Corinthians

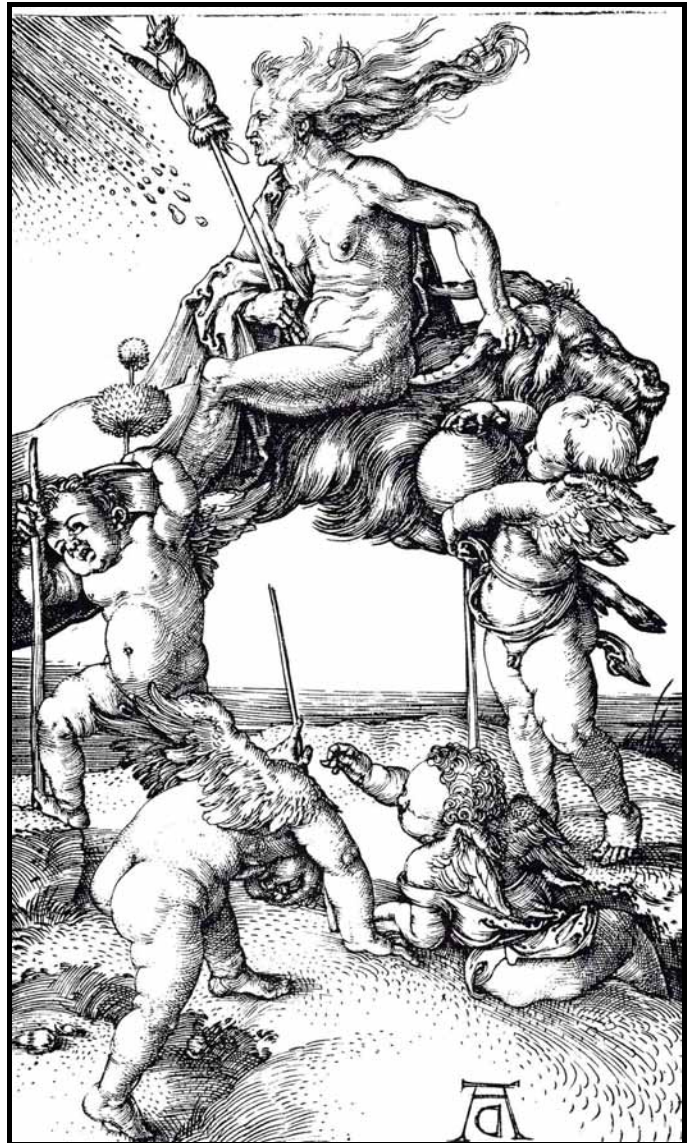
10:21; 1 John 3:7-10; Revelation 13:3-4, 11-15).

Idolatrous rejection of the true God inevitably results in immorality - *“Nor did they*

repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality, or their thefts.” John specifies violations of the fifth (“*murder*”- Greek - “*ton phonon*”), sixth (“*sexual immorality*” Greek - “*tes porneias*”), and seventh commandments (“*thefts*” - Greek - “*ton klemmaton*”). Also included in the vice list is “*their magic arts*” - Greek - “*ton pharmakon*”). This term is sometimes used positively in reference to medicine but in this negative context it applies to any form of sorcery, witchcraft, or spiritism, including the use of poisons, drugs, amulets, necromancy and incantation. These particular sins may have been listed because of their direct connection to various forms of idol worship.

The sounding of the sixth trumpet intensifies and expands the vision of God’s judgement upon sinful mankind. In the face of continued obstinate impenitence that judgement moves forward toward its inevitable conclusion. The vast horde of demonic cavalry is let loose to wreck devastation and death upon impenitent mankind. The grotesque detail in which this host is described serves to emphasize the incredible destructiveness of which these servants of hell are capable. Martin Franzmann observes:

“The very exuberance of these wild prophecies of torturing locusts and resistlessly destructive calvary is a salutary warning against all attempts to trace out fulfillments of them in the transparent facts of history. These prophecies show us the futility of such attempts. God in His judgemental wooing of man-gone-wrong can work in heights and depths and with means which the transparent facts of history conceal rather than reveal.” (Franzmann, p. 74)



*“Wahlpurgisnacht - The Witch’s Sabbath”
by Albrecht Dürer*



“The Angel and the Little Scroll” by Lucas Cranach

The Angel and the Little Scroll

Revelation 10:1-21

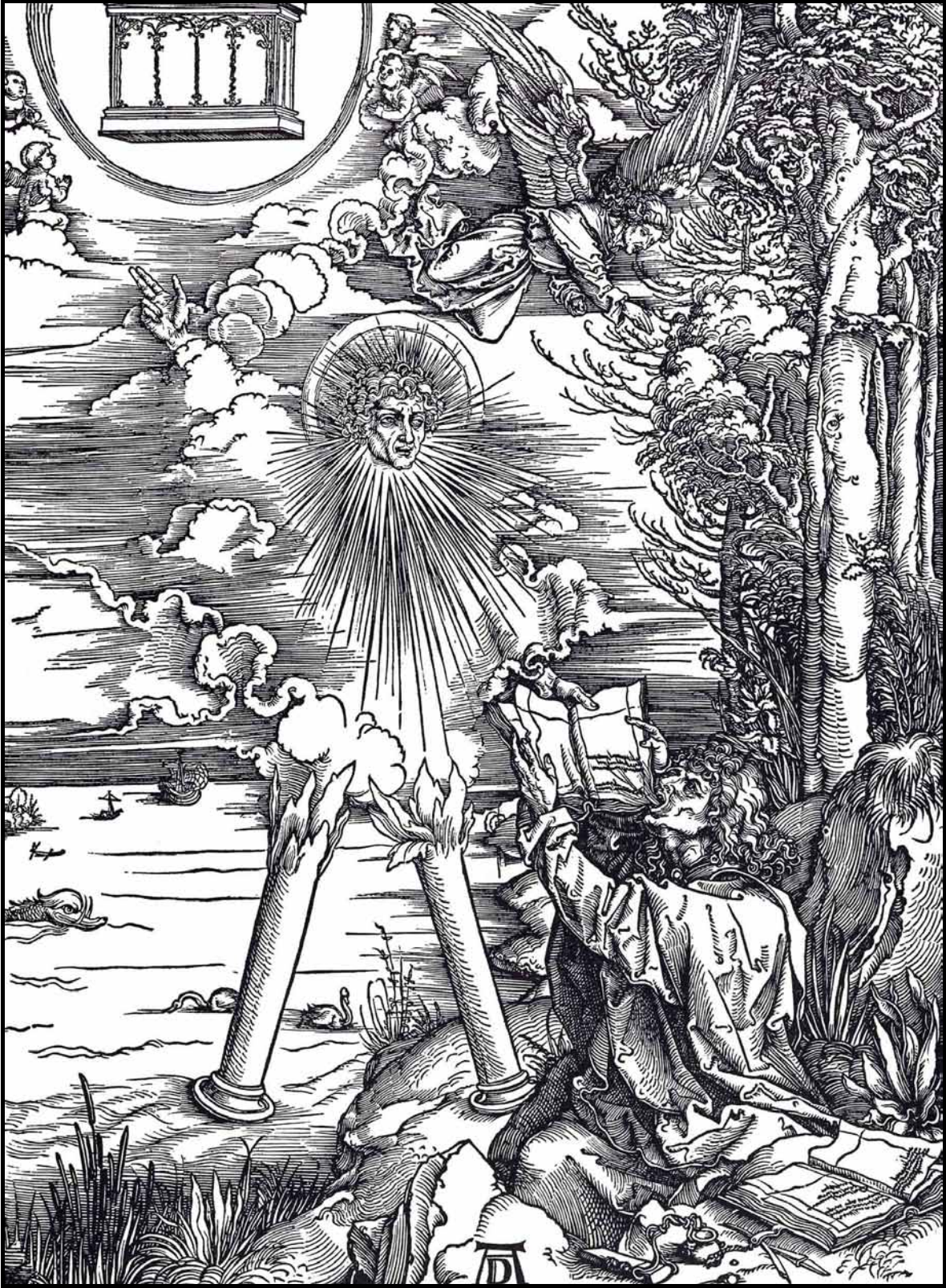
Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, 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.” 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 forever 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 hands 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 you 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."

"Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven." - There was an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, a pause which assured the church of its preservation and victory (Revelation 7). In the same way, there is now an interlude of assurance for both the prophet and the church between the sounding of the sixth and the seventh trumpets. First, St. John is reassured of his commission and call from God. He is reassured that the word which he reveals is the Word of the Lord which will most surely come to pass. A *"mighty angel"* descends from heaven. This is the second of three such angels which appear in the Book of Revelation (Cf. Revelation 5:2; 18:21). The text stresses the fact that this is *"another mighty angel,"* not the same creature that appeared in Revelation 5:2. In fact it is immediately evident that this messenger *"coming down from heaven"* is no ordinary angel. He is, instead, the Lord Jesus Himself. The adjective *"mighty"* (Greek - *"ischyron"*) signifies strength that belongs to God alone. In the



"The Glory of the Lord Upon Mt. Sinai" by Carolsfeld



"The Angel and the Little Book" by Albrecht Dürer

Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the use of this word in the heavenly sphere was reserved only for God Himself. The Gospel writers use the same term to describe Jesus as the One who is **“mightier”** than John the Baptist (cf. Matthew 3:11; Mark 1:7; Luke 3:16). The divine aura of this being is further indicated by his apparel. The **“mighty angel”** is **“robed in a cloud,”** **“clad in the cloud panoply of heaven.”** (Franzmann, p. 75) Throughout the Old Testament only the coming of God is surrounded by the clouds of heaven. The Psalmist declares: **“He makes the clouds His chariots and rides on the wings of the wind.”** (Psalm 104:3). In the pillar of cloud and fire, the Lord led Israel through the wilderness (Exodus 13:21; 14:19-20; Numbers 9:17-21) and the **“Shekinah,”** the glory cloud of the divine presence rested over the ark of the covenant in tabernacle and temple (Exodus 40:34-35; Leviticus 16:2; 1 Kings 8:10; 2 Chronicles 5:13). The **“Angel of the Lord,”** that is, the pre-incarnate Christ, is also associated with the cloud of God’s glory (Exodus 14:19-20). In Daniel 7:13, the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days surrounded by the clouds. God speaks to Jesus from the cloud at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:5; Mark 9:7; Luke 9:35). When Jesus returns to judge the earth He will come **“on the clouds of heaven.”** (Matthew 24:30). Thus, without exception, throughout Scripture, only God is ever spoken of as having been **“robed in a cloud.”** (Cf. Lamentations 3:42-44; Ezekiel 1:4,28).

The second divine identifying mark of this angel is the rainbow above his head. In Revelation 4:3 a rainbow encircled the heavenly throne of God. In Ezekiel 1:28 the prophet tells us **“Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around Him.”** The rainbow had originally been given as a gracious reminder of God’s covenant promise not to destroy the world again by a flood (Genesis 8:22; 9:13-17). Malachi had foretold the coming of **“the messenger (“angel”) of the covenant whom you desire.”** (Malachi 3:1). Now this angel comes, crowned by the rainbow, as the covenant messenger of God.

The Christological character of this angel is further corroborated by his facial appearance - **“His face was like the sun.”** This again is language that Scripture reserves for God alone. The sun is a common image for the glory of God in the Old Testament (cf. Isaiah 60:1-3,20; Psalm 84:11). Malachi designates the coming Messiah as **“the Sun of Righteousness.”** (Malachi 4:2). On the Mount of Transfiguration Jesus’ face **“shone like the sun.”**(Matthew 17:2). When the exalted Christ appears to John in Revelation 1, **“His face was like the sun shining in all of its brilliance.”**



"The Angel and the Little Book" by Jean Duvet

One final detail completes the awesome image of the Christophany - *“and His legs were like fiery pillars.”* Once again, the language recalls the description of the glorified Christ in the Prologue - *“His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace.”* (Revelation 1:15). The Son of Man in Daniel’s vision had *“legs like the gleam of burnished bronze.”* (Daniel 10:6) The slight shift in language here serves to evoke even more strongly the image of the fiery pillar with which the Lord led the Children of Israel on their way to the land of promise. In this way, the image of fiery pillars serves to express the strength and power of Christ as He serves to guard and guide His people.

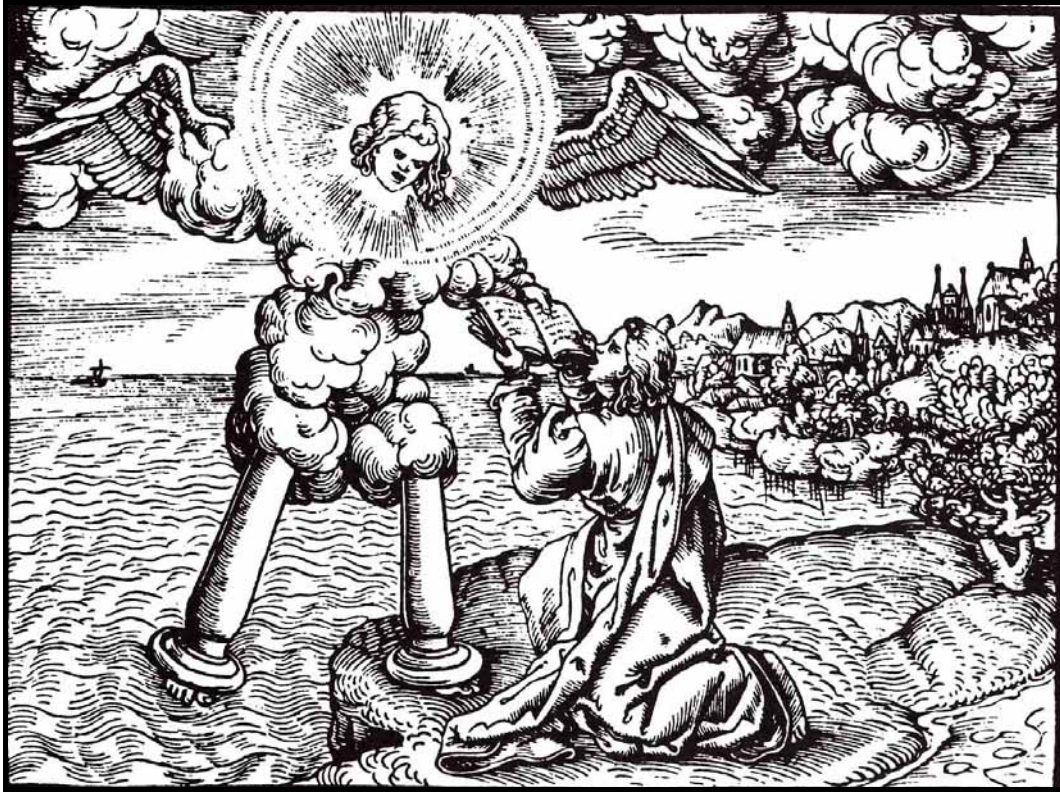
“He was holding a little scroll which lay open in His hand.” - A *“little book”* (Greek - *“biblarpidion”*) lays open in the Angel of the Lord’s hand. It is carefully introduced at this point to highlight its role as a central component in the scene. This is, in all probability, the seven sealed scroll, with its prophetic message of the unfolding plan of salvation and judgement throughout the New Testament era which had been opened by Christ in the preceding vision. Thus the verb *“which lay open”* is a perfect passive participle, literally, *“which has been opened,”* action completed in the past the effect of which continues into the present. The contents of the scroll are known to John. They open before him.



*“The Angel and the Little Book”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

“He planted His right foot on the sea and His left foot on the land.” -

The Angel of the Lord stands astride both land and sea. He is a giant colossus. His stature and His stance denote Christ’s absolute sovereignty over all who dwell upon



“The Angel and the Little Book” - Luther Bible Woodcut

the earth and the profound significance of the mission of salvation and judgement entrusted to Him. As this gigantic figure dominates the vision with one foot on the sea and the other on the land so the Lord rules over the totality of the earth. In the visions to come, we will see dragons and beasts arising from both land and sea. The mighty Angel of the Lord remains in control nonetheless.

“And He gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When He shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke.” - The magnitude of the Angel’s cry - ***“like the roar of a lion”*** - indicates that He speaks with the full power and authority of God. It is no mere co-incidence that when the Lamb of God takes possession of the seven sealed scroll in chapter 5, He is further identified as ***“the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”*** (Revelation 5:5) The lion metaphor as an expression of that power is drawn from the Old Testament. Job complains to God: ***“If I hold my head high, you stalk me like a lion and again display your awesome power against me.”*** (Job 10:16) Amos declares that he must prophesy because the Word of the Lord has been entrusted to him: ***“The lion has roared, who will not fear? The Sovereign Lord has spoken - who can but prophesy?”*** (Amos 3:8) When the Lord promises that He will speak to

His people with saving power, it is through the imagery of the lion's roar: *"They will follow the Lord, He will roar like a lion. When He roars, His children will come trembling from the West. They will come trembling like birds from Egypt, like doves from Assyria. I will settle them in their homes, declares the Lord."* (Hosea 11:10) The inevitability of God's judgement upon His rebellious people is compared to the fearless presence of the lion over his prey:

"As the lion growls, a great lion over his prey - and though a whole band of shepherds is called together against him, he is not frightened by their shouts, or disturbed by their clamor - so the Lord Almighty will come down to do battle on Mt. Zion and on its heights." (Isaiah 31:4)

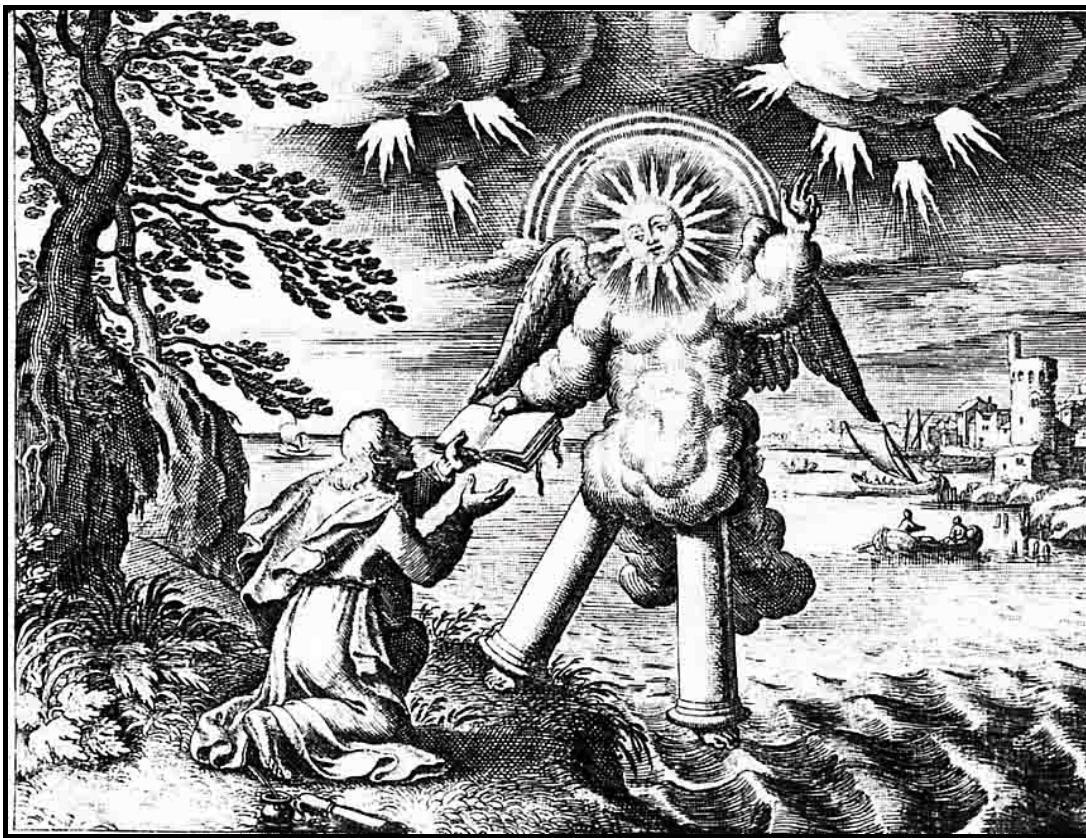
In the Fourth Book of Ezra, a Jewish apocalyptic book written about 100A.D., it is the Messiah who speaks with the roar of the lion: *"And as for the lion that you saw rousing up out of the forest and roaring and speaking to the eagle and reproving him for his unrighteousness, and for his words that you have heard, this is the Messiah."* (4 Ezra 12:31) The point of the image here in Revelation is clear - that which the Angel of the Lord speaks is the Word and command of God. It is proclaimed with convincing power from on high. That image of power and authority is further enhanced by the *"voices of the seven thunders"* which reverberate to the sound of the Angel's voice. There is no specific reference elsewhere in Scripture to *"the seven thunders"* although John's use of the definite article - *"the seven thunders"* seems to indicate that he was referring to a phenomenon with which his readers would be familiar. Perhaps the allusion is the rumbling thunder of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19:16-



"The Angel and the Little Book"
by Hans Burgmair

19). Rabbinic tradition referred to God’s voice of thunder at Sinai which divided itself into seven voices, representing the holiness and completeness of the Law. Reflecting this tradition, Psalm 29 presents a sevenfold song of praise to the thunder of God’s voice -

“The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the glory of God thunders over the mighty waters. The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is majestic. The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars...The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning. The voice of the Lord shakes the desert...The voice of the Lord twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in His temple all cry, “Glory!” (Psalm 29: 3-9)



*“The Angel and the Little Scroll” 18th Century Bible Engraving
by Matthias Merian*

The context of John’s vision strongly suggests that *“the voices of the seven thunders”* are indeed the voice of God. They *“act as God’s imprimatur on the*

angel's voice and mission." (Brighton, p. 269) When John heard the message the thunders proclaimed, he prepared to record their words - **"And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write..."** The Revelator is prevented from doing so by a command from heaven - **"But I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."** Everything that John wrote was revealed to him by God but evidently not everything that was revealed was to be written. The Bible is complete but it is not exhaustive (cf. John 21:25). *"Even the inspired prophet proclaims not everything which he, or God's people, wish to know, but all that they need to know."* (Franzmann, p. 76) Perhaps that which was revealed by the seven thunders was necessary for the prophet himself, in preparing him for that which he still must write or do, but it was not intended for the prophet's audience. It is God alone Who controls and determines the content and the extent of His Revelation.

"Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised His right hand to heaven." - The focus of the scene now returns to the mighty angel Himself. A solemn oath to implement judgement upon the wicked is about to be taken. This is signified by the customary raising of the right hand (cf. Psalm 106:26). In Deuteronomy 32:40, God takes a formal oath to reassure His people that He will surely bring judgement upon the wicked: **"I lift My hand to heaven and declare: As surely as I live forever, when I sharpen My flashing sword and My hand grasps it in judgement, I will take vengeance on My adversaries and repay those who hate Me."** A similar scene occurs in Daniel 12:7 where we read: **"The man clothed in linen who was above the waters of the river, lifted his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and I heard him swear by Him who lives forever."** In both instances, the substance of the God's promise is that His judgement will not fail to overtake those who have defied and denied Him. The oath of the Angel of the Lord in Revelation 10 is similar in its context and content. It is not uncommon for God to use the solemn formality of an oath as a means of comforting His people and strengthening their faith (cf. Genesis 22:16; Exodus 32:13; Isaiah 45:43; Jeremiah 49:13; Ezekiel 20:5; Amos 6:8; Hebrews 6:13). As Thomas Kingo's classic hymn affirms: **"He by His oath hath sworn, I on that oath depend."** (ELH # vs.4)

"And He swore by Him who lives forever 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..." - The majestic language of the oath identifies the eternal and omnipotent Creator as the guarantor of the promise. Only the God who is transcendent,



*“The Angel and the Little Book”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

absolutely beyond time and space - the God who is the source of everything that exists throughout the entire universe - has the power and authority to make such a promise and to keep it. The triple specification of heaven, earth, and sea, stresses the universal scope of that divine power. The fact that the oath is made by Christ, the Angel of the Lord, serves to emphasize His absolute rule over the universe in the last days and His crucial role in the establishment of the new creation. That which was symbolized by the great Angel's stance astride the land and the sea, is given explicit expression in the language of the oath.

*“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.” - The substance of the oath follows the pattern of its Old Testament precedents. The commitment is given that the promises of God will most surely be kept. His plan and purpose for the salvation of His people and the judgement of the wicked will be completely fulfilled. The opening phrase of the oath literally says *“there will be no interval of time!”* - that is to say, nothing shall interrupt or prevent the accomplishment of God's purpose. The imminent sounding of the seventh trumpet will carry us forward to the end of time when *“the mystery of God will be accomplished.”* The word *“mystery”* (Greek - *“mysterion”*) refers to that which cannot be known by natural means, apart from divine revelation. St. Paul uses the term, most prominently in his letter to the Ephesians, to include the entire plan of

salvation by grace through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. John's use of the word here in Revelation 10 is similarly broad. It includes the plan of salvation as it was outlined throughout the Old Testament by the prophets and now comes to its culmination and completion in the prophecies of Revelation itself. It is significant to note that the verb "**announced**" in conjunction with God's message to the prophets is the Greek word "*euangelisen*" which literally means "*to preach or proclaim the gospel.*" This is the only use of the term in the book of Revelation. The Old Testament is, as Luther remarks, the cradle which holds the Christ child. It is a proclamation of the Gospel from the first promise of Genesis 3:15 to the closing verses of Malachi. The martyrs beneath the altar and the saints before the throne had cried for the vindication of God and the coming of His kingdom. The assurance of the angel's oath is that all the promises made through God's prophet's will be kept without fail.

"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..." - The heavenly voice which had

spoken previously to forbid the message of the seven thunders (10:4) now commands John to approach the Angel of the Lord and take up the scroll that lies open in His hand. The scroll represents the message that it contains. The command to take the scroll represent a reaffirmation of John's call and commission as a prophet of God.

When asked for the scroll, the angel provides it with the instruction that John is to take the scroll and eat it - ***"Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey."*** The incident is based upon the call of the



"The Prophet Ezekiel" by J. James Tissot

prophet Ezekiel. There, too, the call of God’s spokesman to proclaim the Word of the Lord was enacted in a visionary command to consume a scroll with the words of God written upon it. Thus. In the graphic imagery of the vision, the prophet digests God’s words so that he may regurgitate them again before the people to whom God sends him.

“Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and warning and woe. And He said to me, “Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the House of Israel. So I opened my mouth and He gave me the scroll to eat. Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it.” So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth.” (Ezekiel 2:9-3:3)



*“The Call of the Prophet Ezekiel” - 19th Century Bible Illustration
by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

The Greek verb “*kataphage*” (“**Eat!**”) is most emphatic. It should be translated “*Devour!*” Jeremiah once used the same image to express his acceptance of his prophetic responsibility to faithfully proclaim the Word of God: “***When your words came, I ate them, they were my joy and my heart’s delight, for I bear Your Name, O Lord God Almighty.***” (Jeremiah 15:16) The symbolic action of eating the scroll indicates not only the acceptance of the prophetic role, but also the necessity that the prophet himself “*inwardly digest*” the Word that he has been called to proclaim. In fact, this Greek verb is often used in precisely that sense “*to receive and contemplate knowledge,*” or “*to digest information.*” The prophet is never personally detached from the message that is preached. That Word impacts and affects him as much as it does his audience. That is the point of the bitter/sweet imagery in the text. The sweet (Greek - “*glykys*”) message of the Gospel offers the same comfort, hope, and joy to both speaker and hearer. In the same way the sharp bitterness (Greek - “*pikros*”) of the Law pierces the hearts and consciences of all. Bitterness may also be the result of the rejection of that message by the audience to whom it is addressed which all too often resulted in the rejection and persecution of the faithful messenger (cf. Jeremiah 12:1-13; 20:7-18; Ezekiel 3:4-9). “***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.”*** - John complies with the angel’s instruction, and it is just as it was foretold - the scroll is sweet and then bitter. Franzmann notes:

“He finds the high privilege sweet to the taste, but he knows that his office means that he will be “a torment to those who dwell on the earth” (11:10) and will leave him with a bitter bellyful. John is assured not that his office will make him happy, but that it will prove valid and effective.” (Franzmann, p. 78)

The prophet’s obligation to faithfully convey the Word of God that has been entrusted to him is absolute - “***you must prophesy again...***” This is a message of vital importance for all of humanity - “***many peoples, nations, languages, and kings.***” This fourfold classification, representing the entire human race, is characteristic of the Book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15).

The symbolism of the Mighty Angel interlude, the oath and the eating of the little scroll, serves to validate the overall ministry of the prophets and to reaffirm the specific responsibility of John as a prophet of God in terms of this particular book of prophecy.



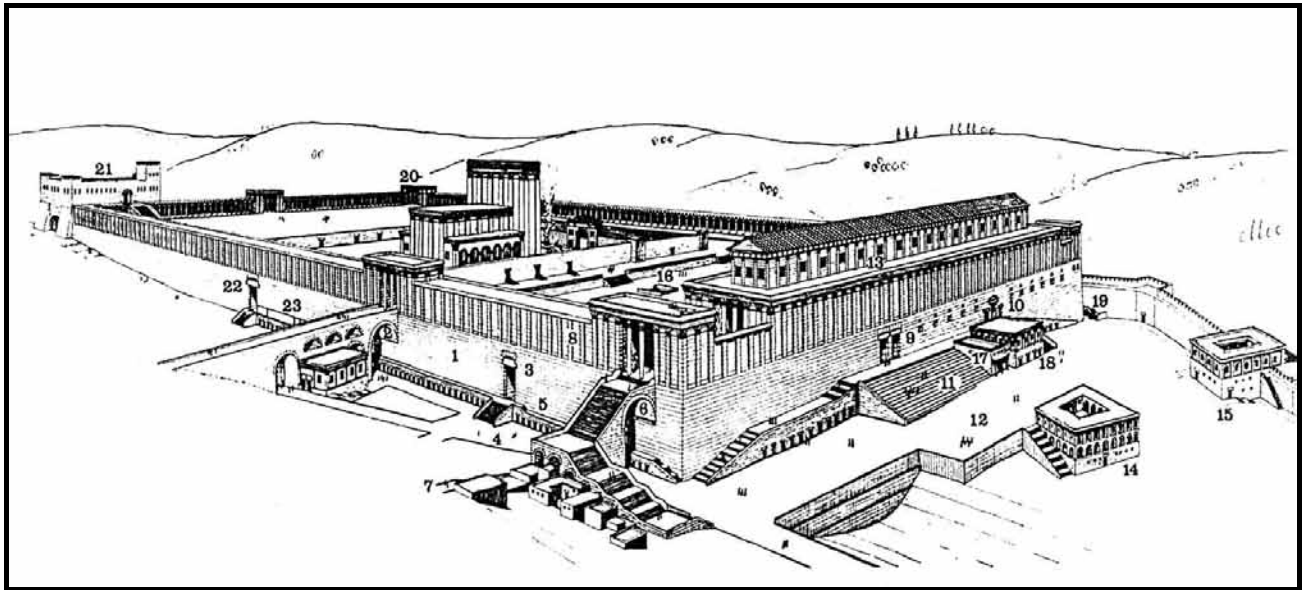
“The Two Witnesses” by Lucas Cranach

The Measurement of the Temple and the Two Witnesses Revelation 11:1-14

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. 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. 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 water into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. 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 streets 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.

"I was given a reed like a measuring rod..." - The focus now shifts to the status of the church during the unfolding judgements of the seven trumpets. What is the fate of the people of God while these horrors and woes are being poured out upon the unbelieving mass of mankind? The ongoing, irrepressible witness of the church is clearly affirmed in the interlude of the measuring of the temple and the two witnesses. The role of the Revelator continues to be more active than that of a mere observer. John has become an actual participant in the visions which unfold before him. The symbolic action of measuring the temple is drawn from the prophecy of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 40-48) and Zechariah (Zechariah 2:1-5). The prophetic measuring of the Temple and the city of Jerusalem in the Old Testament was a promise of divine protection and restoration. That remains its significance here in Revelation. Amid all the judgement plagues that are coming upon the earth the church of Christ shall stand safe and secure. The imagery is clearly symbolic. The great temple of Herod in Jerusalem had been smashed to ruins along with the rest of the city decades earlier by the legions of Titus. Those who fantasize today about literal reconstructions of physical temples have completely missed the point of the symbolism. All the people of God in Christ are the temple in the New Testament era. This crucial theological



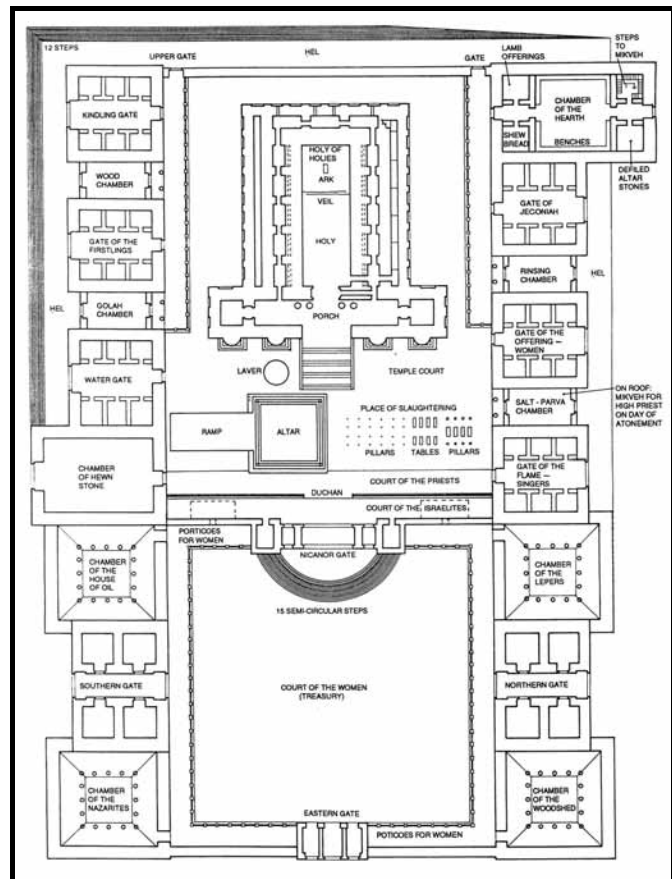
“Herod’s Temple in Jerusalem” by Leen Rittmeyer

insight is nullified or ignored by those who suggest the need for a reconstructed temple in Jerusalem. The temple, unlike the churches of our day, was designed as the sacred dwelling place of God. It was not intended to accommodate a congregation for worship. It was instead a dark and remote place cut off from the people by the massive curtain that veiled the Holy of Holies. When Jesus died on the cross that massive curtain was ripped apart, signaling the removal of the barrier of sin. Now God dwells among us in the person of His Son. ***“For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said, “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God and they will be My people.”*** (2 Corinthians 6:16) Writing to the congregation in Ephesus, St. Paul declares:

“Consequently you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Jesus Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by His Spirit.” (Ephesians 2:19-22; cf. also 2 Thessalonians 2:4)

In the same way, the writer to the Hebrews affirms that you have come to ***“Mount Zion,” “the heavenly Jerusalem,” “the city of the living God”*** which is ***“the church of the first-born whose names are written in heaven.”*** (Hebrews 12:22)

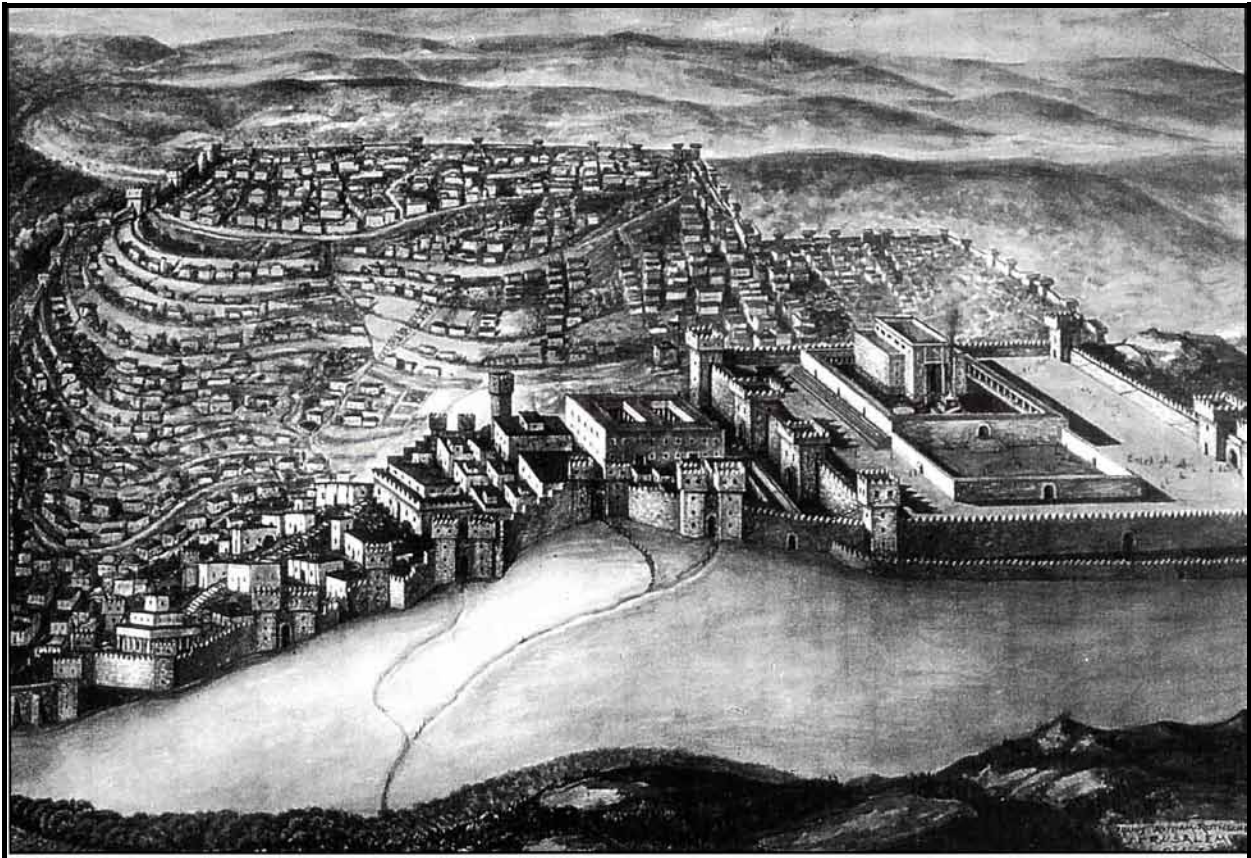
John is given *“a reed like measuring rod.”* The lightweight stalk of this marsh plant, which sometimes grew to the height of 15 to 20 feet, was often used as a measuring tool. The measuring reed used by Ezekiel was about nine feet long. John is directed to measure *“the temple of God and the altar.”* The temple in Jerusalem was a series of ornate colonnades and porches surrounding the Sanctuary itself which housed the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. In this context, as verse 2 will specify, the reference is to the Sanctuary itself and not to the entire complex. The *“altar”* in question is the golden altar of incense (Greek - *“thysiasterion”*) which was located inside of the Holy Place of the Sanctuary. The incense rising from the altar signified the prayers of God’s people (Revelation 5:8; 8:4) The specific inclusion of the incense altar in the measurement may have been designed to emphasize the ongoing worship of the church which will continue without interruption throughout the New Testament era. In addition to these measurements, John is also instructed to *“count the worshipers there.”* As the 144,000 were sealed before the throne (Revelation 7:1-8) so now those who worship in the temple of God are carefully counted and enumerated. Our God knows each and every one of those who are His own. Not one will be overlooked or forgotten. The temple and the altar are meticulously measured - the worshiping congregation is precisely counted - the symbolism repeats and reinforces itself. God will guard and protect His people even as the trumpets of judgement continue to sound throughout the world.



A Diagram of the Inner Courts of the Temple in Jerusalem

“But exclude the outer court; do not measure it because it has been given to the Gentiles...” - John is emphatically instructed not to measure the outer courtyard of the temple. The ground plan of each reconstruction of the temple since

its original design by Solomon included an increasingly exclusive series of courtyards, gates, and buildings with the Holy of Holies at its heart. In the temple of Herod, the huge outer courtyard which occupied most of the temple mount and surrounded the inner courts and the sanctuary, was designated as the “*Court of the Gentiles.*” John makes effective use of that structure to symbolically point out that while God will protect and preserve His Church, He will not render her immune from



“The Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem”

persecution. We have God’s promise that He will surely carry us through all of the tribulations and trials of the last days, but those tribulations will have to be endured nonetheless. The outer court of the temple is not to be measured because “*it has been given to the Gentiles.*” In this context, “*Gentiles*” should be understood in a spiritual sense as “*pagans*” or “*unbelievers*” rather than in an ethnic sense as “*non-Jews.*” The worshipers before the altar who were measured and counted included believers of all races and ethnic backgrounds, Jews and Gentiles alike. Accordingly, the “*Gentiles*” to whom the outer court has been given and who will “*trample on the*



*“Roman Troops Pillage the Holy of Holies”
15th Century Illumination*

“holy city for forty-two months” are the unbelieving mass of mankind from all races and ethnic backgrounds. In the imagery of John’s vision, the sanctuary, the altar, and the worshiping congregation are measured and counted - *“the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church.”* But the outer court and the city are given over to be trampled upon by the enemies of God. The faithful people of God will be called upon, again and again, to offer the good confession in the face of bitter opposition; to endure bloody persecution as the devil and those who are his struggle with increasing desperation to stifle the message of the Gospel. In reality, the testing of that persecution will only serve to strengthen and renew the faith of God’s people. Tertullian, the great historian of the early church said it well” *“The more you mow us down, the more we grow - for the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.”* The devil’s assault will never penetrate beyond the outer court. He can persecute and

oppress the church - but he cannot destroy it. He can torture and torment God's people. He can kill their bodies. But he cannot destroy their souls (Matthew 10:28). The sanctuary remains inviolate. The language of the text - "**They** (the Gentiles) **will trample on the holy city for 42 months**" - is strongly reminiscent of the words of Jesus: "**Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.**" (Luke 21:24) Jerusalem, "**the holy city**" is often identified with the people of God in Scripture. It is a prevalent Biblical symbol for the church. In the closing chapters of Revelation "**the new Jerusalem**" becomes the eternal dwelling place of God's people in the new heaven and the new earth. In this scene, the trampling of the holy city, extends and reinforces the symbolic presentation of the church's persecution at the hands of the unbelieving world.



"Antiochus Epiphanes Pilfering the Temple Treasury" - 15th Century Illumination

The duration of the persecution is specified as "**42 months.**" The prophecy of the two witnesses will last for the same period - "**1,260 days.**" The same time frame occurs three more times in Revelation (12:6; 12:14; 13:5). Whether measured in days (1,260), months (42), or years (3 ½) - the time period is the same. The numerology is derived from the prophecy of Daniel (Daniel 7:25; 12:6,7,11). Three and a half is half of the perfect seven, the number which symbolized absolute perfection and completion. It therefore came to represent a limited time period, only a portion of the greater whole. Among the Jews the number three and a half was directly associated with a limited period of persecution or suffering because of the three and a half years of drought and famine during the ministry of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1; 18:1,42-45; Luke 4:25; James 5:17) and the three and a half year

reign of terror during which the sacrifices in the temple were suspended by Antiochus Epiphanes in the days of the Maccabees. The use of this symbolic number in any of its variations is consistent throughout the Book of Revelation. Three and a half represents a time of suffering and persecution which is limited by the sovereign power of God. It will not continue forever. God has established its termination. In the context of this vision, the 42 months, the 1,260 days, represent the entire New Testament era, the period between the first and second comings of Christ, during which the church will be called upon to patiently endure persecution and opposition. When that limited period is over, ***“Then the end will come.”*** (Matthew 24:14)

“And I will give power to My two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days clothed in sackcloth.” -

The symbolic representation of the church which has characterized this vision continues with the appearance of the ***“two witnesses.”*** These are not particular individuals or specific prophets from the Old Testament. ***“The two witnesses are not individual prophets...Rather they represent the whole community of faith, whose primary function is to be a prophetic witness.”*** (Beale, pp. 572-573) However, their description is certainly patterned after the ministries of Moses and Elijah, the two pre-eminent prophets of the Old Testament, who stood by the side of our glorified Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). Dr. Brighton correctly contends:



***“The Martyrdom of the Two Witnesses”
15th Century Bible Illumination***

“The two witnesses are not actually Moses or Elijah, nor any other OT prophets. For in the same way that John the Baptist was in spirit that Elijah who was foretold,

so now these two prophetic witnesses are in the spirit of Moses and Elijah as they symbolize the church. For the church carries out that prophetic ministry in the same spirit of Moses and Elijah, which spirit is now symbolized by the two witnesses.”
(Brighton, p. 294)



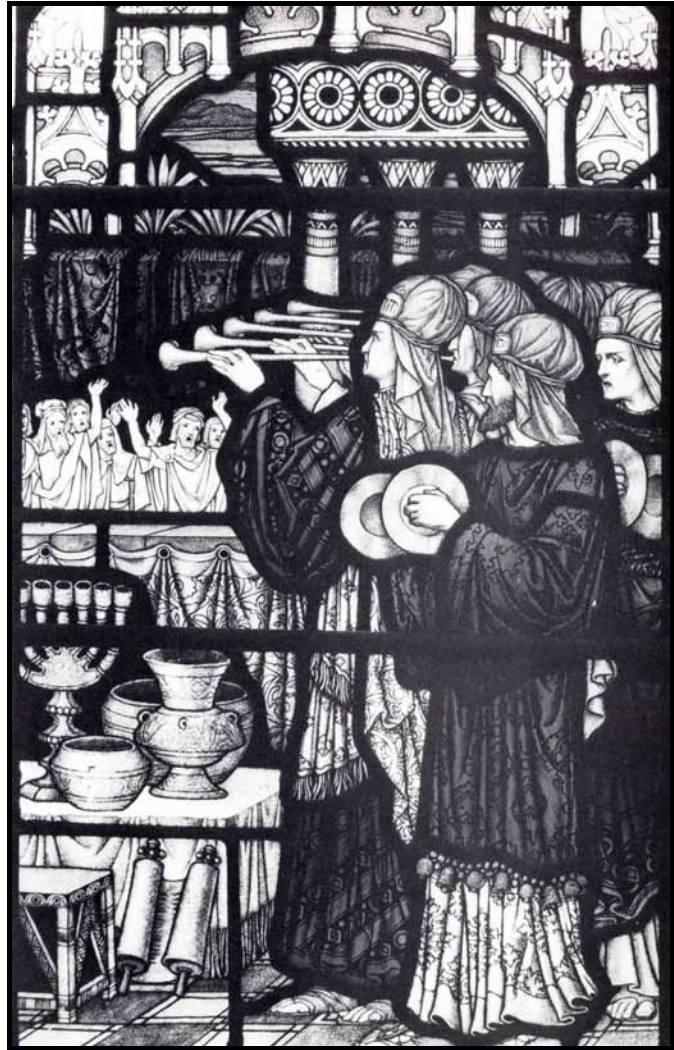
“The Prophet Zechariah” by J. James Tissot

The two witnesses who step forward are given power by God to speak on His behalf - ***“they will prophesy.”*** They are dressed in ***“sackcloth,”*** the traditional vesture of repentance and sorrow for sin (cf. Genesis 37:34; 2 Samuel 3:31; Lamentations 2:10; 1 Chronicles 21:16; Psalm 30:11; Jonah 3:5-8; Matthew 11:21) as a reminder that the confession of the church must always remain a humble call to repentance and forgiveness. Sackcloth, a coarse dark colored fabric made of goat or camel hair which was originally used for making grain sacks, was also the historic garb of a prophet (cf. Isaiah 20:2; Zechariah 13:4; Mark 1:6). The witnesses are two in number not to designate two particular individuals but in order to provide competent legal testimony which must be established with the corroboration of at least two witnesses. (Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6,15,19). The activity of the two witnesses is to continue throughout the New Testament era - ***“they will prophesy for 1,260 days.”***

“These are the two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.” - The imagery of ***“olive trees”*** and ***“lampstands”*** is freely adapted from Zechariah 4:2-14 where the

prophet is shown a golden lampstand with seven lamps that has an olive tree growing on either side of it. The golden lampstand represents Israel, the people of God. The

seven lamps upon the lampstand represent the omniscient *“eyes of the Lord which range throughout the earth.”* (Zechariah 4:10). The two olive trees represent the high priest and the king as the two leaders who the Lord has anointed to guard and protect His people and accomplish the reconstruction of the temple (Zechariah 4:14). The point of Zechariah’s vision was the assurance that despite powerful opposition the temple would be rebuilt - *“Not by might, not by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord Almighty.”* (Zechariah 4:6) John employs the same basic imagery but with significant alteration. Now the two prophet/witnesses which represent the people of God are signified by two lampstands along with the two olive trees adapted from Zechariah’s vision. The image of the church as the bearer of light in the world’s darkness has already appeared in Revelation (Revelation 1:20) and is a most appropriate image of her prophetic responsibility. John repeats the divine title used in Zechariah 4:14 - *“the Lord of the earth”* - to acknowledge his dependance upon the ancient prophet. In the original scene, the two olive trees provided the oil for the lampstand signifying God’s providential care of His people. John makes a similar point with the juxtaposition of the lampstands and the olive trees - the church is anointed and equipped by God to serve as His prophetic witness. Apart from that divine empowerment, the church’s witness will falter and fail

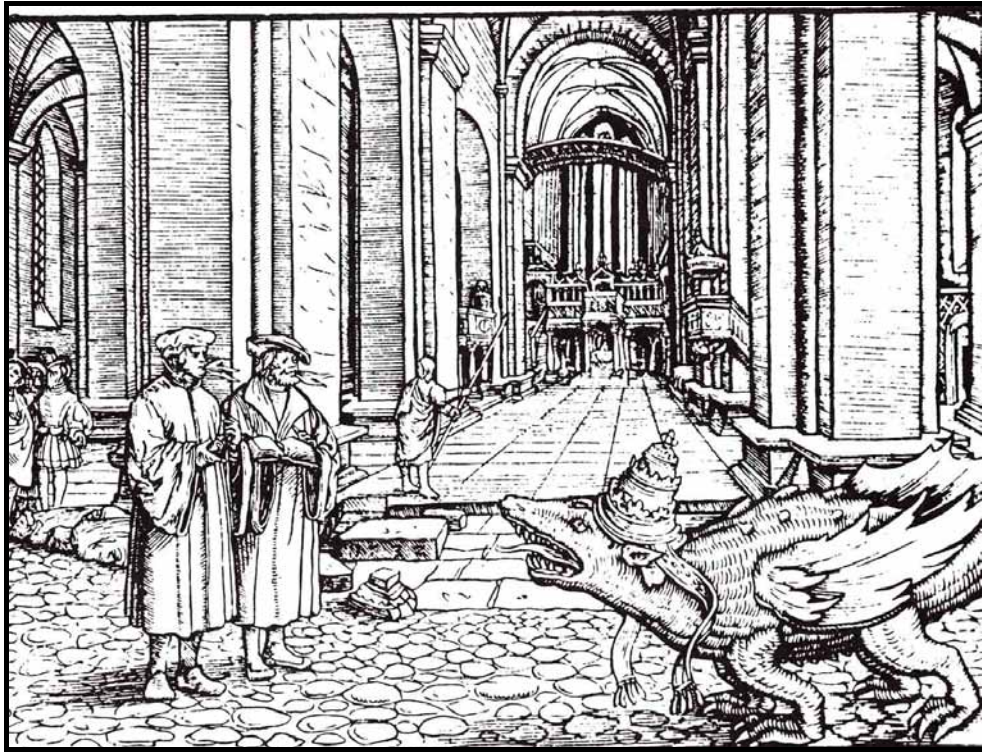


“The Celebration of the Rededication of Zerubbabel’s Temple”

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“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.” - Those who set

themselves against the witnesses of God do so at great peril. The Lord labels them as ***“My witnesses.”*** They stand under the protection of God and the word that they speak on His behalf contains the power of His judgement. Those who seek to harm them will be consumed by the ***“fire that comes from their mouths.”*** The phrase



“The Two Witnesses and the Beast from the Abyss”
Luther Bible Woodcut

refers not to physical flame but to the consuming fire of the Word of God which judges and condemns those who defy the Lord and consigns them to the undying fires of hell. God assured His prophet Jeremiah: ***“Because these people have spoken these words, I will make My words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.”*** (Jeremiah 5:14). A similar image of judgement fire proceeding from the mouth of the Divine Judge is found in 4 Ezra, a Jewish apocalyptic work written about the same time as Revelation. The author saw the Son of the Most High rising up from the heart of the sea with wind and fire and a storm coming out of His mouth. The symbolism is explained in this way:

“My Son will reprove the assembled nations for their ungodliness (this was symbolized by the storm), and will reproach them to their face with their evil thoughts and with the torments with which they are to be tortured (which were

symbolized by the flames); and He will destroy them without effort by the Law (which was symbolized by the fire).” (4 Ezra 13:37-38)

“These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain while 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.” - The awesome powers which God bestows upon His prophets are illustrated from the great events of the Old Testament like the prophet Elijah who brought drought upon the land of Israel as God’s judgement upon Ahab (1 Kings 17:1) or Moses whom God empowered to send 10 plagues upon the land of Egypt (Exodus 7-11). The judgement plagues of God are never capricious or vindictive. It is always His design to lead stubborn sinners to repentance.

“I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt. I killed your young men with the sword, along with your captured horses. I filled your nostrils with the stench of your camps, yet you have not returned to Me, declares the Lord. I overthrew some of you as I overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. You were like a burning stick snatched from the fire, yet you have not returned to Me, declares the Lord.” (Amos 4:10-11)



“The Tenth Plague of Egypt - The Death of Pharaoh’s Firstborn” by Ernst Normand



*“The Two Witnesses and the Beast”
by Hans Burgmair*

“Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them.” - The church of the faithful witnesses will always experience the persecution and opposition of the world. There can be no peaceful co-existence between the true church and the world. The devil cannot tolerate the proclamation of the truth. The full weight of his fury will fall upon those who refuse to compromise and conform to the way and wisdom of this world. The murder of the two witnesses depicts the persecution of the faithful church throughout the New Testament era and affirms that despite the devil’s rage, this witness will never be silenced. It is the Lord who determines the duration of the witnesses’

testimony - *“when they have finished their testimony.”* The Greek verb in this phrase is *“telesosin,”* the same word with which Christ announces the completion of His work of redemption from the cross - *“It is finished!”* (John 19:30). God in His providential power sees to it that the testimony of the Gospel goes on. When the faithful testimony of one witness is complete and that confessor is silenced or cut down, God will raise up another to take his place. Throughout the history of the church, that testimony has continued - the light has never gone out, although oftentimes it has seemed that the darkness threatened to overwhelm it. As Christ has promised, the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church.

The deadly enemy of the Gospel is *“the beast that comes up from the Abyss.”* The language of the text describes a ferocious wild animal of immense destructive power. In this instance, no further description is provided. This is in contrast to other beasts



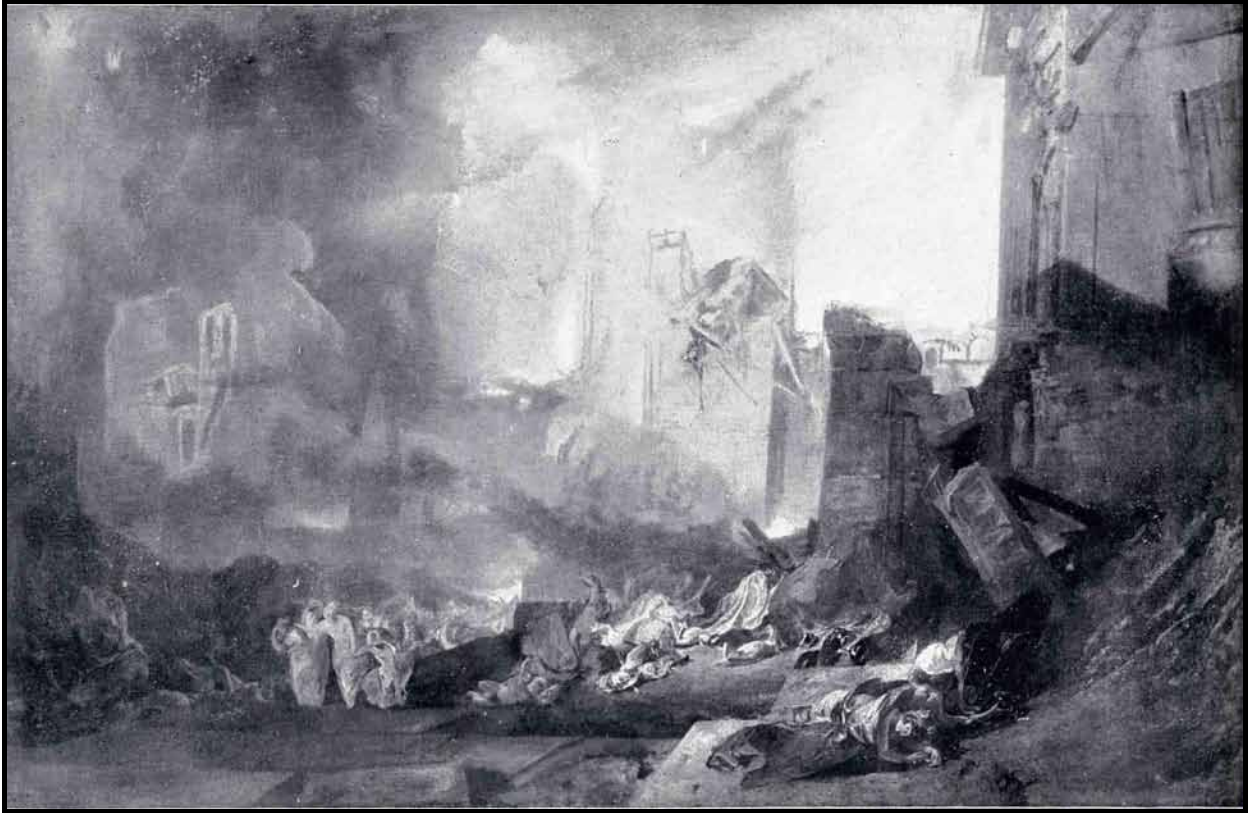
"The Two Witnesses and the Beast" by Jean Duvet

that appear later in Revelation which are described in graphic detail. All that we are told of this monster is that he rises up from the bottomless pit of Hell. This is the “*Angel of the Abyss*,” (Revelation 9:11), “*Abaddon*” and “*Apollyon*,” the Destroyer. His lust for destruction and his ability to destroy is captured in the image of “*the beast that comes up from the Abyss*.” His warfare against the Gospel and its witnesses is brutal and relentless. He will never give up or grow weary in this age-old fight. All those who would stand for the truth of God must be prepared to face his rage. Again and again he will “*overpower and kill*” God’s witnesses. The majority will always be with him. The forces of falsehood and evil will maintain the appearance of overwhelming and irresistible power. They seem to move from victory to victory - “*truth forever on the scaffold - wrong forever on the throne.*”



“The Death of the Witnesses” by Matthias Merian

The defenders of truth and righteousness will be treated with cruel contempt - “*Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt where also their Lord was crucified.*” The denial of burial was an expression of singular contempt, indignity, and humiliation (1 Samuel 17:44,46; 2 Kings 9:10; Psalm 79:1-5; Isaiah 14:19-20; Jeremiah 8:1-2; 9:22; 16:4-6; 22:19). A modern example of this concept at work can be seen in the public display of the battered



The Destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah” by J.M.W. Turner

bodies of the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and his mistress after their execution in 1945 amid the jubilation of the liberated populace. The macabre display takes place ***“in the street of the great city which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt where also their Lord was crucified.”*** The ***“great city”*** is not one particular metropolis but serves as the epitome of the ungodly and anti-christian world and its power. It is every city where Satan prevails and sinful mankind rebelliously relishes his defiant disobedience of God. It is every city where corruption and falsehood rule and the truth is ridiculed and repressed. The allusion to the crucifixion points to Jerusalem and yet every other use of the title ***“the great city”*** in Revelation refers to Rome in the guise of ***“Babylon the Great”*** as the personification of the ungodly and anti-Christian world (cf. Revelation 14:8; 16:19; 17:18; 18:10, 16, 18-21). This city is ***“figuratively (Greek - “pneumatikos” - “spiritually”) called Sodom and Egypt.”*** Apostate Jerusalem, now ground to dust beneath the conqueror’s heel, had become no different to the spiritually discerning than ancient seats of evil that had become synonymous with wickedness and sin. The sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were prime examples of places of immorality and corruption destroyed by God’s judgement (cf. Deuteronomy 29:22-26; 32:28-33; Isaiah 9:1-15; Jeremiah 23:14-15).

Egypt had come to be equated with oppression and injustice because of the four centuries of Israelite bondage in that land (Deuteronomy 5:6; Joshua 24:17; Isaiah 19:1; Ezekiel 20:7; Joel 3:19).



*“The Two Witnesses and the Beast”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

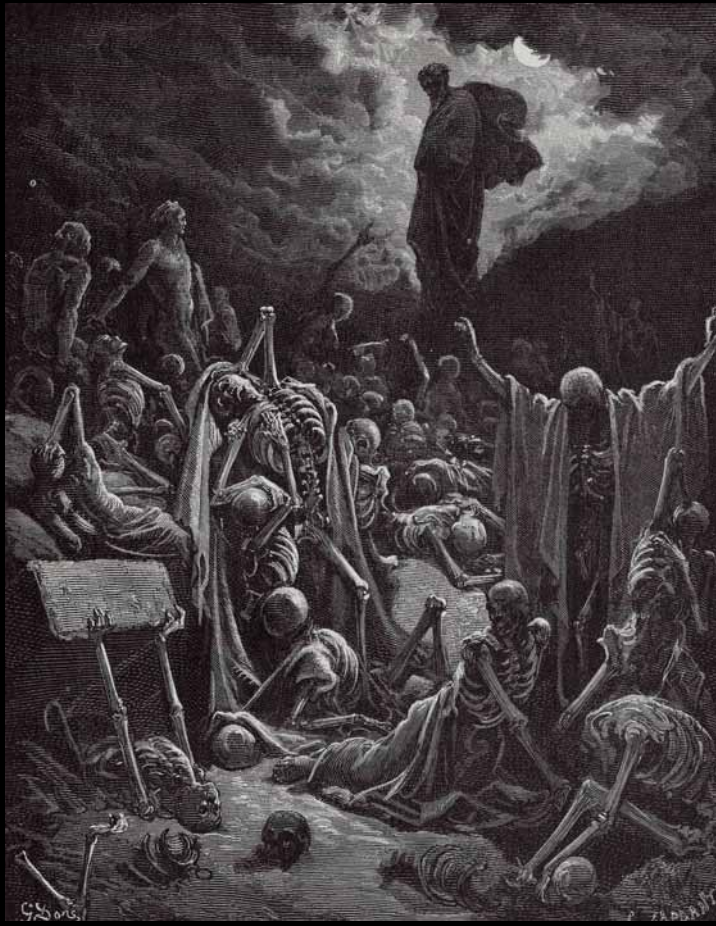
“For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language, and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.” - Sinful humanity will celebrate the downfall and death of the faithful witnesses with unrestrained jubilation. The phrase *“the inhabitants of the earth”* is used consistently in Revelation to describe the mass of unbelieving mankind. The worldwide application of these events is emphasized by the fourfold repetition - *“men from every people, tribe, language, and nation.”* The devil’s triumph is apparent - not real. It will only last for a brief time. The broken seven - three and a half - is here condensed to a mere three and a half days to symbolize the brevity of evil’s victory. The great Reformation chorale, *“O Little Flock Fear Not the Foe”* says it well:

*“O little flock fear not the foe who madly seeks your overthrow;
Dread not his rage and power.
What though your courage sometimes faints, his seeming triumph o’er God’s saints
Lasts but a little hour.*

In this context, the three and a half days, can also be seen as an allusion to the three day period of Christ’s death and burial. The burial of Christ, it should be noted, took place over the bitter objections of His enemies. It was Pilate’s way of expressing his anger over the manipulations and machinations of the High Priest (cf. John 19:38-42) The manner in which the world treats Christian’s is no different than the manner in which it treated Christ. The text strongly emphasizes mankind’s sadistic delight in the downfall of the witnesses - ***“they will gloat over them.”*** It is almost as though a world-wide holiday - an *“Antichrist-mas”* (Franzmann, p.81) has been declared with merry making and the exchange of gifts. One commentator describes their celebration as *“at once fiendish and childish.”* (Swete, p. 138) The gift exchange may, in fact, be a reference to the Hebrew Feast of Purim - ***“a day for gladness and feasting..a day on which they send choice portions to one another and gifts to the poor.”*** (Esther 9:19,22). The festival commemorated the deliverance of the Jews from destruction in the days of Esther and Mordecai. With the death of the witnesses



“Esther Denounces Haman to Save Her People” by Ernst Normand



*“Ezekiel’s Vision of the Bones”
by Gustave Dore*

sinful mankind feels as though it has been delivered - delivered from troubled consciences, the torment of guilt, and the accusations of the law. By speaking the truth, and holding up before mankind the ugly reality of its sin - **“these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.”**

“But after 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.” - The world’s merriment is found to be premature and comes to an abrupt end. At the end of the three and a half days, the time of the devil’s triumph, the breath of God which moved through the valley of the dry bones in the vision of Ezekiel (Ezekiel 37), **“entered them”** (cf. Ezekiel

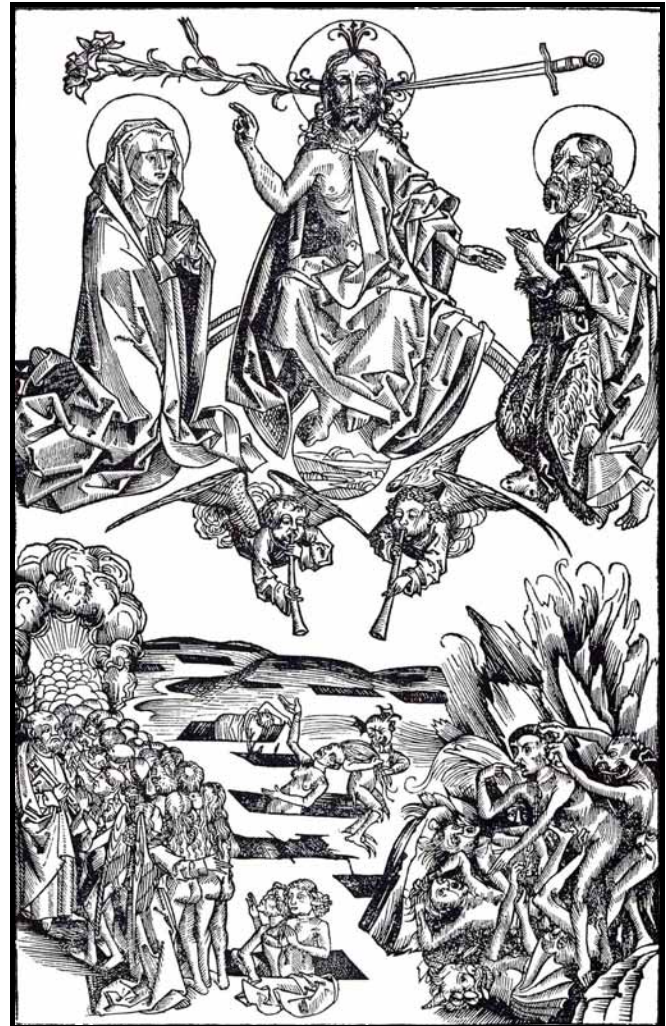
37:10) and the murdered witnesses live again. The language here closely reflects that of Ezekiel’s magnificent vision. Joyful celebration is suddenly replaced by desperate fear (Greek - *“phobos”*) - **“and terror struck those who saw them.”** The wording clearly indicates the final judgement context of these events. 4 Ezra uses virtually identical language to describe the fear of the last day:

“The trumpet will sound aloud, at which all people, when they hear it, will be struck with sudden fear. At the same time the earth will be stricken with fear...And those who have been taken up, those who have not tasted death from their birth, will appear... for evil will be blotted out.” (4 Ezra 6:23-27)

Mankind had rejoiced over the downfall of the witnesses because their death put an end to the troubling message of judgement which they proclaimed. Their ignominious demise seemed to discredit and deny their warning of impending

punishment for sin from the hand of a righteous God. But now the witnesses are alive again and their resurrection validates their message. Now the time of grace is over and the time of judgement is at hand. The resurrection of the witnesses and their vindication before the startled eyes of the world takes us to the end of the day and the great day of resurrection when the Lord shall return in glory and power to judge the living and the dead. The long awaited vindication will finally come for each and all of the witnesses when the dead in Christ shall rise to meet the Lord in the clouds.

“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.” - The resurrected witnesses are summoned into the presence of God by ***“a loud voice from heaven.”*** The triumph of the witnesses is no secret rapture. The voice of God thunders from the heavens and the victorious ascent of the saints takes place deliberately and emphatically before the startled eyes of mankind - ***“while their enemies looked on.”*** The text echoes the grim prediction of Revelation 1: ***“Look He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of Him. So shall it be. Amen!”*** (Revelation 1:7) The ascension of the witnesses resembles that of Christ who rose up into the clouds before the eyes of His startled disciples (cf. Acts 1:9).

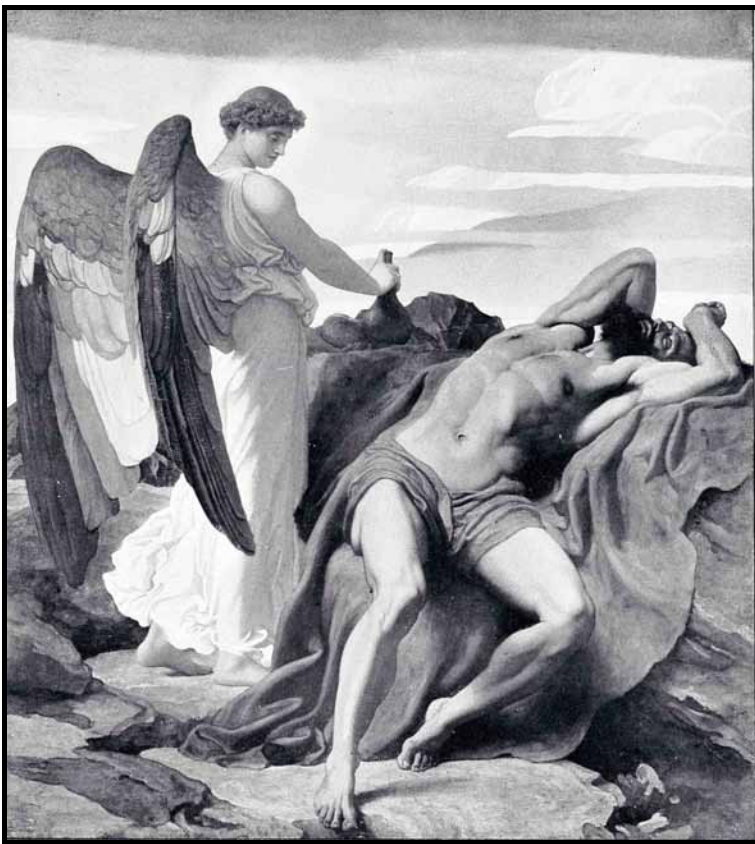


“The Last Judgement” by Michael Wohlgemuth

“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 Lord had prophesied: ***“And***

this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:14) The resurrection and ascension of the witnessing church marks the end of time. Now must come the judgement. *“At that very hour”* emphasizes the immediacy of the divine retribution. There is no further delay for by now every one of the elect has been gathered in (cf. Mark 13:20-27; 2 Peter 3:8-10). Now the foundations of the earth will be shaken and the old order will pass away. The end of the world is signaled by *“a severe earthquake* (Greek - *“seismos megas”*). The same words are used in Ezekiel 38:19 to describe the final judgement of unbelieving mankind, Gog and the host Magog. The translation *“severe earthquake”* understates the magnitude of this cataclysm. This will be a seismic event of global proportion, literally off the Richter scale. It will involve not one nation but every nation. Human civilization will totter and fall as the death throes of the earth decimate mankind - *“a tenth of the city collapsed.”* The use of the ordinal number “10” in this context signifies the unraveling of the physical order of things. It is not that 10% of the city has been destroyed while the other 90% remains stable and secure. The collapse of the physical universe has

commenced and in its opening seconds the city is decimated. Lenski aptly compares the tenth that is destroyed to the first complete stone, the keystone, that falls from the arch, with the inevitable result that all the rest must now collapse. In John’s vision *“Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake.”* The symbolic number seven thousand may have been deliberately chosen to reflect the Elijah remnant of seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kings 19:18). The judgement is then a *“lex talionis”* - eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth - penalty (Exodus 21:24). The



“Elijah in the Wilderness” by Frederic Leighton



“Daniel in the Lion’s Den” by Briton Riviere

two witnesses who were killed represent the church. The number of unbelievers slain in the earthquake then matches the figurative number which represents the church. Just as the faithful remnant (7,000) were killed for their testimony so 7,000 unbelievers must die in retribution. Those who do not perish immediately will be overcome with dread and belatedly ***“gave glory to the God of heaven.”*** But it will be too late. There will be no unbelievers left on that great day. All will be compelled to acknowledge the reality and the majesty of God, not in faith, but in desperate fear. These are the same words with which the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar begrudgingly acknowledged the reality of Daniel’s God after the prophet’s deliverance from the lions’ den (Daniel 4:34). They did not indicate the presence of saving faith there and they do not here. As John reported at the end of the sixth trumpet vision - ***“The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent.”*** (Revelation 9:20). As in the days of Noah when the vast majority of mankind rejected the patriarch’s warning of impending judgement until the door to ark was closed and the deluge had begun so it will be on the last day. On that day the moment of final recognition will come for every man on earth and all will know the

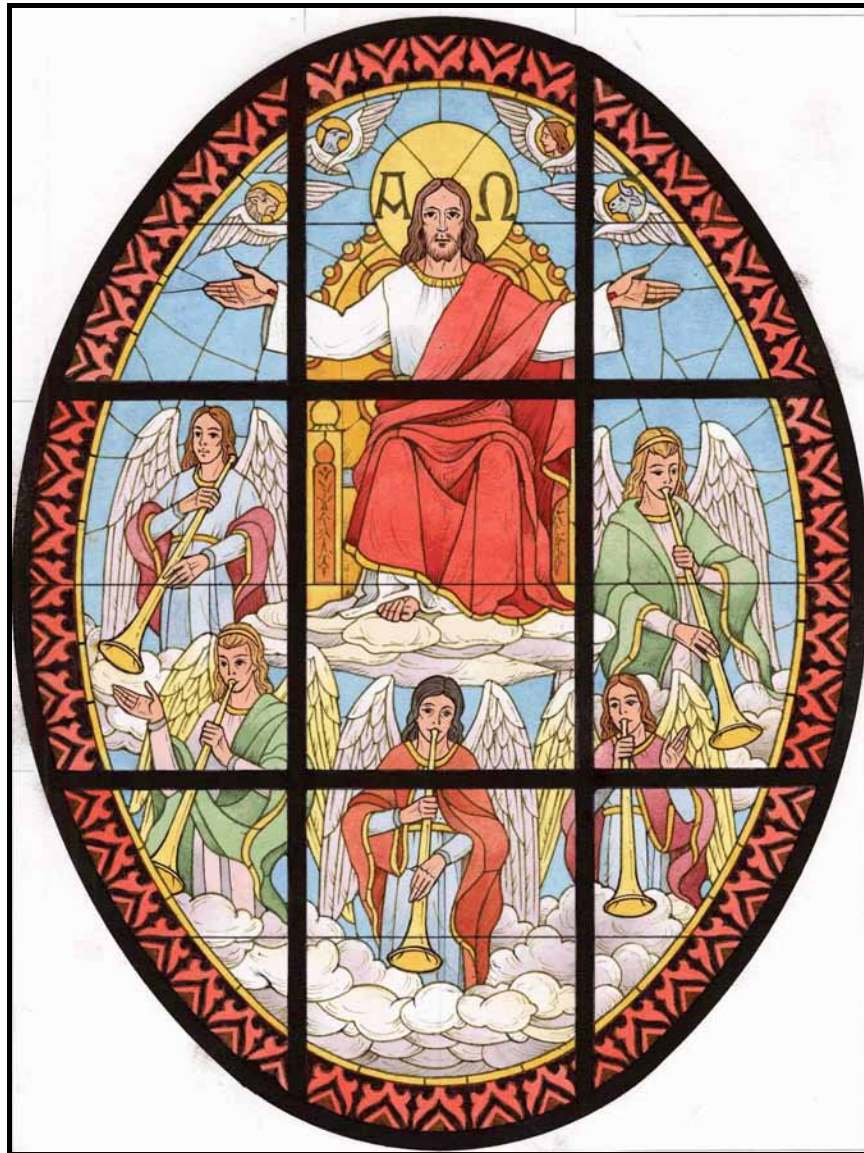


“The Death of Mankind in the Flood” by Karl Schorn

fatal error of their ways. But by then it will be too late. When judgement comes the time of repentance is over. Hear the bitter lament of God over the damned:

“If you had responded to my rebuke, I would have poured out my heart to you and made my thoughts known to you. But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you - when calamity overtakes you like a storm, when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind, when distress and troubles overwhelm you. Then they will call to me but I will not answer; they will look for me but will not find me.” (Proverbs 1:23-28)

“The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.” - The announcement that the second woe has come and gone reverts to Revelation 9:21 and the completion of the sixth trumpet. The interlude of the mighty angel’s oath and the two witnesses was interspersed between the end of the second woe and the beginning of the third. The announcement here that the third woe is imminent serves to pick up the narrative where it had been interrupted after 9:21.

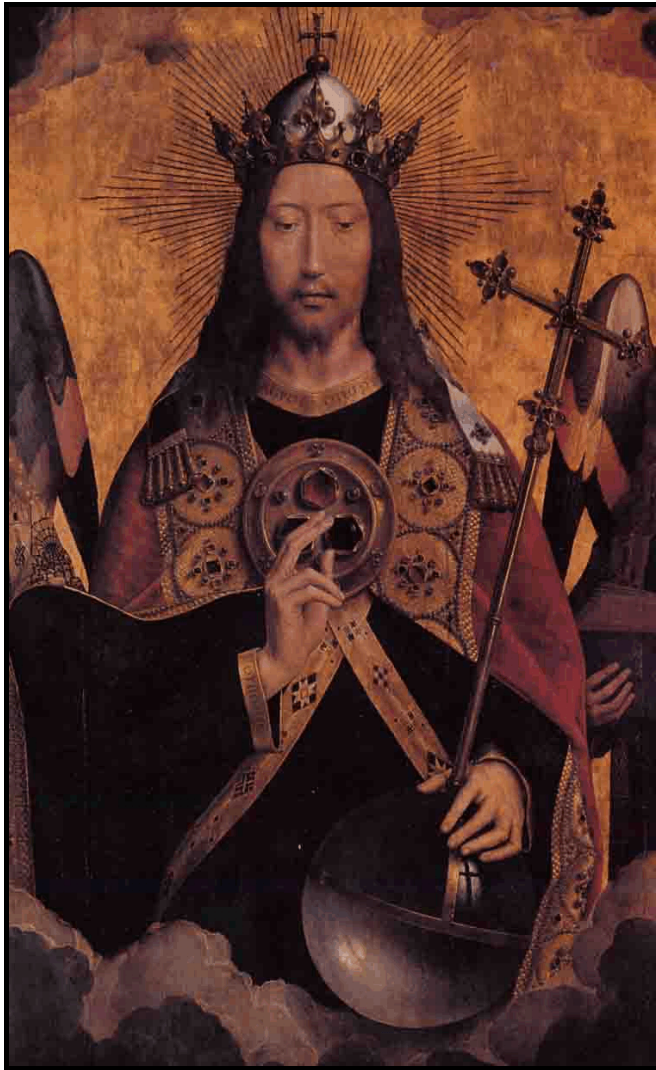


*“Christ the Omega”
Our Savior Lutheran Church*

The Sounding of the Seventh Trumpet
Revelation 11:15-19

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 forever 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, 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.” 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, and earthquake and a great hailstorm.



“Christ the King of Kings” by Hans Memling

god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4) and *“the ruler of the kingdom of the air”* (Ephesians 2:2).

“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven...” - The seventh trumpet sounds and the scene shifts from earth to heaven. The mighty acts of God’s judgement have been completed, the people of God have been vindicated, and the reign of evil is ended. Now a triumphant song of heavenly praise welcomes the coming of the kingdom of God. The kingdom for which God’s people have longed and prayed throughout history has finally arrived and the response is joyful celebration. The voices of the myriad hosts of angels and the resplendent host of glorified saints both of whom will accompany the Lord who comes in judgement now sound the triumph song. Throughout the long years of human history, from the fall of man until the second coming of Christ, the universe - *“the kingdom of the world”* (Greek - *“he basileia tou kosmou”*) has suffered beneath the tyrannical domination of sin and Satan. Hence Scripture describes the devil as *“the*

The sovereign control of God over all things has, of course, always been absolute; but

it has not always been evident. Through Christ's redemption, the power and dominion of sin has been destroyed. When Christ returns in glory and power to judge the living and the dead ***"the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ"*** will be publically and undeniably demonstrated before all. This is the cause of the heavenly celebration depicted in conjunction with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. The first six trumpets have carried us across the New Testament era to the end of time and now the final trumpet proclaims the consummation of human history and the culmination of God's age-old plan for the salvation of His people. The heavenly anthem joyfully acknowledges the end of time and the beginning of eternity - ***"and He will reign forever and ever."***



"Christ in Glory" by Melozzo da Forlì - 15th Century

"And the twenty-four elders who were seated on their thrones before God fell down on their faces and worshiped God saying..." - The victory anthem reverberates from the twenty-four elders around the throne of God who represent the people of God throughout the ages, the church of the Old and the New Testaments. The perspective of their praise is demonstrated by their posture as they ***"fell down on their faces"*** before God in adoration and awe. Their song is an acclamation of thanksgiving (Greek - *"eucharistoumen"* from which the English word *"Eucharist"* is derived) and praise that God has heard the prayers of His people and demonstrated the glory of His Name. God is addressed as ***"Lord God Almighty Who is and Who was."*** The classic Hebrew title ***"Lord God Almighty"*** (*"Yahweh Sabaoth"* - literally - *"Lord of Armies"* - Greek - *"kyrie ho theos pantokrator"*) emphasizes the sovereign power of God. It is modified by ***"Who is and Who was."*** This is two thirds of the traditional Hebrew designation for God as the Lord ***"Who was, Who is, and Who is coming."***

(Cf. Revelation 1:4,8; 4:8) In this instance, the customary third component in that title has been omitted and replaced with the phrase - ***“because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.”*** This alteration reflects the perspective of the scene in which the coming of the Lord is no longer a future event but has become present reality. The language reflects the view that the power and reign have been God’s all along. At this point He has acted to reclaim (***“You have taken”***) that which has always been rightfully His.

“The nations were angry and Your wrath has come.” - The establishment of the kingdom of God arouses the fury of the nations. The NIV’s translation ***“the nations were angry”*** fails to express the intensity of the original. The Greek verb is

“orgisthesan” which means ***“to be enraged.”*** The response of the people and powers of this world to the return of Christ is impotent fury. His coming means that their day is over and the time of their judgement has come. Every weapon in the devil’s arsenal has been used to frustrate this purpose and prevent this event, but all have failed. The wicked anger of sinful mankind is contrasted in the text to the righteous ***“wrath”*** (Greek - ***“orge”***) of God’s judgement. As always, the punishment fits the crime. The ***“wrath”*** of God is the Lord’s response to the rage of defiant humanity. The language of the phrase clearly recalls that of Psalm 2.



***“Christ’s Glorious Reign” - Greek Fresco
1603***

***“Why do the nations rage and the
peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth take the stand
and the rulers gather together
Against the Lord and against His
Anointed One.
“Let us break their chains,” they say,
“and throw off their fetters.”
The One enthroned in heaven laughs;***

the Lord scoffs at them.
Then He rebukes them in His anger and terrifies them in His wrath, saying,
“I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill.”
I will proclaim the decree of the Lord:
He said to Me; “You are My Son, today I have become Your Father.
Ask of Me and I will make the nations Your inheritance,
The ends of the earth, Your possession.
You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like
pottery.”
Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth.
Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry and you be destroyed in your way,
For His wrath can flare up in a moment.
Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.

Some have been perplexed by the fact that the great majority of the third “*Woe*” is a heavenly song of celebration. But these verses remind us that that which causes celebration in heaven among the people of God causes consternation on earth for the people of this world. The day of His coming will mark a glorious victory for the saints but it will be a time of wrath and dire judgement for those consigned to damnation. Thus, it is properly designated as the third “*Woe*.”

“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 great and small.” - There is an awesome finality in these words. The Greek word for time in this phrase is the powerful “*kairos*.” This is a moment of divine destiny; in many ways the ultimate moment of divine destiny - the last day, the final judgment. On that great day of judgement, all the dead shall rise to stand before the judgement seat of God - every human being who has ever lived from the creation of Father Adam to the call of the last trumpet. For the faithful this will be a time for “*rewarding*” (Greek - “*ton misthon*”). The word generally refers to a reward or recompense that is based on what a person has earned or deserved. The word is often used in the context of the pronouncement of eternal destiny which will occur on the last day in the New Testament (i.e. Revelation 22:12). The purpose of that great and terrible day of the Lord is not to decide who is going to heaven or to hell, but to publically and irrefutably demonstrate the perfect justice of God before all of humanity. Thus the empirical evidence of works is presented as the basis for the judgement rendered (cf.



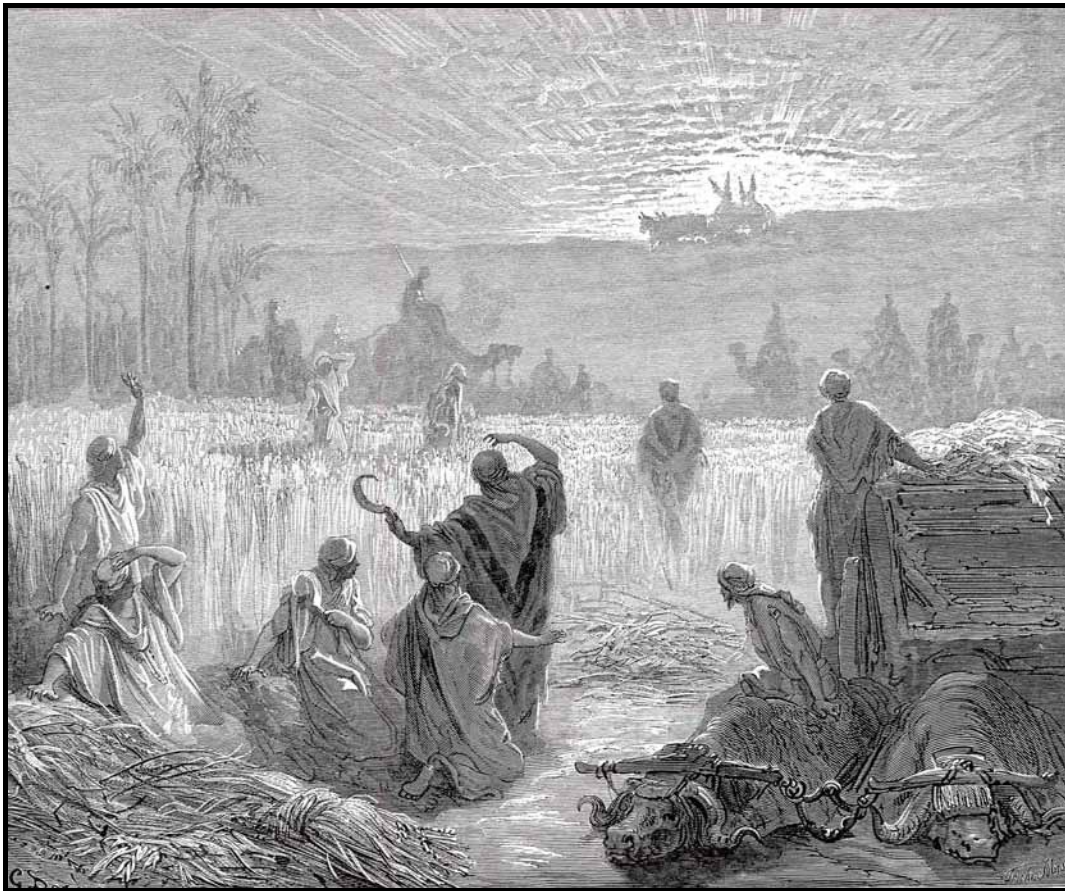
“The Ark Passing Through the Jordan” by J. James Tissot

Matthew 25:31-46). In that specific context the term “*reward*” describes the salvific benefits which God bestows upon His people by grace (Romans 3:27 - 4:5). While all who enter heaven do so absolutely by God’s undeserved love in Christ, degrees of glory in heaven will vary in proportion to the role which every individual was called upon to play in God’s work on earth (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:8; Daniel 12:3).

The people of God are described in three all inclusive phrases each of which refer to all of God’s people. This is characteristic of Revelation (cf. Revelation 16:6; 18:20,24). The inclusive intent of the text is emphasized by the addition of “*both great and small.*”

“*And for destroying those who destroy the earth.*” - In marked contrast to the reward prepared for witnesses and saints who revere the holy Name of God there is only destruction in store for the destroyers. Jeremiah had prophesied the doom of great Babylon in similarly balanced terms - **“*I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth, declares the Lord. I will stretch out My hand against you, roll you off the cliffs and make you a burned out mountain.*”** (Jeremiah 51:25). Once again the punishment matches the crime (“*lex talionis*” -

Exodus 21:24). Sinful humanity is guilty of destroying the earth not only literally, but primarily morally, in their opposition to the reign of God and their defiling themselves and the lands in which they live by their depravity and sin (Amos 4:7-9). God warns Israel not to participate in the wickedness and corruption of the Canaanites which were so disgusting that the land was going to vomit them out (cf. Leviticus 18:24-28).



“The Return of the Ark from Philistia” by Gustave Dore

“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.” - The result and effect of God’s judgement is symbolized by the opening of the temple and the disclosure of the ark within the Holy of Holies. Both tabernacle and temple had been divinely designed to architecturally convey the truth that sinful men cannot stand in the presence of the holy God. The further one proceeded into the temple courts and buildings the more

restricted access became. Finally, at the heart of the sanctuary was the Holy of Holies which contained the sacred ark of the covenant. The sanctity of the Holy of Holies was protected by a massive temple curtain and elaborate precautions were taken to guarantee that profane eyes would never gaze upon the ark, or later, the place where it had been. After complex purification rituals and preparation, the high priest was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies once a year, on *Yom Kippur*,” the great Day of Atonement. The ark of the covenant was a golden chest designed by God to serve as the physical symbol of His presence in the midst of His people (Exodus 25:10-11). The “*shekinah*,” the glory cloud of the divine presence rested between the outstretched wings of the guardian cherubim over the ark (1 Kings 8:1-11; Psalm 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16). The apocryphal book of 2 Maccabees reports the tradition that God instructed Jeremiah and his disciples to remove the ark from the sanctuary

before Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians and the temple was destroyed. The prophet was directed to conceal the ark in a cave on Mount Nebo where it will remain hidden - “*until God gathers His people again and shows His glory.*” (2 Maccabees 2:4-8) The ark remained a potent symbol of God promise to deliver and restore His people. The opening of the temple, and the disclosure of the ark for all to see in John’s vision indicates the fulfillment of that hope. God has acted to saved His people. The barrier of sin which divided the Creator from his creatures has been broken down in the blood of Christ (Luke 23:45). The Lord has kept His covenant. The promise



*The Cherubim Guarding the Ark”
13th Century Hebrew Manuscript Illumination*

of heavenly glory is that we shall see our God face to face. The characteristic storm theophany, the majestic physical manifestations of the presence of God - “***And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and earthquake and a great hailstorm.***” - accompanies the opening of the temple and the unveiling of the ark.



“The Beast and the Woman Clothed With the Sun” by Lucas Cranach

The Fourth Vision - Revelation 12:1-15:8

The Seven Scenes

Introduction

With the beginning of chapter 12 we enter the second half of the Book of Revelation and the fourth of its seven visions. Unlike the previous three visions, each of which was explicitly structured in seven segments (letters - seals - trumpets), the fourth

vision lacks a specific seven part structure. Nonetheless seven different scenes can be observed in this vision. After the opening scene in Revelation 12:1, each new segment is introduced with the Greek phrase “*kai eidon*” - “*And I saw.*” (13:1; 13:11; 14:1; 14:6; 14:14; 15:1). Unfortunately, most English translations (both KJV and NIV) do not translate the phrase consistently and thereby obscure the structure of the vision. As in the prior visions of the seals and trumpets, the final, seventh scene in this fourth vision serves as the introduction and bridge to the vision of the seven bowls which follows.



“*The Devil*” by Albrecht Dürer

The fourth vision presents the vast panorama of the ancient conflict between God and Satan, the underlying reality behind the sinful world reeling beneath God’s judgements presented in the earlier visions. In a sense, we have now come to the heart of the matter, as the grim truth is revealed. The previous visions showed us what was happening. This vision explains why it is happening. The physical world is the battleground upon which an age-old spiritual conflict is being waged. All of the death and destruction, all of the violence, hatred, persecution that have been described up to this point are the results of a cosmic conflict between the King of Heaven and the Prince of Hell. The demon armies that have spewed forth from the abyss in previous visions are the legions of an ancient and implacable foe. Now his identity, his nature, and his strategy will be fully revealed. Now we will see “*the dark satanic*

depths which underly the surface operations of opposition and persecution with which the church must deal.” (Franzmann, p. 84) The devil, to use Luther’s apt phrase is “*the ape of our Lord God,*” (Klug, II, p. 265) ever seeking to imitate, that is to counterfeit and negate, God and His mighty acts. An anti-Trinity - the red dragon, the beast from the land, and the beast from the sea - a counter church, and a resurrection from the dead (13:3) will mock and mimic that which God has done for man’s salvation in the infernal cause of man’s damnation. The visions which follow will demonstrate his downfall and destruction. But first we must see our enemy as he truly is and understand the magnitude of the conflict in which we are engaged.



“The Woman and the Red Dragon” - Luther Bible Woodcut

Scene I - The Vision of the Great Red Dragon

Revelation 12:1 - 13:1

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. 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. 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. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now has 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 his time is short." 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 a 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 against 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. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.

"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." - The announcement of a "great and wondrous sign" in the heavens signals a subject of unique significance. A "sign" in Scripture is a visible presentation which points to or explains something of the divine. Thus, the miracles of our Lord are often described as signs which reveal the true nature of Christ as the presence of God among men. The virgin birth would be the unrequested sign for reluctant King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:14). The shepherds were told to look for the sign of a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger (Luke 2:12). This sign appears "in heaven," that is to say, from God. The sign which John observes is a beautiful woman "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head." This woman personifies the people of God. She is the church.

The image of God's people as a woman - a mother, or a bride - is common throughout Scripture. The prophet Hosea rebukes apostate Israel as an unfaithful



"The Woman and the Red Dragon" by Albrecht Dürer

wife who has betrayed her loving husband in flagrant adultery (Hosea 1-3). For Isaiah, Israel is the **“daughter of Zion”** (Isaiah 1: 8), a distressed and disgraced wife whom a compassionate God will restore again (Isaiah 54:4-8) as His beloved **Hepzibah**.(Hebrew - **“My Delight Is In Her”**) and **“Beulah”** (Hebrew - **“One Who**



“I Am My Beloved’s” by F.M. Strudwick

Is Married”) (Isaiah 62:4-5). John the Baptist hails Christ as the long-awaited bridegroom who has come to claim His bride, the church (John 3:29). Christ Himself draws the same analogy in the parable of the wise and foolish virgins (Matthew 25:1-13). He warns that the time is coming when the bridegroom shall be taken away (Matthew 9:15). St. Paul reminds the congregation in Corinth that they are a bride promised to one husband (2 Corinthians 11:2). He counsels Christian husbands to love and care for their wives as Christ does the church (Ephesians 5:22-33). It is, however, in the visions of Revelation that the image of church as the bride of Christ comes to its fullest development. The people of God are the bride of the Lamb, arrayed in the fine linen of His righteousness (Revelation 19:7-8). The new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God is dressed in the finery of a bride prepared to meet her husband (Revelation 21:2,9). In the closing verses of the book, the church’s longing for the return of her Lord is expressed in the cry of a bride for her husband: **“The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!”** (Revelation 22:17).

The woman of the vision is arrayed in heavenly splendor as a radiant bride. The image depicts the church as she is seen by God, not from the perspective of men.



“The Woman and the Red Dragon” by Jean Duvet



“The Beloved” by Alexandre Cabanel

“The woman appears in her true heavenly and glorious character despite her seemingly fragile and uncertain earthly history...The woman’s brightness connotes the heavenly identity and brightness of the people of God, as well as their purity.” (Beale, p. 627)

The language recalls the lover’s description of his beloved in the Song of Songs: **“Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?”** (Song of Songs 6:10) It is most significant to note the contrast between the adornment of this lady and that of the woman on the beast who will personify the devil’s counter-church in chapter 17:

“The glory which belongs to the sun-clad, moon bestriding, star-decked mother is all from above, from the

world of God, and stands in sharp contrast to the rich and gaudy decking-out of the harlot Babylon, whose ornaments all come from below, from the earth and the sea.” (Franzmann, p. 86)

The sun, moon, and stars imagery of the scene also recalls Joseph’s dream in which the sun and the moon (Jacob and Rachel) and the eleven stars (his brothers) bow down before him (Genesis 37: 9-11). It is evident that the brilliance of the woman’s array is a gift bestowed upon her. Unlike Christ who Himself gleams with the brilliance of the sun (Matthew 17:2; Revelation 1:16), the church is **“clothed with the sun.”** *“But God has put around her the brilliant, sunlit glory of His Christ, signifying that in Christ and because of Him she stands in God’s holy presence. “Clothed about with the sun” also suggests how much God in Christ honors the woman.”* (Brighton, p. 326) The positioning of the moon beneath her feet *“speaks of dominion”* (Mounce, p.236) and expresses the authority which God has graciously

bestowed upon His church. The moon is the symbol of the night, the time of darkness. Darkness signifies sin, death, and the devil. The fact that the moon is placed beneath her feet indicates the victory which God's people have won in Christ over sin, death, and the devil. That victory is further emphasized by the victor's crown (Greek - "*stephanos*") upon her head. The crown is adorned with twelve stars. As previously noted, twelve in the numerology of Revelation is the number of the people of God, from the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles of Christ. Hence, the twelve stars in her victory crown confirm the identification of the woman as the personification of the church.



"The Woman and the Red Dragon" by William Blake

"She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth." - The anguish of the woman about to give birth to her child represents the anxiety, torment and persecution endured by the people of God in the days preceding the birth of the

Messiah. The Greek text literally reads - “*and she was with child, and cried being in travail, even being tormented to give birth.*” The verb “*being tormented*” is never used elsewhere in the New Testament in reference to childbirth. It is the characteristic word in the New Testament for punishment, trial, and persecution endured by God’s people (cf. Matthew 8:6,29; 14:24; Mark 5:7; 6:48; Luke 8:28; 2 Peter 2:8; Revelation 9:5; 11:10; 14:10; 20:10). The image of Israel as a woman suffering the anguish of labor is common among the prophets (cf. Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; 26:17-18; 61:7-8; 66:7ff.; Jeremiah 4:31; 13:21; 22:23; Hosea 13:13; Micah 4:10; 5:2-3). The image of the Messiah being born of the people of God is not unknown in Scripture. From the beginning, the prophecies had foretold that He would be born of a woman (Genesis 3:15). Paul cites the tracing of “*the human ancestry of Christ*” from them as the greatest distinction of Israel (Romans 9:5). In Galatians 4:26, Paul hails the church, the true Jerusalem above, as “*our mother.*” A passage from one of the “*Thanksgiving Hymns*” of Qumram discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls, closely parallels this text as it figuratively describes the community of believers as a mother in travail giving birth to the Messiah:

*“And like a woman in travail with her firstborn child,
upon whose belly pangs have come and grievous pains,*



*“The Woman Clothed with the Sun Gives Birth”
13th Century English Apocalypse*

*filling with anguish her child-bearing
 crucible.
 For the children have come to the throes of
 death
 And she labors in her pains who bears a
 man,
 For amid the throes of death she shall bring
 forth a man-child,
 And amid the pains of hell there shall spring
 forth from her child-bearing crucible
 A Marvelous, Mighty Counselor.
 And a man shall be delivered from out of the
 throes,
 When He is conceived, all wombs shall
 quicken,
 And the time of their delivery shall be in
 grievous pains;
 They shall be appalled who are with child,
 And when He is brought forth every pang
 shall come upon the child-bearing
 crucible.” (Aune, p. 682)*



*“The Dragon and the Bride”
 Luther Bible Woodcut*

Roman Catholic commentators have historically gone to great lengths to demonstrate a connection between the glorious mother of John’s vision and the blessed Virgin Mary. It is, however, unmistakably clear from the text that the emphasis here is not on an individual but on the entire community of faith, within which down through hundreds of generations the Messiah was finally born. *Mary in the New Testament*, a recent study edited by some of the world’s leading Roman Catholic Bible scholars reluctantly concedes the absence of significant historical support for the view that the mother of John’s vision represents Mary “raises the question of whether it represents an exegesis of the text itself or simply an imaginative theological application as part of a search for biblical support for Marian doctrine.” (Brown, p. 236).

“Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads.” - The second sign appears in the form of a monstrous red dragon. The contours of this monster are drawn in a colorful mosaic of Old Testament imagery.



*“The Creation of Leviathan and Behemoth”
by William Blake*

The term “**dragon**” (Greek - “*drakon*”) is used thirteen times in the New Testament, all in the second half of the book of Revelation. It is used four times in the Septuagint, the Greek Old Testament, as a translation for the Hebrew name “*Leviathan*” (“*the Coiled One*” - Job 40:25; Psalm 74:14; 104:26; Isaiah 27:1). In the imagery of the Old Testament “*Leviathan*” became a designation for the Satanic serpent whom the Lord shall destroy in the deliverance of His people - “***In that day, the Lord will punish with His sword, His fierce, great and powerful sword, Leviathan, that gliding serpent, Leviathan, the coiling serpent; He will slay the monster of the sea.***” (Isaiah 27:1). In Psalm 74:14, “*Leviathan*” is a monster with many heads. He is closely associated with “*Rahab*” the female monster of chaos

(Isaiah 51:9-10) who dwells at the bottom of the sea (cf. Psalm 89:11; Job 9:13; 26:12-13). The association of these monsters with the devil and demonic powers can be seen in the fact that the titles “*Leviathan*” and “*Rahab*” are often linked to the great empires which opposed and oppressed the people of God in the Old Testament era. In Psalm 74:14 “*Leviathan*” is Egypt. In Isaiah 27:1 he is Assyria and Babylon. Rahab is Egypt in Isaiah 30:7 and Psalm 87:4. The Septuagint also uses “*drakon*” fifteen times as a translation for the Hebrew word “*tannin*.” “*Tannin*” literally means the stretched out or elongated ones. The word is variously translated as “*sea serpent*,” “*monster*,” or “*dragon*.” Many scholars believe that this is the word the Bible uses to describe the massive reptiles which later came to be known as “*dinosaurs*” (Latin - “*terrible lizards*”). Based on the association of Satan and the serpent in the temptation of Eve (Genesis 3) “*drakon*,” the dragon, had become a prominent designation for the devil in early Judaism (cf. Revelation 12:9).

The dragon is John’s vision is “*enormous*” (Greek - “*megas*”). This marks him as a being of unique magnitude and power. The dragon’s color is a blazing “*red*” (Greek - “*pyrros*”) the color of fire, blood, and death. The color of this fearsome beast signals the mission upon which he has come. He comes from the fires of hell to serve the damning cause of the devil. Red is also the color of bloodshed. Later, in Revelation 17:3-6, the red color of the whore of Babylon is linked to the fact that she is “*the woman drunk with the blood of the saints*.” The vast reach of his cunning and



*“The Woman and the Red Dragon”
by Gerard Groeningen - 1561*

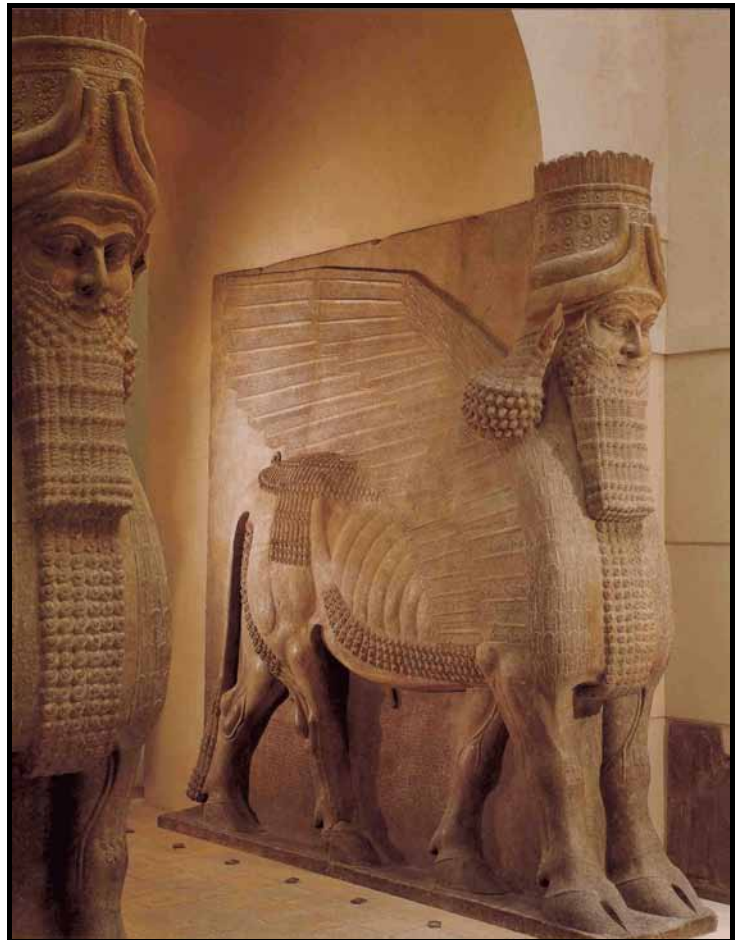
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“The Woman and the Red Dragon” - Our Savior Lutheran Church

power are represented by **“seven heads and ten horns.”** The dragon’s appearance mocks and mimics that of the Lamb (Cf. Revelation 5:6 and the seven horns and eyes of the Lamb). The ten horns of the dragon reflect the ten horns of the fourth beast in Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7:7). They signify his power and strength (cf. Psalm 89:17; 1 Samuel 2:10). The crowns upon the dragon’s heads are **“diademata,”** the royal crowns of a king. They once again reveal the devil’s character as **“God’s ape,”** as he imitates the Christ who is the true **“King of Kings and Lord of Lords.”** who will wear many crowns upon His head (Revelation 19:12). Hendrickson aptly describes the devil’s crowns as **“crowns of arrogated authority.”** (Hendrickson, p. 165) The crowns upon the dragon’s heads also indicate his ability to enlist the support of earthly kings and rulers in support of his cause (cf. Revelation 19:19). The powers of this world will consistently stand by his side in his bitter opposition to God and His people, for the devil is the god and prince of this world.

“His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth.” - The image of stars swept down from the sky and hurled to the earth is drawn from Daniel 8:10 where the action is carried out by the little horn of the beast. John modifies the image and now it is the tail of the mighty dragon that sweeps **“a third of the stars out of the sky.”** The stars of the heavens are a popular symbol for angels in Scripture (cf. Judges 5:20; Job 38:7; Revelation 1:20). The fall of the star from the sky the downfall of the devil and the angels that followed him in his doomed rebellion against God (cf. Isaiah 14:12; Luke 10:18; Revelation 9:11). The image of evil angels as fallen stars is also prevalent in the popular first century Hebrew apocalypse 1 Enoch (cf. 18:13-16; 21:6; 86:1-6; 88:1; 90:24). John



Assyrian Guardian Cherubs from the Palace of Sargon II

once again uses the symbolic third to convey the fact that a significant minority of the angels joined Satan in his revolt (cf. 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). The mighty power of the dragon is illustrated by his most awful deed. This highest and most glorious of the angels, “*anointed as a guardian cherub*” (Ezekiel 28:11-19) seduced massive number of the heavenly host to rise up against the Creator. The image of the dragon’s tail may be an allusion to Satan’s awesome powers of treachery and deceit (Isaiah 9:14 - “*The elders and prominent men are the head, the prophets who teach lies are the tail.*” Cf. also John 8:44).



*“The Deliverance of the Child”
13th Century German Apocalypse*

“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.” - The child about to be born is the object of the devil’s malevolent attention. The church, pregnant with the promise of the Messiah, is presented as a woman about to give birth. The huge red dragon stands poised before the woman ready to devour the babe at the instant of its birth. Since the beginning, he has lived in dread of the fulfillment of the ancient promise that God would send a descendant of the woman to crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15). The verb “*stood*” is in the imperfect tense, indicating continuous, ongoing action. The dragon does not know when the promise will be fulfilled. He stands in constant readiness. This child must be destroyed. His grim intent is to “*devour her child the moment*

it was born.” The image of the great dragon swallowing up the child is a picture of utter destruction. Jeremiah used the same language to describe the complete



“The Triumph of the Innocents” by W. Holeman Hunt

devastation of the kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians: ***“Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured us...like a serpent he has swallowed us and filled his stomach with our delicacies, and then has spewed us out.”*** (Jeremiah 51:34). Behind the power of the image lurks the ugly history of Herod’s soldiers rampaging through the streets of Bethlehem, their swords stained crimson with the blood of babies (Matthew 2:16-18). Satan’s increasingly desperate efforts to destroy Jesus culminate in apparent success on Calvary. On the eve of His death, our Lord calmly declared: ***“The ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over Me.”*** (John 14:30) But in that success his cause is destroyed and the ancient prophecy that the serpent’s head will be crushed by the heel of the woman’s child is fulfilled.

“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 promised child, the Messiah is born. The repetitive language - ***“a son, a male child”*** alludes to Isaiah 66:7 where similar terminology is used. The wording of the descriptive phrase which follows is drawn from the messianic prophecy of Psalm 2: ***“You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*** (Psalm 2:9) The iron rod rule over the nations which the Psalmist predicts looks beyond the

humiliation and meekness of Christ's earthly life to the time of His glorious return in power. When all that was necessary *"for us and for our salvation"* was accomplished God recalled His Son to the right hand of His glory in heaven. John's phrase - *"her child was snatched up to God and to His throne"* encompasses the exaltation and enthronement of the incarnate Son of God as they were visibly demonstrated in His ascension. The promise of Christ's triumphant return to judge the living and the dead is explicit in the ascension event: *"This same Jesus who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen Him go into heaven."* (Acts 1:11).



"The Flight of the Woman" - 14th Century English Apocalypse

"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." - As Israel wandered in the desert wilderness for forty years prior to her entry into the Promised Land, so also the new Israel, the church of God in Christ, must also endure her time in the wilderness. The fury of the dragon, frustrated in his attempt to destroy the child, now focuses upon the child's mother. As God once assured Israel, *"It was I who knew you in the wilderness."* (Hosea 13:5) so now God has *"a place prepared"* for the new Israel *"where she might*

be taken care of.” The duration of this wilderness wandering is “**1,260 days,**” (42 months - 3 ½ years) the characteristic designation for the New Testament era in Revelation. The details of the church’s sojourn in the wilderness of this world, and of God’s care for her, will be provided in subsequent verses but first the scene now shifts from earth to heaven.

“And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back.” - The events described in Verses 7-12 are the heavenly counterpart of the earthly events recorded in Verses 1-6. The vision of the woman and the dragon revealed one dimension of the struggle, the angelic war in heaven reveals the other. As G.K. Beale notes: *“This is typical apocalyptic style and has precedents already in Daniel 10:13,21 and 12:1 and in later apocalyptic literature.”* (Beale, p. 650) In Daniel’s prophecy the archangel Michael (Hebrew - *“He Who Is Like God”*) is the champion of the host of heaven, the guardian of God’s people - **“the great prince who protects your people”** (Daniel 12:1) - assisting the divine Son of Man in battle against the evil angel of Persia. Here in Revelation Michael is again the champion of the host of heaven, leading the good angels in battle against the devil and his demons.



“St Michael and the Dragon” by Martin Schongauer

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This climactic confrontation is not an historical account of the original fall of the devil and his angels. It is, instead, a symbolic description of the effect of the incarnation and exaltation of Christ already described in the previous scene. This battle rages **“in heaven.”** This is not the heavenly dwelling place of God where



“The War in Heaven” by Albrecht Dürer

perfect peace and joy prevail throughout eternity. That heaven will never be troubled by conflict or war. The Greek noun “ouranos” (“heaven”), like its English counterpart, has a variety of meanings. In this instance, the term is used in a more general sense to describe the spiritual realm, in contrast to the physical world of time and space, as also in Ephesians 6:12 - ***“Our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers and authorities and cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*** The point at issue in this war is not the control of heaven, which could never have been in doubt, nor the ability of the devil and his angels to appear before God in heaven subsequent to their fall into sin. Job 1:6-12 clearly indicates that when it suits God’s purpose this can indeed occur. When Revelation reports ***“But he was not strong enough and they lost their place in heaven.”*** the point at issue is the devil’s ability to stand before God as the accuser of mankind, demanding their just condemnation (cf. Zechariah 3:1-10). By His righteous life and innocent death Christ has removed the basis for the accusation against us. His resurrection, ascension, and enthronement at the right hand of God demonstrate that the Father has accepted the substitutionary atonement of His Son and that now we stand before God justified. The victorious Christ is now our Advocate, our Mediator (1 Timothy 2:5) before the bar of divine justice. This is the context of the heavenly hymn of praise which follows: ***“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..”*** (Vs. 10)



“St Michael and the Dragon” by Giovanni Pietro Birago



“The Justification of Adam and Eve” by Jacob Lucius - 1556

This classic Reformation era woodcut illustrates the Biblical concept of justification. In the center foreground, Father Adam and Mother Eve stand before the bar of divine justice as the representatives of the human race. Their heads are bowed. Their faces blush with shame, and their hands shield their downcast eyes from the glory of the holy God. Their bodies are concealed behind the pathetic fig leaves which represent mankind’s futile attempts to deal with the aftermath of sin. They are literally the picture of guilt. Behind them stands the grotesque figure of Satan, a humanoid bird of prey with a fiery sword at his waist, perhaps recalling the cherubim who barred the way to the Garden of Eden after the Fall. Hellish flames spurt out from beneath his costume. He holds Adam and Eve captive in the coils of the serpent, the instrument of the Fall. From his beak comes the accusation: *“My Lord Judge, I raise the cry against Adam and Eve!”* At the center of the image is the judge’s table surrounded by the bar of justice. At each of the table’s four corners is a putti/cherub reminding

the viewer that this is the heavenly court of justice. The two tablets of the law, with the ten commandments inscribed upon them are before the judge. The commandments rest upon a skull, symbolizing the fact that the Law brings only death and damnation to the sinner. At the center of the table is the Messianic rose, Old Testament emblem of the promised Savior, and the olive branch of peace. At the rear center, behind the judge's table are the three persons of the Trinity within the "shekinah," the "Glory Cloud" which indicated the presence of God in Tabernacle and Temple. To the right is God the Father in the ornate brocaded robe of the King with a gleaming golden crown upon His head. In His hands are the symbols of royal power, the orb and the scepter, signifying that He is the sovereign of all the world. The words coming from God the Father are a quotation from Ezekiel 33:11 - ***"As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live."*** To the left is Jesus Christ, God the Son. He also holds a scepter identifying with the divine reign of the Father. Christ presents the words of 1 Peter 3:18 - ***"For Christ died for sins, once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."*** A dove with human features, representing God the Holy Spirit hovers over the Father and the Son. Behind the Trinity are the sword and the lily, representing the holiness and justice of God. The right side of the woodcut represents the Law and its stern demands. Therefore the female personifications of Justice (Latin- "***JUSTICIA***"), holding the scales, and Truth (Latin - "***VERITAS***"), holding the square, stand to the right of the bar. Justice holds Ezekiel 18:4 - ***"The soul who sins is the one who will die."*** Truth holds the warning of Genesis 2:17 - ***"But you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die."*** The cloud aureole on the Law side is populated by weeping putti. Behind them, in the upper right hand corner is the Fall into Sin as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden partake of the forbidden fruit. The gaping jaws of hell swallow up sinful mankind in the lower right hand corner. The left side of the image represents the Gospel. Here the female personifications of Mercy (Latin - "***MISERACORDIA***"), her hands folded in prayer, and Peace (Latin - "***PAX***"), with the olive branch on her shoulder, kneel in humble supplication before the bar. Both figures are holding prayers requesting the Lord to remember His mercy and compassion. The putti in the cloud aureole on the Gospel side of the illustration are rejoicing. Behind them in the upper left hand corner is the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. In the lower left hand corner is the risen Christ leading the saints in triumphant procession thru the open gates of heaven. Note the prominent presence of Luther and Duke Frederick the Wise among the saints.

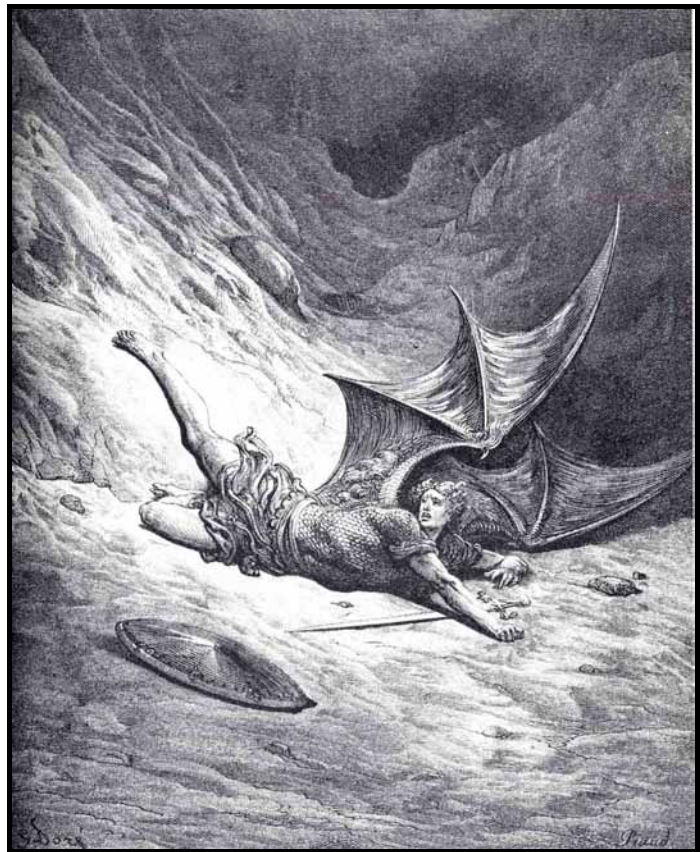


“Satan and His Angels Cast Out of Heaven” by Gustave Doré

The panoramic picture of heavenly war between Michael and the dragon is designed to present the successful accomplishment of mankind’s redemption - the victory of Christ and the defeat of Satan. The salvation or damnation of humanity hung on the outcome of this conflict. A series of three powerful phrases indicate the utter and complete defeat of the devil and his minions. First the direction of the battle becomes clear - **“he was not strong enough.”** The tide of the battle turns into a decisive rout - **“they lost their place in heaven.”** And finally, the moping up action in which the final pockets of rebel resistance are wiped out - **“He was hurled to the earth and his angels with him.”**

“The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.” - The leader of the fallen angels is completely identified and unmasked. He who is the master of the disguise, the masquerade, and the counterfeit (2 Corinthians 11:14) is clearly revealed in his true nature. He is ***“that ancient serpent... who leads the whole world astray.”*** The allusion is to the Fall of mankind in the beginning and the serpent through which the devil beguiled the woman and brought about the condemnation of our race (Genesis 3). Each of the two titles disclose his activities and his role. ***“Devil”*** is from the Greek ***“diabolos”*** means ***“slanderer”*** or ***“false accuser.”*** ***“Satan”*** (Greek - ***“Satanas”***) is ultimately derived from the Hebrew. It means ***“adversary,” “enemy,”*** or ***“accuser.”*** The one who poses as our friend is actually our deadliest foe. His delight is to demand our damnation so that we may share an eternity in Hell with him.

“He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.” - The devil and his legions were decisively defeated, but they were not destroyed. Their power was broken, but it has not yet been eliminated. The language of the text - ***“the great dragon was hurled down,” “he was hurled down to the earth”*** indicates great violence and bitter struggle. Jesus expressed a similar concept when He said: ***“Now is the judgement of this world, now shall the ruler of this world be cast out.”*** (John 12:31) After the seventy-two disciples preached the gospel throughout Palestine, Jesus responded: ***“I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.”*** (Luke 10:18) Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection have resulted in drastically curtailing the devil’s role of deception and nullifying his role of slanderer. That is the meaning of the image of the devil and his angels being cast out of heaven and hurled down to the earth. This is not a matter of physical location, as



“Satan Smitten by Michael” by Gustave Doré



“St. Michael Fighting the Rebel Angels” by Lucas Vorsterman - 1595

if such things could be pertinent to angels, but of power and possibility. The Gospel of salvation will now go forth to the whole world. The devil and his demons cannot stop or silence that witness. The devil will continue his deceptive work. He will oppose and he will oppress, but the *“gates of hell”* shall not prevail against the church (Matthew 16:18).

“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...” - The triumphant cry of victory now resounds throughout heaven. The song not only celebrates, but interprets and explains the significance of the heavenly war between Michael and the dragon. The source of the *“loud voice”* is unidentified, however, given the content of the hymn which follows, it is most probably the twenty-four elders who surround the throne of God representing the church of all ages. This is the song of the saints in glory, rejoicing in that which God has done for them. The verb *“have come”* is in the aorist tense in the Greek text indicating action that is fully complete. That which the song celebrates is present reality. This is a *“done deal”* to use the contemporary idiom. In



*“St. Michael Triumphs Over the Devil”
by Hieronymus Wierix - 1553*

the ascension and exaltation of Christ at the right hand of God is undeniably evident to all. What is it that has been completely accomplished? - *“salvation,” “power,” “kingdom,”* and *“authority.”* *“Salvation”* (Greek - *“soteria”*) is God’s action in rescuing his people from death and damnation and the safety and security which

results from that action. **“Power”** (Greek - *“dynamis”*) is the divine power of God which has accomplished this salvation through the incarnation and exaltation of the Son which broke and defeated the power of the dragon. **“The kingdom of our God”** (Greek - *“basilea tou theou”*) refers to His rule of grace and salvation reaching out to save men everywhere despite all the efforts of Satan. **“The authority of His Christ”** (Greek - *“he exousia tou christou autou”*) is the power delegated to our Lord by the Father to implement and carry out the plan of salvation (cf. Matthew 28:18). Now that the plan of salvation has been fully accomplished, the authority of Christ has been displayed and demonstrated before all. *“But now this authority of Christ is seen in all of its consummating power, before which no enemy can stand and by which Christ completely exonerates his followers and the faith they have in Him (cf. Phil. 2:7-11).”* (Brighton, p. 337)



*“The Woman and the Red Dragon”
by William Blake*

“For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.” This is the core of the vision’s meaning. The basis for Satan’s accusations against the saints has been taken away. He is no longer able to successfully lodge a charge against any one of God’s elect (cf. Romans 8:33-34). Our sins are covered over in the blood of Christ. The pure white robe of His perfect righteousness conceals the filthy rags of our unrighteousness. Now we stand before the divine judge justified. G.B. Caird offers the intriguing observation that although the vision depicts this battle in military terms, it is essentially a legal

battle between opposing counsel in which the loser is disbarred. The devil's role in all this is particularly malevolent in that he is the instigator of the very sins for which he demands punishment.

“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.” - Christ is the Lamb of God whose innocent blood has taken away the sin of the world. It is that atoning sacrifice which has destroyed the basis for the Adversary's accusations. The blood of the Lamb is the expiatory reason for our acquittal. Thus, ***“they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb.”*** The hymn adds a second reason for the victory of God's people over the dragon - ***“and by the word of their testimony.”*** Lenski describes this as *“the mediatory cause,”* (Lenski, p. 379), that is to say that the defeat of the devil was accomplished by means of the faithful testimony of God's people, as they proclaimed the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in the sacrificial death of Christ. For many, down through the ages the price of that faithful testimony has been a martyr's death. Nonetheless the witness has gone forth in every place and time - ***“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.” - The hosts of heaven, men and angels, are summoned to join in the exultant celebration. But while the church triumphant in heaven rejoices, the church militant on earth remains locked in deadly struggle. The 1,260 days are not yet complete. The relentless assault continues. Satan's defeat has only served to intensify his fury. He is determined to do all within his now limited power to drag the souls of men down into the fires of hell. He know full well that his time is running out as the world hurtles on toward judgement. It is truly ironic that *“the troubles of the persecuted righteous arise not because Satan is too strong, but because he is beaten.”* (Mounce, p. 244) The impotent rage of an already defeated but still powerful foe is a dangerous reality indeed.

“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 scene shifts back to the earth again and to the woman in the wilderness. The dragon, frustrated in his attempt to destroy the child, now vents his anger upon the woman. The dragon furiously pursues the woman into the wilderness. Behind the dramatic imagery of the vision lies this truth -the devil was unable to destroy the Christ and prevent the accomplishment of the plan of salvation. His kingdom was shattered and his power curtailed. He turns now

to persecute and punish the people of God. By deception and false doctrine within and persecution and oppression without, he desperately seeks to limit the proclamation of the pure Gospel. Accordingly, the church on earth must live “*simultaneously in the high confidence of faith and in the open eyed sobriety of fear.*” (Franzmann, p. 90)



“To Me She’s Dear the Worthy Maid” by Rudolf Schäfer

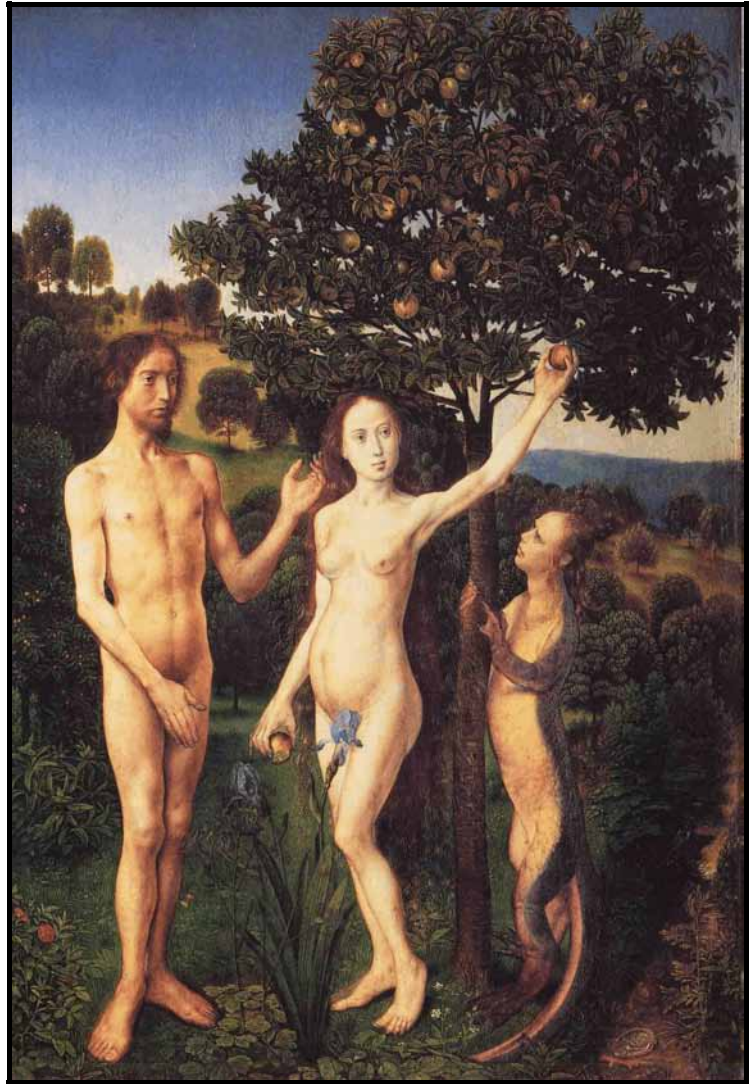
In 1535, amid religious upheaval and civil disturbance, Martin Luther wrote a magnificent hymn based upon the vision of the woman and the dragon. He used the structure and manner of the courtly love songs of his era. The hymn is entitled “*To Me She’s Dear, the Worthy Maid.*” It was composed as a hymn of comfort to the church under the cross. It captures the sense of the text and effectively expresses the intended meaning of the vision. Unfortunately the hymn’s complicated meter and melody have consigned it to undeserved obscurity:

*1. To me she’s dear the worthy maid, And I cannot forget her;
Praise, honor, virtue of her are said; Then all I love her better.
I seek her good, and if I should Right evil fare, I do not care,
She’ll make up for it to me. With love and truth that will not tire,
Which she will ever show me; And do all my desire.*

*2. She wears of purest gold a crown Twelve stars their rays are twining;
Her raiment, glorious as the sun, And bright from far is shining.
Her feet the moon are set upon. She is the bride with the Lord to bide,
Sore travail is upon her; She bringeth forth a noble Son
Whom all the world must honor, Their King, the only one.*

3. *That makes the dragon rage and roar, He will the child upswallow;
His raging comes to nothing more; No jot a gain will follow.
The infant high, up to the sky Away is heft and he is left
On earth all mad with murder. The mother now alone is she,
But God will watchful guard her, And the right Father be. Amen.*

“The woman was given 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 a half a time, out of the serpent’s reach.” - God led the Children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt and protected them through the perils of wandering in the wilderness for forty long years. In describing that loving care God used the image of an eagle protecting its young: ***“You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagle’s wings and brought you to Myself.”*** (Exodus 19:4). In his final words to the Israelite nation Moses reminded them that God had cared for their fathers: ***“Like and eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions.”*** (Deuteronomy 32:10-11; cf. also Psalm 91:4).



The Fall Into Sin” by Hugo van der Goes - 1470

When Isaiah seeks to describe the unfailing care of God for His own he says: ***“They will soar on wings like eagles...”*** (Isaiah 40:31). The Revelator calls upon this effective Old Testament image to describe God’s providential care of His Church throughout her time of persecution - ***“the woman was given two wings of a great eagle...”*** The woman is brought to a place of refuge where she will be safe from the



“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” by Rudolf Schäfer

fury of the dragon - *“out of the serpent’s reach.”* The fact that the dragon is once again referred to as *“the serpent”* - recalling the original temptation in Eden to doubt the Word of God and usurp His place - suggests that the nature of the devil’s attack upon the Church will be primarily spiritual, that is, an assault upon the truth of the Word and substance of the faith. This is reflected in the traditional rabbinic understanding of the eagle metaphors in Exodus 19 and Deuteronomy 32. The rabbis taught that the sanctuary to which God delivered Israel was the truth of the Torah and that their safe refuge was *“none other than the protective place in the wilderness where God’s sustaining Word and tabernacling presence provide.”*

(Beale, p. 670). Hence the place of refuge which the vision depicts is not a physical location but the spiritual refuge of God’s Word and the unfailing comfort and courage which it will provide in time of trouble. This is not a promise of deliverance from deception and persecution but a promise of endurance through deception and persecution. It is as Luther declares in his great battle hymn of the Reformation:

*“Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us.
 We tremble not, we fear no ill, they shall not overpower us.
 This world’s prince may still, scowl fierce as he will;
 He can harm us none. He’s judged the deed is done.
 One little Word can fell him.*

The duration of the woman's sojourn in the wilderness is defined as ***“a time, times, and half a time.”*** This is the characteristic three and one half (1,260 days - 42 months), the broken seven, the limited period of persecution that comprises the New Testament era.

“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.”

- Though crippled and cast out, the dragon is not helpless. In his rage and fury he



“The Hosts of Egypt Drowning In the Red Sea” by J. James Tissot

lashes out at the woman. The cascade of ***“water like a river”*** which gushes forth from his gaping jaws is intended for nothing less than extermination - ***“to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent.”*** The metaphor of an overflowing flood occurs quite frequently in the Old Testament to describe judgement and persecution (i.e. Psalm 18:4,16; 32:6; 46:3; 88:7; Isaiah 43:2; Daniel 11:10,22). In the library at Qumran and the rabbinical commentaries of the first century the metaphor of the overwhelming flood is most often understood as a reference to the deception and false teaching which threatens to overwhelm the people of God. Given the serpent allusions to the Fall in this text, that would appear to be the intended sense here. The flood proceeding from the serpent's mouth portrays the devil's efforts to destroy the church by deception and false teaching. Just as the serpent deceived the first woman with lies and half-truths so he now attempts to deceive the latter day woman with his lying words. It is evident from the letters to the seven churches in the first vision that false teachers were already infiltrating the young congregations

and causing significant disruption and defection. This river of lies and deception is the devil's cruel counterpart to the "**river of the water of life**" which flows bright as crystal from God's heavenly throne (Revelation 21:1). But this river does not bring life. It brings only death. In the context of the church's sojourn in the wilderness, the waters of the devil's flood also recall the waters of the Red Sea which threatened to destroy the Children of Israel when they were pursued by the army of Pharaoh. God led his people through the sea on dry land but when the host of Egypt attempted to follow them - "**You stretched out Your right hand and the earth swallowed them.**" (Exodus 15:12) When Korah led a rebellion against Moses as the chosen spokesman of God "**the earth opened her mouth and consumed**" the rebels and their families (Numbers 16:12-14). So now in John's vision the earth "**opening its mouth and swallowing the river**" signifies God's care and His deliverance of His people.

"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" - The dragon's continued failure to destroy the woman serves only to enrage him further. He was unable to kill the woman's child. His attempt to engulf the woman herself in the torrent of the river also ended in abject failure. But still he will not desist. The campaign of extermination continues. His anger is redirected toward "**the rest of her offspring.**" The faithful remnant, the true Christian Church, "**those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus**" - now become the target of his frantic wrath. "*If he can neither unseat the throned Christ nor destroy the Church, yet individual Christians may enjoy no such immunity.*" (Swete, p. 160) While the gates of hell will not prevail against the church, individual believers remain subject to the attacks of the dragon and may be destroyed. Those who are steadfast in their obedience to the Word and commandments of God; those who will not compromise or yield to the world's relentless pressure to conform; those who faithfully and consistently testify to the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ - these are they who become the dragon's prime target. Their destruction and their downfall must be the devil's basic objective. "**And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.**" - This change in the dragon's position signals the transition to the next scene in which the two monstrous agents through which the dragon will carry out his war against the faithful offspring of the woman will be presented.



“Mankind Worships the Beasts” by Lucas Cranach

The Second Scene - The Beast from the Sea

Revelation 13: 1-10

And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with 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?” 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 who was slain from the creation of the world. 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.

Introduction - The Beasts of Revelation 13

The beasts of Revelation 13 present different dimensions of the same reality. By splitting the single image into two different symbolic figures John is able to highlight and emphasize particular characteristics of this reality. At the same time, the expansion of the one into two enables him to complete the image of the Satanic Anti-Trinity - the red dragon, the beast from the sea, and the beast from the land - which reveal the devil as the great counterfeit. The view that the two beasts represent different dimensions of the same reality is strongly reinforced by the interchange of their roles throughout their various appearances in Revelation. In this vision, the beast from the land is portrayed as the agent and servant of the beast from the sea (Revelation 13:12-15). When they next appear, the two are presented as equals gathering the hosts of evil for the battle of Armageddon (Revelation 16:12-14). Later, in Chapter 17, the beast from the land, now in the guise of Harlot Babylon, is depicted as the mistress of the beast from the sea, riding upon his back (Revelation 17:3-8). The beasts are two sides of the same coin, each side presenting a different face of the same figure.

The subject of this chapter is the “*Antichrist*” and the host of anti-Christian powers that serve the cause of Satan in this world. The composite presentation of Antichrist and anti-Christ together is characteristic of St. John. In 1 John 2:18, the apostle had warned the Church of the imminent arrival of “*the Antichrist*” and of the host of “*many anti-Christ*s” that had proceeded his coming: “*Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many anti-Christ*s have come. *This is how we know it is the last hour.*” Now again, in the beasts from the sea and the land, we are confronted by the Antichrist and his entourage. (Cf. “*Excursus - The Biblical Doctrine of the Antichrist*”, p.383ff.)



"The Beasts from the Sea and the Land" by Albrecht Dürer

“And I saw a beast coming out of the sea.” - “The characteristic phrase **“And I saw”** (Greek - *“kai eidon”*) signals the beginning of the next scene in the vision. The dragon had moved to **“the shore of the sea”** in preparation for this scene, as if waiting for the monster that will rise to do his bidding. Now John sees a grotesque **“beast coming out of the sea.”** To the Hebrew mind, the sea represented chaos, confusion, and evil. The upheaval of its waves, crashing endlessly against one another, signified the tumult of the nations, constantly in conflict with one another

(cf. Isaiah 17:12; 57:20-21; Jeremiah 49:23; Daniel 7:2; Ezekiel 26:3; Revelation 17:15). For John on the island of Patmos, to gaze out over the sea was to look to the West and to Rome, seat of the empire that had conquered the world. That which rises up from the murky waters of the deep is a **“beast”** (Greek - *“therion”*). The word indicates an animal of great strength that is characterized by wild, uncontrolled ferocity. This horrendous being is the second member of the Satanic anti-Trinity. He is deliberately presented as the opposite in every way of Christ, the Lamb of God. This is clearly indicated by the stark contrast of their symbolic representations: on the one hand the lamb, the image of meekness and vulnerability; on the other the beast, the image of ostentatious power, arrogance, and



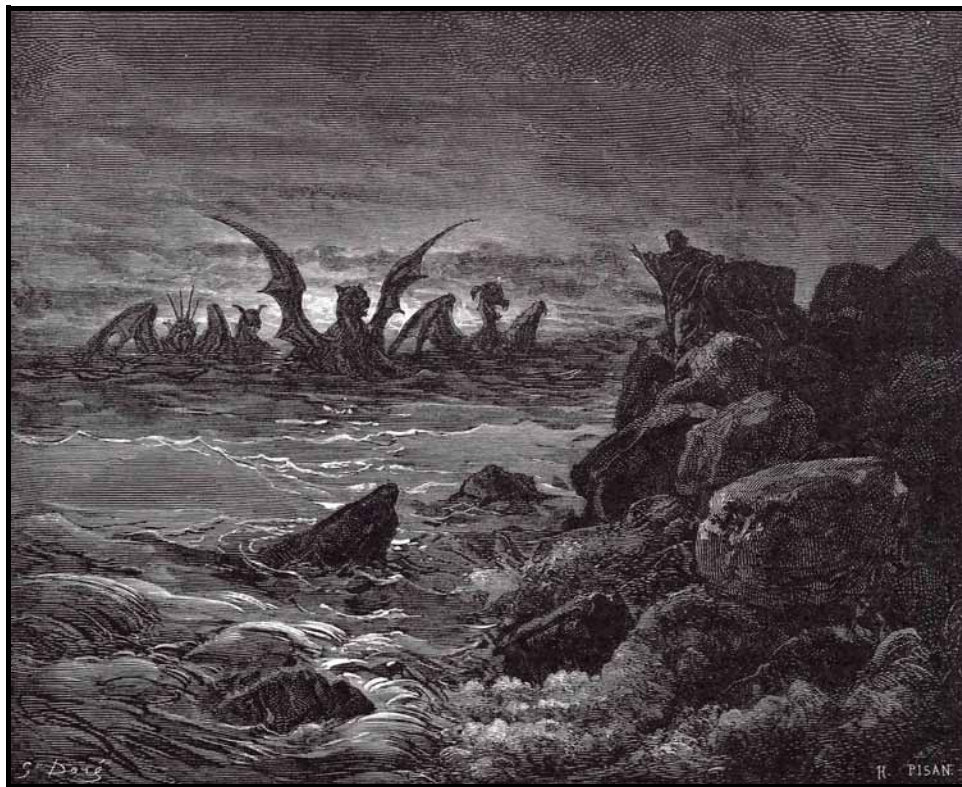
“The Red Dragon and the Beast from the Sea”
by William Blake

invincibility. The beast stands for might against right, chaos against order, evil against good, death against life, and Satan against God. While he seeks to emulate and imitate the Christ, he is the very opposite and enemy of the Christ. The beast symbolizes the anti-Christian perversion of civil government and the power structures of this world, particularly their personification in and manipulation by the great Antichrist (cf. 1 John 1:18).



“The Beast from the Sea” by Jean Duvet

“He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on each of his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.” - The beast mirrors the appearance of the dragon who is his master (Revelation 12:3) and is thus identified as an agent and servant of the devil. Like his Satanic master, he boasts the golden crowns of royalty (Greek - *“didemata”*). But in this instance, the crowns are not upon his heads but upon his horns. The shift may signal the fact that this beast is nothing more than a tool in the hand of his devilish Master. While he may believe himself to be an independent agent, pursuing his own goals and purposes, perhaps even doing that which he believe to be good and right, in reality he is nothing more than a puppet whose strings are being pulled from the depths of the Abyss. The heads represent cleverness and intelligence. They are seven in number to signify the craftiness of our foe. The dragon’s crowns, unlike those of the beast rest directly upon his head to show that he is the mastermind. It is in his diabolical cleverness that the schemes carried out by the beast are devised. Ten is the ordinal number, the number of government and law. The horn, as we have seen, represents power. Many commentators also view the combination of seven and ten in this scene as an allusion to Rome, the city built upon seven hills, and to the ten original imperial provinces of the Roman Empire. In Daniel’s vision (Daniel 7:7-8), the horns of the beasts represented individual



“Daniel’s Vision of the Four Beasts” by Gustave Doré



“Men Worshiped the Beast” - Luther Bible Illustration -1534

monarchs ruled by the devil to use their power for evil. John broadens the symbol and places the royal crowns upon the horns themselves to symbolize all the powers and authorities of this world. While the primary focus here is on civil government, all the power structures of human culture are included in this dreadful image - political/governmental, military, economic, social, scientific, philosophic and educational.

A *“blasphemous name”* was inscribed on each of the beast’s seven heads. Blasphemy is the essence of this monster - his basic concern and his fundamental activity, as will be seen in the descriptions which follow. Blasphemy is all thought, speech, or action which denies, questions, or challenges the majesty or the power of God. The sin of blasphemy focuses specifically on the misuse or mockery of God’s Name or His Word. *“Blasphemy is the defaming and abusive speech by which God and all that belongs to Him are ridiculed and mocked.”* (Brighton, p. 350) The blasphemous names written upon the heads of the beast from the sea represent the claims of any human authority to absolute sovereignty over the hearts and minds of men throughout history. When human authority in any form presumes to take the



*“The Red Dragon and the Beast from the Sea”
Luther Bible Woodcut by Hans Burgmair*

aware that they were gazing into the bloodshot eyes of the brutal beast from St. John’s vision:

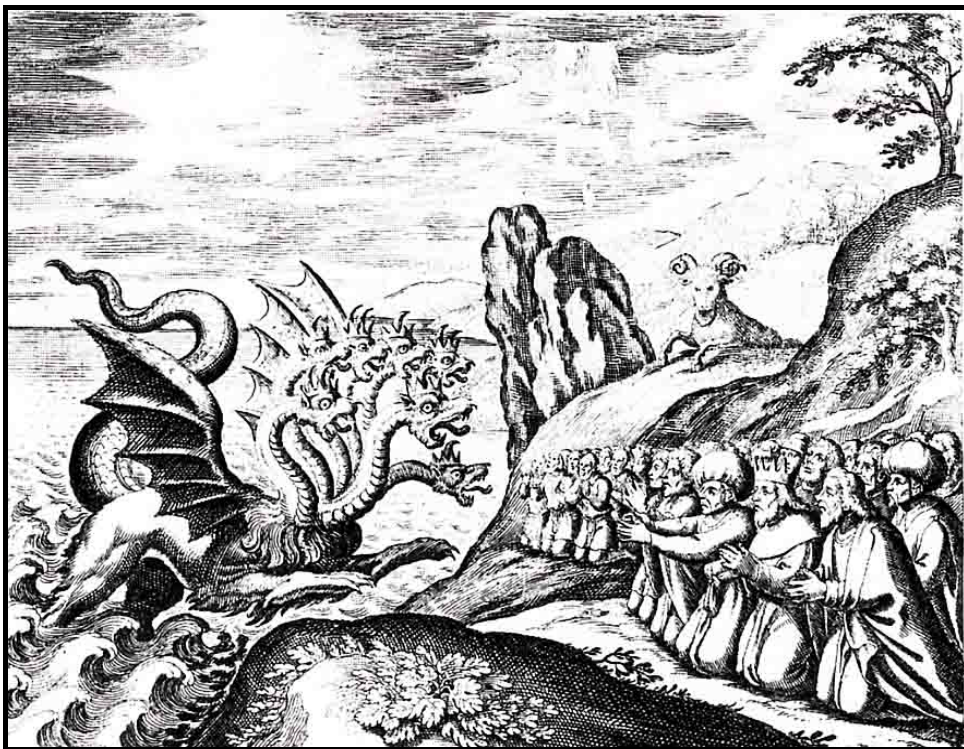
*“The connection between worldly government and the church consists in this alone, that the church points out to worldly government through its proper proclamation the limits of their own order so that they do not thereby become a tool of the devil, who in the end seeks only chaos so that he may destroy all life. Worldly government ought to expect this service, and this service alone, of the church. With this service the church preserves those under authority from the deceit of the devil who desires unlimited power to have himself worshiped as life-giver and savior.”
(Bonhoeffer/Sasse, p. 113)*

“The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth

place of God it becomes a blasphemy. That judgement applies to the divine claims of ancient emperors and the totalitarian demands of modern dictators. In 1933, the Nazi government of Germany was systematically moving to control every dimension of the nation’s life. Lutheran theologians Herman Sasse and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were commissioned to draft the church’s response to Hitler’s efforts to manipulate the convictions and the confession of God’s people. The result of their effort has come to be known as *“The Bethel Confession.”* The confession emphasizes the inherent limitation of human governmental authority and the profound danger of the Satanic abuse of that authority to replace God. In reading the language of this prophetic document it is clear that the authors were well

like that of a lion.” - The prophet Daniel beheld a vision of four beasts, representing the succession of world empires that would conquer and oppress the people of God from the time of the prophet until the coming of the Messiah - Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome. These four great world empires were represented by a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a monster with iron teeth. John combines all four into one great monstrosity. He presents us with an almost unimaginable image of destructiveness, ferocity and power. This is clearly not one particular ruler or power but a composite of all human authority as it is manipulated and abused by the red dragon in pursuit of his anti-Christian goals. An individual ruler or government may epitomize the beast from the sea at a specific time in a particular place, but none can exhaust the image for it encompasses them all. Even the “*Great Antichrist*” himself, who is the master at manipulating human authority for his own ends and whose malevolent presence will continue throughout the New Testament era, does not exhaust the image of the beast.

“Satanic evil expressed itself through the kingdoms of Assyria, Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Sodom, and Rome. This system of evil will continue to manifest itself in yet future kingdoms of the world, and has the ability to manifest itself as well in economic, social, and religious structures on earth.” (Beale, p. 686)



“All Men Will Worship the Beast” by Matthias Merian

The authority of civil government is ordained and established by God Himself (Romans 13:1-7). However, when human government oversteps its bounds and usurps the power and place of God it then becomes demonic, a tool of the devil - ***“The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.”*** The beast personifies not authority itself, but human authority gone wrong - the anti-Christian abuse of human government that takes the place of God.



“The Beasts from the Land and the Sea” Luther Bible Woodcut

“One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed.” - The death wound from which the beast’s head had recovered is a mocking parody of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Lamb of God upon the throne bears the wounds of one who was slain. Heaven had rejoiced:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God... Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength, honor and glory and praise.!” (Revelation 5:9,12)

The visible wounds of Christ, the Lamb of God, are of profound theological

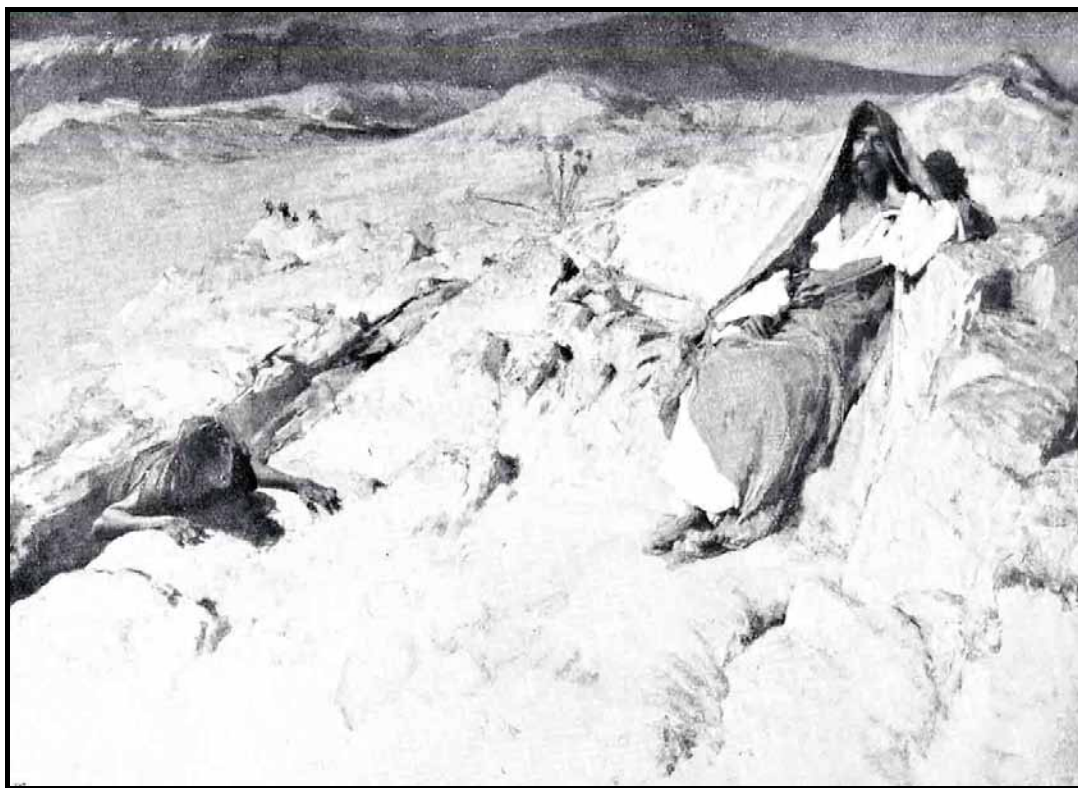
significance in the symbolism of Revelation. They link Christ's exaltation to His humiliation and assert the substitutionary death of Jesus as the sole basis for the salvation of humanity. The resurrection of Jesus proves that Christ is truly the Son of God and that He is worthy to rule and reign at the right hand of the Father. The Lamb who was slain has now begun His reign. As previously noted, the devil is "God's ape." He delights in mimicking and counterfeiting God and His great acts of salvation. The fatal wound of the beast is designed to serve the same purpose as the wounds of the Lamb - that is, to validate the beast's message of human power and pride. Many commentators see this detail of the vision as an allusion to alleged resurrections by divine emperors (i.e. Caligula or Nero), to the rise and fall of individual world governments, or the reformation. Given the scope of the vision, however, all such views seem too limited.

The first Messianic prophecy in the Garden of Eden had promised that the Descendant of the Woman would crush the head of the satanic serpent (Genesis 3:15). The fatal wound on the head of the beast reflects and rejects the language of that original Gospel promise. Later in the Chapter, John will specify that this fatal wound was caused by a sword (vs. 14). This recalls the prophecy of Isaiah: "***In that day the Lord will punish with His sword, his fierce, great, and powerful sword, Leviathan the gliding serpent, Leviathan, the coiling serpent. He will slay the monster of the sea.***" (Isaiah 27:1) God fulfilled His ancient promise that He would crush the serpent's head in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. But to all appearances the devil continues to reign. The final judgment did not immediately follow Christ's death and resurrection. From the world's false perspective the realm of Satan has not merely continued, it has flourished and grown. No matter how many times the



*"The Worship of the Beast"
Luther Bible Woodcut*

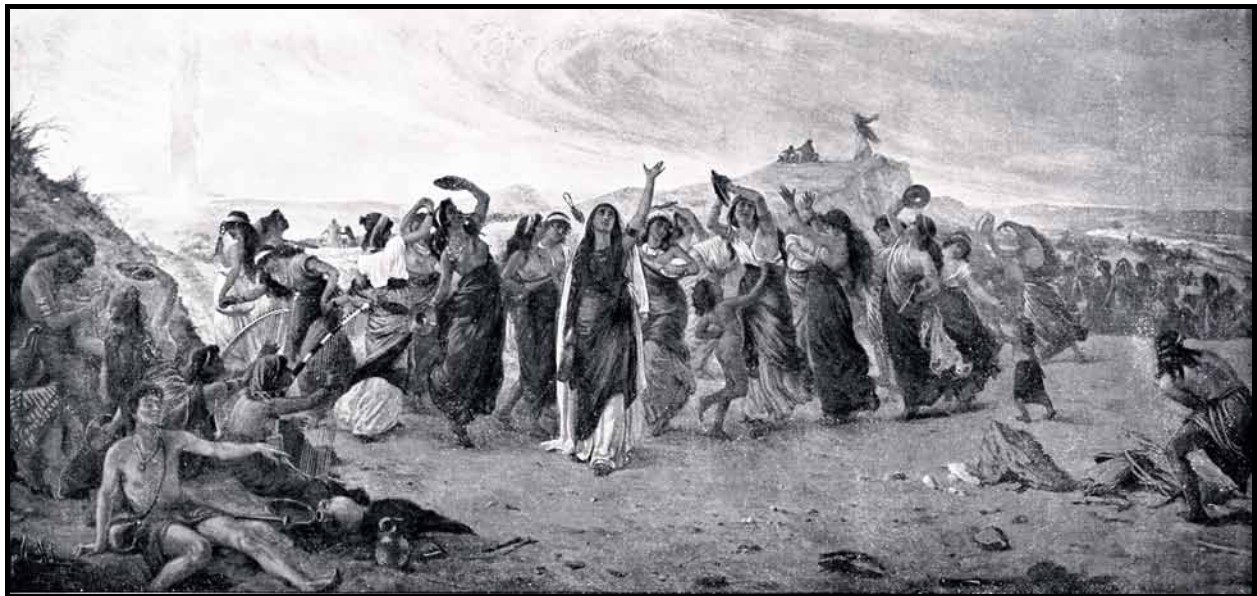
bestial power of godless government is defeated, it always seems to rise again. New tyrants come forth, hungry for new blood, wrecking havoc and destruction. To the vast majority of men, who live by sight and not by faith, who cannot spiritually discern the actual state of affairs, it does indeed seem that the devil has recovered from his mortal wound. In this way, the devil's imitation has the desired effect - ***“The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.”***



“The Temptation in the Wilderness” by Domenico Morelli

“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?’” - The allure of the beast is such that most of mankind is captivated by him and his apparently invincible power. The devil once invited Christ to fall down and worship him in return for all the riches and power of this world (Matthew 4:9). Jesus refused, but the masses of humanity have always found that invitation irresistible. Those who are beguiled by the things of this world - power, popularity, pleasure, success or wealth - are, in fact, worshipping the dragon and the beast which serves him. Those who will not live in the love of God are ***“the children of the devil.”*** (1 John 3:10) There is no comfortable uncommitted middle ground. Jesus denounced the leaders of the Jewish religious establishment who had vehemently

rejected His claim to be the Savior: ***“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire.”*** (John 8:44) The Jews were horrified at His words. They were religious men who sincerely believed that they were carrying out the will of God. But their misguided zeal had become a tool in the clawed hands of the beast and his satanic master. While the great majority of men would recoil in horror from the vile practices of Satanism, they are only too eager to bow down before one of the legion of alternative idols which he makes available to them. All of men’s self-serving bargains with the power realities and moral ambiguities of this world are, in truth, worship of the dragon and the beast which serves him. Their adoring hymn of praise - ***“Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?”*** is a blasphemous parody of the Song of Moses on the shores of the Red Sea: ***“Who among the gods is like You, O Lord?”*** (Exodus 15:11; cf. Also Malachi 3:2) At the



“The Celebration of Israel at the Red Sea” by William Gale

same time, the masses praise of the beast is also a bitter mockery of Michael the Archangel who led the hosts of heaven against the dragon and his angels. The name ***“Michael”*** means ***“Who Is Like God,”*** emphasizing the uniqueness of the only true God and encouraging people to worship Him alone. ***“Who is like the beast?”*** on the other hand, twists that mighty name and directs the people’s worship away from God and toward the beast and the dragon whom he serves. The world loves a winner and that is exactly what the dragon and his mighty beast appear to be. R.C.H. Lenski sadly acknowledges that this aura of invincibility has had a significant impact, even



“Michael and the Dragon” by Rudolf Schäfer

among Christians and Christian churches. Here too, popularity and institutional success can easily become decisive, effectively replaced faithfulness to Christ and to His Word as the decisive characteristic of the church.

“Indeed at times even Christians imagine that the anti-Christian power in the world all about them is invincible. Certainly the voices heard in the whole earth triumphantly shout these two questions or their equivalents. Some Christians surrender; whole churches succumb. They keep the Christian name but yield to ‘the spirit of the age,’ to the new wisdom of science, etc.” (Lenski, pp. 395-396)

“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.” - Twice before active forms of the verb *“to give”* have been used (cf. Vss. 2,4) to describe that which the dragon has given the beast. Beginning here in Verse 5, the same verb occurs in the passive voice - ***“was given”*** - to indicate God’s permission for the activities of the beast. Neither the devil nor his minions operate outside of or beyond the control of almighty God. The Lord is sovereign in all things.

To use Luther's phrase, the devil must always remain "*Gottes Teufel*" ("*God's Devil*"). All that the devil does ultimately serves God's purpose and plan. He can do nothing without God's consent (i.e. Job 1:6-12). Our limited minds boggle at the concept of God's absolute sovereignty. Nonetheless, Scripture clearly and repeatedly asserts that nothing in this world takes place apart from the determinative control of God. While it may not be possible for us to understand the ways and whys of God's sovereign control, the reality of that control can serve as a source of profound comfort and assurance for every humble believer. The beast and his infernal master exist only by God's consent and may operate only under the restrictions and limitations which God places upon them.

"The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies..." - Like the anti-Christian "*little horn*" of Daniel's vision (Daniel 7:8-12), the mouth of the beast indulges in an ongoing flowing of blasphemy and boasting. The Greek verb is a durative present infinitive, signifying continuously ongoing action. He challenges, denies, and defies God. He claims for himself power and prerogative which rightfully belong to God alone. This is the essential characteristic of the Antichrist (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:4). Each of the beast's seven heads was emblazoned with a blasphemous name (vs. 1). That which fills the head pours forth from the mouth in an uninterrupted stream of blasphemy:

"God lets the beast pour out great floods of blasphemy upon men, and the world of men drinks in all of these blasphemies. The saints feast upon the holy Word of



"The Beast from the Sea and the Red Dragon"
15th Century Bible Illumination

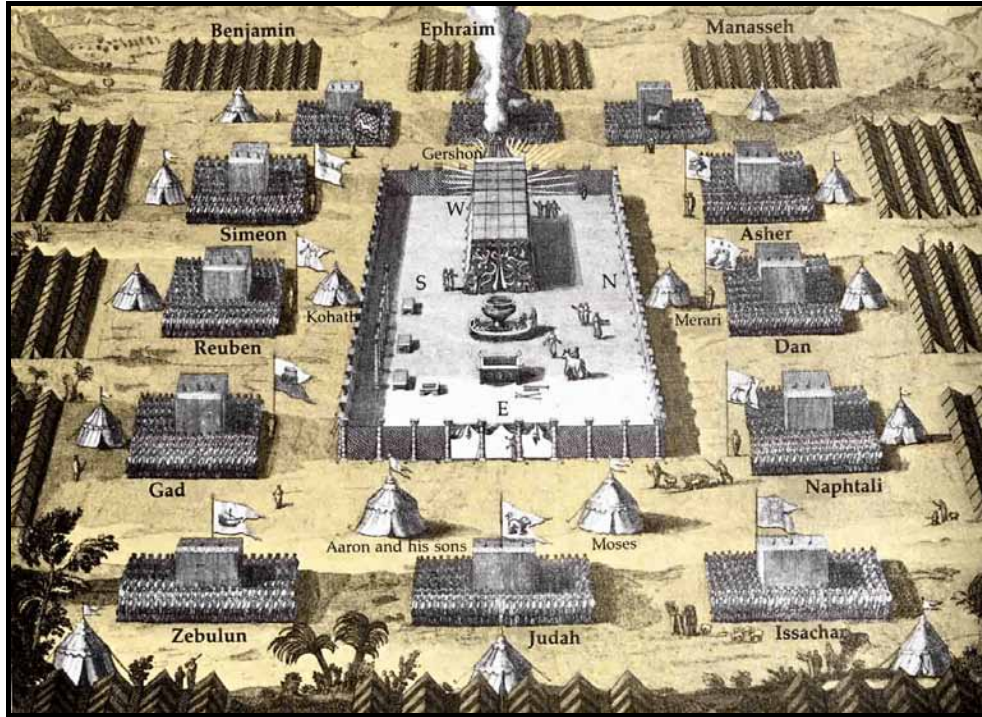
God; the antichristian power fills mens souls with uncounted blasphemies, contradictions of God and His Word.” (Lenski, p. 397)

God will permit the blasphemy of the beast to continue throughout the New Testament era - **“to exercise his authority for forty-two months.”** (cf. Daniel 7:25; 12:7)

“He opened his mouth to blaspheme and to slander His name and His dwelling place and those who live in heaven.” - This verse amplifies and explains the blasphemy of the beast. The language of the text vividly present the blasphemous speech of the beast as if it were a face to face challenge between God and the monstrous mouthpiece of Satan (Greek - *“blasphemias pros ton theou”*). He constantly and continuously hurls his defiance and denial against the God of heaven. It is significant to note that the blasphemy is defined by its substance , not its motive. Whether the intent is innocent or malevolent, every denial of God or His Word constitutes blasphemy. Lenski explains the broad scope of the concept:

“Who can count all of these blasphemies against God alone? It makes no difference whether the language is vicious or mild. So also there is no difference whether it is spoken in parliaments or in the courts, in newspapers, in magazines, in books, over the radio, and in the public forum, in universities, in colleges, and in homes or on the street or in the shop.” (Lenski, p. 398)

The objects of the beast’s blasphemy are specified - **“to slander His name, His dwelling place, and those who live in heaven.”** The verb *“blaspheme”* is used four times in Revelation, twice in reference to God (Revelation 16: 11,21) and twice in reference to the Name of God (Revelation 13:3; 16:9; cf. Romans 2:24; 1 Timothy 6:1; James 2:7). **“His name”** is that by which God reveals Himself or makes Himself known. It includes not only all of the names and titles of God revealed in sacred Scripture but all that which God has deigned to disclose about Himself, His attributes, and His actions. In the Biblical view, a name expresses the essence of the person who bears that name. The next two phrases - **“His dwelling place and those who live in heaven.”** are linked together in the Greek text by the repetition of forms of the verb *“to dwell.”* (**“His dwelling place”** - Greek - *“ten skenen autou”*; **“those who live in heaven”** - Greek - *“tous en to ourano skenountas”*) The etymology of this intriguing word goes back to the pitching of a tent or tabernacle, an allusion to the Tent of Meeting where God’s Glory dwelt within the encampment of Israel. The original text does not include the conjunction **“and”** which has been inserted between the two



*“The Tabernacle With the Glory Cloud in the Midst of the Camp”
18th Century Engraving*

phrases by the NIV translators. It seems likely that the second phrase stand in apposition to the first, that is, the second phrase explains and defines the meaning of the first. A literal translation would read: *“His dwelling place, that is, those who dwell in heaven.”* The people of God are His dwelling place, the place where He pitches His tent (cf. Ephesians 2:19-21). Revelation 21:3 uses the same combination of words in a similar sense to declare: *“Now the dwelling place 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.”* The sense of the text is then that the beast not only blasphemes against God but also attacks His people, those who dwell under His protection - *“They are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits upon the throne will spread His tent over them.”* (Revelation 7:15)

“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.” - Once again John carefully emphasizes that everything which the beast does is done with God’s permission and consent - *“He was given...”* The beast’s role remain subordinate to the sovereign power of God. The target of his hellish crusade is the infant from the

previous scene, the “*offspring*” of the woman, all those “*who hold to the testimony of Jesus*” (Revelation 12:17). The Antichrist’s use of secular power and authority is always ultimately directed against God and His people. The means may be political, military, economic or cultural but the final goal is always spiritual. The devil’s purpose is not merely domination but damnation. The terminology used to describe the beast’s onslaught against the Church is drawn from Daniel 7:21 - “*As I watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them.*” In an unholy world the presence of “*the saints*” (Greek - “*hagioi*” - “*the holy ones*”) is an intolerable offense. Their witness must be silenced and their presence eliminated. The beast is not only given the power to make war but also “*to conquer them.*” Throughout history he has rampaged among the faithful, wreaking death and



“*The Beast Waging War Upon the Faithful*” - *The Brussels Tapestry*

destruction on every side. In the exquisite “*Brussels Tapestry*,” woven in the mid-16th century, this scene is depicted with graphic power. The monstrous beast surges forward toward the faithful with irresistible might, each of his seven lion heads snarling ferociously. He is the epitome of destructive power. The battle line of the Church falters as those not already dead turn to flee in consternation and confusion.

The banner of the cross has fallen to the ground, its pole snapped in two by the brutal attack. But the victory of the beast is not final. He may persecute, kill and destroy - but those faithful saints whom he has slaughtered are the true victors (Revelation 15:2). The vision reports that the beast prevails throughout the whole world for ***“He was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation.”*** The fourfold division in this phrase, utilizing the symbolic earth number, represents all of unbelieving mankind. The same phrase was used earlier (Revelation 5:9) in reference to those whom the Lamb had died to redeem.

“All the 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.” - Despite the overwhelming success of the devil and his beasts, the people of God will survive. The Church will remain an isolated and tormented minority, a tiny remnant, but the Church will remain. Mankind will fall before the deceptive power of anti-Christ and the Antichrist - ***“All the inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast”*** but those whom God has chosen will be preserved nonetheless.

“The book of life belonging to the Lamb” is a metaphor in Revelation for God’s predestination of His elect from eternity (Revelation 3:5; 17:8; 20:12,15; 21:27). It is the Lamb’s book of life because the blood of the Lamb paid the ransom price which won eternal life for fallen mankind. The blood of the Lamb is the indelible ink in which the names of the saints are inscribed in the Book of Life. The genitive ***“of life”*** indicates the nature and purpose of this book. Those whose names are recorded



“The Lamb’s Book of Life”
12th Century German Apocalypse



“The Lamb’s Book of Life - 15th Century French Apocalypse

therein receive the gift of eternal life with God in heaven. Those who worship the beast are those whose names were not recorded in that book before time began.

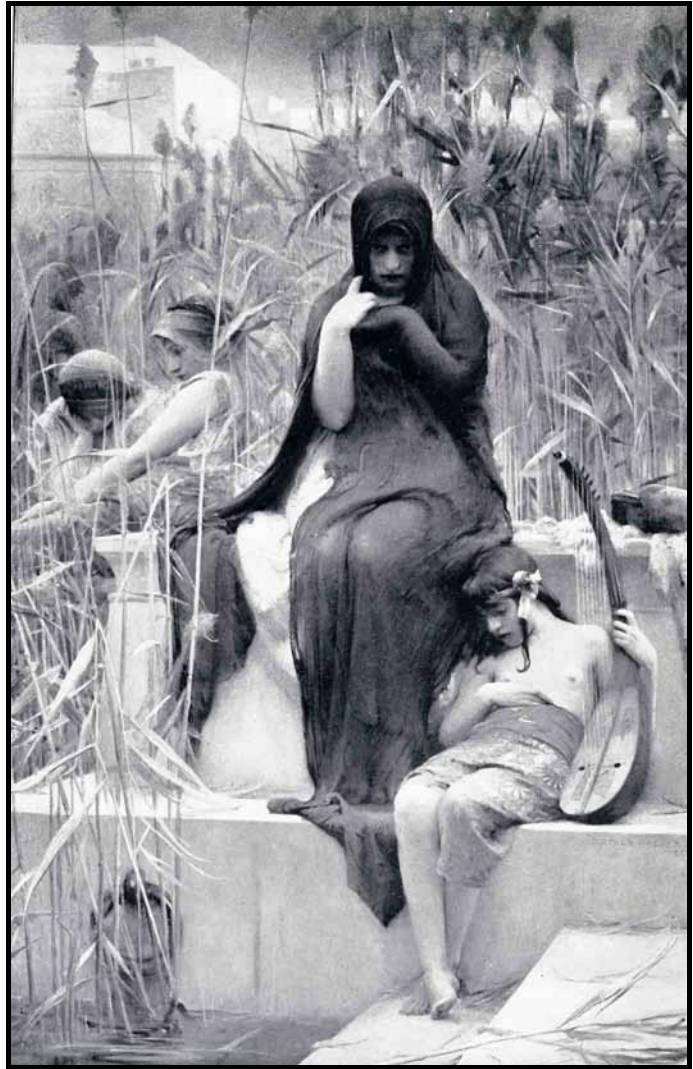
“He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.” - Seven times before this cry for spiritual discernment had gone out from the Christ who addressed the seven letters to the seven churches (Revelation 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). It recalls the oft repeated admonition of Christ in the Gospels (cf. Matthew 11:15; Mark 4:9). The summons alerts the reader to the particular importance of what follows. These are not warnings which pertain to a safely distant future, as in the delusions of those who believe that God’s people will be “*raptured*” away before the “*Tribulation Period*” begins. The urgency of the text emphasizes that their relevance is immediate. Careful attention must be paid to what is being said.

The suffering church is reminded again that God remains in control. The calamities that overtake the church do not occur by chance. The God who has chosen them from

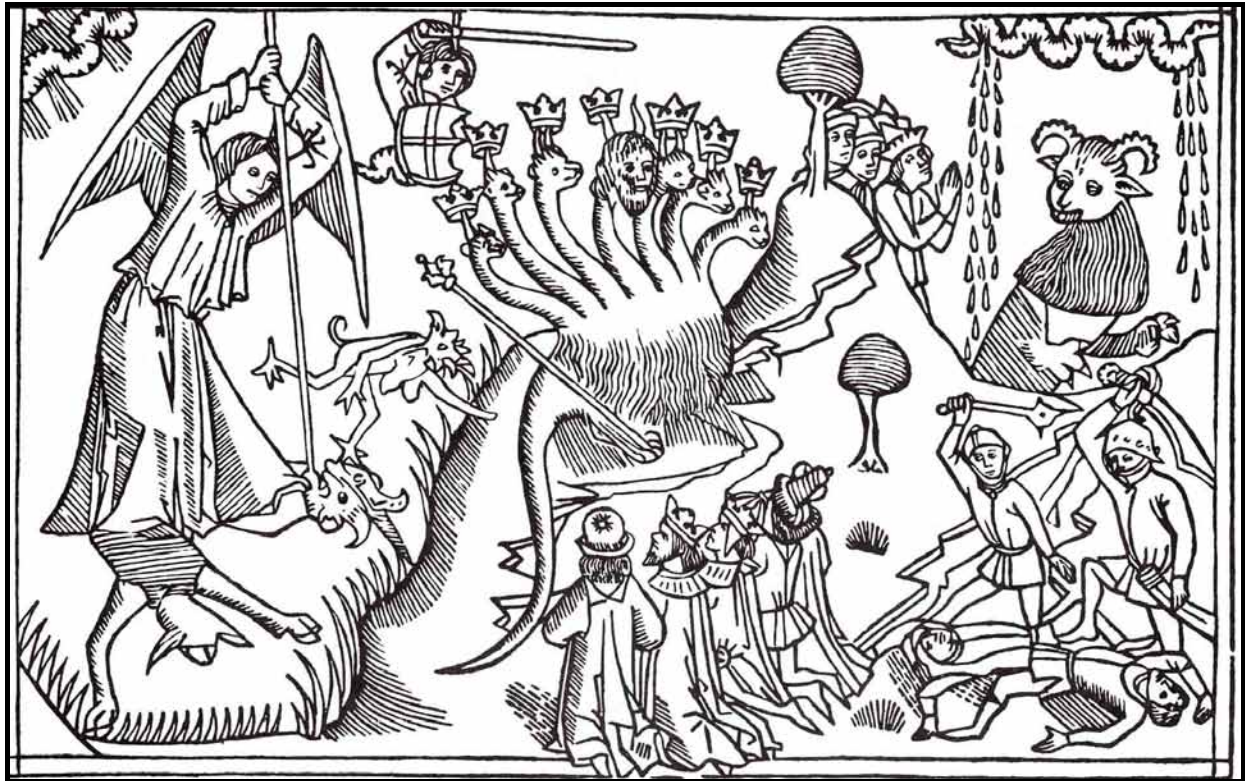
eternity to be His own remains sovereign. John's words recall God's prediction of the Babylonian captivity from Jeremiah 15:2 - ***"This is what the Lord says: 'Those destined for death to death; those for the sword to the sword; those for starvation to starvation; those for captivity to captivity.'"*** The same assertion of divine sovereignty resounds in His promise of the downfall of Egypt before the might of Babylon in Jeremiah 43:11 - ***"He will come and attack Egypt, bringing death to those destined for death, captivity to those destined for captivity, and the sword for those destined for the sword."***

Humble submission to the will of God is the appropriate response of the faithful. The NIV's translation - ***This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.***" - is an interpretive expansion of the original text which simply says - *"here is the patience and faith of the saints."* The Church dare never respond in kind to the cruelty and violence of the world.

"While in God's estimate the time is short, for the Christian undergoing persecution and suffering, the time can seem endless. Especially then will Christians be tempted to take things into their own hands. But the Spirit of God warns Christians not to do so. Rather, accept what God allows, even if it is cruel and unjust, and do not resist it. No human being can stand against the beast or control it, for 'on earth is not his equal.'the Christian is to suffer patiently and in faith for the sake of the Lord Jesus." (Brighton, p. 357)



"By the Rivers of Babylon We Wept as We Remembered Zion" by Arthur Hacker



“The Visions of the Beasts and the War in Heaven” - The Cologne Bible, 1479

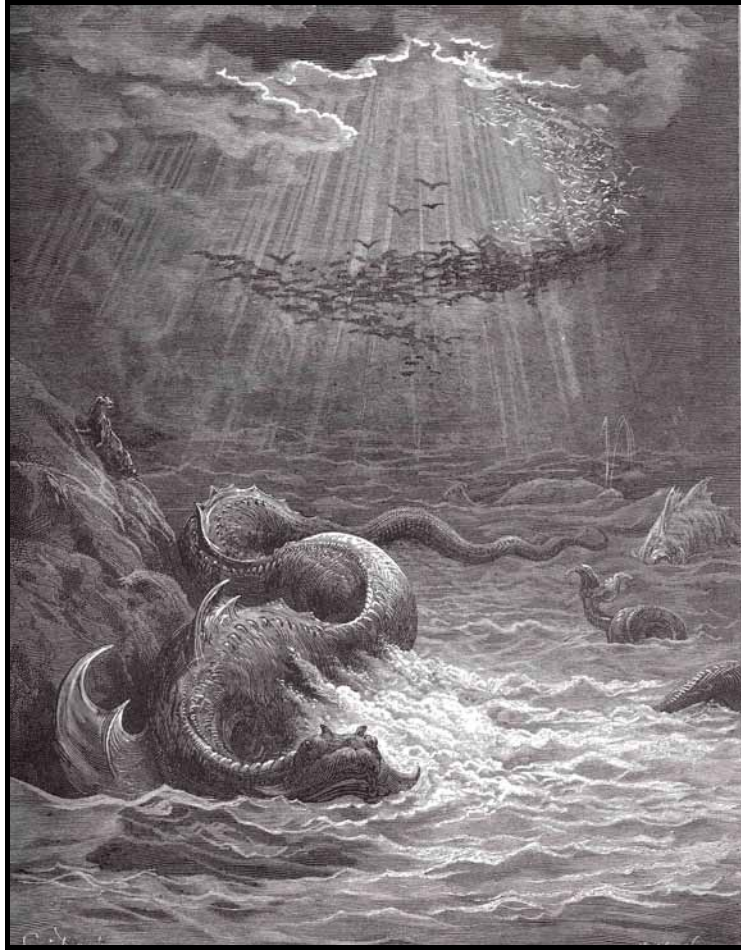
The Third Scene - The Beast from the Earth Revelation 13:11-18

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 of 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 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 none could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man's number. His number is 666.

“Then I saw another beast coming out of the earth.” - The characteristic ***“Then I saw”*** (Greek - *“kai eidon”*) signals the change of scene. The appearance of a second beast completes the satanic anti-Trinity - the dragon/Father, the beast from the sea/Son, and the beast from the land/Spirit. In the divine Trinity, the role of the Holy Spirit centers on sanctification, that is, the giving and maintaining of faith. In that light, the beast from the earth will be presented in this scene as the agent of the beast from the sea. His work is to create and foster faith in his fellow beast. Thus, John’s contemptuous dismissal of the devil as the imitator, the mimic of the one true God is completed. Like its predecessor, this figure is a ***“beast”*** (Greek - *“therion”*), a wild ferocious animal of great destructive power. But the menace represented by this beast is different, as the detailed description will show. The second beast arises not from the sea, but from the land. The distinction may simply be a matter of staging within the scenes of the vision. The dragon stood on the shore of the sea (Revelation 13:1). One beast rising from the sea and the other from the land places one on either side with the dragon in the prominent center, thus indicating that both serve and derive their power from him. It is significant to note that despite their different points of origin: *“The two beasts have this in common, that they do not descend from heaven above, but come from below. To borrow the words of James 3:15, they are earthly, sensual, devilish.”* (Poellet, p. 173) At the same time, the concept of beasts from the land and the sea may reflect the Old Testament tradition of Leviathan, the fire breathing monster of the sea and Behemoth, the massive creature of the land (cf. Job 40-41).



*“The Visions of the Two Beasts”
15th Century Luther Bible Woodcut*



“Leviathan” by Gustave Dore

“He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon.” -

The beast from the seas depicted the Antichrist and all his anti-Christian powers of this world brazenly and boastfully flaunting their strength to coerce the obedience and obeisance of mankind. Now, the more subtle devious side of our enemy is revealed. The same power is present, but it is carefully hidden. This is not external coercion and persecution from the unbelieving world, but sabotage from within, subversion inside the Church itself concealed beneath a mask of piety. The outward appearance of this creature is disarming and reassuring - ***“he had two horns like a lamb.”*** The real nature of this beast, however, is indicated by the sound of his voice - ***“but he spoke like a***

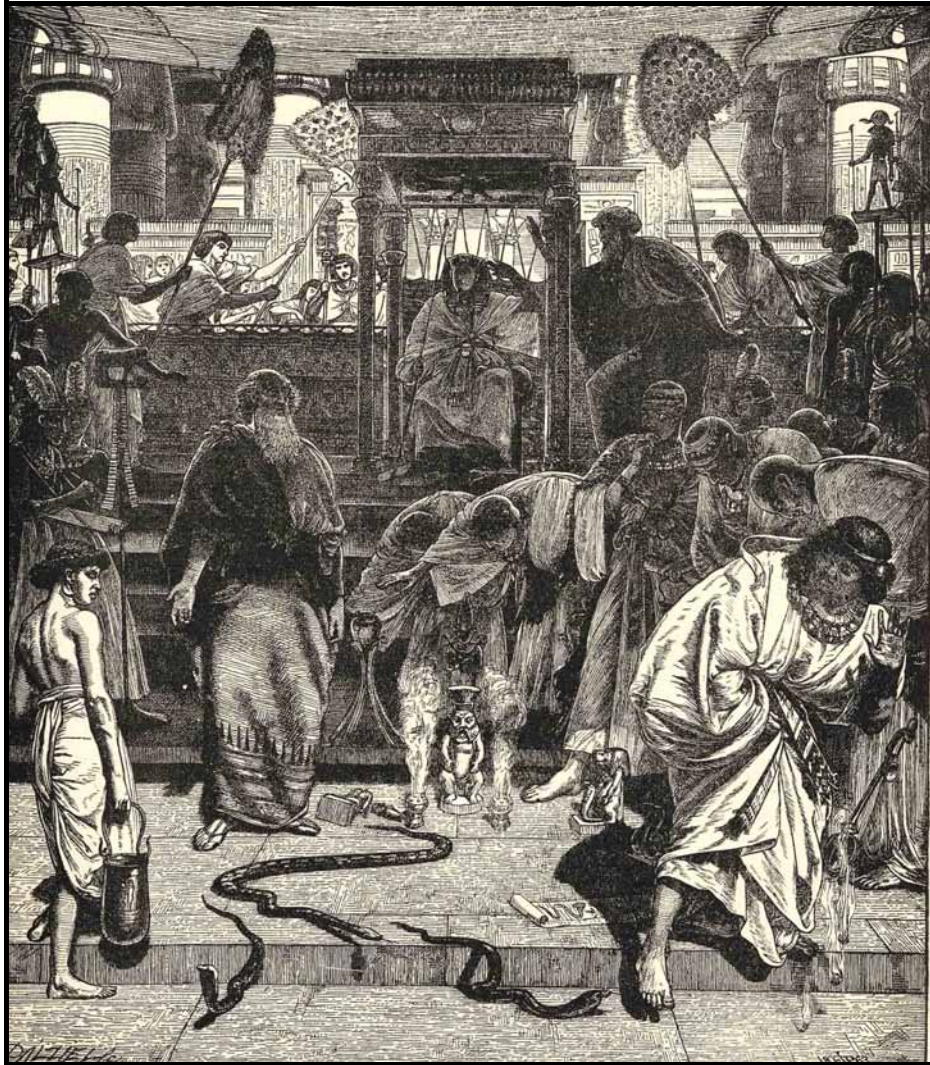
dragon.” The beast from the earth is not what he seems to be. Behind the false facade of the lamb lurk the deadly jaws of the dragon. Deception is the essence of his being. In subsequent scenes even his name will change as he shifts from one disguise to the next. In Chapter 16 he becomes ***“the false prophet”*** (Revelation 16:13) and in Chapters 17 and 18 he appears as ***“the great prostitute”*** (Revelation 17:1), Harlot Babylon. Instead of the seven horns of the Messianic Lamb (Revelation 5:6) the disguise of the beast from the earth bears two lamb-like horns. He mimics the two witnesses, lampstands, and olive trees which signified the Church in Chapter 11. He also reflects the second beast of Daniel’s vision - ***“a ram that had two horns.”*** (Daniel 8:3) Christ had warned that false prophets and messiahs would infiltrate the Church (Matthew 24:5). John’s imagery here may well have been based upon the words of Christ’s warning - ***“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”*** (Matthew 7:15)

“The image of a wolf in lamb’s clothing suggests a traitor within the fold of the Church. Though the beast professes to represent the truth and appears as harmless as a lamb, his inner Satanic nature is revealed through his speaking with the authority of the dragon, reflecting the alluring, deceptive speech of Satan, the dragon, that led to the sin of Adam and Eve.” (Beale, p. 708)



“The Beast from the Land” by Albrecht Dürer

“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.” - As the Holy Spirit of God leads people to faith in Christ, crucified and risen from the dead, so the anti-Spirit of the Satanic Trinity leads people to *“worship the first beast whose fatal wound had been healed.”* The language of the text emphasizes the close and intimate relationship between the two beasts. The Greek text literally reads - *“and he exercises all the authority of the first beast before him.”* The first beast had received his power and authority from the dragon (Revelation 13:2). In the imagery of the text he now delegates the power which he had received from the dragon to the beast from the land to utilize it on his behalf. The whole pattern is a blasphemous parody of the inter-relationships of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit within the divine Trinity. The description of the beast from the sea was characterized by the repeated use of the Greek verb *“dokeo”* (*“to give”*). In a similar way, the description of



*“Jannes and Jambres Confront Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

the beast from the earth is characterized by the use of the Greek verb “*poieo*” (“*to do*”). Forms of the verb occur five times in this segment to describe the beast’s actions on behalf of his hellish counterpart. They form an effective team! The goal of the beasts is remove God from His place and substitute themselves - ***“and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast.”***

“And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men.” - The beast from the earth authenticates his message with ***“great and miraculous signs.”*** (Greek - “*semeia megala*”) The noun “***signs***” is typically used in connection with the supernatural or miraculous.

Thus the NIV adds the adjective *“miraculous.”* Moses had warned the children of Israel long ago not to judge a prophet merely by the miraculous signs which accompany his message but by the substance of the message itself:

“If a prophet comes to you or one who foretells by dreams appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, ‘Let us follow other gods (gods you have not known) and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you.” (Deuteronomy 13:1-3)

St. Paul had warned that the coming of the Antichrist (*“the Man of Lawlessness”*“) would be accompanied by *“all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:9) The miraculous signs in question are *“counterfeit”* not in the sense that they are not genuinely supernatural. Although those who serve Satan are often charlatans who practice deceit and trickery, the devil can and does use genuinely supernatural power to accomplish his nefarious goals. These miracles are *“counterfeit”* in the sense that the message they serve to authenticate is false, as, for example Jannes and Jambres, the notorious magicians of Pharaoh, who duplicated the wonders performed by Moses and Aaron in order to harden the heart of Egypt’s king (Exodus 7:11; 2 Timothy 3:8)



“Moses and Aaron Before Pharaoh” by J. James Tissot

The 1st Century apocalyptic writing *“The Ascension and Martyrdom of Isaiah”* describes the miracles of the Antichrist in this way:

“By his word he will cause the sun to rise at night, and the moon he will make to appear at the sixth hour. And he will do everything he wishes in the world; he will act and speak like the Beloved and will say; ‘I am the Lord and before me there was no one’...And the power of his miracles will be in every city and district.” (*“The Ascension and Martyrdom of Isaiah”* 4:5-9)



“Saul and the Witch of Endor” by J. James Tissot

The beast from the land mimics the great miracles of God prophets in the past like Elijah who called the fire of God from heaven in his confrontation with the prophets of Baal upon Mt. Carmel (1 Kings 18:36-40). To seek particular historical events as the literal fulfillment of this (or any other) specific detail of the vision is to misunderstand the nature of apocalyptic revelation. John uses the image of fire called down from heaven to convey the truth that the signs and wonders of the beast will imitate the mighty deeds of Christ and the true prophets and apostles of God. The use of false signs and wonders in endless variety - through apparitions, magical relics, spectacular direct revelations, etc. - will be characteristic of the Satanic efforts of anti-Christian religion throughout the latter days between the first and second comings of the true Christ.

The Christian believer must walk by faith, not by sight, in humble obedience to the Word of God. For the believer there is no need of external supernatural confirmation or information. Our rallying cry must be that of the ancient prophet Isaiah - *“To the Law and to the Testimony!”*

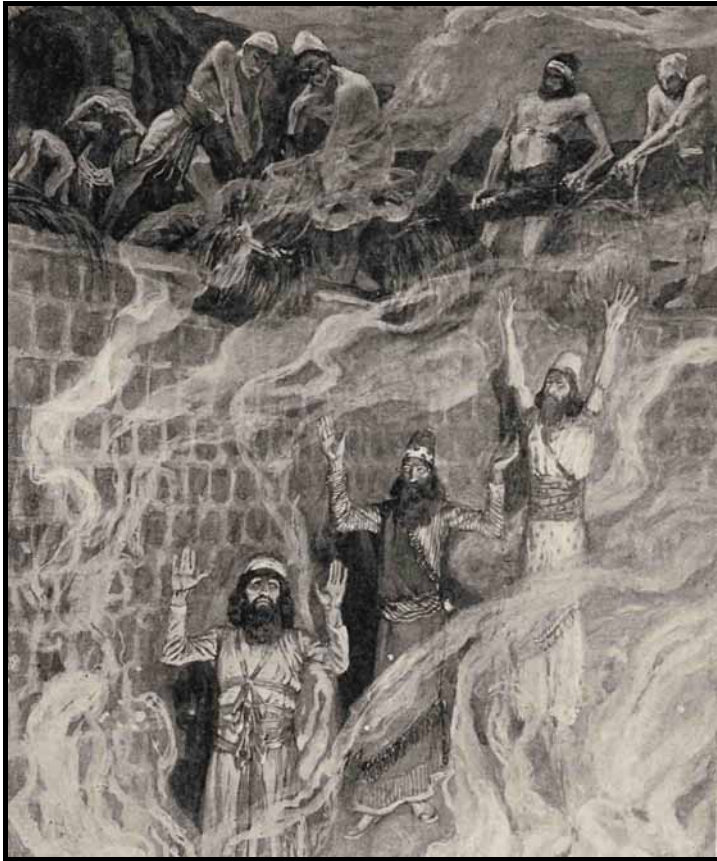


“Elijah and the Prophets of Baal” by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld

“When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, ‘Should not a people inquire of their god?’ Why consult the dead on behalf of the living! To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word they have no light of dawn.” (Isaiah 8:19-20)

“Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.” - As has consistently been the case throughout these visions, the text emphasizes the divine consent under which the beast must operate - ***“the signs he was given power to do.”*** The miracles of the beast make a powerful impression upon humanity. The majority of men have always been drawn to that which is spectacular and grandiose. But, to use the experience of Elijah once again, the true God is not to be found in the mighty wind or the great earthquake but in the still small voice of His Word (1 Kings 18:11-13). The dragon is ***“the deceiver of the whole world”*** (Revelation 12:9). The beast is his apt pupil as he carries out the same pattern of deception across the earth. The Greek verb ***“plana”*** (***“deceived”***) is in the present tense indicating a repetitive process of ongoing action.

Deception is his characteristic trait, and he is a master at it! He will deceive the world over and over again. The phrase *“the inhabitants of the earth”* refers to the entire body of unregenerate humanity.



*“The Three Men in the Fiery Furnace”
by J. James Tissot*

“He ordered them to set up an image 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 caused all who refused to worship the image to be killed.” - The world’s idolatrous acceptance of anti-Christian religion is symbolically presented in a sequence of events all too familiar throughout the course of human history. Daniel tells of the golden statue erected by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar, which the people were commanded to worship on pain of death. The enforcement of this decree led to the attempted execution of Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace (Daniel 3). Later, Daniel predicted

the coming of a tyrant whose arrogant self-deification and desecration of the Holy Place in Jerusalem would be precursors of the Great Antichrist to come in the end times (Daniel 8). The prophet’s warning found grim fulfillment in the atrocities of the Greek King Antiochus Epiphanes during the inter-testamental period. As his boastful name suggests, Antiochus actually believed himself to be the earthly incarnation of the great god Zeus. He erected an idol of himself within the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem and had swine sacrificed in his own honor upon the sacred altar. Thousands who refused to bow down before his image were slaughtered and the streets of Jerusalem ran red with the blood of the faithful. The cruel excesses of this mad man provoked the Jewish revolt which led to the establishment of the Kingdom



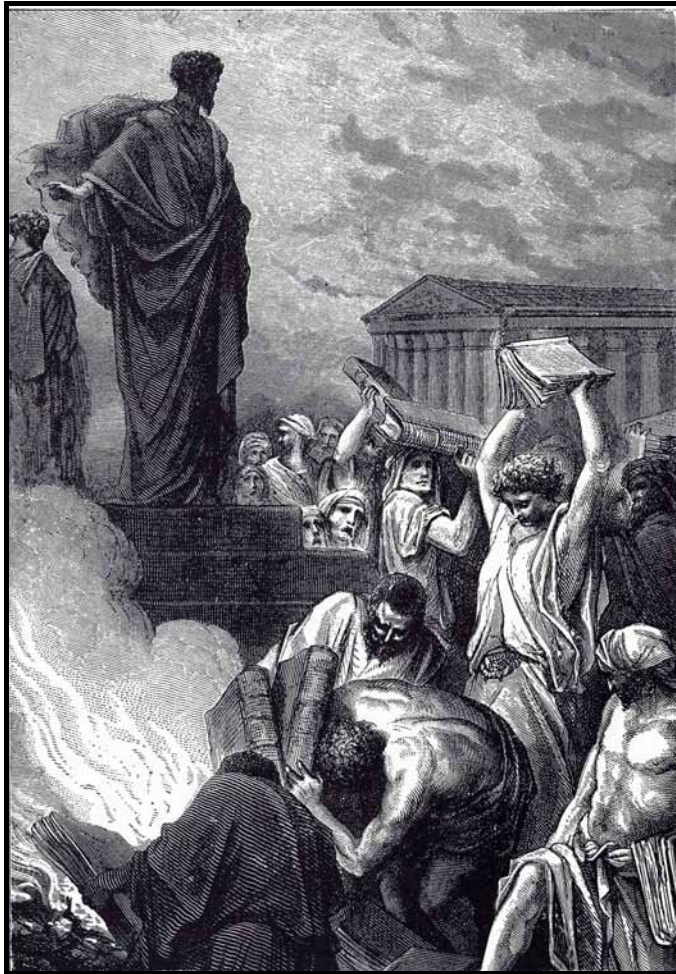
*“The Idol of Antiochus Epiphanes in the Temple”
by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld*

of the Maccabees (1 Maccabees 1:44-60; 2 Maccabees 6:1-9). John’s original audience did not have to look to history to see this insidious pattern at work. They would have been painfully familiar with the scenario outlined in this portion of the vision. These people knew from personal experience about the combination of the brutal power of the state with idolatrous religion. The cult of the divine emperor flourished in Asia Minor in the latter part of the 1st Century. Caligula had established temples dedicated to himself throughout the region and only his assassination in A.D. 41 prevented the forced installation of his image within the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem. Domitian, the current emperor, was also an enthusiastic supporter of the imperial religion. In Ephesus, the site of John’s home congregation, the imperial temple housed a colossal idol of Domitian.

“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.” - Scripture asserts that the worship of idols is, in fact, demon worship. Whatever genuine supernatural power an idol may have must have hell as its source (cf. 1 Corinthians

10:19-22). In the ancient world, the priests and priestesses of the various idol cults often sought to convey the impression that the statues of their idols could be brought to life through the utilization of what today would be called “*special effects.*” Sceptics and philosophers denounced the priests as charlatans, frauds and imposters

who used ventriloquism, speaking tubes, air shafts, levers and pulleys to deceive the credulous masses. David Aune summarizes the practice and beliefs of the ancients:

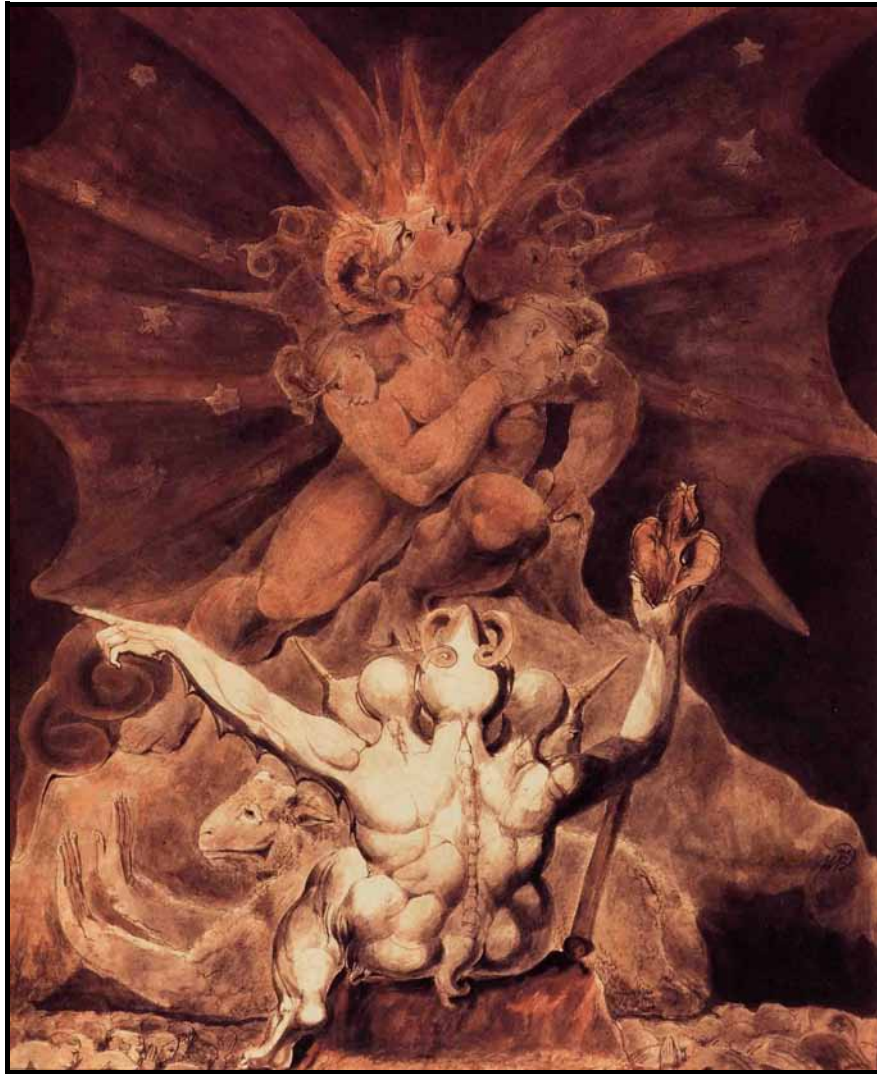


**“The Burning of the Ephesian Sorcerer’s Books”
19th Century Bible Illustration**

“This reflects the world of ancient magic in which the animation of the images of the gods was an important means for securing oracles. The general Greek view was that the images of the gods were not the actual gods themselves but only reminiscent of them...The popular view of the Roman and Hellenistic world, however, was that the gods inhabited their statues. There were many reports in the ancient world of statues turning, sweating, weeping, or speaking...Magical rituals for achieving animation are preserved in the magical papyri. Christians, such as Minucius Felix, were convinced that unclean spirits concealed themselves inside of the cult images and were able to give oracles. The Babylonians had rituals intended to give life to the statues of the gods. In ancient Egypt, beginning at an even earlier period, statues of the gods vitalized through a ceremony of ‘opening the mouth.’ This procedure is reflected in the hermetic treatise ‘Asclepius’ - ‘I mean statues, but

statues living and conscious, filled with the breath of life and doing many mighty works, statues which have foreknowledge and predict future events by the drawing of lots and prophetic inspiration and by dreams and in many other ways; statues which inflict diseases and heal them, dispensing sorrow and joy according to men’s deserts.’” (Aune, II, p. 762)

The practice of Satanic magic is well attested in the New Testament (i.e. Elymas - Acts 13:6-12; the fortune teller at Philippi - Acts 16:15; the Ephesian sorcerers - Acts



"The Number of the Beast Is 666" by William Blake

19:13-20). Simon the Sorcerer is reported to have boasted to Peter: *"I have made statues move. I gave breath to inanimate objects."* (Aune, II, p. 764) In this context, there is no reason to assume that the animation of the statue of the beast from the earth in this scene of the vision is not being portrayed as a genuine demonstration of supernatural power from Hell. The statue actually does come to life, speaks, and commands the execution of all who will not bow down before it. *"This is the monstrous tyranny of the lamb/beast - death to all who refuse to surrender conscience and soul."* (Lenski, p. 409) Thus, once again, John symbolizes the demonic supernatural power of anti-Christian religion through a scenario with which his readers would have been most familiar.

"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.” - The host of the Lamb received His protective seal to mark them as His own and guard them during the impending tribulation (Revelation 7:1-8). That which the Lamb does the beasts imitate. All who submit to them must wear their brand of ownership. The coercive nature of this action is signaled by the verb **“forced.”** Its comprehensive application is indicated by the word **“everyone”** and the three couplets which define it - **“small and great, rich and poor, free and slave.”** The focus is on economic or cultural status. There are no exceptions - to serve the beast is to bear his brand. The noun **“mark”** (Greek - *“charagma”*) refers to the brand or tattoo which indelibly marked a rebellious slave as the property of his owner. It was also used to punish disobedient or deserting soldiers. At times, the most fanatical devotees of religious cults would also brand themselves with the image of their god. This practice may be reflected by the fact that the mark is **“the name of the beast or the number of his name.”** The mark of the beast, branded on the forehead or the hand symbolically reminds us that those who worship the world’s false gods are truly slaves of Satan. The Christian who refuses to bow down before the world’s idols, who will not play the world’s game by the world’s rules will be excluded and penalized both

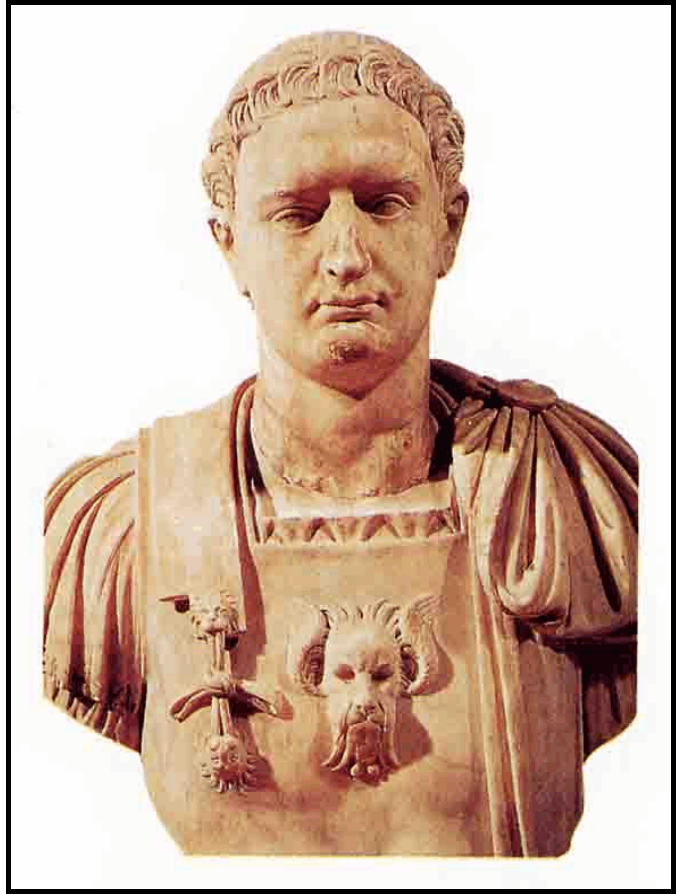


“Christian Martyrs in Rome” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

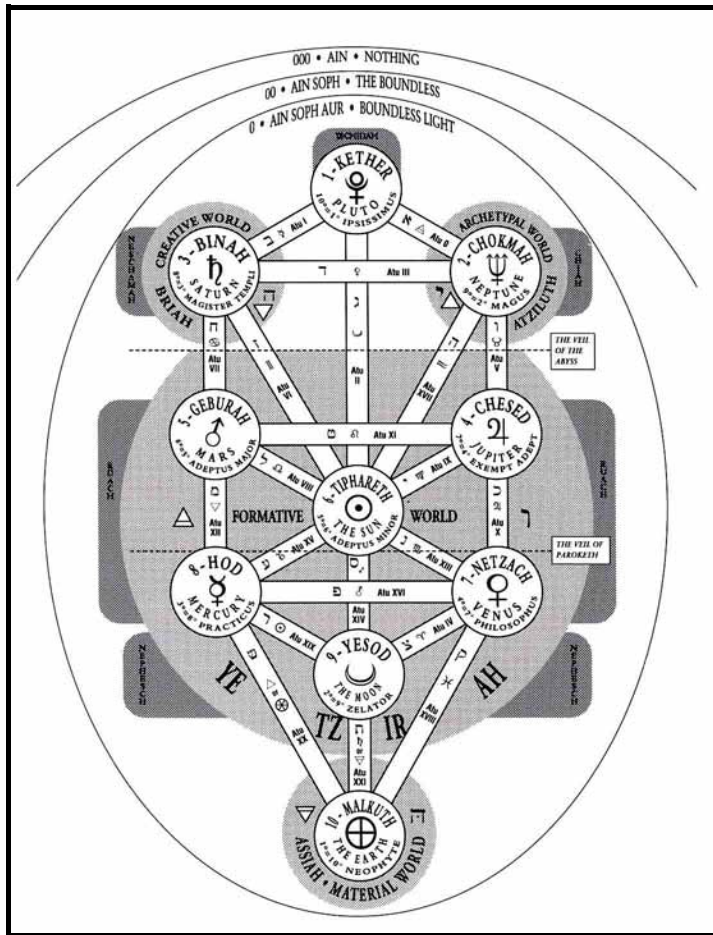
economically and socially. John notes that without the mark of the beast *“no one could buy or sell.”* This may be an allusion to the fact that the term *“mark”* was also used in reference to the official seal of the divine emperor which appeared on all legal documents and business contracts and to describe the image of the emperor which was stamped upon all of the Roman Empire’s coins.

“This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man’s number. His number is 666.” - Dr. Mounce asserts *“No verse in Revelation has received more attention than this one with its cryptic reference to the number of the beast.”* (Mounce, p. 263) This is not an exaggeration. When St. John speaks of *“The number of his name”* and

“the number of the beast,” he is referring to the obscure practice of *“gematria”* which evolved within the *“Kabbalah”* (Hebrew - *“Tradition”*), a movement of Hebrew mystics and magicians on the fringes of Judaism. The *“Kabbalah”* became quite prominent in the early centuries of the Christian era and many of the occult practices of the West are derived from it. The practice of *“gematria”* assigned a numerical equivalent to each letter of the alphabet. The word itself was adapted in Hebrew from the Greek noun *“geomatria”* which means *“manipulation with numbers.”* In the magical ceremonies of these Jewish mystics, *“gematria”* was designed to provided insight into the nature of words and the realities they represented through the symbolic meaning of numbers. Its practitioners believed that this was particularly true of names. Each letter of various alphabets had a numerical equivalent. For instance, the first nine letter of the Greek alphabet represented the numbers one through nine, the next nine represented the numbers ten through ninety, and so on. When the alphabet in use lacked sufficient letters to provide the numbers



*“Domitian - Persecutor of the Church”
1st Century Marble Bust*



A 19th Century Diagram Displaying the Kabbalah's "Tree of Life" With the Magical Letters and Numbers of the Hebrew Alphabet

necessary, archaic or modified letters were added. Accordingly, the system could become extremely complex. The calculation of the number of a name provided a cryptogram, or secret code which could provide mystical insight into that person's nature or identity based on the symbolic meaning of the numbers. The code could then be used in magical spells and incantations to manipulate or influence that individual. A poignant example of this process at work can be seen in an inscription left on a wall in the destroyed Roman city of Pompeii which reads: "I love her whose number is 545." (Aune, II, p. 772) While "gematria" does not occur elsewhere in Scripture, it is a regular feature of contemporary extra-biblical apocalyptic writings throughout this period.

Accordingly it should come as no surprise that it would occur in the Book of Revelation. Many features of Revelation, the only completely apocalyptic book in the Bible, are rare or unheard of elsewhere in Scripture. Verse 17's comment "**which is the name of the beast or the number of his name**" strongly suggests the use of "gematria." Verse 18's somewhat esoteric introduction of the symbolic number - "**This requires wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is a man's number.**" - further reinforces this impression. The opening words of the phrase - "**This requires wisdom**" are echoed in Revelation 17:9 - "**This calls for a mind with wisdom.**" The "**wisdom**" (Greek - "*sophia*") called for in this context, joined with "**insight**" (Greek - "*noun*") reflects the language of the Old Testament book of Daniel, which also includes some apocalyptic material. Daniel declares: "**None of the wicked will understand, but those who are wise will**

understand.” (Daniel 12:10; cf. Also Daniel 11:33)

In this instance, John is using the system in reverse to make his theological point about the nature of the beast. Rather than deducing the number from the name, John reversed the process. He provided the number of the beast - “666” - and then invited the reader to decipher its name. The challenge of that reverse decoding has resulted in a host of various interpretations.

“The man with understanding is called upon to calculate or count up the number of the beast. This is an invitation to work backwards from the 666 to the name for which it is the numerical equivalent. Gematria was widely used in apocalyptic because of its symbolic and enigmatic quality. It served as a precaution against the charge of sedition.” (Mounce, p. 264)

The symbolic significance of the number “666” is not at all difficult to recognize. It is intended to indicate the ultimate imperfection of the beast. The number six falls one short of the perfect seven. The triple repetition of the number constitutes the superlative expression of its meaning. The beast is the personification of absolute imperfection. His quest to imitate and replace the perfection of God is foredoomed to pathetic and utter failure. An intriguing contrast to the beast’s “666” is provided by “*The Sybilline Oracles*,” a 1st Century extra-Biblical apocalypse. Using the same numerical symbolism, the “*Oracles*” report that the “*gematria*” of the name “*Jesus*” is “888.” The triple repetition of the number eight, which surpasses the perfect seven by one, represents the superabundant



“The Number of the Beast” by Peter Grau - 1945

perfection of the eternal Son of God. (Beale, p. 727) Robert Mounce summarizes the symbolic message of the “666”: “*This evil trinity, 666, apes the holy Trinity, 777, but always falls short and fails.*” (Mounce, p. 265)

But while the symbolic significance of the number is clearly evident, the name concealed within that number is not. The Revelator informed his readers that the “666” was “*a man’s number*” (Greek - “*arithmos gar anthropou estin*”), that is to say, it is a human number which pertains to man not to God. The decipherment of this number does not require special divine revelation. It can be calculated - the Greek verb is “*psephisato*” based on the term used for the pebbles used by the ancients in counting and calculating. At the same time, John called for the application of “*wisdom*” in deciphering this numeric code. The wisdom required is the spiritual discernment which enables the believer to comprehend the true meaning of the signs of the times throughout the latter days. Given the strong emphasis upon deception which has predominated throughout the vision of the beast from the earth, this call to wisdom and discernment is not unexpected. The encouragement of the text is that believers not allow themselves to be fooled by outward appearance. Instead, discern the true meaning hidden beneath the false facade. The history of the interpretation of this phrase indicates that all too often such wise discernment has been sadly lacking. Luther Poellet notes:

“Wisdom and understanding have not always been brought to bear on this passage, with the result that especially Revelation 13:18 has been made the point of departure into an almost unlimited and fanciful world of speculation and misinterpretation.”
(Poellet, p. 178)

Scores, perhaps hundreds, of specific identifications for the beast have been offered, labeling virtually every villain throughout the long history of the Church. One of the earliest and most plausible among this legion of alternatives comes from Ireneas, Bishop of Lyon in the Roman Province of Gaul (A.D. 130-200). In the middle of the 2nd Century, Ireneas wrote a book entitled “*Against Heresies*” in which he discussed the threats which confronted the Christian Church in his day. Rather than a particular individual, Ireneas suggested that the name concealed within the number code of Revelation 13 is the Greek term “*lateinos*” - pointing to Rome and a power which would arise from the ruins of the imperial city and her empire to endure throughout the latter days.



"The Preaching of the Antichrist" - 16th Century Woodcut

Excursus - The Biblical Doctrine of the Antichrist

Scripture indicates that God's people will be called upon to endure relentless persecution, opposition, and infiltration throughout the New Testament era (Matthew 24:24; John 15:18; Acts 20:29-30). From the outside the devil will utilize all the powers of this world - the coercive might of civil government, economic pressure, and influence of cultural institutions - in support of his bitter quest for the damnation of humanity. Within the Church itself an endless variety of false prophets and teachers, false Christs and antichrists, will seek to lead Christians away from the Lord

and His precious Gospel of salvation. Satan, the Father of the Lie, will hurl deception of every sort against the one Truth of God, often using the sincerity of fanatical or misguided Christians as his most effective means of wrecking havoc within the Church.

Among all the enemies of the Truth one ominous figure stands out, shrouded in mystery and menace. The Bible calls him *“the Antichrist”* and *“the Man of Lawlessness.”*

“Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.” (1 John 2:18-19)

“Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.” (1 John 4:1-3)

“Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and even sets himself up in God’s temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don’t you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of His mouth and destroy by the splendor of His coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that

deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refuse to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-12)

Already foretold in the writings of the Old Testament prophets (cf. Daniel 7 & 11), the rise and the rule of the Antichrist is a characteristic feature of the latter days, the entire era between the first and second comings of Jesus Christ. The presence of the Antichrist in the world is God’s constant reminder that we have entered upon the final hour (1 John 1:28).

The power of the Antichrist was already secretly at work in the Church in the days of the apostles (2 Thessalonians 2:7; 1 John 4:3) and his nefarious activity will continue until the time of his destruction when the Lord comes again to judge the living and the dead (2 Thessalonians 2:8). Christ summons His Church to watchfulness and prayer and admonishes His people to beware of the enemy who is among us now. Those who consign the Antichrist to a safely distant future in the days immediately prior to the Second Coming have fundamentally misunderstood the prophecy and its purpose. They leave the



“The Downfall of the Papal Antichrist and the Turkish Sultan” by Nicholas Gerung

Church vulnerable and defenseless, unable to recognize the enemy within her midst or protect herself against him.

The term “*the antichrist*” occurs five times in the Johannine letters of the New Testament (1 John 2:18,22; 4:3; 2 John 7). In its initial occurrence (1 John 2:18), it is used in both singular and plural forms to contrast a particular phenomenon - “*the antichrist*” - with multiple manifestations of false teaching and deception which are designated as “*many antichrists.*” All false teacher and opponents of the Gospel are

antichrists in the broad sense. This general usage should not be confused, however, with the specific reality which Scripture calls “*the Antichrist.*” At times, our theologians have used the title “*the Great Antichrist*” to emphasize this distinction. Given the time frame of the Antichrist’s activity - currently over 2,000 years - it is evident that the Great Antichrist cannot be a individual human being. The ongoing, trans-temporal nature of his activity throughout the New Testament era indicates a collective reality, a permanent institution which will be represented or personified by a succession of individuals throughout the centuries.

Like its English counterpart, the Greek preposition “*anti*” when used as a prefix can mean “*against*” or “*in opposition to.*” However, the Greek prefix differs from its English counterpart in that it also carries the connotation of “*alongside of*” or “*in place of.*” Thus, the use of this Greek prefix in the term “*antichrist*” indicates a more subtle enemy whose opposition



“*The Birth of the Antichrist Upon the Papal Throne*” by Nicholas Gerung

to Christ comes in the form of replacement or substitution. The Antichrist is not an overt opponent of Christ, but a counterfeit who seeks to take the place of Christ or to stand in as His substitute. John effectively demonstrates this crucial dimension of the Antichrist's nature in the imagery of Revelation through the consistent use of parallel symbolism for the true Christ and the beasts which represent the Antichrist. The beast from the earth conceals his real appearance behind the semblance of a lamb. This parallelism continues throughout the imagery of the beasts. G. K. Beale offers this helpful summary of the parallels:

“There are so many parallels between the beasts in Chapter 13 and that of the Christ elsewhere in the Apocalypse that it is clear that John intends to identify the beasts with the grand nemesis himself rather than with just one emperor or one historical empire. Both Christ and the beast (1) have swords; (2) have followers who have their names written on their foreheads (13:16-14:1); (3) have horns (5:6; 13:1,11); (4) are slain (5:6; 13:3,8); (5) rise to new life and are given new authority; (6) have authority over “every tribe, tongue, people, and nation” (5:9; 7:9; 13:7; 17:12,15), and (7) receive universal worship (5:8-14; 13:4,8). There are other noteworthy parallels...The dragon, the sea beast and the land beast form a competing trinity with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. As the Son receives authority from the Father, so the sea beast receives authority from the dragon; and as the Spirit glorifies the Son, so the second beast does with respect to the first beast. The parody of the Trinity is also hinted at by the triple six in imitation of - but short of - the triple seven for the divine Trinity. The point of the parody in Daniel, and especially in Revelation is that, though the satanic beasts appear to feign the truth successfully in their attempts to deceive, they remain ever evil and never achieve the divine character they mimic.” (Beale, pp. 691, 729)



“Satan Concealed Beneath the Pious Facade of the Antichrist” - 14th Century Illumination

The Antichrist is the greatest of all Satan's counterfeits, carefully designed to appear as the mirror image of the true Christ. This is the essence of the threat posed by the

Antichrist - secret seduction. The danger which he presents to the people of God is his virtually unrecognizable presence in their midst. The most dangerous enemy is the foe who is trusted and accepted as a friend. St. Paul categorizes his activity as “*the mystery of iniquity.*” (2 Thessalonians 2:7) Lutheran theologian Herman Sasse emphasizes the unique threat of the Antichrist:

“The Antichrist is more dangerous than all of the other enemies of the Church. No Roman Caesar, no modern dictator is so dangerous as the enemy of Christ within the Church...The Antichrist’s great art is that he can bring Christians to fall away without persecution...The highest art of the Antichrist is that he can make falling away a work of religious piety.” (Sasse, p. 114)

Those who anticipate an Antichrist who is blatantly evil or satanic - a figure who can be readily identified by his wickedness and corruption - fail to understand the nature of this menace. The Antichrist will appear to be - and may well believe himself to be - a pious and devoted servant of Christ (Matthew 16:13-23). To all outward appearances he will be the most Christian of Christians, the least likely suspect of all. Every one of his denials of the Gospel will be carefully concealed within a fervent affirmation of the Gospel. His replacement of Christ as Savior and Lord will be advanced as humble ministry to the Lord Jesus. Unlike the swaggering world dictators and megalomaniacal idolaters of millennialist fantasies, the Biblical Antichrist will be the personification of Christian piety and virtue. The great Renaissance artist Luca Signorelli captured this crucial dimension of the Antichrist’s nature in a fresco entitled “*The Rule of the Antichrist.*” (cf. p. 389) in the San Brizio Chapel of Italy’s Orvieto Cathedral. The Antichrist stands in the foreground of the scene, preaching to a receptive crowd. Satan stands behind him, whispering into his ear and the devil’s arms reach through his robe to become his own. The face of the Antichrist in this masterpiece is the face of Christ himself. By deliberate design, the Antichrist appears to be identical to Christ. He becomes the Christ mask behind which the devil conceals himself as he deludes the people of God. The evil of Satan lurks behind that mask, ever hidden - always dangerous - like the deadly serpent that strikes without warning from its place of concealment.

Scripture warns that the Antichrist will arise within the Church itself, at the very heart of Christendom - “*He sets himself up in God’s temple.*” (2 Thessalonians 2:4) The Antichrist is a religious figure, whose fundamental goal is the damnation of men through the subversion and distortion of the Gospel of salvation. As the true Christ came to the people of God and carried out His ministry among them, so also the



"The Antichrist and Satan" by Luca Signorelli - 1500

Antichrist “*set himself up*” among God’s people as their leader, protector, and guide. The Antichrist claims for himself honor, glory and power which rightfully belong to God alone. When St. Paul designates him as “*the man of lawlessness*” (2 Thessalonians 2:3), he is indicating that while the Antichrist demands that all men submit to his authority, he will himself acknowledge no authority beyond his own. At the same time, the reign of the Antichrist represents an ungodly combination of the power of both church and state. While he is essentially a religious figure, a spiritual leader within the church, the Antichrist will also control and manipulate political and military power along with vast material wealth. He will command armies and rule over nations. From his position of privilege and power within the church, he will stand as an equal among the political leaders of the world.



“The Antichrist Performing False Miracles Before His Temple” by Luca Signorelli

The realm of the Antichrist will be sustained through and characterized by the use of “*all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders.*” (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10; cf. also Revelation 13:2,13-14) These attempts to prey upon the superstition and credulity inherent in sinful men will meet with widespread success - “*Because of the*

signs he was given to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth.” (Revelation 13:14) The triple repetition - *“miracles, signs and wonders”* - reminds us that the false miracles of the Antichrist are an integral part of his overall effort to replicate and replace the ministry of the true Christ. This is language which has been frequently used in Scripture to characterize the ministry of Christ and His apostles. In Acts 2:22, Peter hails Jesus as *“a man accredited by God to you by miracles, signs and wonders.”* According to Hebrews 2:4, God corroborated the preaching of the apostles *“by signs, wonders and various miracles.”* However, unlike the miracles of the true Christ, the miracles of the Antichrist are *“counterfeit”* - not because they are not real, but because they are designed to validate falsehood. F.W. Schlink explains the vast difference between miracles that are true and miracles that are false:



“The Antichrist Distributes Gifts” - 1496

“Christ’s miracles were true miracles, miracles of truth, as He Himself is the Truth. The miracles of the Antichrist, on the other hand, are ‘counterfeit signs and wonders.’ The apostle does not mean to say that all the miracles of the lawless one are deceptions without reality, fraudulent mystifications, coarse swindles, trickery, or the results of illusions or hallucinations. That may be true in innumerable cases, yet it cannot be denied, and the apostle does not mean to dispute the fact, that many of the strange feats performed can neither be classed as outright frauds nor be explained according to the known laws of nature. Yet, even granted that many of the Antichrist’s miracles are unexplainable, are supernatural, they are nevertheless counterfeit signs and wonders. The Antichrist boasts that they are divine miracles, performed by divine power, proving him to be the divinely appointed head of the Church; while in truth he does not perform even one miracle by the authority and power of God, but from the Satanic power of the Prince of Darkness...His miracles proceed from falsehood since they deceive and mislead men into unbelief.” (Schlink, p. 580)



“The Church of Christ and Antichrist” by Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1545

The prominence of signs and wonders in the life of the people of God is significantly different today than it was in the days of the prophets and apostles. As we have seen, God used signs and wonders throughout the centuries during which the Bible was being written to validate the ministry of His Son and the prophets and apostles whom He had chosen as His inspired spokesmen. With the completion of the Bible, the written Word of God, the Lord calls upon His people to live by faith in humble submission to His Word. Impressive signs and miraculous wonders are now unnecessary, and should not be demanded or expected by those to whom God has spoken, once for all, through His prophets and apostles. Signs and wonders in the latter days will be the mark of the Antichrist, not the true Christ.

The Lutheran Confessions identify the institution of the papacy as the Antichrist prophesied in Holy Scripture. For example, in *“The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope,”* Phillip Melancthon declares:

“But it is manifest that the Roman pontiffs and their adherents defend godless doctrines and godless forms of worship, and it is plain that the marks of the Antichrist coincide with those of the pope’s kingdom and his followers. For in

describing the Antichrist in his letter to the Thessalonians Paul calls him ‘an adversary of Christ who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.’ (II Thessalonians 2:3-4) He speaks, therefore, of one who rules in the church, and not of the kings of the nations, and he calls that man ‘an adversary of Christ’ because he will devise doctrines which conflict with the Gospel and will arrogate to himself divine authority. On the one hand, it is manifest that the popes rule in the church and that he has set up this kingdom for himself on the pretext of the authority of the church and the ministry, offering as pretext these words, ‘I will give you the keys’ (Matthew 16:19). On the other hand, the doctrine of the pope conflicts in many ways with the Gospel, and the pope arrogates to himself a threefold authority. First, because he assumes for himself the right to change the doctrine of Christ and the worship instituted by God, and he wishes to have his own doctrine and worship observed as divine. Second, because he assumes for himself not only the power to loose and bind in this life but also the jurisdiction over souls after this life. Third, because the pope is unwilling to be judged by the church or by anybody, and he exalts his authority above the decisions of councils and the whole church. Such unwillingness to be judged by the church or by anybody is to make himself out to be God. Finally, he defends such horrible errors and such impiety with the greatest cruelty and puts to death those who dissent. Since this is the situation, all Christians ought to beware of becoming participants in the impious doctrines, blasphemies, and unjust cruelties of the pope. They ought to rather abandon and execrate the pope and his adherents as the Kingdom of the Antichrist.” (“The Treatise on the Power and Primacy of the Pope”, 39-41; cf. also “Apology of the Augsburg Confession” XV; “Smalkald Articles” II, IV)

It is important to maintain the distinction between the office of the pope and the individual occupants of that office. The particular men who hold the office may well be acting in all sincerity, in the firm belief that they are serving Christ and His Gospel. Herman Sasse emphasizes the importance of this distinction between the office and the man in Lutheran theology:

“It is not only human beings who are engaged in this drama. It was not only Eugenio Pacelli (Pope Pius XII; 1939-1958) who proclaimed the false doctrine of the Assumption of Mary as a revelation given to Christianity. It was not actually and not alone Giovanni di’ Medici (Pope Leo X; 1513-1521) who cast Luther out of the church. It was not actually Alessandro Farnesse (Pope Paul III; 1534-1539) who repudiated sola fide and so also the Lord Christ Himself. Rather it was the Antichrist who spoke and acted through them. For this reason we, as also Luther did, can have some human sympathetic understanding for those men who bore the fearful office of the papacy. This is especially true in the case of those popes who, as far as human eyes can see, were noble figures in the history of the papacy.” (Sasse, p. 125)



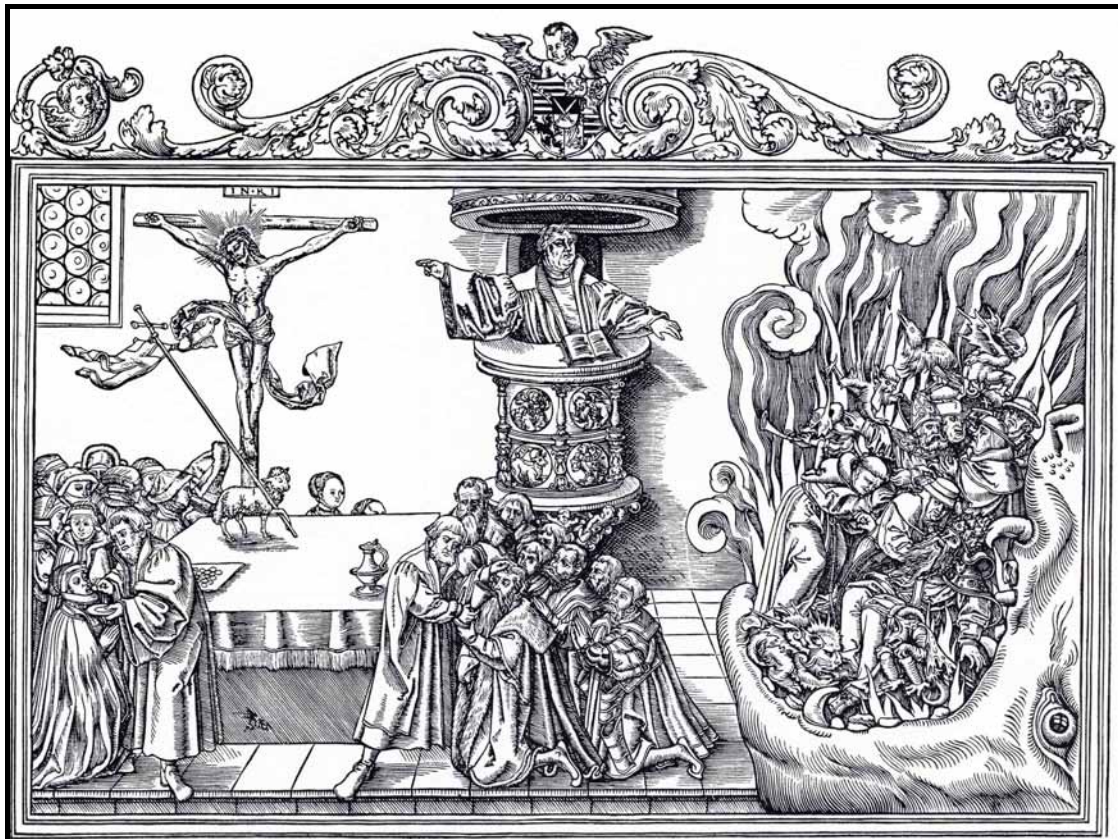
“Lord Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word and Curb the Turks’ and Papists’ Sword; Whom Jesus Christ, Thine Only Son, Now Seek to Drive From Off His Throne” Martin Luther - 1542

It is bitterly ironic that the personal integrity and piety of individual popes only serves to enhance the credibility of the papal office, thereby enabling Satan to more effectively pursue his work of undermining Christ and His Gospel within the Church through the Antichrist. But here, as so often throughout history, the devil’s most effective servant is the man who genuinely believes that he is serving the Lord.

The institution of the papacy, both in its official doctrinal position, and in the authority and power which it claims for itself by divine right, exhibits all of the Biblical marks of the Antichrist.

The presence of the Antichrist will persist throughout the New Testament era. Its

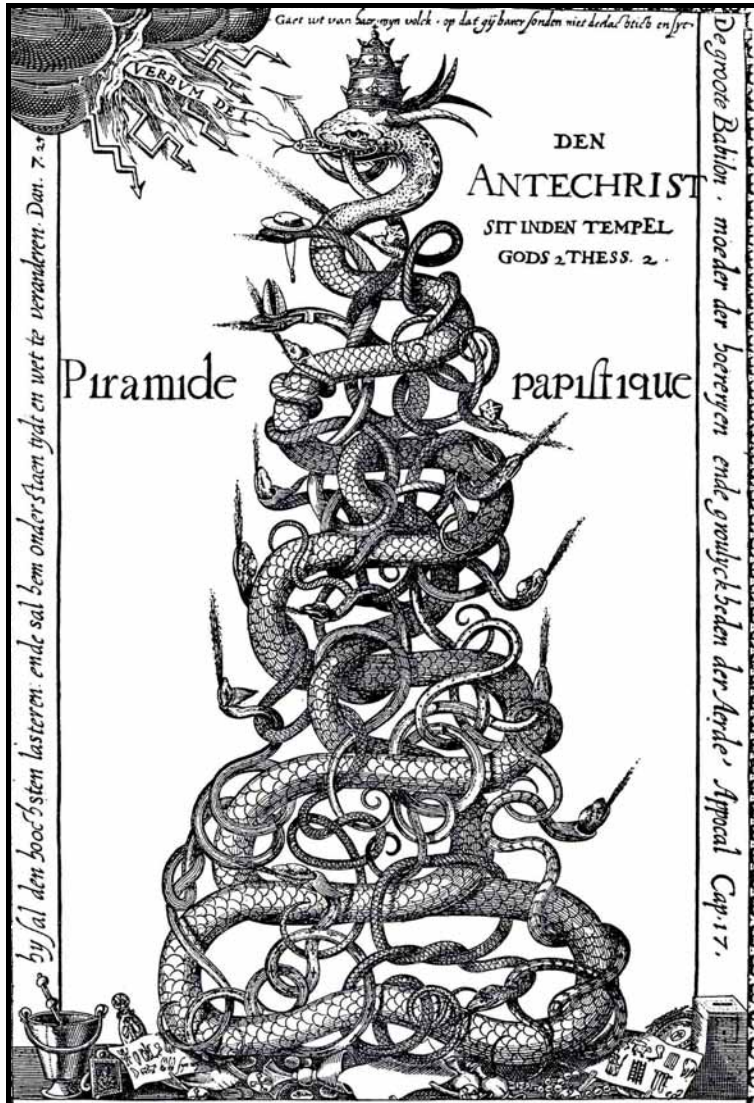
beginnings were already present in the days of the apostles and it will remain until its destruction on the Day of Judgement (cf. Daniel 7:21-27; 11:36,39; 1 John 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7; Revelation 13:5). The papacy has existed without interruption throughout the interval between Christ's first and second comings. Although its means and methods have changed many times across the centuries to accommodate the need of the moment, the papacy itself always remains. In its earliest years, the public establishment of the papal hierarchy was restrained by the opposition and persecution of the Roman government (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7). That restraint was removed early in the 4th Century with the legalization of Christianity and its elevation to the status of official state religion. From that moment on, the aspirations of the Bishops of Rome, and their pretensions of supreme power within the Church



“Christ and Antichrist” by Lucas Cranach the Younger - 1540

proceeded rapidly. As the Roman Empire weakened and eventually collapsed in the West, the power of the papacy increased and expanded, moving to fill the vacuum left by Rome's decline and fall.

The Kingdom of the Antichrist will be a unique combination of both spiritual and



*“The Pyramid of Papal Power”
16th Century Dutch Engraving*

Christ on Earth” (Latin - “*vicarius*” - “*substitute*”) - through whom alone the Church is constituted and ruled is blasphemous presumption. Such absolute authority is the prerogative of God alone. The Biblical prophecies of the Antichrist indicate that he will honor and glorify himself above God and refuse to recognize any authority beyond his own (Daniel 11:36-37; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4; Revelation 13:1,5,6). The official pronouncement of papal infallibility by the First Vatican Council in 1870 conferred upon the pope God-like authority well beyond the boldest pretensions of the most notorious popes of the Dark Ages and threatened all who would question or deny that authority with eternal damnation in Hell.

temporal power (Daniel 11:38; Revelation 13:1-8). The papacy represents a unique combination of both religious and political authority. The pope is not only the spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church, he is also the political ruler of the Vatican State, a tiny sovereign nation of only a few square blocks in the heart of the city of Rome. This was not always the case. For many centuries, the Papal States occupied much of the Italian peninsula. Popes commanded armies and conquered nations. Although significantly reduced in size, the existence of the Vatican State continues to enable the pope to function as an equal among world leaders, enjoying all of the privileges and prerogatives of statehood and diplomacy.

“If, then, any should deny that it is by institution of Christ the Lord, or by divine right, that blessed Peter should have a perpetual line of successors in the primacy over the universal Church, or that the Roman pontiff is the successor of blessed Peter in this primacy, let him be anathema...We teach and declare that by the appointment of our Lord, the Roman Church possesses a sovereignty of power over all other churches, and that this power of jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff, which is truly episcopal, is immediate, to which all - of whatever right and dignity - both pastors and faithful are bound to submit...not only in matters which belong to faith and morals, but also in those which appertain to the government and discipline of the Church throughout the world...And since by divine right of apostolic primacy, the Roman pontiff is placed over the universal Church, we further teach and declare that he is the supreme Judge of the faithful...Therefore, faithfully adhering to the tradition received from the beginning of the Christian faith, for the glory of God our Savior, the exaltation of the Catholic religion, and the salvation of Christian people, with the approval of the sacred council, we teach and define that it is a dogma divinely revealed that the Roman pontiff, when he speaks ‘ex cathedra,’ that is, when in the discharge of the office of pastor and teacher of all Christians, by virtue of his supreme apostolic authority, he defines a doctrine regarding faith or morals to be held by the universal Church, is, by the divine assistance promised him in blessed Peter, possessed of that infallibility which the divine Redeemer willed that His Church should be endowed in defining doctrine regarding faith and morals; and that therefore, such definitions of the Roman pontiff are of themselves, and not merely from the consent of the Church, irreformable. But if anyone - which may God avert - presume to contradict our definition: let him be anathema.” (Schaff, II, pp. 261-262, 270-271)

Such absolute assertions leave little room for ambiguity or doubt. There is no comfortable, uncommitted middle here. *“The pope is either Christ’s vicar or he is the Antichrist...Either the papacy is indeed instituted by God or it is an institution ‘instituted by the devil.’”* (Sasse, p. 120)

The central mark of the Antichrist is his bitter opposition to the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone. All that the Antichrist is and does is directed toward overturning and denying salvation by grace. This is the core teaching of Christianity, the Truth upon which the Church stands or falls. In the aftermath of the Reformation, the pope summoned the cardinals and bishops together in the Italian city of Trent to formulate the official doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church. *“The Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent,”* issued in 1563, emphatically rejected and condemned this central doctrine of the Christian faith:

“If anyone says that men are justified either by the sole imputation of the justice of



“The Papal Antichrist” - 16th Century Woodcut

Christ, or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of the grace and charity which is poured forth in their hearts by the Holy Ghost and remains in them, or also that the grace by which we are justified is only the good will of God, let him be anathema! If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else than that confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake, or that it is this confidence alone that justifies us, let him be anathema!” (Schaff, II, pp.112-113)

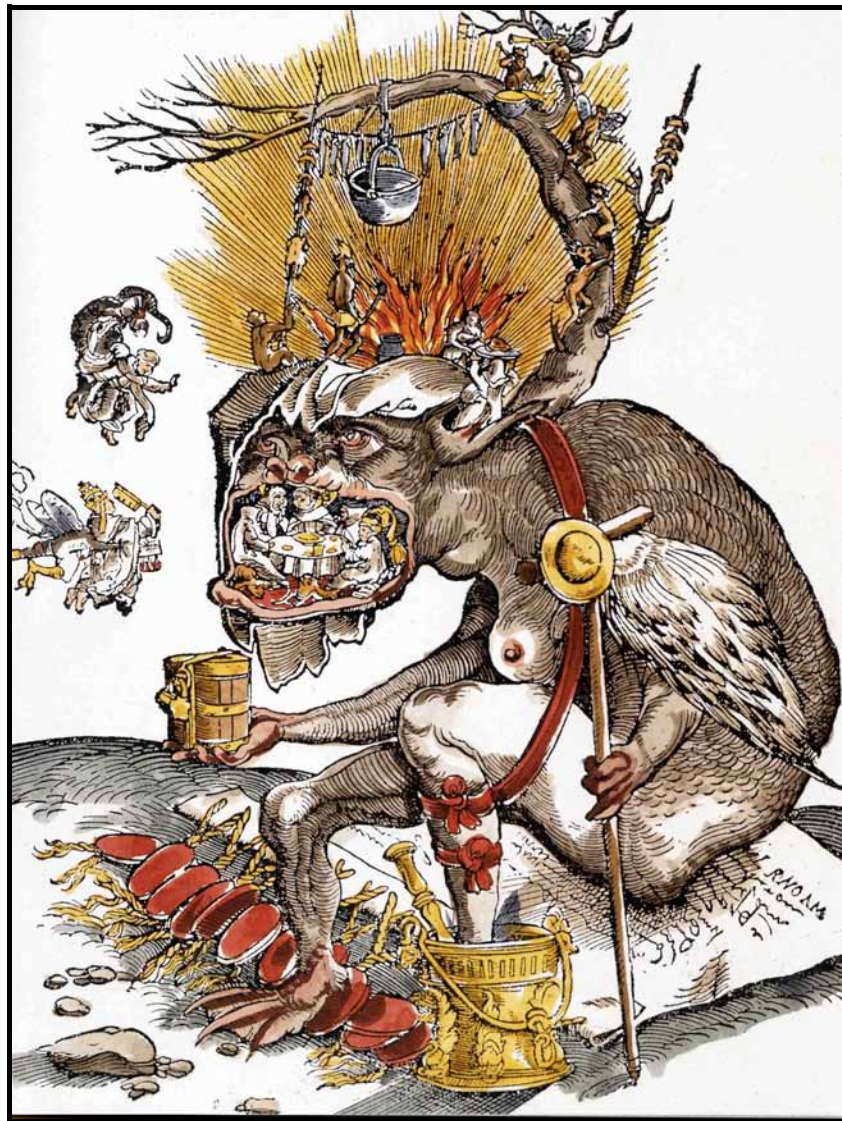
This unequivocal denial of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone remains the official doctrinal position of the Roman Catholic Church today.

The foundational truth that Jesus is the world’s only Savior and Redeemer is further undermined by Rome’s growing emphasis on the alleged contribution of the Blessed Virgin Mary to the salvation of humanity. The papacy in the modern era has taken the lead in this movement with the proclamation of Mary’s

“*Immaculate Conception*” (1854) and physical “*Assumption*” into heaven where she now reigns as the Queen of saints and angels (1950). In recent years Rome has gone so far as to refer to Mary as the “*Co-Redemptrix*” of the human race and the “*Mediatrice*” between God and man. The Latin motto on the personal coat of arms of Pope John Paul II was “*Totus tuus sum Maria*” (“*Mary I am Totally Yours!*”) Roman Catholic theologian M. I. Miraville describes papal doctrine on this subject:

“We have learned to know Mary better and better as the partner of the Redeemer, who was allowed to add her contribution to Christ’s immense act of atonement. This was taught to us by Pope Leo XIII ‘that she was a participant with Jesus in the most

difficult work for the reparation of the human race.’ And Pope Benedict XV said it just as clearly that ‘in this way she suffered with her suffering and dying Son, and to appease the justice of God to the extent that she could, she offered her Son.’ The truth has been borne in upon us more clearly and distinctly that the Mother of Men helped to merit the salvation of her children. This co-appeasing and co-meriting was realized, in the first place, in her painful compassion. Pope Benedict said in this context: ‘The fact that she was with her Son, crucified and dying, was in accord with the divine plan. To such extent did she suffer and almost die with her dying Son, and to such extent did she surrender her maternal rights over her Son for man’s salvation, and immolated Him insofar as she could in order to appease the justice of God that we may rightly say that she redeemed the human race together with



***“The Pope Cast Into the Mouth of the Beast”
Hand Colored Woodcut by Matthias Gerung - 1536***

Christ. In all this, God's intention was that Mary who would be Co-Redemptrix by obtaining the graces of salvation, would also be partner and help in the distribution of these graces...In this way Mary became in God's plan of salvation, the general distributor of all grace. In this way, Christ, who is the only Mediator between God and men has wanted to add His Mother as Advocate for Sinners, as Mediatrix of all Graces. In this way, Mary became in the full sense the Mother of Mankind." (Miraville, pp. 28ff.)

In this connection, the apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the host of alleged miracles which have occurred in conjunction with those appearances at the shrines built to commemorate them must also be noted. The Bible warns that one of the hallmarks of the Antichrist will be dependence upon ***"all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders."*** (2 Thessalonians 2:9; Revelation 13:13-15) In order to accomplish the goals of his hellish master, the Antichrist must divert God's people



"The Assumption of the Virgin Mary" by Paolo Veronese - 1560

from the objective truth of the Word to follow after the inclinations of their own hearts. The Roman Catholic Church teaches that Mary has repeatedly served as *"God's special emissary to earth"* to convey unique revelations of warning and encouragement from God. In a recent study entitled *"The Woman and the Dragon - Apparitions of Mary"* (a title drawn directly from the imagery of Revelation 12), Catholic scholar David Michael Lindsey lists twelve major Marian apparitions since December 9th, 1531, when a Mexican peasant name Juan Diego reported the appearance of Our Lady of Guadalupe. In 1858, Bernadette Soubirous saw the Blessed Mother in a grotto near the French village of Lourdes. Since then, millions of pilgrims from around the world have journeyed to the site and the waters of the spring at Lourdes have been

credited with tens of thousands of miraculous healings. Our Lady of the Rosary appeared to three shepherd children near Fatima in Portugal in 1917. She revealed three secrets which were to be revealed only to the Holy Father in Rome. Pope John Paul II is convinced that the failure of his attempted assassination on May 13th, 1981, (the 64th anniversary of the Virgin's first appearance at Fatima) was prophesied by Mary at Fatima and that his survival was the result of the Virgin of Fatima's miraculous intervention. The assassin's bullet removed from his body now rests in Mary's golden crown at the Fatima Shrine. Most recently, Mary is believed to have appeared to three young Croatian girls at Medjugorje in the Balkans. In addition to these major apparitions, thousands of other local Marian visitation in every Roman Catholic country in the world are commemorated and venerated. There are presently 937 Marian shrines in France alone. These sites where Mary is believed to have appeared have become the focus of pilgrimage and intense devotion among Roman Catholics, validated by miraculous healings, prophecies and revelations. Almost six million pilgrims visit Lourdes every year. The veneration of holy relics, statues that weep or bleed, and images of the saints continue to play an important role in Roman Catholic piety. For instance, five million pilgrims travel each year to the remote Polish village of Czestochwa to pray before the famous "*Black Madonna*," an icon of the Virgin Mary. The image is said to have been painted by St. Luke on the plank of a table belonging to the holy family in Nazareth. All of this serves to distract God's people from the Word and the precious Gospel of salvation which it conveys. This is precisely what the Antichrist prophecies of Scripture had warned against.



"The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin" by Jose Antolinez

Scripture reveals the prophecies of the Antichrist in order to enable the people of God to recognize and guard against this dire threat to the Gospel of salvation. Without these warnings, the Antichrist, shielded by a cloak of piety and devotion, would have been able to operate with impunity within the Church. Those who would disregard, deny or distort the prophecies of the Antichrist imperil the Gospel and jeopardize the salvation of souls. For the father of the Reformation, the identification of the papacy as the Antichrist was not a matter of mere denominational polemics. Nor was it a judgment upon the personal morality or piety of individual popes. The reformers were convinced that the doctrinal position of the papacy represented a denial of the essence of the Gospel. They were prepared to stake their lives and their eternal salvation upon that conviction. True love of Christ and of His Gospel necessitates hatred of the Antichrist and his denials of the Gospel. There is no comfortable middle ground in these matters. Indifference about the Antichrist is indifference about Christ Himself. The harsh attacks of Luther and his comrades - in written word and visual image - upon the papacy and its teaching are an embarrassment to most Christians today. We live in an era of indifferent permissiveness and easy-going tolerance that scorns the very concept of truth and falsehood. The Church has grown listless and complacent. The mystery of the Antichrist thrives in just such an environment. Now, more than ever, the Biblical prophecies of the Antichrist must be heard and heeded. He must be unmasked so that all the faithful may recognize him for what he is. Those who truly love the Christ and His Gospel must sound the alarm and rouse the people of God so that they may recognize the mortal danger in their midst. In 1545 Martin Luther took up his pen one last time. His health was failing. He knew that death was near. The reformer's final theological work was entitled - *“Against the Roman Papacy - An Institution of the Devil.”* In it he explained the intensity of his passion on the subject of the Antichrist.

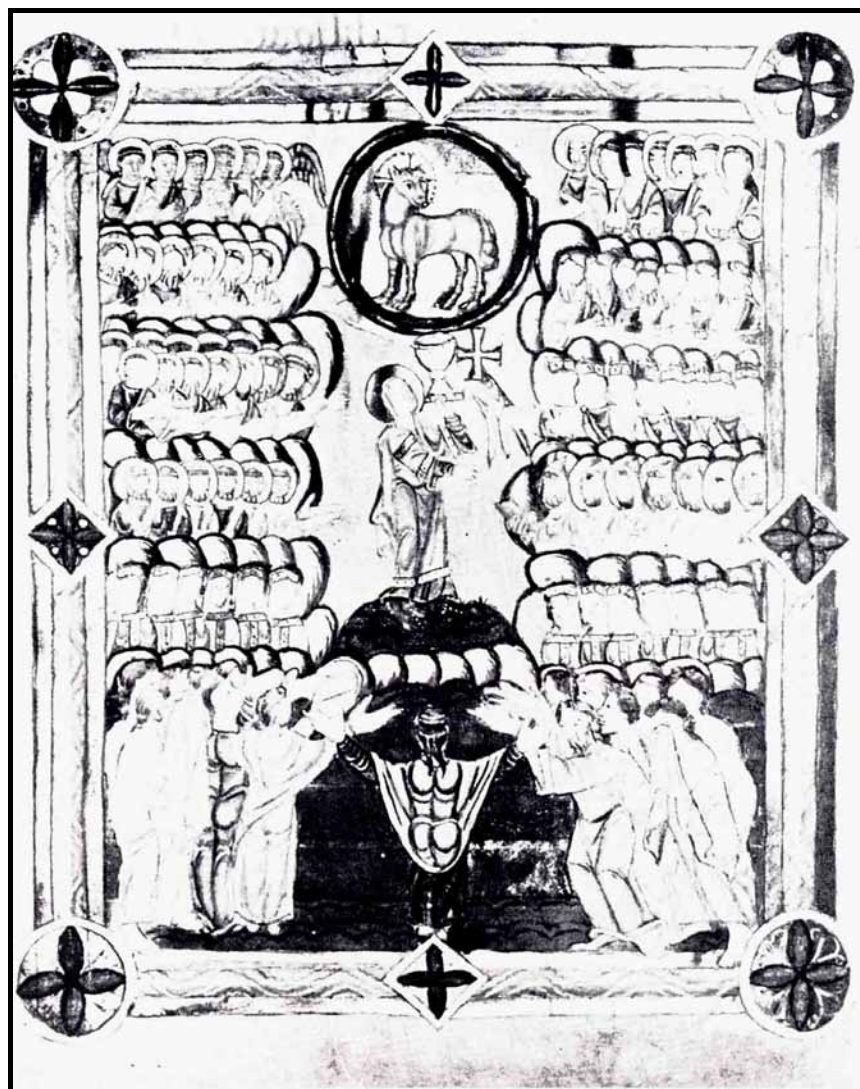
“Someone may think that here I am satisfying my own desire with such scornful, stinging, wounding words to the pope. O Lord God, I am far, far too insignificant to deride the pope. For more than six hundred years now he has undoubtedly derided the world and has laughed up his sleeve at its corruption in body and soul, goods and honor. He does not stop and he cannot stop. No man can believe what an abomination the papacy is! A Christian does not have to be of low intelligence either to recognize it! God Himself must deride him in hellish fire. Our Lord Jesus Christ - St. Paul says in 2 Thessalonians 2:8 - ‘will slay him with the breath of His mouth and destroy him by His glorious coming.’ I only deride him with my weak derision so that those who now live and those who come after us should know what I have thought of the pope, the damned Antichrist, and so that whoever wishes to be a Christian may be warned against such an abomination.” (Luther, AE, 41, 273)

**Wider das Papstum zu
Rom vom Teuffel gestiftt/
Mart. Luther D.**



**Wittenberg/1545.
durch Hans Lufft.**

The Title Page of Martin Luther's Last Theological Work - "Against The Roman Papacy Established by the Devil" - 1545



“The Adoration of the Lamb” - 11th Century Illumination

The Fourth Scene

The Lamb and the 144,000

Revelation 14:1-5

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 they 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 first fruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

“Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb...” - The first three scenes of the vision displayed the rampant power of Satan and his minions. In impressive array we have seen the dragon and his beasts from sea and land come forth for war. All the powers of this world have bowed down before the masters of hell and have given their aid and support to their increasingly desperate resistance to the Creator. The Christian reader might well be growing apprehensive at this point, intimidated by the impressive panoply of the foe. In Chapter 6, John terrifying vision of the great tribulation was followed by the reassuring image of the sealing of the 144,000 (Revelation 6:2-17; 7:1-17). Now, once again, the fearsome symbolism of the dragon and his beasts is followed by the comforting vision of the Lamb and the 144,000. The characteristic phrase *“Then I looked”* (Greek - *“eidon kai idou”* - literally - *“I looked and behold”*) signals the change in scene. Cavorting beasts and dragons are replaced by the image of the Lamb. The deliberate juxtaposition of the false lamb who spoke with the voice of the dragon (Revelation 13:11) and the true Lamb of God makes the contrast between them unmistakably clear. This is the



“The Adoration of the Lamb” - 13th Century Illumination

Lamb's second appearance in Revelation. His exaltation and coronation were described in connection with the presentation of the seven-sealed scroll (Revelation 5-7). The symbolic representation of Christ as the Lamb of God serves to emphasize His sacrificial death and the meekness and vulnerability with which He came into this world. The devil flaunts his power. The Son of God reveals His strength in that which the world scorns as weakness.

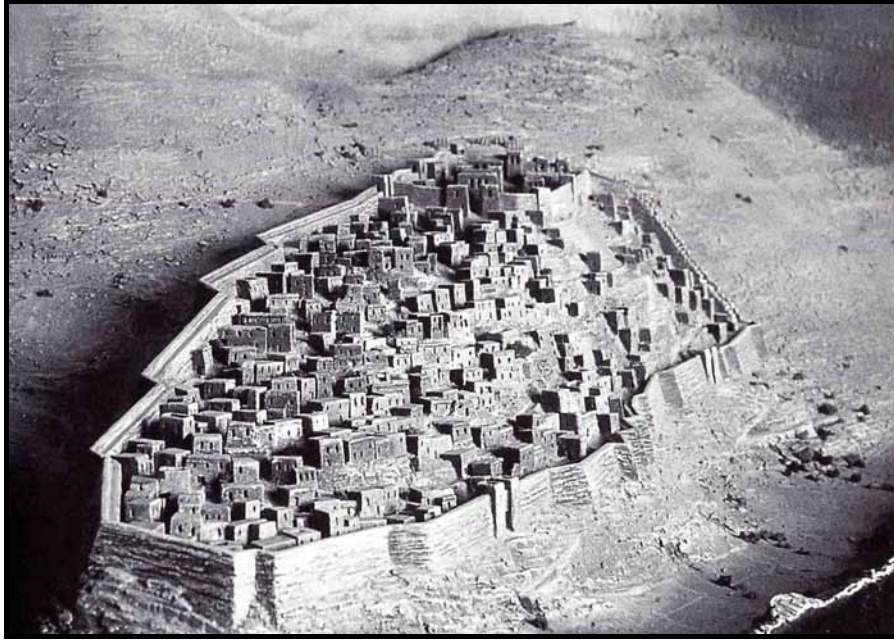
The Lamb stands upon "**Mount Zion.**" Mount Zion was the most prominent of Jerusalem's hills. The term is derived from an Arabic root which means "*protection*" or "*fortress.*" The original acropolis or citadel of the Jebusite city was located on the crest of this ridge. It was conquered by David and became his capital city (2 Samuel 5:6-16). Subsequently the temple of Solomon was constructed on Mount Zion. The Old Testament uses the word Zion 155 times in a variety of ways to refer to the

physical location itself, the entire city of Jerusalem, the people of God, the temple, and the heavenly Jerusalem. The term occurs seven times in the New Testament. In five of those instances, the New Testament author is quoting an Old Testament text (Matthew 21:5 quoting Zechariah 9:9; John 12:15 quoting Zechariah 9:9; Romans 9:33 quoting Isaiah 28:16; Romans 11:26 quoting Isaiah 59:20; and, 1 Peter 2:6 quoting Isaiah 28:16). The sixth reference comes in Hebrews 12:22 and the seventh is here in Revelation 14. Both of the latter texts use the word in its characteristic Old Testament sense. In these texts, Mount Zion is not a physical location but "*the place of redemption, where God and His messianic King reign in grace among His people.*" (Brighton, p. 365)



"The Lamb Upon Mt. Zion and the Fall of Babylon" - Luther Bible Illustration by Hans Burgkmair -1534

The Psalmist had prophesied that God



*“Jerusalem - The City of David With Its Citadel Upon Mt. Zion”
Model from The Museum of the History of Jerusalem*

would install His messianic King upon Mt. Zion to provide a place of refuge for His people and to bring judgment upon His enemies: ***“I have installed My King on Zion, My holy hill...Therefore you kings, be wise; be warned you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling... Blessed are all who take refuge in Him.”*** (Psalm 2:6-12) John envisions this fulfillment of that prophecy as he depicts the Lamb standing upon Mount Zion surrounded by ***“the 144,000”***. As in its previous usage (Revelation 7:4-8), ***“the 144,000”*** is a numerological symbol representing the entirety of the people of God. Twelve, the number of the church, is multiplied by itself to embrace both the Old Testament (tribes) and the New Testament (apostles) people of God. That number ***“144”*** is then multiplied by ***“1,000”*** to emphasize its perfect completeness. Not one saint will be omitted or forgotten. All the people of God, from the beginning of time to its end will be included. ***“The 144,000”*** are identified as those who ***“had His name and His Father’s name written on their foreheads.”*** In Chapter 7, ***“the 144,000”*** were sealed, but the specific nature of that seal was not identified. Now John informs us that the seal is the name of the Lamb and His Father. This parallels the mark of the beast upon the foreheads of his slaves - ***“the mark which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.”*** (Revelation 13:17) The close identification of the Lamb and the Father serves to further distinguish the true Lamb of God from its devilish counterpart in the anti-trinity. The seal is a mark of ownership and allegiance. Those

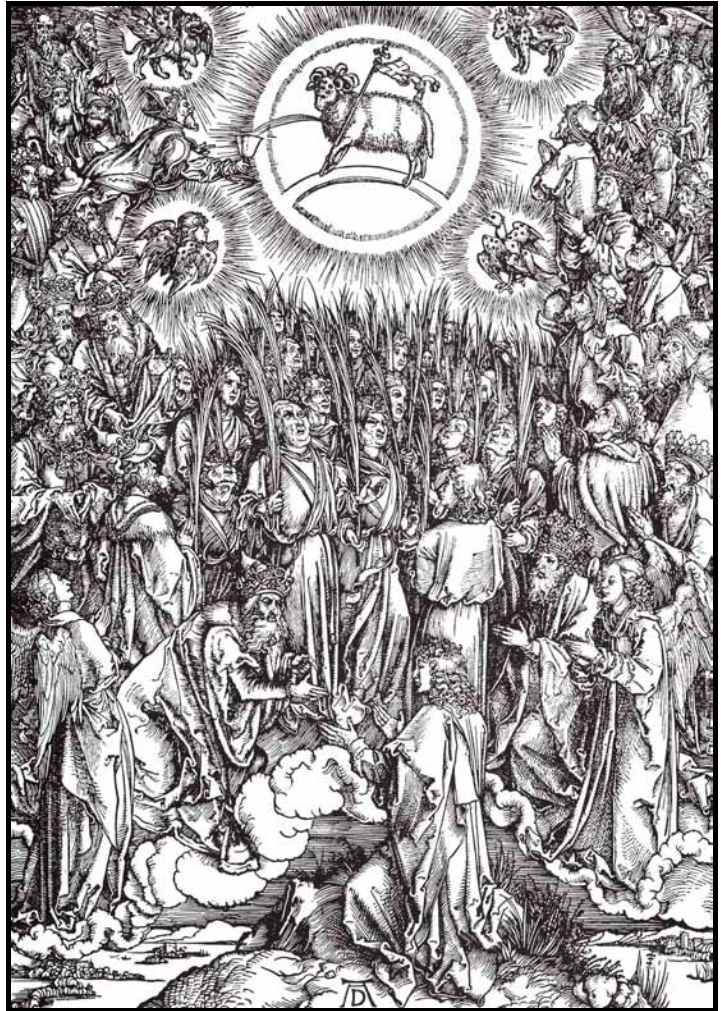
who bear the name of the Lamb and His Father belong to Him, are under His protection and care, and are empowered to serve Him.

“And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters...” - John reports the occurrence of a massive and magnificent sound reverberating from heaven. The emphasis in the text is on the magnitude of this sound - **“like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder.”** In Revelation 1:15, the voice of Christ is said to be **“like the sound of rushing water.”** The simile will recur in Revelation 19:6 in reference to the chorus of the victorious saints. The prophet Ezekiel uses the same phrase to describe the voice of the Almighty God (Ezekiel 1:24; 43:2) The sound of loud thunder is used twice elsewhere in Revelation; once to describe the voice of one of the four living beings (Revelation 6:1) and again in Revelation 19:6 in reference to the song of the saints. The imagery is combined in this text to describe the overwhelming volume of the **“new song”** performed by **“the 144,000.”** A third more musical simile is also provided - **The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.”** The sound from heaven is not only overwhelmingly powerful, it is also beautifully melodious. The Greek title for this instrument is **“kithara.”** This was the instrument of David, Israel’s sweet singer, and the book of Psalms. It was commonly used by the Levites to provide music for the temple services. The Greek text uses variations of the same word three times for alliterative effect - literally **“harpists harping upon their harps.”** In Revelation, harps also appear in 5:8 and 15:2.



“Like That of Harpists Playing Their Harps” by Rudolf Schäfer

“And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders.” - The host of the redeemed burst forth in joyful song. Revelation 5:8-9 also tells of the singing of a ***“new song”*** (Greek - *“oden kainen”*). There the four living beings and the elders sing to celebrate the victory of the Lamb. Although the lyrics of the new song are not repeated here, the context makes it clear that this is also a victory anthem, celebrating the triumph of God over His foes. The text is strongly reminiscent of Psalm 33: ***“Praise the Lord with the harp; make music to Him on the ten-stringed lyre. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully and shout for joy!”*** (Psalm 33: 2-3; cf. also Psalm 96:1-2). This majestic song of praise and thanksgiving is the sole possession of those who have been washed in the blood of the Lamb - those who have received salvation as a gift of God’s grace in Jesus Christ. ***“No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth.”*** ***“Only the 144,000 can know and sing that song, for they have been redeemed from the earth; they have emerged triumphant from that haunt of sin and Satan, from the miasma which clogs and chokes man’s singing in praise of his God.”*** (Franzmann, p. 99)



“The Adoration of the Lamb” by Albrecht Dürer

“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 first fruits to God and to the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths.” - Three figures describe the 144,000. First - ***“These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure.”*** The language is clearly figurative. The 144,000 are all the people of God



*“The Parable of the Wise and the Foolish Virgins”
by W. J. Wainright*

both male and female. Scripture often portrays the people of God as a pure virgin bride, undefiled by the corruption and impurity of this sinful world (cf. Isaiah 37:22; Jeremiah 14:17; 18:13; 31:4,21; Lamentations 1:15; 2:13; Amos 5:2; 2 Corinthians 11:2). The prophets often used adultery and sexual impurity as an image for idolatry and the worship of false Gods (cf. Jeremiah 3:6; Hosea 1-3). This is not surprising, given the nature of many pagan religions, particularly those of the Canaanites, as fertility cults whose worship involved temple prostitution. In this instance the virgins are male, which is unusual in Biblical imagery. Perhaps this is a reflection of the abstinence required of God’s warriors as they prepare to go into holy war for Him

(Deuteronomy 23:9-10). The gender shift may also anticipate the harlot of Babylon imagery to follow in Revelation 17 where the people of God are those who have not committed adultery with the whore and have not yielded to the temptation of her impurity.

Secondly - *“They follow the Lamb wherever He goes.”* The verb is a present participle indicating ongoing continuous action. In Mark 8:34 Jesus declares: *“If any man would come after Me let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow Me.”* Like a loyal army in marching order behind its general, the people of God follow their Lord. They will not live by the standards of this world nor bow down before its idols. They march to the beat of a different drummer, following in the footsteps of the Savior who offered His life in their place as a sacrificial offering upon the cross. To follow Christ is to live by His Word, submitting to His will - in short, to walk the way of the cross. This discipleship was made possible by Christ’s redemption of His Church. *“They were purchased from among men and offered as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.”* The first fruits offerings of the Old Testament were the finest

portion of the harvest, the very best, set aside and given to God in humble gratitude for the abundance of His blessing. Having been purchased in the blood of Christ, believers are liberated from the loyalties of this world, to live as the sole possession of God. The basic motive of the Christian life must be to offer praise and thanksgiving to God - to glorify the name of the God of our salvation (cf. Romans 12:1). The image of the people of God as the first fruits offering also anticipates the vision of the harvest of the earth which follows later in the chapter (vss. 14-20).

Finally, truthfulness is set forward as a basic characteristic of those who belong to Christ. ***“No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.”*** The wording of the text is very similar to the description of the Messianic Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53: ***“Nor was there any deceit in His mouth.”***

(Isaiah 53:9) *“After purity, truthfulness was perhaps the most distinctive mark of the followers of Christ, when contrasted with their heathen neighbors; cf. Eph.4:20-25”* (Swete, p.180) Lying is a sin which is often singled out in Scripture as being particularly hateful to the God of Truth (cf. Proverbs 6:17; Psalm 5:6). The devil is the ***“Father of Lies”*** (John 8:44). The pagan world has ***“exchanged the truth of God for a lie.”*** (Romans 1:25). Among those who will be excluded from the eternal city of God are ***“everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”*** (Revelation 22:15) Lies cannot be found in the mouth of those who have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. Like the ancient prophet, their lips have been cleansed by the purifying fire of God (Isaiah 6:7). ***“They are blameless.”*** because in Christ they stand before God justified, their sins forgiven and forgotten. Now they are free to speak and live the truth of God as witnesses to Jesus Christ.



“The Rich Young Man” by George Watts



*“The Adoration of the Lamb and the Three Angels”
by Lucas Cranach*

The Fifth Scene - The Three Angels

Revelation 14:6-13

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 judgement has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and the springs of water.” A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” 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 the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured out 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 forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast or 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 and their deeds will follow them.”

“Then I saw another angel flying in midair...” - For the fifth time in this series of seven the typical phrase - *“Then I saw”* (Greek - *“kai eidon”*) signals the introduction of a new Scene. The first three Scenes had portrayed the nefarious anti-trinity in all of their destructive power. In Scene 4 the victory of God’s people over all the powers of hell was affirmed. The angels of the fifth Scene promise that the Gospel will be preached throughout the latter days and that the devil and all those who serve him will certainly receive the full measure of their judgment.

The first angelic messenger is described as *“another angel.”* There does not appear to be any special significance to the modifier *“another,”* other than to contrast this messenger with all those which have appeared in previous visions. The angel appears *“flying in midair.”* The Greek term



*“An Angelic Messenger”
by John Strudwick - 1900*

“meso-ouranema” literally means *“in the midst of the heavens.”* The word indicates that point in the sky which is directly overhead - as the modern fighter pilot would say, *“twelve o’clock high.”* The angel flies in mid-heaven to be seen and heard by all since his message is intended for all of humanity. The term is used three times in the New Testament, only in the Book of Revelation (Revelation 8:13; 14:6; 19:17). In all three instances it occurs in conjunction with an announcement about the coming of God’s judgment. Lenski further suggests that the placement of the angel in the midst of the heavens signals the failure of all the devil’s effort to suppress the message of the Gospel:

“Neither the dragon nor the dragon’s two heads can reach him in mid-heaven and stop his gospeling. All the anti-christian power and its blasphemies and the anti-Christian deceitful tyrannous propaganda are unable to reach this divine messenger in mid-heaven and to smother his great voice.” (Lenski, pp. 427-428)



*“The Angel with the Eternal Gospel”
19th Century Bible Engraving*

The angel’s message is characterized as *“the eternal gospel”* (Greek - *“euangelion aionion”*). The noun literally means *“good news.”* That characterization is reinforced by the use of the Greek verb *“euangelisai,”* based on the same root, which literally means to preach or proclaim the good news of salvation. It occurs frequently throughout the New Testament as the usual term for the good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The appearance of the word here is unique in that this is the only time in the New Testament that the word appears without the definite article. The NIV’s translation inserts the definite article *“the eternal gospel”* although it is not present in the Greek text. The content of the angel’s message, as specified in the verses which follow, is clearly not the good news of salvation, but an urgent warning of God’s impending judgment. This is not *“gospel”* in the ordinary sense of the term. Evidently the absence of the

customary definite article in this text signals a broader use of the word. In the Greek of the Old Testament Septuagint, “*euangelion*” more generally referred to a message, which could be either good or bad news. John’s usage here may reflect that more neutral connotation. David Aune’s suggested translation - “*an eternal message to proclaim*” - reflects both the absence of the definite article and that broader sense. The angel’s warning is not merely a pronouncement of judgment but is designed to stimulate repentance. In that way it serves the cause of the gospel in the narrow sense. At the same time, the announcement of God’s impending judgment is certainly good news for Christians eagerly awaiting Christ’s return and in this context that may explain the unusual use of the terminology. The message that is proclaimed is “*eternal*,” that is to say, it proclaims the changeless counsel of God for all time. It is immutable and permanently valid. As long as time and space endure the proclamation of this gospel will continue despite all the efforts of its enemies to suppress it.



*“The Angel in the Midst of the Heavens”
19th Century Bible Illustration*

The purview of the message is universal, for all of mankind. This is indicated by the two parallel phrases which follow - “*to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language and people.*” The language of the first phrase differs from the usual formulation in Revelation - “*those who live on the earth*” in which the Greek word “*katoikeo*” (“*to dwell*” or “*to make one’s home*”) is used (cf. Revelation 3:10;6:10; 8:13;11:10;13:8,12,14; 17:2,8). This phrase ordinarily refers only to unbelievers. Here, a different Greek word (“*kathemenous*” - literally “*those who sit upon the earth*”) is used to signal that the proclamation of the angel is addressed not merely to unbelievers but to all mankind. The point is stressed again by the typical use of

the earth number in the fourfold division in the second phrase. The concept echoes that of the *“Little Apocalypse:”* ***“This good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come.”*** (Mark 13:10). The proclamation is irrepressible for the angel sounds forth his message - ***“with a loud voice.”***

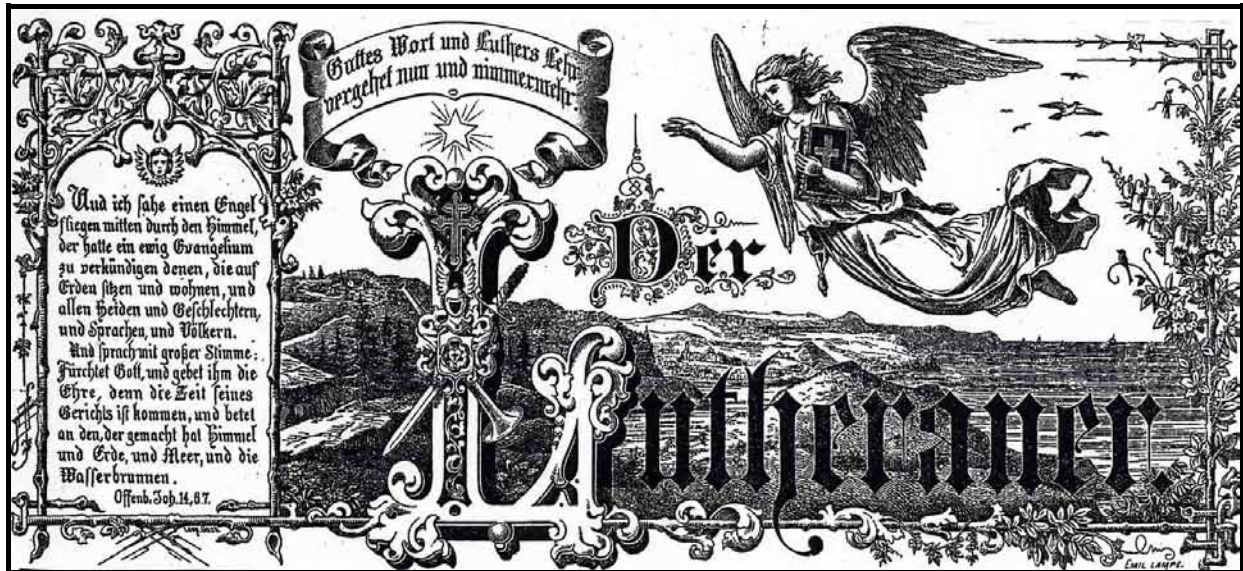
“Fear God and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”
- The angel’s proclamation is a contradiction and a denial of all the lies of the devil and his legions of servants. The words recall Christ’s rejection of Satan’s insidious invitation to fall down and worship him: ***“Away from Me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God and serve Him only!”*** (Matthew 4:10)

In the face of the imminent judgment of God humanity is summoned to worship and praise God - ***“Fear God and give Him glory.”*** Dr. Siegbert Becker offers this helpful summary of the meaning of the often misunderstood concept of the fear of God:

“The term “the fear of God” covers a broad spectrum of meaning in the Holy Scriptures, ranging from abject terror before the wrath of God to childlike awe and respect before His ineffable grace. For the sinner, the fear of God is “terror smiting the conscience through the knowledge of sin.” That kind of fear is described by the Lord when He says: “Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28) For the forgiven sinner the fear of God is holy awe which results from the contemplation of the undeserved pardon which has come to him from the just and holy God who is also the God of infinite grace. Of this latter kind of fear the psalmist spoke when he wrote: “With You there is forgiveness; therefore You are feared.” (Psalm 130:3)...This should not be understood to mean that the first kind of fear is never found in the heart of a believing child of God. Because of weakness of faith we are not as sure as we ought to be of our forgiveness. Christians are sometimes also terrified at the thought of God’s holy wrath. Such fear, however, is characteristic of the Old Adam rather than of the new man. The Lutheran Confessions define the “childlike fear” of a Christian as a fear which is relieved by faith while the “slavish fear” of the unbeliever is the same kind of fear, but which is not relieved by faith (Apology to the Augsburg Confession XII,38).” (Becker, p. 224)

The angel’s words constitute ***“one last call for civilization to repent and give glory to God.”*** (Mounce, p. 273) The appeal is couched in the language of natural theology acknowledging God as the Almighty Creator of all things. Note the fourfold repetition - ***“the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.”*** The angel summons all of His creatures to worship and adore Him. The goal of this

proclamation is repentance and salvation. Paul and Barnabas used the reality of creation and judgment in the same way in their attempt to evangelize the citizens of Athens (Cf. Acts 17:8-18).



The Masthead of “Der Lutheraner” Showing the Angel with the Everlasting Gospel

Historically Lutheran theologians have viewed this scene as a prophecy of the Reformation. This passage is, in fact, the traditional Epistle Lesson for Reformation Day. Dr. Lenski comments:

“The older Protestants regarded this first flying angel as a prophecy of Luther and his gospel and to this day Revelation 14:6-7 is the regular pericope for Reformation Day...When commentators reject this interpretation they do so without sufficient reason. The text for Reformation Day is well chosen, for the fathers of Reformation days selected it not because they identified the first angel wholly with Luther. The reformer too preached only the old apostolic gospel. The angel for the eternal gospel is the messenger for the whole New Testament era and thus most certainly includes a man like Luther who once made the eternal gospel ring out in all its saving power and purity in the whole world despite all the devil’s effort to hush its voice. Use the text as the fathers intended it to be used and all is well.” (Lenski, p. 428)

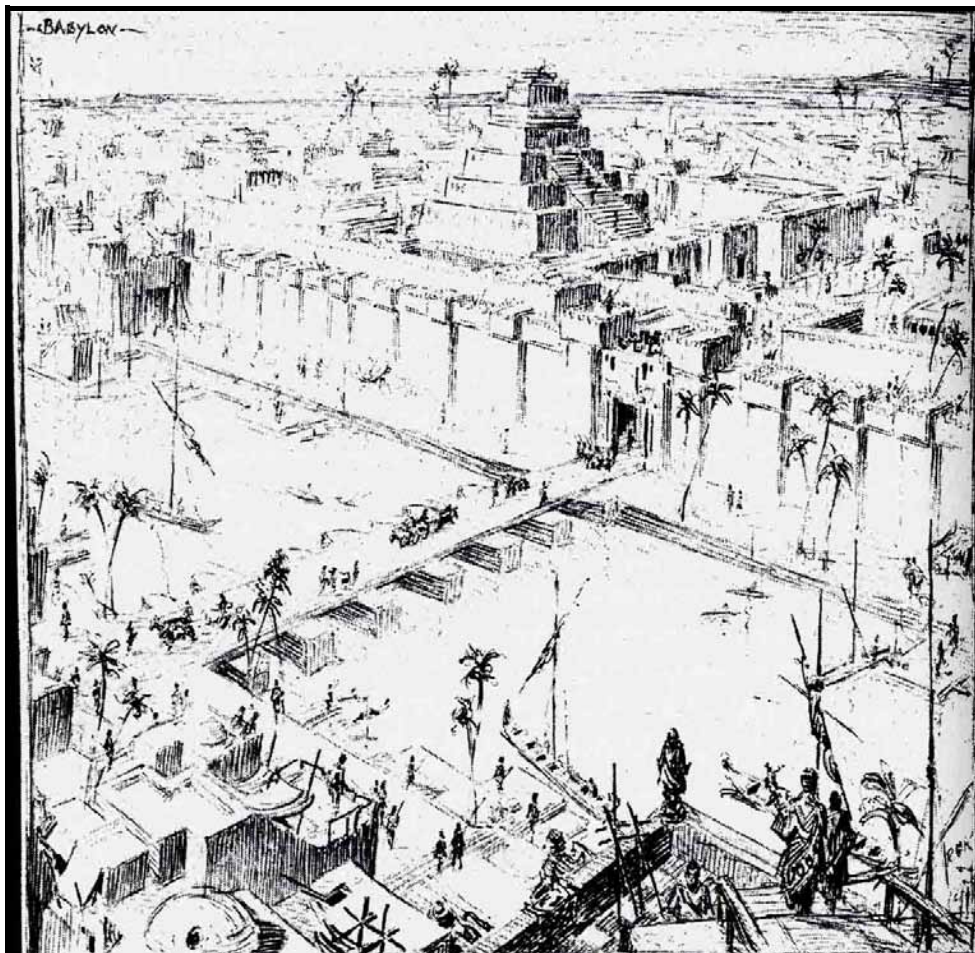
Reflecting this view, for many decades the masthead of the Missouri Synod’s German publication “*Der Lutheraner*” featured the image of the mighty angel flying in mid-heaven with the slogan - “*Gottes Wort und Luthers Lehr vergehet nun und nimmermehr!*” (“*God’s Word and Luther’s Doctrine Pure - May they Now and Evermore Endure!*”).



“The Fall of Babylon” - 19th Century Bible Engraving

“A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” - A second angelic messenger follows immediately in the wake of the first. The first angel had affirmed the continuous, ongoing proclamation of the *“eternal gospel”* and had pleaded with mankind to acknowledge the one God and worship Him before the imminent coming of His judgment. The second angel takes the matter a step further with a more explicit declaration of judgment, actually announcing the downfall of all of the enemies of God. The announcement is abrupt, without introduction or explanation. John is evidently confident that his readers will understand exactly what he is talking about. The angel’s message is drawn from the Old Testament, from the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. *“Fallen, fallen is Babylon!”* (Isaiah 21:9) *“Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord’s hand, making all the earth drunken; the nations drank of her wine; therefore the nations went mad.”* (Jeremiah 51:7) The specific title *“Babylon the Great”* comes from Daniel 4:30 and the proud boast of Nebuchadnezzar - *“Is this not the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”* John synthesizes and modifies the Old Testament language to meet the needs of his message. As the old theologians have said, when the Holy Spirit quotes Himself He has the right to quote freely. The Neo-Babylonian Empire dominated the ancient Near East in the Eighth

century B.C. As the political and religious capital of this great world empire, the city of Babylon was renowned for its luxury and moral corruption. The “*Hanging Gardens*” of Nebuchadnezzar’s massive palace were regarded as one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Babylon’s massive walls and fortifications were believed to be impregnable. Cyrus the Persian conquered the city by treachery after diverting the waters of the great River Euphrates. In the Old Testament, Babylon came to represent all the enemies of the people of God. It was mighty Babylon which conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem and the temple, carrying the people of God away into captivity. Babylon put an end to the independent existence of the Israelite nation. “*Because of the destruction and horror perpetrated by ancient Babylon she henceforth became a type of all the enemies of God.*” (Brighton, p. 378) For the early church at the beginning of the New Testament era Babylon, although long



“The Greatness That Was Babylon” by Roy Krenkel



“The Israelites Mourning Their Captivity in Babylon” by Herbert Schmalz

eclipsed as a literal world power (cf. Jeremiah 28:39; 50:39-40; 51:24-26,62-64; Isaiah 13:19-22), continued to epitomize the wickedness and corruption of the world in bitter opposition to the people of God. The name Babylon was often used by writers of the period as a designation for the city and empire of Rome. For example, the Sibylline Oracles, a Hebrew apocryphal book written in Egypt in the mid 70's, describes the reign of Nero and predicts the downfall of Rome in this way:

“Playing at theatricals with honey sweet songs rendered with melodious voice, he will destroy many men, and his own wretched mother. He will flee from Babylon, a terrible and shameless prince whom all mortals and noble men despise...A great star will come from heaven to the wondrous sea and will burn the deep sea and Babylon itself and the land of Italy, because of which many holy faithful Hebrews and a true people perished...It is the last time of the holy people, when God, who thunders on high, founder of the greatest temple, accomplishes these things. Woe to you, Babylon, of golden throne and golden sandal. For many years you were the sole kingdom ruling over the world...” (Sibylline Oracles, V, 143,159,434)

2 Baruch, Hebrew apocalypse written in Palestine in the aftermath of the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D., follows a similar pattern in calling down God’s judgment upon Rome for its treatment of the Jews:

“Now this, I, Baruch, say to you, O Babylon: If you had lived in happiness with Zion in its glory it would have been a great sorrow to us that you had been equal to Zion.

But now, behold, the grief is infinite and the lamentation is unmeasurable, because behold, you are happy and Zion has been destroyed...But the king of Babylon will arise, the one who now has destroyed Zion, and he will boast over the people and speak haughtily in his heart before the Most High. And he too will fall finally.” (2 Baruch 11:1; 67:7)

Many commentators believe that 1 Peter 5:13 is a New Testament example of this same pattern at work. Peter, presumably writing from Rome, concludes his epistle with these words: ***“She (the church) who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son, Mark.”*** The designation of Rome as Babylon served a dual purpose. First, it concealed what in many cases government officials would have considered the sedition of these authors. But more importantly the application of this ancient title was a theological statement about the nature of Rome and the Roman government. It said that Rome had become what Babylon once



“The Adoration of the Lamb and the Three Angels” - Luther Bible Woodcut

had been, the embodiment of all this world’s wickedness and corruption in opposition to the people of God.

This is the first of six references to Babylon in the Book of Revelation. The use of

the term six times (the number of the Anti-Christ) is certainly no mere coincidence (cf. Revelation 16:19; 17:5; 18:2,10,21). Babylon in Revelation is not a literal place but a powerful symbol, a symbol for all of the enemies and oppressors of God's people, past, present and future. John's "***Babylon the Great***" is not one city. It reaches beyond the seats of ancient empires and modern totalitarian governments. It is every city - "*The world city is the manufactory of all that inflames and satisfies those passions which make men unfaithful to their Creator and Lord; the Creator's good gifts are put to unhallowed uses.*" (Franzmann, p. 101)

"Babylon the Great" is not only corrupt but corrupting - "***which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.***" The imagery is that of a prostitute who plies her prospective client with wine to deprive him of his judgment so that she may lure him into her bed. The point of the text is not physical adultery but the spiritual adultery of idolatry and false worship. As noted in the previous scene (cf. p. 314) the prophets often use adultery as an image for the spiritual unfaithfulness of idolatry. Hosea (4:10-12) makes that link explicit in a passage that is strikingly similar to this text:



"Isaiah's Vision of the Doom of Babylon" by Gustave Dore

“They have deserted the Lord to give themselves to prostitution, to old wine and new, which take away the understanding of My people. They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood. A spirit of prostitution leads them astray; they are unfaithful to their God.”



*“The Adoration of the Lamb and the Destruction of Babylon”
Luther Bible Woodcut*

The text also suggests the element of coercion - *“**which made all the nations drink.**”* Babylon uses her power to compel compliance causing the earth’s inhabitants to choose a path that they in no way would have chosen without her influence.

It is significant to note that the aorist tense of the verb - *“**Fallen is Babylon!**”*. In the Greek language the aorist tense is used to describe an event that has just happened, an event completed in the immediate past. Here the aorist tense is prophetic and speaks of a future event as of something that is irrevocably in the past. The sovereign control of God is absolute. His Word is sure. That which He says will happen is as certain as that which has already happened in time.

“A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the

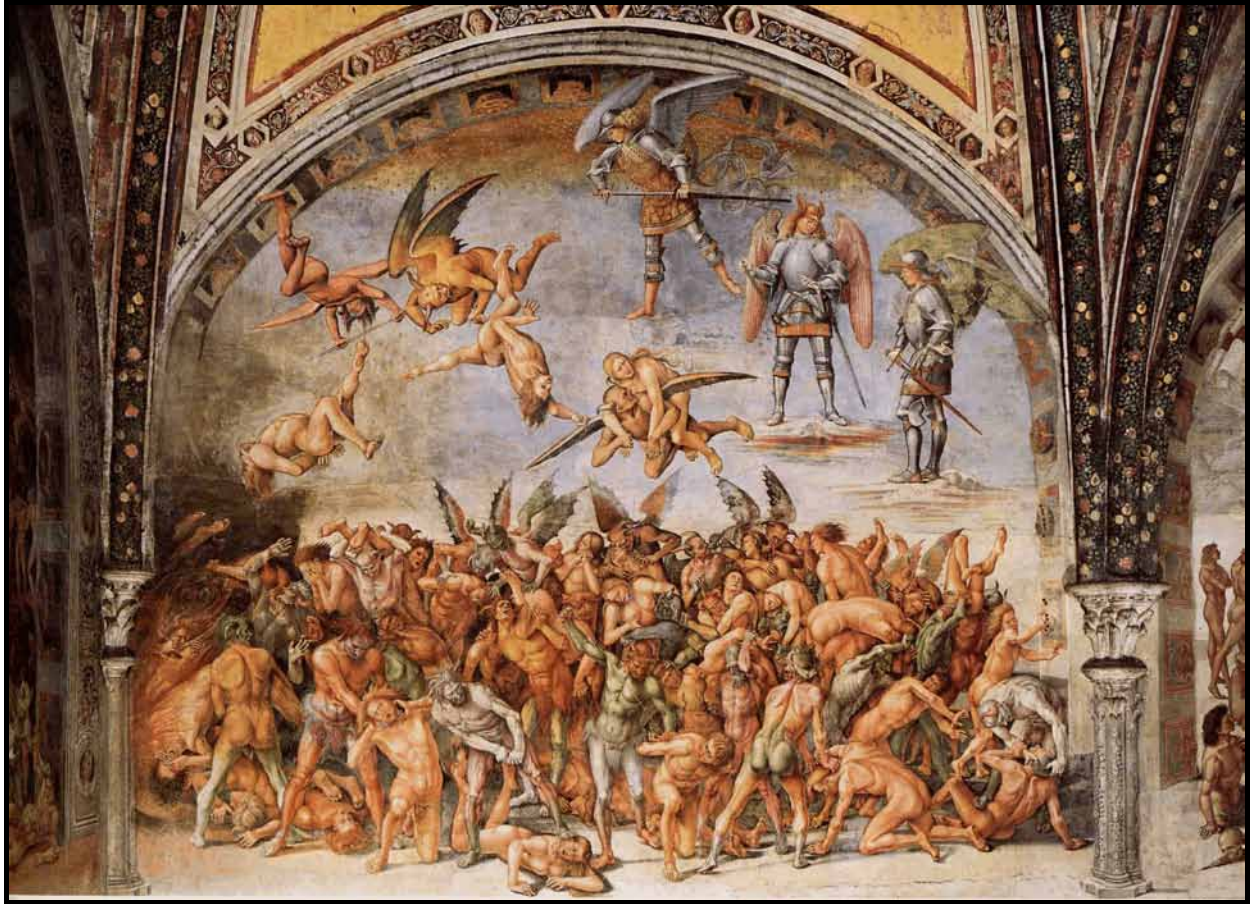
beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath." - Now the final angel in this scene makes his appearance and proclaims his ominous message. The message of impending judgment intensifies once more as the general announcement of the downfall of Babylon the Great is followed by a graphic description of the implications of Satan's defeat for every individual who has chosen to follow him. Allegiance to Satan is defined in terms of the imagery of the vision of the beast from the land (Revelation 13:11-18) - *"If anyone worships the beast and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand..."* The imagery includes all those who have spurned the worship of the true God and have chosen instead to live by the values of this world, having thereby chosen to worship the false gods of this world. The second angel had said that Babylon *"made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."* Now the punishment

fits the crime. Those who have chosen to drink of the wine of Babylon's adultery will be given *"the wine of God's fury"* to drink. That judgment will not be mitigated or diluted as *"the wine of God's fury"* *"has been poured full strength into the cup of His wrath."*



"The Adoration of the Lamb and the Doom of Babylon" - Luther Bible Woodcut

The image of God's judgment as strong, untempered wine is a common one in the Old Testament. David laments: *"You have shown Your people desperate times; You have given us wine that makes us stagger."* (Psalm 60:3) In Psalm 75, the psalmist depicts the judgment of God as foaming wine in the cup of God's judgment: *"In the hand of the Lord is a cup full of foaming wine mixed with spices; He pours it out, and all the wicked of the earth drink it down to its very dregs."* (Psalm 75:8) Isaiah combines the images in his warning to apostate Israel: *"Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath, you who have drained to its*



“The Torments of the Damned” by Luca Signorelli

dregs the goblet that makes men stagger.” (Isaiah 51:17) In Jeremiah 25, compelling the nations to drink from the cup of God’s wrath serves as a graphic image of the prophet’s entire ministry:

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, said to me: “Take from My hand this cup filled with the wine of My wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it. When they drink it, they will stagger and go mad, because of the sword I will send among them.” So I took the cup from the Lord’s hand and made all the nations to whom He sent me drink it...Then tell them, “This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says, “Drink, get drunk, and vomit, and fall to rise no more because of the sword I will send among you.” But if they refuse to take the cup from your hand and drink, tell them, “This is what the Lord Almighty says, “You must drink it!” (Jeremiah 25:15-16,27-28)

The image of the cup of God's wrath will recur twice more in the visions of Revelation (Revelation 16:19; 19:15).

“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 forever and ever. There is no rest day and night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.” - The link between ***“burning sulfur”*** - (traditionally - ***“fire and brimstone”***) and divine judgment go all the way back to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (cf. Genesis 19:28). This is the grim reality of hell. ***“We need not speculate about this fire, its nature and its effects. Human expressions are used to represent what is really beyond our present powers of conception.”*** (Lenski, p. 437) As the great Lutheran theologian John Gerhard advised many centuries ago: ***“It is wiser to be concerned about escaping this eternal fire than to engage in an unprofitable argument as to the nature of this fire.”***



“The Torments of the Damned” - 13th Century Illumination

The eternal punishment of the damned is to take place ***“in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb.”*** The phrase emphasizes the role of Christ as the eternal Judge of mankind. Jesus declared: ***“Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son...And He has given Him authority to judge because He is the Son of Man.”*** (John 5:22,27) The angelic host becomes the courtroom gallery before whom the judgment takes place. Jesus had warned: ***“I tell you, whoever acknowledges Me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. But he who disowns Me before men will be disowned before the angels of God.”*** (Luke 12:8-9) All are in full accord with the perfect justice

and righteousness of God's judgment. This judgement is final. There will be - there can be - no appeal.

"Their punishment is just; the angels who protect the servants of God (7:1-3), waft the prayers of all the saints into the presence of God (8:3), and to the very last have proclaimed an eternal gospel (14:6) will not intercede for them. Nor will the Lamb who loved them and died for them (1:5). He who once interceded for His executioners (Luke 23:34) will not intercede for them." (Franzmann, p. 102)



"Abraham Observes the Smoke of Sodom's Destruction" by Edward Armitage

And the smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night..." - When Abraham observed the dense column of smoke rising over the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah he knew that God's judgment had finally come upon those sinful cities. (Genesis 19:28) So also here *"the smoke of their torment"* signals that the decisive judgment of God has taken place. The language recalls the description of God's judgment upon the land of Edom in Isaiah 34: *"Edom's streams will be turned into pitch, her dust into burning sulfur; her land will become burning pitch. It will not be quenched night and day; its smoke will rise forever."* (Isaiah 34:9-10) The text makes it painfully clear that the torment of the damned will be eternal - *"forever and ever"* and without interruption - *"there is no rest day or*



*“The Mark of the Beast”
13th Century Illumination*

night.” The objects of this unimaginable punishment are again defined as *“those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name.”* The phrase repeats the language of Verse 9.

“This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.” - In the face of the dreadful fate awaiting those who allow themselves to be lured or coerced into the worship of the beasts, God’s people are urged to remain steadfast and true. Do not yield. Do not follow the inclination of

your own sinful heart or conform to the ways of this world but *“obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.”* The temporary suffering and persecution which must be endured as the price of that loyalty pale into insignificance in comparison with the eternal torments of the damned.

“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.” - The appeal to steadfastness is followed by the second of the seven beatitudes of the Book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 1:3;16:15;19:9; 20:6; 22:7). The command to *“Write”* emphasizes the importance of that which follows.

The specific source of the voice is not identified, but it comes from heaven, thus from God. The blessing is immediately affirmed by the Spirit of God Himself. *“Blessed”* is the Greek term *“makarios.”* The basic meaning of the word is *“happy”* or *“happiness.”* God promises this blessing to *“the dead who die in the Lord from now on.”*

Faithfulness to Christ in a world where the devil and his minions rule and rage may well result in martyrdom and death. But those *“who die in the Lord from now on”*



“The Ramparts of God’s House” by John Melhuish Strudwick

need no longer fear death, for man’s ancient enemy has been transformed from a curse to a blessing for all those who are **“in the Lord.”** By His death and resurrection Christ has broken the power of death. Death cannot destroy, nor even interrupt, the relationship of Christ with His people. The blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord is immediate **“from now on”** (Greek - *“ap arti”*). The Greek phrase might well be translated *“from this very moment.”* The blessedness of the dead who die in the Lord begins at the instant of their death as they are immediately with Christ in heaven. There the struggle against the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh that characterized their life here on earth is over as they rest safe and secure in the loving arms of Jesus - **“they will rest from their labor.”** The language stands in stark contrast to the fate of the damned - **“There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image.”** (V.11) The deeds which are the unmistakable evidence of true faith will go with them to be presented as evidence on the final day of judgment.



“The Judgement Harvest” by Lucas Cranach

The Sixth Scene - The Judgment Harvest

Revelation 14: 14-20

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 that was seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. 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.

"I looked and there before me was a white cloud..." - As the vision of the seven scenes draws to its conclusion, the focus upon the end of time and the final judgment sharpens. The image of the last judgment as a harvest is common in Scripture. The language of this scene closely resembles that of the prophet Joel who spoke of the judgment in these terms: *"Swing the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Come trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow - so great is their wickedness."* (Joel 3:13) Jesus frequently spoke of the harvest as a picture of the ingathering of God's people (i.e. *"The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into His harvest field."* Matthew 9:37-38; cf. also Mark 4:29; Luke 10:2; John 4: 35-38). The Parable of the Wheat and the Tares (Matthew 13:24-30) is based upon the comparison of the judgment to a harvest. The figure of *"One 'like a son of man'"* sitting on a white

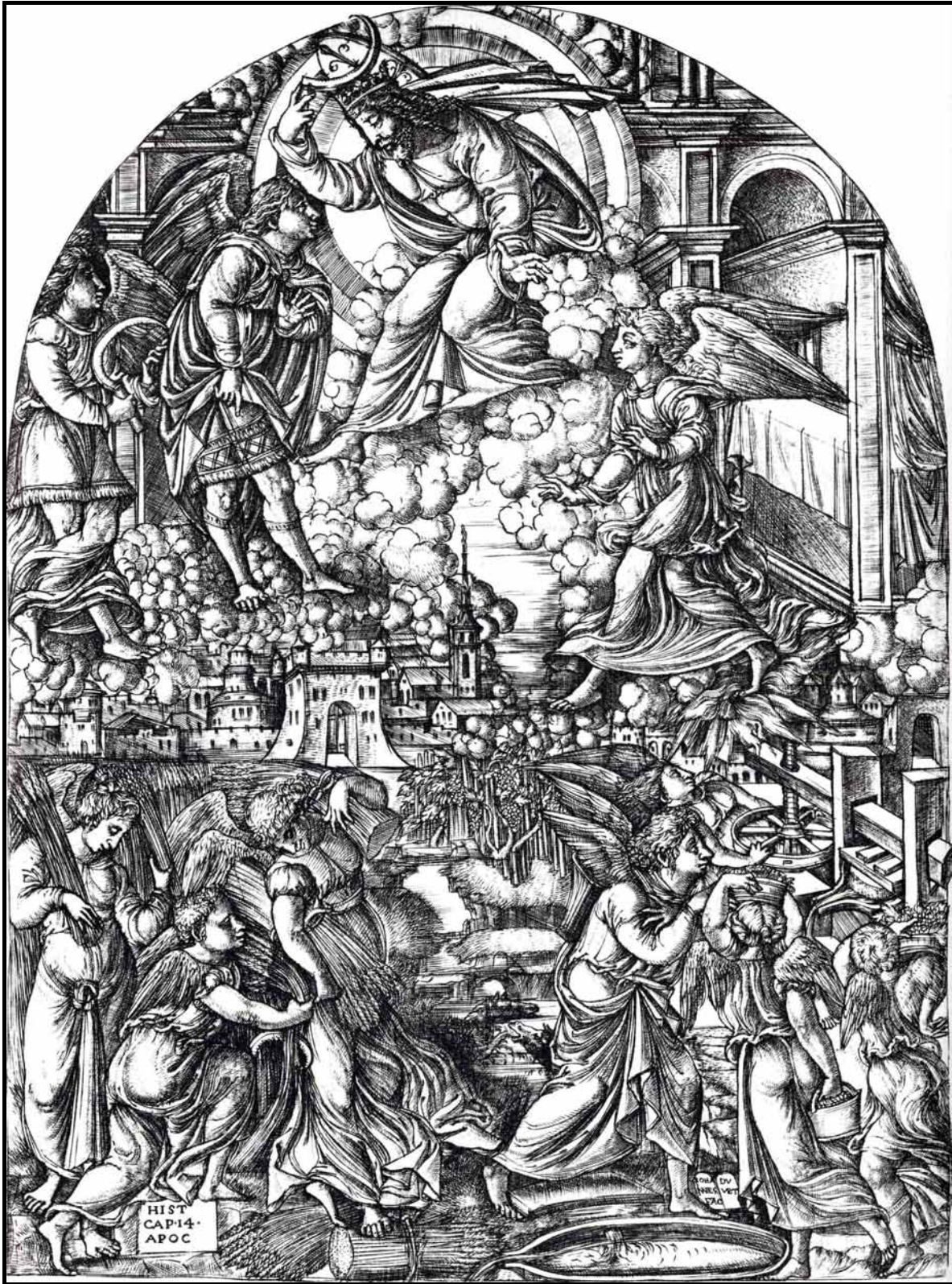


*"The Vision of the Harvest and the Winepress" - Luther Bible
Woodcut*

cloud introduces the scene. This is the Lord Christ. This classic Messianic title from the Old Testament was used in the Introduction to the Book to describe Jesus amid the golden lamp stands (cf. Revelation 1:13). The prophet Daniel had foretold that on the day of judgment the Son of Man would come **“with the clouds of heaven.”** (Daniel 7:13). Christ used the same words when He promised His disciples that on the Last Day **“They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.”** (Matthew 24:30). He reiterated that theme in His warning to Caiaphas and the leaders of the Sanhedrin: **“But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.”** (Matthew 26:64) The cloud upon which the Son of Man is seated in this vision is specifically designated as **“a white cloud”** (Greek - *“nephele leuke”*). White is the color of purity, righteousness and holiness. In this context it signifies the righteousness of God in judgment.

Two further details define the identity and the role of the Son of Man in the scene. First, there is a **“crown of gold”** upon his head. This is the victor’s crown indicated by the Greek word *“stephanos.”* **“Once before the Son of Man had worn a crown: a thorny crown, a crown of mockery in His suffering (Mark 15:17). That crown has been replaced by a golden crown, a crown denoting victory. So now in bearing the crown He comes as the victor.”** (Brighton, p. 390) Later in Revelation 19:12, Christ will be portrayed wearing the royal crown to signify His royal authority as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. In His hand he bears the instrument of the harvest **“a sharp sickle.”** This sickle is **“sharp”** - it is honed and ready for use. He is fully equipped and prepared for the task before Him, to gather in the harvest of God’s judgment. The job will be done quickly and completely. The word is used eight times in the New Testament, seven of which are in the Book of Revelation.

“Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to Him who was sitting on the cloud...” - The time for judgment has finally arrived. God sends His messenger (**“another angel”** - the fourth angel in this sequence) forth from the **“temple”** (Greek - *“naos”*) with the divine command for the harvest to commence. The temple is the holy place in which God dwells. The fact that the angel comes from the temple indicates that the command that he brings originates with God Himself. This is the first of three angels which come out of the temple in the scene. There is a compelling sense of dramatic urgency in the command which the angel relays to the Son of Man - **“Take your sickle and reap because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”** The language closely resembles that of Joel: **“Swing**



"The Judgement Harvest" by Jean Duvet



*“The Vision of the Harvest” by Hans Burgkmair
Luther Bible Woodcut*

the sickle for the harvest is ripe.” (Joel 3:13) Mankind is like a field that has reached perfect readiness and ripeness. The farmer who harvests too soon finds his crop green and incomplete. The farmer who delays the harvest too long finds his crop over-ripe and past its prime. The harvest must occur at just the right moment. This is that perfect moment, as the Almighty Sovereign God sends forth His command. Let the reaping begin now! This is the right time. Bring in the harvest. The act itself is described in startling brevity without embellishment or detail - *“So He that was seated on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.”*

“Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too

had a sharp sickle...” - The prophet Joel had used the dual image of a grain harvest and the crushing of the grapes in the harvest of a vineyard. John follows that pattern as the scene unfolds to represent the violent fury of God’s judgment upon His foes. Another angel comes forth from the temple - another messenger of the holy and righteous God. Like the Son of Man he bears a sharp sickle in his hand, the instrument of the judgment harvest. He is followed by yet another angel, the angel *“who had charge of the fire.”* This angel was the keeper of the flame on the incense altar. This may well be the same angel depicted in Revelation 8:3-5 who stood before the altar to offer the incense which represented the prayers of the saints. The martyrs beneath the altar had earnestly pleaded for the vindication of God’s righteousness in the destruction of the wicked (Revelation 6:9-11). Now their prayer is answered as the *“grapes from the earth’s vine,”* ripe and ready for harvest, are gathered to be

crushed and destroyed in the great *“winepress of God’s wrath.”* Long ago the prophet had spoken of God’s people as His previous vineyard: *“My beloved had a vineyard on a fertile hillside. He dug it up and cleared it of stones and planted it with the choicest vines. He built a watchtower in it and cut out a winepress as well.”* (Isaiah 5:1-2). The bitter grapes of this harvest have sprouted from *“the earth’s vine.”* This is unbelieving mankind, disobedient and defiant to the end.

“The winepress in ancient times consisted of two bowls hewn out of solid rock. One was higher than the other and contained the grapes which someone walked on to squeeze the juice from them. The juice flowed through a duct into the lower basin where it was collected until being removed for storage or consumption.” (Thomas, p.223)



“The Judgement Harvest” by Karl Bauer

The winepress as an image of God’s judgment upon unbelievers was a favorite theme in the prophetic writings of the Old Testament. In the closing chapters of the Book of Isaiah, the prophet foretells the coming of the great day of the Lord’s vengeance and the total defeat and destruction of the enemies of the people of God exemplified by the heathen nation of Edom, Israel’s most bitter foe. Isaiah depicts the Messiah as a warrior champion returning victorious from the fight, his robes bloodstained and red:

“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? “It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.” Why are your garments red like those of one treading the winepress? “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.” (Isaiah 63:1-6; cf. also Lamentations 1:15)



*“Christ the Conqueror” - 19th Century
Engraving by Franz Stassen*

The brutal realism of the vision captures the fury of God’s wrath against those who have made themselves His enemies unto death. The Victorian hymnist Thomas Kelly composed a classic Easter hymn that expresses the sense of the text extremely well:

*“Who is this who comes from Edom, all his
raiment stained with blood,
To the captive speaking freedom, bringing and
bestowing good,
Glorious in the garb He wears, glorious in the
spoil He bears?”*

*‘Tis the Savior, now victorious, traveling
onward in His might;
‘Tis the Savior, O how glorious to His people
is the sight!
Satan conquered and the grave, Jesus now is
strong to save.*

*Why this blood His raiment staining? ‘Tis the
blood of many slain;
Of His foes there’s none remaining, none the*

contest to maintain.

Fall'n they are, no more to rise; all their glory prostrate lies.

*Mighty Victor, reign forever, wear the crown so dearly won;
Never shall Thy people, never, cease to sing what Thou hast done.
Thou hast fought Thy peoples' foes; Thou hast healed Thy people's woes.
(TLH # 209)*



“The Valley of Hinnon” by Thomas Seddon

“They were trampled in the winepress outside the city and the blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.” - The grim consequences of divine judgment continue to be presented in gruesome detail. The contemplation of sin’s ultimate consequences is not for the squeamish. The grapes ***“trampled in the winepress”*** represent unrepentant, unbelieving humanity. The verb ***“they were trampled”*** is passive but the agent who carries out the treading is not specifically identified. Later, in Revelation 19, Christ Himself, as the agent of God’s judgment, is depicted as the one who ***“treads the winepress of the fury of God’s judgment.”*** (Revelation 19:15). It is safe to assume that the same is true in this instance. The fact that the winepress of God’s wrath is ***“outside the city”*** signals its role in the punishment of unbelievers. The city is the Jerusalem of God, where the elect dwell in His presence. By grace, they have been spared the fury of his judgment upon unbelief and sin. In the imagery of the prophets, the final judgment and the destruction of the wicked is frequently depicted as taking place outside of Jerusalem



*“The Judgement Harvest”
15th Century Bible Illumination*

so great that it overflows from the press out onto the ground. The deep purple color of the juice of the grape resembles that of blood. In the blessing of his son Judah, Jacob predicts: **“He will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.”** (Genesis 49:11; cf. also Deuteronomy 32:14). John uses this grisly image to describe the consequences of God’s judgment. A vast sea of blood pours forth from the winepress to cover the land **“rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.”** The image is that of battlefield carnage on an unimaginable scale. Apocryphal 1 Enoch paints a similarly grotesque picture of the devastating judgment of God:

in one of the valleys that surrounded the city. Joel tells of the great Day of the Lord in the Valley of Jehoshaphat below Mount Zion (Joel 3:12-16). Zechariah describes the Mount of Olives splitting in two to create a great valley in which the Lord will do battle with the nations (Zechariah 14:1-5). The Valley of Hinnon, south of Jerusalem, was the site of pagan worship and child sacrifice late in the monarchy (2 Kings 23:10; 2 Chronicles 28:3). Jeremiah foretold a time when the Valley of Hinnon would become known as **“the Valley of Slaughter”** because it would be filled to overflowing with the bodies of the dead when the judgment of God finally came (Jeremiah 7:30-34). In fact, **“Gehenna,”** the Hebrew word for Hell, literally means **“the Valley of Hinnon.”** Thus, the Revelator’s image of the bloody destruction of the wicked outside the city of Jerusalem would have come as no surprise to those familiar with the Old Testament.

John goes to great length to emphasize the magnitude of this judgment. The volume of grapes in the winepress is

“In those days the father will be beaten together with his sons, in one place; and brothers shall fall together with their friends, in death, until a stream shall flow with their blood. For a man shall not be able to withhold his hands from his sons nor his son’s sons in order to kill them. Nor is it possible for the sinner to withhold his hands from his honored brother. From dawn until the sun sets they shall slay each other. The horse shall walk through the blood of sinners up to his chest; and the chariot shall sink down up to its top.” (1 Enoch 100:1-3)

Unfortunately, such bloodbaths are far from unknown in human history. In his letter to the pope announcing the Christian conquest of Jerusalem at the end of the first Crusade, Archbishop Daimbert proudly reported: *“God delivered the city and His enemies to us...And if you desire to know what was done with the enemy we found there, know that in Solomon’s Portico and in his Temple our men rode in the blood of the Saracens up to the knees of their horses.”* (*The Dream and the Tomb*, Robert Payne, p. 103).

The extent of the bloody outpouring is defined as **“1,600 stadia.”** By modern measurement this is a distance of some 184 miles. Some would link the number to the approximate length of the land of Palestine but this view misunderstands the message of the text. Here, as elsewhere throughout the visions of Revelation, the number is not literal but symbolic. Four is the earth number. The earth number squared times ten squared equals 1,600 to signal that God’s righteous judgment engulfs all of mankind. Every unbeliever who has ever lived on this earth, from time’s beginning to its end, will be included in the gruesome conflagration. Only those who dwell by grace within God’s holy city will be spared. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *“Battle Hymn of the Republic”* appropriated the imagery of this vision for the historic circumstances of the American Civil War. Her words have become one of the most powerful and enduring of America’s anthems. They convey a stirring sense of the irresistible righteousness of God triumphant over every evil that transcends any national or international conflict:

*“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord,
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword,
His truth is marching on!
Glory, glory Hallelujah! Glory, glory Hallelujah!
Glory, glory Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.”*



“The Vision of the Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues” by Lucas Cranach

The Seventh Scene - The Seven Angels with the Seven Last Plagues - Revelation 15:1-8

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.” 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 forever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and His power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

“I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign:” - Verse 1 serves as a superscription, a summary of the entire chapter. The final scene in this vision of seven scenes is introduced in the customary manner - *“And I saw”* (Greek *“kai eidon”*). As in the previous visions of sevens, this final scene serves as the interlocking link which provides the transition to the vision which follows. Twice before in this series- in reference to the woman with the child and the dragon (Revelation 12:1,3) - John had described his vision as a *“sign”* (Greek - *“semion”*). The particular significance of this third and final sign is indicated by the adjectives *“great and marvelous.”* This combination is repeated in Revelation 15:3 as a description of the works of the Lord. These are the only two appearances of the phrase in the New Testament. This sign is not only *“great”* (Greek - *“megas”*), like



“The Vision of the Seven Bowls” - Luther Bible Woodcut

the sign of the woman with child in Revelation 12:1, it is also *“marvelous.”* The adjective *“marvelous”* (Greek - *“thaumastos”*) denotes the fearful awe of the creature before the almighty power of the Creator. The *“great and marvelous sign”* is the appearance of the seven angels with the seven plagues. The term *“plagues”* recalls the ten visitations of God’s judgment upon the land of Egypt in the days of Moses (cf. Exodus 7-11). This connection will be specified and amplified in the verses which follow. The angels and the plagues which they bear are *“seven”* in number signaling the perfection and completeness of the task they are to carry out. These outpourings of God’s judgment will carry us through to the end of time and the Final Judgment. The point is further emphasized by the designation of these plagues as *“the seven last plagues - last because with them God’s wrath is completed.”* These seven plagues represent the righteous judgment of the holy God upon sinful mankind throughout the New Testament era culminating - that is, reaching its goal or completion - in the Last Judgment. *“God’s wrath”* (*ho thymos tou theou*) is not *“the freakish fury of an angered deity but is a designation of the impassioned but deliberate majesty of God the Judge.”* (Franzmann, p. 104)

“And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire...” - Having introduced the seven angels which are the agents of God’s judgment in history, poised and prepared to pour out the devastation of His fury, John pauses briefly to remind his readers of the victory celebration that is already under way before God’s throne in heaven. The Revelator observes *“what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire.”* In Revelation 4:6, John had spoken of *“what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal”* before the throne of God. In the imagery of the Old Testament and Revelation, the surging chaos of the sea is a symbol of evil, sinful mankind locked in endless violence and conflict. The crystal sea depicts the chaotic power of sin calmed and contained by the sovereign power of God. Fire in the Old Testament and Revelation is the symbol of God’s judgement, destroying and purifying. In Daniel 7:10 the prophet uses the image of *“a river of fire”* flowing forth from God’s heavenly throne to symbolize divine judgment upon the beast (cf. Daniel 7:10-12). John combines these two powerful images. The crystal sea is now ablaze with fire, the fire of God’s judgment impending over sinful mankind.

“Standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name.” - The Children of Israel had celebrated God’s victorious destruction of the army of pharaoh on the shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 15). John continues the *“Exodus atmosphere”* (Beale, p. 789) of the scene



“Miriam Leads the Children of Israel in Celebration at the Red Sea” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

as the celebration of the victorious saints of God is linked to the fiery crystal sea. The NIV translates the Greek preposition “*epi*” as “*beside.*” While that translation is possible, in this context, given the text’s emphasis on the sea’s solid surface, the word more likely means “*on*” or “*upon*” (Cf. Revelation 11:11; 12:18; 14:1). The fact that the saints are standing upon the sea itself stresses the reality of the saints involvement in the struggle against the dragon and all who serve him. The sea is “*the battlefield on which the warfare between the church and the beasts of Satan is taking place.*” (Brighton, p. 400) The nature of their victory is defined in terms of Revelation 13 and the beasts from the sea and the land. The threefold repetition - “*over the beast and his image and over the number of his name*” - serves to remind



“Sing Hosanna!” by Simeon Solomon

the reader of the relentless nature of the struggle and of the constant pressure to conform and to yield which the faithful are called upon to resist. The saints in heaven are presented as warriors who have victoriously come forth from the battle to celebrate the magnificent triumph that has been won. While the dragon and his minions successfully maintain the illusion of victory and power on earth, their downfall and defeat is already being celebrated in heaven. The Israelites' victory celebration at the Red Sea was accompanied by musical instruments. So also John's vision of the heavenly victory celebration includes musical instruments. Once again, the harp (Greek - "Kitharas") is the instrument of choice for their songs of praise and rejoicing (cf. Revelation 5:8; 14:2). To make

the Exodus connection unmistakable John entitles the victory anthem - ***“the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.”*** This is not two songs, but one united anthem. The Greek conjunction “*kai*” is epexegetical, adding a second phrase which explains or defines the first. The English translation “*that is*” or “*even*” would reflect this use of the conjunction. The rabbis of Israel called Moses the first Deliverer and the Messiah the Last Deliverer. That which God accomplished through His servant Moses was a preview of the deliverance of humanity from its bondage to sin, death, and the power of the devil. Moses was, in that sense, a precursor of the Savior, the Lamb of God, Who was to come. The writer to the Hebrews draws the contrast between the servant and the Son in this way: ***“Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. But Christ is faithful as a Son over God's house.”*** (Hebrews 3:5-6) The combination of Moses and the Lamb as the authors of this song of praise in response

to the mighty acts of God in delivering His people joins the church of the Old Testament and the New in one magnificent chorus of praise and thanksgiving. Many years earlier, the prophet Hosea had foretold that when the Messiah would finally come the church: ***“Will sing as in the days of her youth, as in the day she came up out of Egypt.”*** (Hosea 2:15). Now that prophecy is fulfilled.

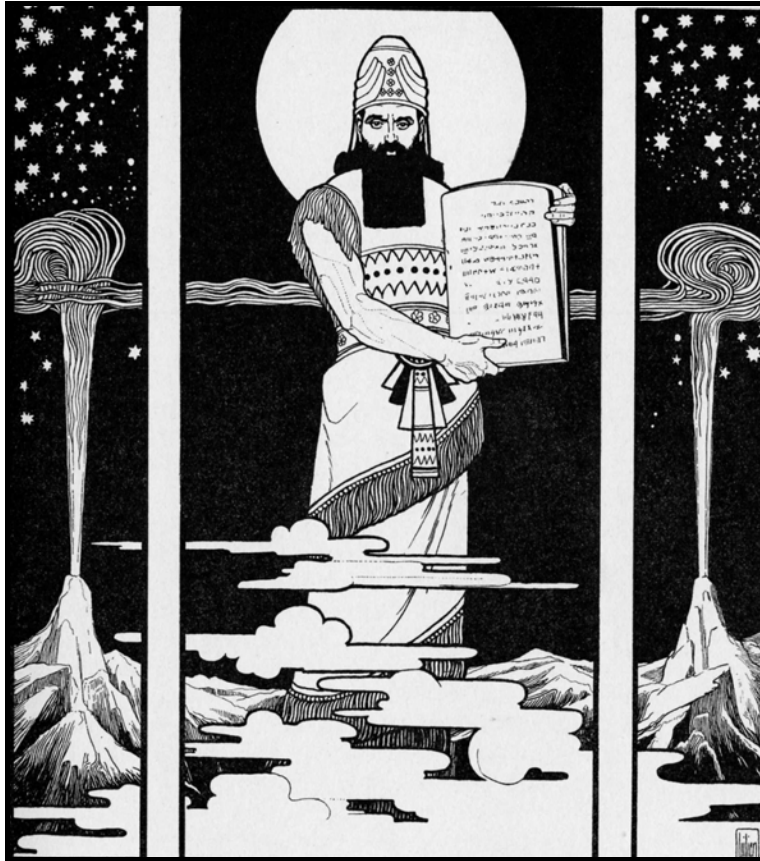
“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty...” - The content of the song is not drawn from Exodus 15 or any other particular passage but from texts throughout the Old Testament which extol the gracious power and majesty of God. Like ancient song of Moses on the shores of the Red Sea (Exodus 15) and the song of the host arrayed in white before God’s heavenly throne - those cleansed in the blood of the Lamb - this is a celebration of victory. ***“In its form the song is a perfect example of beauty in variety of expression and balance, following the pattern of the Psalms.”*** (Poellet, p. 200)

The first part of the song extols the marvelous works and ways of God - ***“Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of all ages.”*** The language of the opening phrase is reminiscent of Psalm 111 - ***“Great are the works of the Lord; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Glorious and majestic are His deeds, and His righteousness endures forever.”*** (Psalm 11:2-3) The righteous judgment of God upon sinful mankind elicits the wonder and adoration of His people. The formal



“Moses” by J. James Tissot

title of God in this phrase - **“Lord God Almighty”** (Greek - *“kyrie ho theos ho pantokrator”*) is the Greek equivalent of the Old Testament Hebrew title *“Yahweh Sabaoth”* - *“Lord God of Hosts.”* The title emphasizes the infinite sovereign power and authority of God. The ways of God Almighty are **“just and true.”** (Greek - *“dikaiai kai alethinai”*). It also occurs in Revelation 4:8 and 11:17. The phrase is drawn from the second song of Moses in Deuteronomy 32:4, emphasizing the



“Moses” by E.M. Lilien

absolute justice and complete accuracy and truthfulness of the judgments of God. There is a textual variation in the end of Verse 3. The NIV chooses the phrase **“King of all Ages”** (Greek - *“ho basileus ton aionon”*). However, our best and most reliable manuscripts for the Book of Revelation render the phrase **“King of all Nations”** (Greek - *“ho basileus ton ethnon”*). The latter reading also seems to best fit the context in its stress of the sovereign power of God.

The only appropriate and proper response of the creature to these attributes of the Creator God is humble awe and adoration- **“Who will not**

fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your Name?” The negative rhetorical question obviously implies a negative answer. There is no one who can contemplate the majesty and the justice of God with reverence and praise. This response is in marked contrast to the blatant blasphemy of the dragon and his beasts who rail against God and all His works and who advance themselves as rivals and replacements for Him. The word **“fear”** (Greek - *“phobethe”*) is used in a twofold sense in Scripture. Dr.

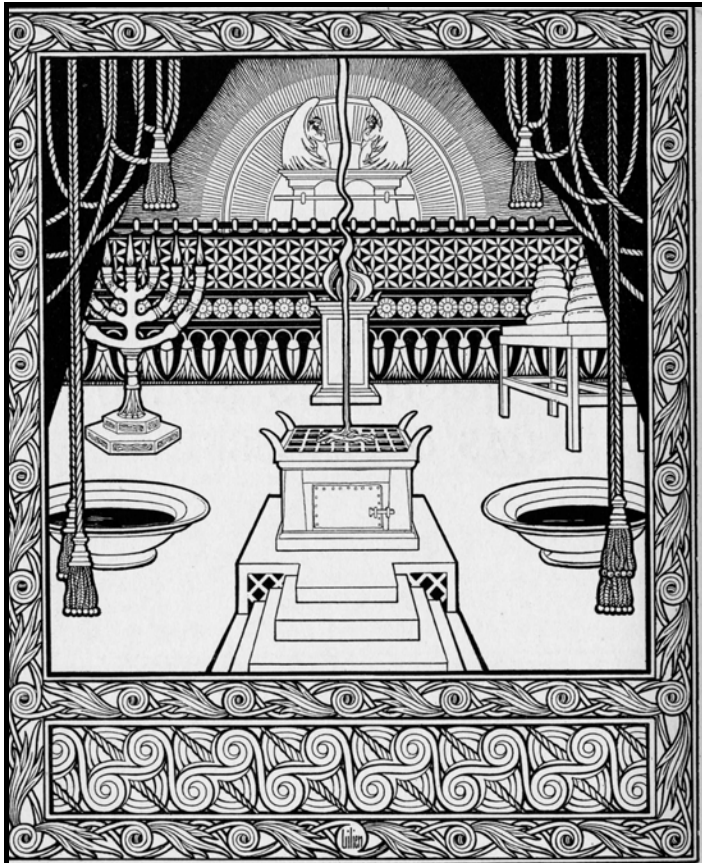


"The Holy Trinity" by Albrecht Dürer

Becker explains the application of the term to both unbelievers and believers:

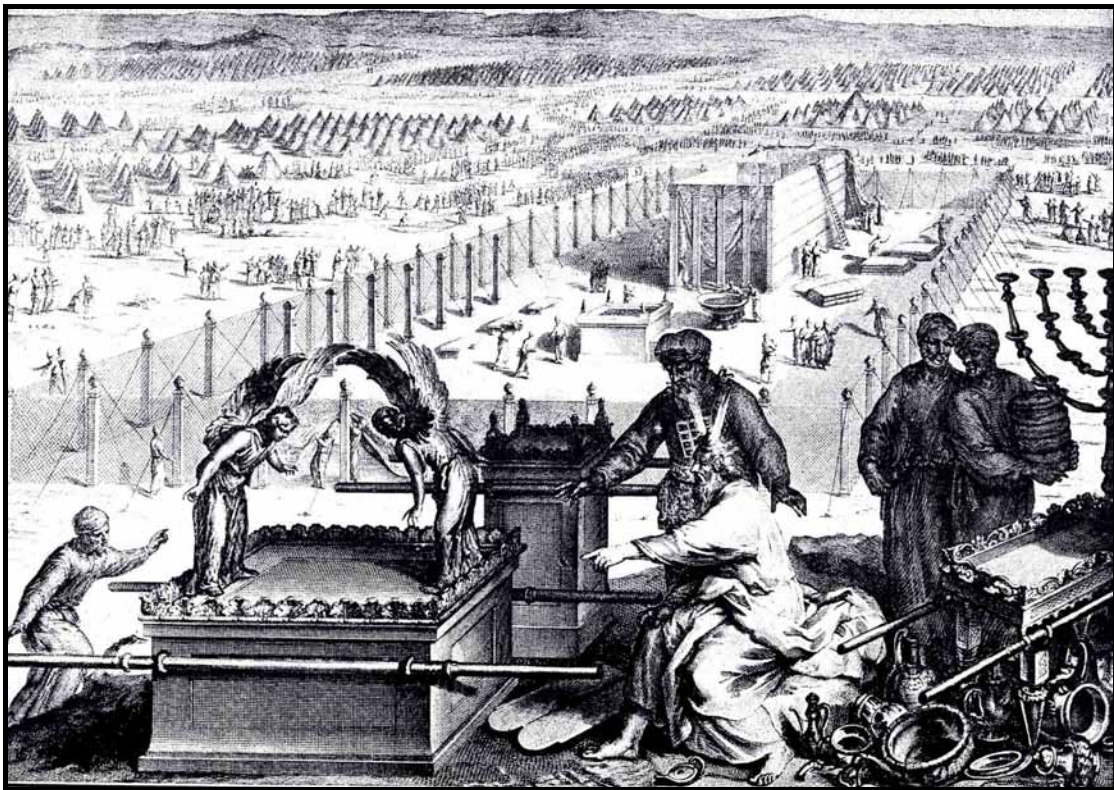
“The first and basic meaning of “phobeomai” is to be frightened or terrified. This will be true of the enemies of God when they come to know from experience what these victorious saints in glory know. But the word also means to reverence or to respect, In that sense the question also applies to the believing children of God. They have already overcome the terrors of conscience by faith in the forgiveness of sins. Thus all men will finally fear God, either with the fear of a terrified conscience or with the awe and respect of a believing heart.” (Becker, pp. 238-239)

The universal fear of God will result in the universal magnifying of His Name. The name of God is not merely a particular title or designation for God but the total revelation of Who He is. *“It includes everything we know of Him from the Bible - His essence, His attributes, His works, His commandments, and His promises. The Name of God is God Himself as He has revealed Himself to us...God’s name is God’s Word.”* (Poellet, p. 201)



*“The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies”
by E.M. Lilien*

“For You alone are holy!” - This clause, introduced by the Greek preposition *“hoti”* (English - *“because”*) explains the basis for mankind’s fear of God. The text does not use the typical New Testament term for the holiness of God *“hagios”*. Instead, the Greek word in this phrase is *“hosios”* which emphasizes not merely moral purity or sinlessness but the uniqueness and the majesty of God as the One absolutely set apart from that which He has created - *“the sum of divine attributes distinguishing God from His creation.”* (Beale, p. 796). The qualifier **“alone”** (Greek - *“monos”*) reinforces this emphasis. God is to be feared by all because He is the one and only



“The Erection of the Tabernacle” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

God. There is none other like Him nor could there be. He is by definition “*sui generis*” - “*one of a kind.*” The same emphasis on the uniqueness of the one true God can be seen in Jeremiah 10 from which the wording of this segment is drawn. Jeremiah compares the one true God with the idols of the nations which are silent and helpless “*like a scarecrow in a melon patch.*” (Jeremiah 10:5). The prophet concludes: “*Do not fear them; they can do no harm, nor can they do any good. No one is like You, O Lord; You are great and Your Name is mighty in power. Who should not revere You, O King of the Nations? This is Your due...there is no one like You.*” (Jeremiah 10:5-7). The only other instance in the New Testament where this adjective is ascribed to God is in Revelation 16:5.

“All nations will come and worship before You for Your righteous acts have been revealed.” - The effect of the incomparable holiness of the one God is universal acknowledgment and worship from the nations. The “*righteous acts*” of God in this phrase are His righteous pronouncements of judgment, the eternal verdicts which He will issue upon humanity. On the great day of judgment all mankind shall stand before the throne as the perfect righteousness of God is demonstrated and declared both in the salvation of the redeemed, who have received by grace the perfect

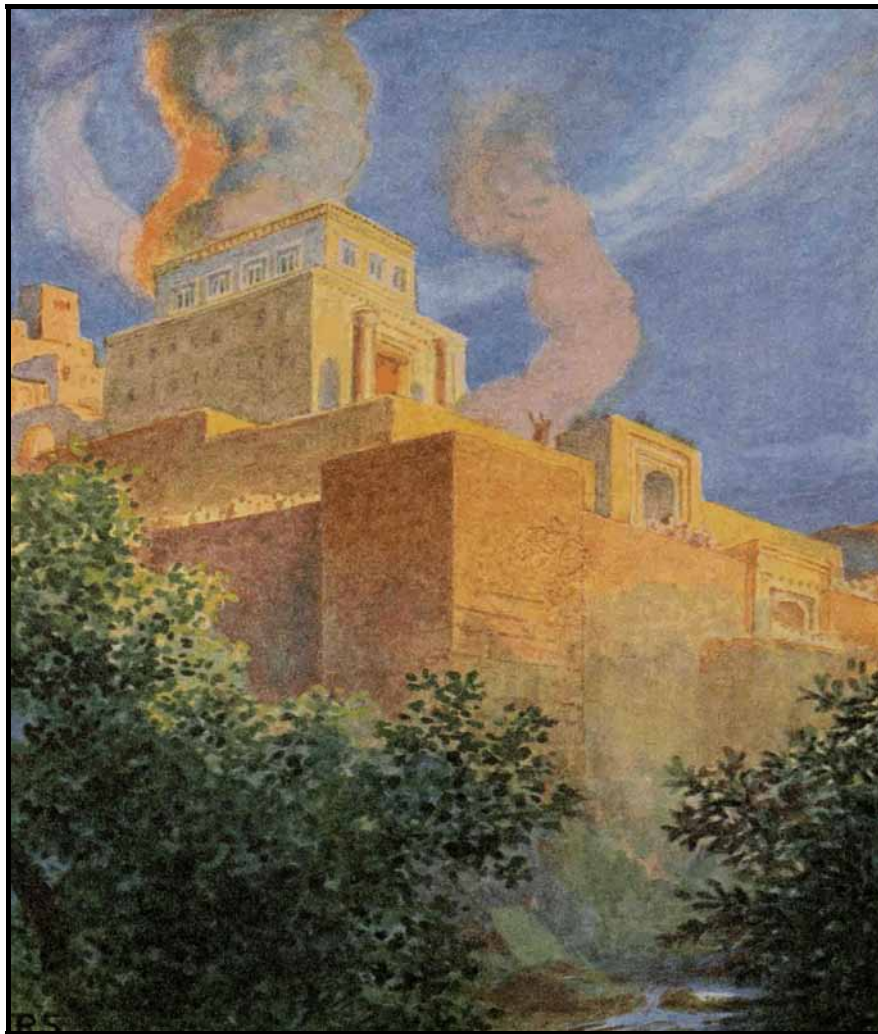
righteousness of Christ, and the condemnation of the damned. No one shall be able to challenge or deny the justice or the fairness of all of God's acts and verdicts. This is indeed the purpose of Judgment Day - the public irrefutable demonstration of God's perfect justice and righteousness. It is significant to note that the victorious saints do not celebrate their own victory, but instead they rejoice in the ultimate vindication of the justice and righteousness of God.

“After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is the tabernacle of Testimony, was opened.” - The focus now returns to the seven angels bearing the seven bowls of God's wrath. The NIV's translation - ***“the temple, that is the tabernacle of Testimony”*** is somewhat misleading with its dual reference to temple and tabernacle. The Greek text literally reads *“ho naos tes skenes”* - *“the sanctuary which is the tabernacle.”* The reference is to the portable worship center designed by God for the



“The Serephim Upon the Ark” by E.M. Lilien

Children of Israel during the 40 years of wandering in the wilderness. The tent was called ***“the tabernacle of Testimony”*** because of the presence of the Ten Commandments - called ***“the two tablets of the Testimony”*** (Exodus 32:15; 40:20-21) - within the Ark of the Covenant inside the Holy of Holies. The designation is common in the Old Testament (cf. Numbers 17:4,7-8;18:2; 2 Chronicles 24:6). The tabernacle was also called ***“the Tent of Meeting”*** because there God would meet with the people and their leaders (cf. Exodus 29:42-46). In this instance, the tabernacle is



“The Temple of Solomon With the Shekinah” by Rudolf Schäfer

in heaven where God dwells in the midst of His saints in the same way that He once dwelt in the midst of the camp of Israel. The language is nearly identical to that of Revelation 11:19 - ***“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened and within His temple was seen the ark of His covenant.”*** The opening of the temple and the tabernacle in these texts emphasize the fact that the judgments proclaimed come from God Himself - *“In this context it emphasizes that the final plagues come from the presence of God and are the expression of His unalterable opposition to sin.”* (Mounce, p. 289). The angels come forth from the heart of the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies. The judgment which they bear is an affirmation and an expression of the perfect holiness of God.

“Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues.” - These seven

angelic messengers of God's judgment and the plagues which they bear were first introduced in Revelation 15:1. The specific description of the outpouring of their bowls of wrath will follow in chapter 16. The image of "*seven plagues*" is reminiscent of Leviticus where God repeatedly threatens to punish His faithless people with "*seven plagues*" for their idolatrous and sinful ways (cf. Leviticus 26:18,21,24,28). As throughout Revelation, the number is figurative, not literal. It



"Aaron and Miriam Within the Sanctuary" by E.M. Lilien

signifies the fact that God's judgment will be visited upon mankind perfectly and completely. The angels are garbed in the sacred vestments of the priesthood - "*They were dressed in clean shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests.*" (Cf. Exodus 28:4,39) The description is very similar to that of the Son of Man in

Revelation 1:13 which in turn was drawn from the vision of the prophet Daniel (cf. Daniel 10:5). The purity of their raiment is indicative of the mission of purification upon which they have been dispatched.

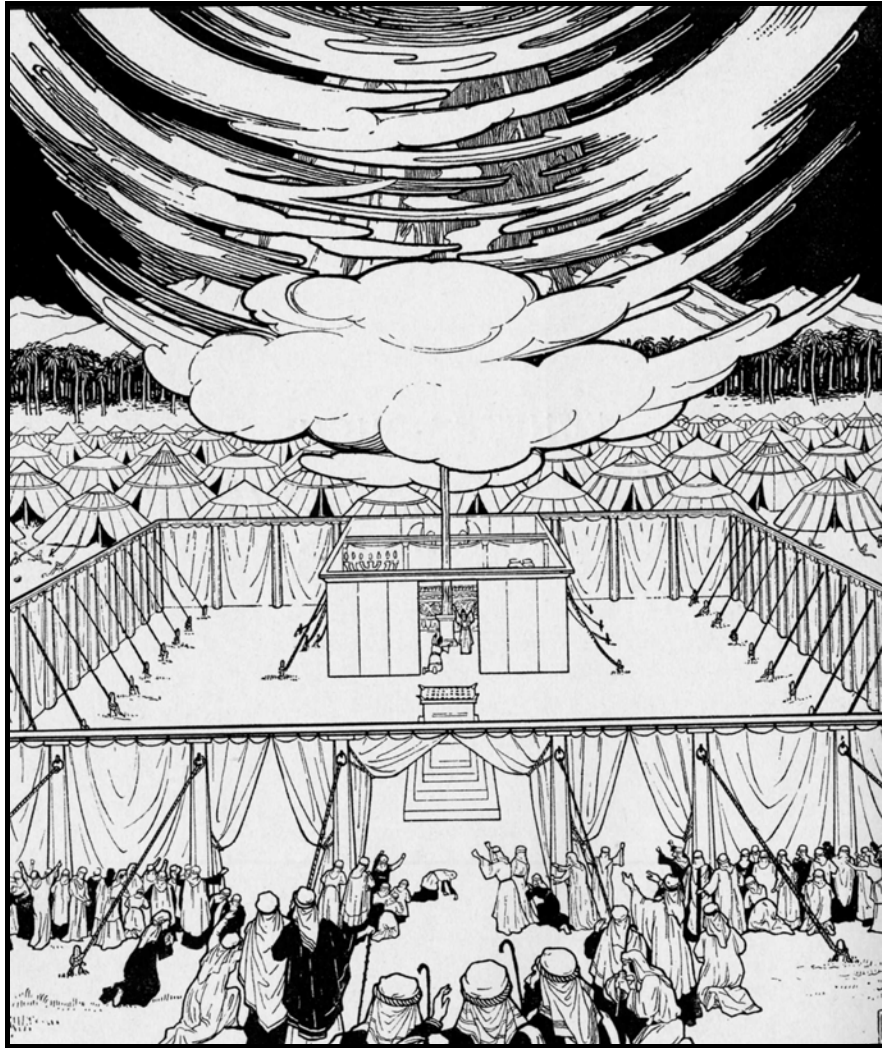
“Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.” Like those who came before them (cf. Revelation 6:6-14; 8:2) the seven angels are commissioned and empowered from the throne of God. The text does not indicate which of the four living creatures acts as the representative of God in this instance. The living creature presents the angels with ***“seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God.”*** The image of the wrath of God as liquid in a bowl or cup is familiar in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 51, the prophet promises that the bitter dregs of the bowl of God’s wrath which has been poured out upon His people will finally be poured out upon the enemies of God:



***“The Seven Angels Receive the Seven Bowls”
15th Century Bible Illumination***

“Rise up, O Jerusalem, you who have drunk from the hand of the Lord the cup of His wrath, who have drained to its dregs the goblet that makes men stagger...See, I have taken out of your hand the cup that made you stagger; from that cup, the goblet of My wrath you will never drink again.” (Isaiah 51:17,22)

The Greek noun used in this passage, *“phialas,”* is the equivalent of the Hebrew word used in Isaiah 51. It refers to a cultic utensil used in the temple to pour out



“The Glory Cloud Resting Over the Tabernacle” by E.M. Lilien

libation offerings, typically wine. St. Paul alludes to this practice in 2 Timothy 4:6 - ***“For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.”*** At times, the imagery of the Old Testament depicted the wrath of God like liquid slowly, gradually rising in the bowl until it finally poured out over the rim (cf. Genesis 15:16). In this instance, the Greek text emphasizes that the bowls of God’s wrath are filled to the brim, ready to overflow (Greek - *“gemousas”*). The time of judgment has come.

The author of that judgment is ***“God, Who lives forever and ever.”*** The awesome title sets the one true God apart from all false gods and idols (i.e. the image of the beast). The eternity of God is cause for great joy on the part of the saved (Psalm

16:11; 23:6) but for the damned God's eternity means endless torment in hell (Mark 9:42-48). As the writer to the Hebrews notes: ***“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”*** (Hebrews 10:31)

“And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power...

- The concluding statements of Chapter 15 focus on the glorious majesty of the holy God and emphasize again that the seven angels are merely the dispensers of God's righteous wrath. Smoke is a consistent indicator of the glorious presence of God in the Old Testament. Bengel, the classic Lutheran commentator, calls it *“tegmen majestatis divinae”* (Latin - *“the covering of divine majesty.”*) When the Lord descended upon the heights of Sinai - ***“Mount Sinai was covered with smoke,***

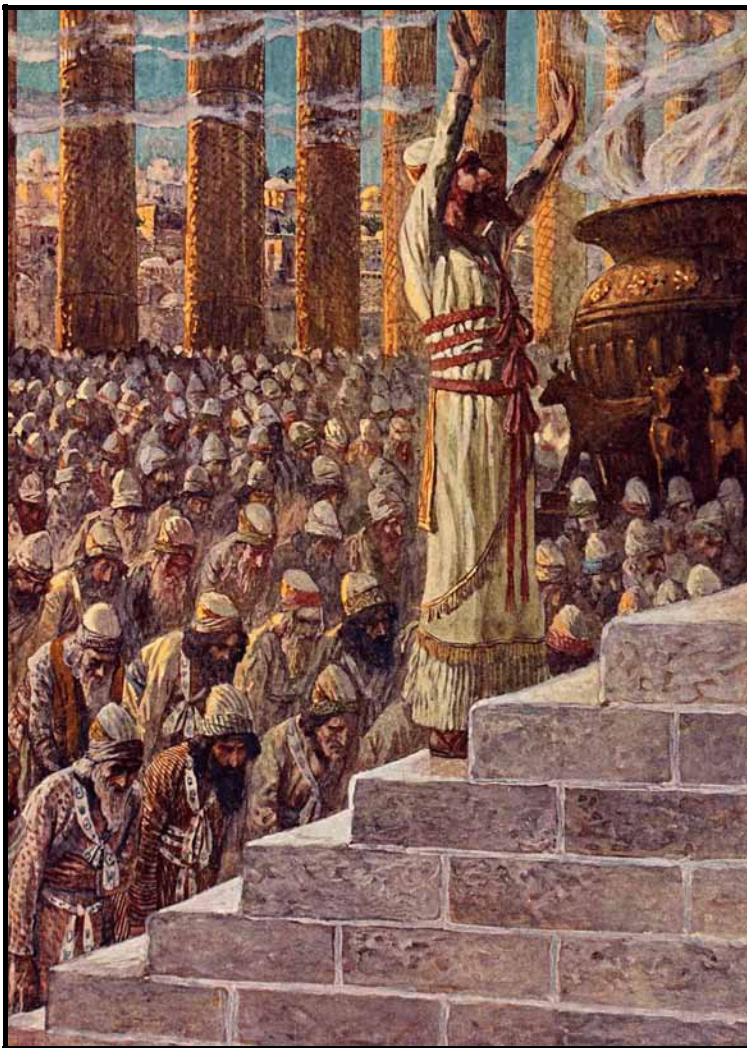


“The Pillar of Fire Upon the Ark Leading the Children of Israel”
by William West

because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed upon on it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.” (Exodus 19:18-19) Dr. Swete suggests that the smoke in Old Testament theophanies signifies the imminence of divine judgment:

“The terrors of the imminent judgment are still further emphasized by the smoke which is seen to fill the sanctuary...Smoke is an O.T. symbol of the divine presence when the awful majesty of God is to be insisted upon.” (Swete, p. 199)

The judgment connotation here is reinforced by directly linking the smoke which fills the heavenly sanctuary with *“the glory of God”* and *His power.”* The specific wording of this phrase appears to be drawn from Isaiah 6: *“I saw the Lord, seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of His robe filled the temple...At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.”* (Isaiah 6:1,4)



“The Dedication of Solomon’s Temple” by J. James Tissot

“And no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.” - In the original tabernacle Moses was not permitted to enter the sanctuary while the *“shekinah,”* the cloud of God’s glory had settled upon it (cf. Exodus 40:34-38). In the temple of Solomon the same prohibition applied to the priests: *“When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the Lord. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled His temple.”* (1 Kings 8:10-11) The closing of the temple represents the irrevocable judgment of God. The tabernacle was the place of mercy and prayer. Now access to those resources is cut off. The time of grace is over. The time of judgment is at hand.



“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls” - Hand Tinted Luther Bible Woodcut

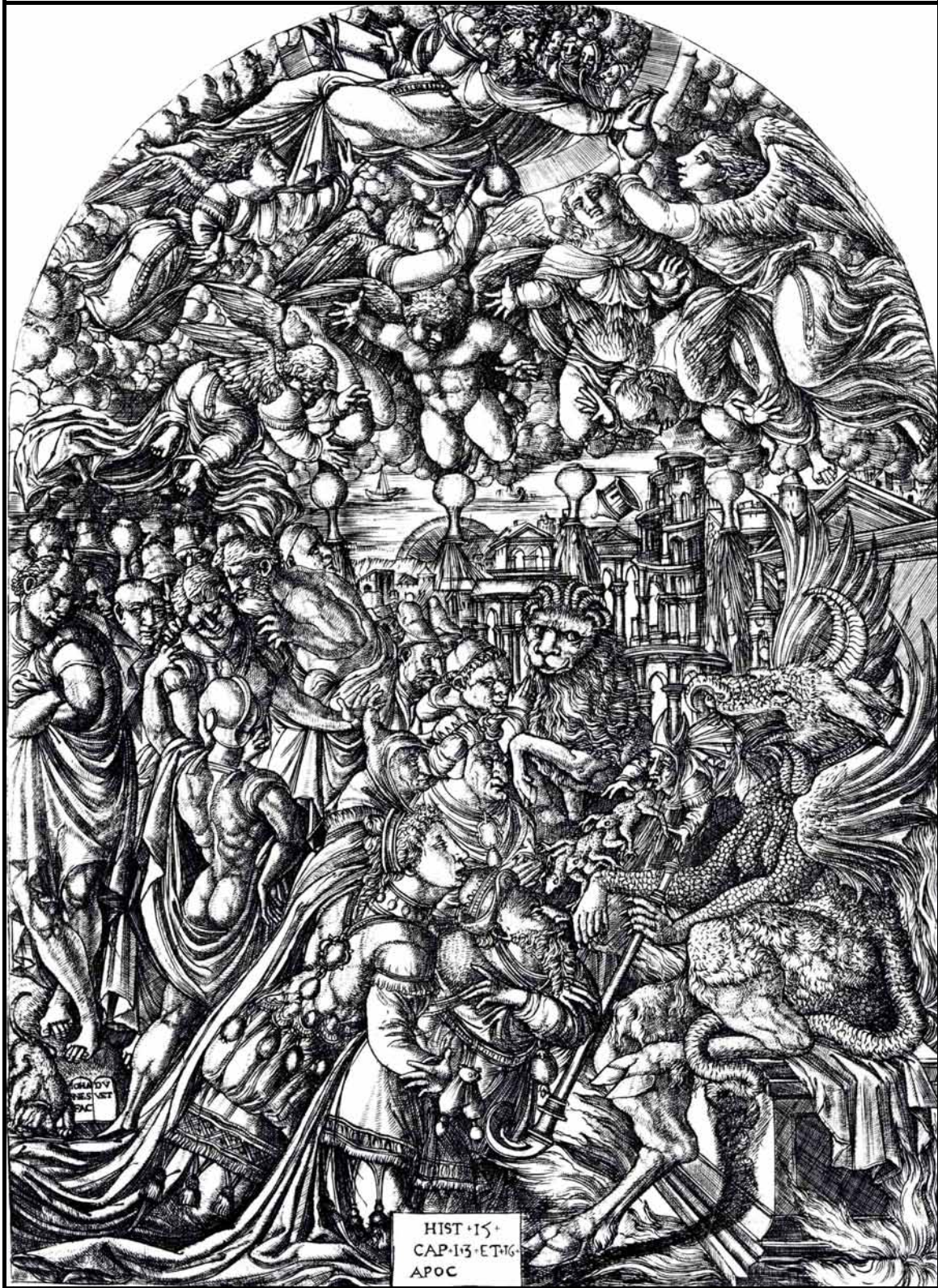
The Fifth Vision - The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls

Revelation 16:1-21

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath upon the earth.” The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. 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. 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 Almighty, true and just are Your judgments!” 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. 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. 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 the Lord Almighty. "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. 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 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.

"Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath upon the earth." - The voice of command sounds forth, not from the "temple" (NIV) but from the sanctuary of the tabernacle (cf. Revelation 15:5 - "After this, I looked, and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony was opened."). Although the speaker is not specifically identified, since no one could enter the sanctuary because of the presence of God's glory (Revelation 15:8 - "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.") it can be safely assumed that the voice is that of God Himself. The wording of the phrase may be an allusion to the judgment proclamation of Isaiah 66:6 - "Hear that uproar from the city, hear the voice from the temple! It is the voice of the Lord, repaying His enemies all they



“The Seven angels and the Outpouring of the Seven Bowls” by Jean Duvet



“The First Plague - Water to Blood” by E. Bernard

deserve.” The sound that is heard is *“a loud voice”* (Greek - *“phone megale”* - literally a great voice). The phrase occurs twenty times in Revelation to describe a voice that speaks with power and authority. The sound of this voice causes things to happen. The command is addressed to the seven angels from the preceding chapter. They are instructed to immediately commence their work of judgment - *“Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath upon the earth.”* The perfect *“seven”* serves to emphasize the fact that God’s judgment will be carried out completely without omission or exception. The image of the wrath of God poured out from the libation bowl of the sanctuary is drawn from the Old Testament. In Jeremiah 10:25, the prophet prays that God would vindicate His righteousness and holiness by the destruction of His enemies: *“Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge You, on the peoples who do not call on Your Name.”* Earlier in Jeremiah, God had warned: *“My anger and My wrath will be poured out on this place, on man and beast, on the trees of the field and on the fruit of the ground, and it will burn and not be quenched.”* (Jeremiah 7:20; cf. also Lamentations 2:4; 4:11; Ezekiel 22:21-22; 30:15-16; Zephaniah 3:8). The language of Psalm 79, which combines the image of God’s wrath poured out upon that nations and the perfect number seven, closely parallels the imagery of the seven bowls: *“Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge You, on the kingdoms that do not call on Your Name...Pay back into the laps of our neighbors seven times the reproach they have hurled at You, O Lord.”* (Psalm 79:6,12).

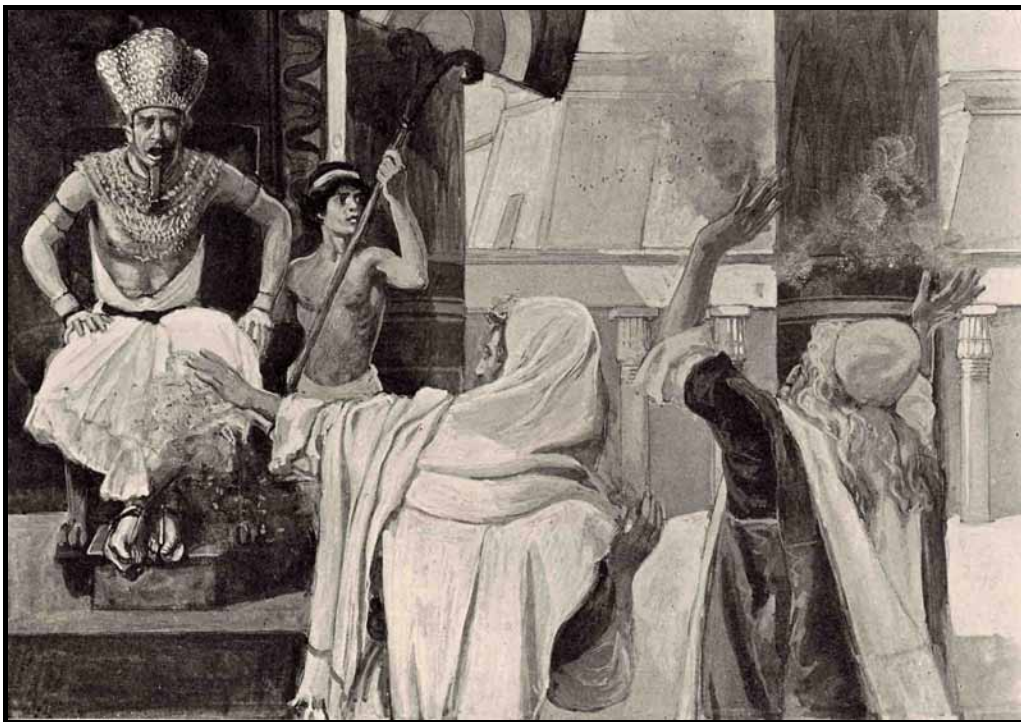
“The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.” - The sequence and the substance of the plagues inflicted by the seven bowls closely parallels that of the seven trumpets (Revelation 8:6-9:20; 11:15-19). Both the bowls and the trumpets are clearly derived from the ten plagues which God inflicted upon Egypt in the days of Moses (cf. Exodus 7:14 - 11:10). A definite progression and intensification can be observed between the plagues of the trumpets and the plagues of the bowls. The trumpet plagues were partial in their impact (i.e. - the killing of one fourth of mankind (6:8), the burning of a third of the earth and the trees, and the destruction of a third of the sea, the sea creatures, and the ships (8:7-8). The bowl plagues are universal without restriction or limitation of any kind. The trumpet plagues are largely indirect, that is, they impact mankind by striking his environment. The bowl plagues afflict and destroy man himself from the outset. These differences are indicative of the general progression within the Book of Revelation. Each of the seven visions, while covering largely the same ground, focuses more clearly on the last judgment and the eternity which will ensue. That same progression is indicated by the language used to describe the bowl plagues. The introduction to the vision of the seven bowls in Chapter 15 had emphasized that these are ***“the seven last plagues”*** (Revelation 15:1), thus linking the plagues to the end of time and the last judgment. The progression the plagues present, gradually



“The Second Plague - Frogs” by G. Freemann

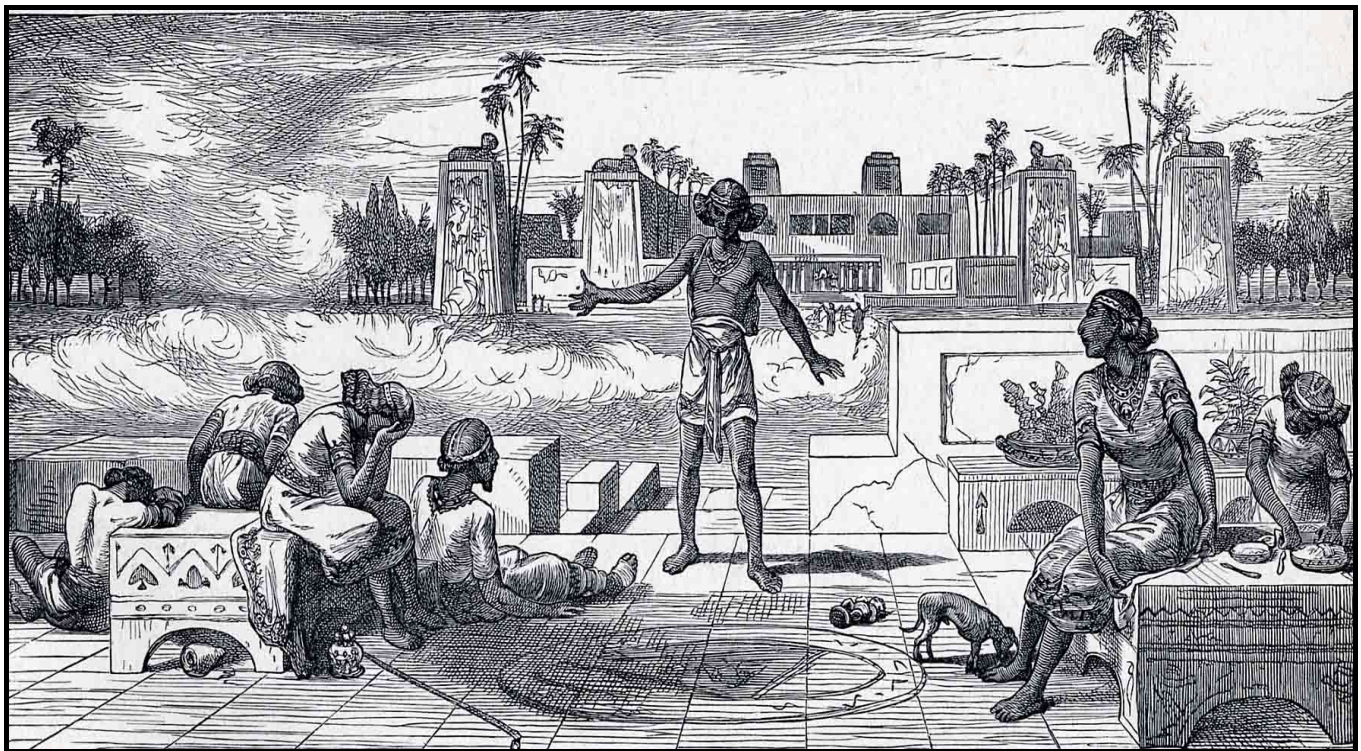
growing more severe, serves to remind us that God's judgments throughout time will intensify and culminate in the end of time and the final judgment.

The bowl of the first angel is poured out *“on the land.”* The result of this judgment is that *“ugly and painful sores broke out on those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”* The plague obviously parallels the sixth of the plagues of Egypt, the plague of boils which God inflicted throughout that unfortunate land (Exodus 9:8-12). It falls upon all of unbelieving mankind, described in the imagery of Revelation 13 as has been the case throughout this segment - *“all those who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.”* The horror of this affliction is described in graphic detail in the Old Testament book of Job: *“So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes.”* (Job 2:7-8). The imagery does not describe a particular ailment but instead represents the totality of all the physical pain and suffering which sinful men will be compelled to endure throughout the latter days.



“The Plague of Boils” by J. James Tissot

All of the awful diseases, all of the physical pain and suffering leading up to and including physical death, all of the disfigurement and distortion of God's originally perfect design for immortal humanity which sin brought crashing down upon Adam's descendants, is represented in this gruesome image. It is, of course, true that believers must also endure all of these things here in time. But the physical suffering of those who are in Christ is transformed by the faith recognition *"that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him"* and *"that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."* (Romans 8:28,18). That trust puts our physical suffering in an entirely different category. To be called upon to endure these horrors without the presence and promise of Christ is a tragedy which for the believer is blessedly unimaginable.



"The Plague of Boils" - 19th Century Bible Illustration

"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." - The first of Egypt's plagues saw the life giving water of the sacred Nile turned to blood (Exodus 7:14-24; cf. also the second trumpet - Revelation 8:8-9). This is not merely a transformation of color - the sea doesn't merely turn blood red. The water is changed into *"blood like that of a dead man"* - that is, black, coagulated and rotting with the cloying stench of death



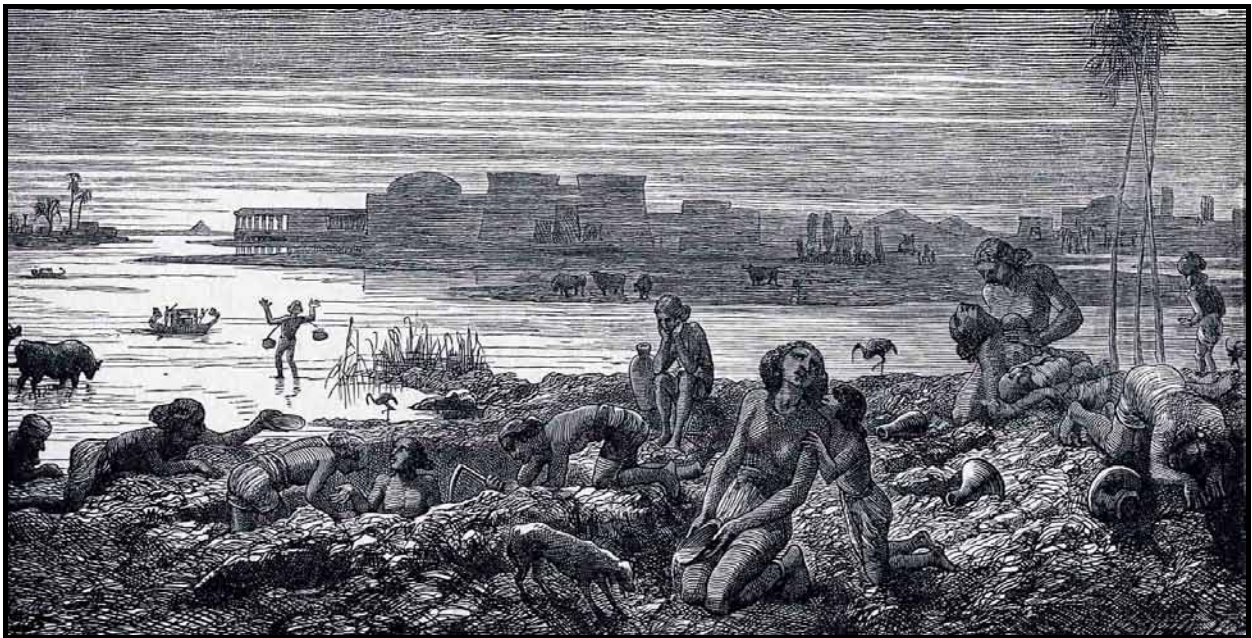
“The Water Carriers of Egypt” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

itself. In Egypt the transformation of the Nile to blood resulted in death of all the fish and a stench that permeated the entire country (Exodus 7:21). So also in John’s imagery *“every living thing died.”* The term *“sea”* (Greek - *“thalassa”*) occurs 24 times in Revelation. In the majority of those instances it carries the symbolic connotation of the Old Testament in which the waves of the sea represent the seething chaos of sinful humanity. That would also appear to be the case in this instance. The transformation of the waters of the sea into the stinking blood of a corpse signifies the fatal dominion of death over fallen mankind.

“The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and the 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.” - The third angel pours out his judgment bowl upon the world’s fresh water sources. This corresponds to the third trumpet plague in which the burning star turned the world’s water bitter (Revelation 8:10-11). In the first Exodus plague the blood pollution of the Nile spread to all the springs, wells, and water sources of Egypt despite the frantic efforts of the Egyptians to set aside some potable water (Exodus 7:19; cf also Psalm 78:44). The nature of the plague here is clearly defined by the angel’s comment which follows. Those who *“shed the blood”* of *“saints and prophets”* are to be punished

in kind - ***“You have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”*** Those who have dealt in death must now face the grim reality of death themselves (cf. Genesis 9:5-6). The sinful kingdom of this world is the realm of death. As the latter days draw to their inevitable conclusion, death’s viselike grip upon the throats of her subjects will grow ever tighter. Violence and destruction, devastation and death will increase and intensify until finally there is no life left at all. This is only fair. The justice of God in bringing death to those who have dealt in death is undeniable. As the *“Wisdom of Solomon”* declares: *“By what things a man sinneth, by these he is punished.”* Through His prophet Isaiah, God declares that those who have sought to devour Israel will be compelled ***“to eat their own flesh; they will be drunk on their own blood as with wine.”*** (Isaiah 49:26) The punishment perfectly fits the crime (*“lex talionis”*).



“The Water to Blood” - 19th Century Bible Illustration

“The Lord of all history, in His even handed justice, has exacted from those who have shed the blood of saints and prophets, the very blood of those who have revered and proclaimed the sanctity of the life given by the Creator. They would have blood. God’s justice commends the ingredients of their poisoned chalice to their own lips. He gives the bloodthirsty their due; they shall have blood to drink.” (Franzmann, p. 108)

The angel who responds to God’s judgment is called ***“the angel in charge of the waters.”*** The language reflects the typical Hebrew insight that all of the elements of



“The Seven Angels with the Seven Bowls” - 10th Century Spanish Apocalypse

the natural world are controlled and directed by God’s angels in the supernatural world. Elsewhere in Revelation we have heard of the angels in charge of the four winds (7:1) and of an angel who held power over fire (14:18). These angels are the agents of the divine Creator who sustains and maintains all that which He has made. In this instance the affirmation of God’s justice comes from the angel responsible for the element afflicted by the judgment plague.

The angel’s affirmation of the righteousness and justice of God’s judgment is immediately seconded by a response from *“the altar.”* Earlier, in Revelation 6:9, the souls of the martyrs were depicted beneath the heavenly altar. In Revelation 8:3-5 the prayers of the saints were signified by the incense arising at the altar. Now, the altar itself, becomes the personification of the prayerful desire of God’s people for the vindication of His righteousness. The altar testifies to the perfect appropriateness of God’s judgment upon the wicked. It could not be otherwise for the Judge is *“the Holy One,” “Lord God Almighty,”* whose divine judgments are always *“true and just.”*

“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.” - In Revelation 7:16-17 the elder had described the blessedness of the redeemed in heaven with these beautiful images from the world of nature: ***“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.”*** The serenity and comfort of that image is now reversed as the fourth angel pours out his bowl of divine judgment ***“and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire.”*** Protection from the burning rays of the sun had served as an effective metaphor of God’s providential care of His people in the harsh desert climate of Old Testament Israel. The psalmist had previously assured Israel: ***“The Lord watches over you - the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun shall not harm you by day nor the moon by night.”*** (Psalm 121:5-6). Later in days of dark despair, God’s prophet Isaiah had promised His exiled people that when the Messiah finally came - ***“They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat upon them.”*** (Isaiah 49:10; cf. also Psalm 89:11; Malachi 4:2) John dramatically reversed this familiar picture. In the imagery of the apostle’s vision, the beneficent sun has mutated into an agent of judgement which would scorch people with fire and cause



“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls” by Matthias Merian

them to be *“seared with the intense heat.”* C.H. Little aptly described the meaning and significance of the scene as he noted: *“This presents to us a picture of all that makes life comfortable turned into intolerable burning and poured out unceasingly upon the enemies of God and the Lamb.”* (Little, p. 163) The imagery does not merely apply to the natural world, but to everything in life which was intended to bring man joy and satisfaction. All is perverted and destroyed by sin and life apart from God is reduced to misery and torment.



*“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls”
15th Century Bible Illumination*

The response of sinful mankind is not repentance, but further defiance and blasphemy. The intensity of the plague is emphasized in the Greek text by repetition - literally, *“they were burned, the human beings, with a great burning.”* Like Pharaoh of old, their hearts are hardened, and *“they cursed the name of God who had control over these plagues but they refused to repent and glorify Him.”* Their obstinate blasphemy reflects that of the false god of this world to whom they have foolishly given their allegiance. *“They have wholly taken on the character of the false god they serve.”* (Mounce, p. 297) Note well the progression evidenced here. Man’s reaction to God’s judgment is intensifying even as the plagues themselves rise toward the final judgment crescendo. We have progressed, if one can rightly call such movement progression, from mere desperation (Revelation 6:15-17),

to impenitence (Revelation 9:20-21) on to the same defiant blasphemy which has characterized the beast himself (Revelation 13:5-6).

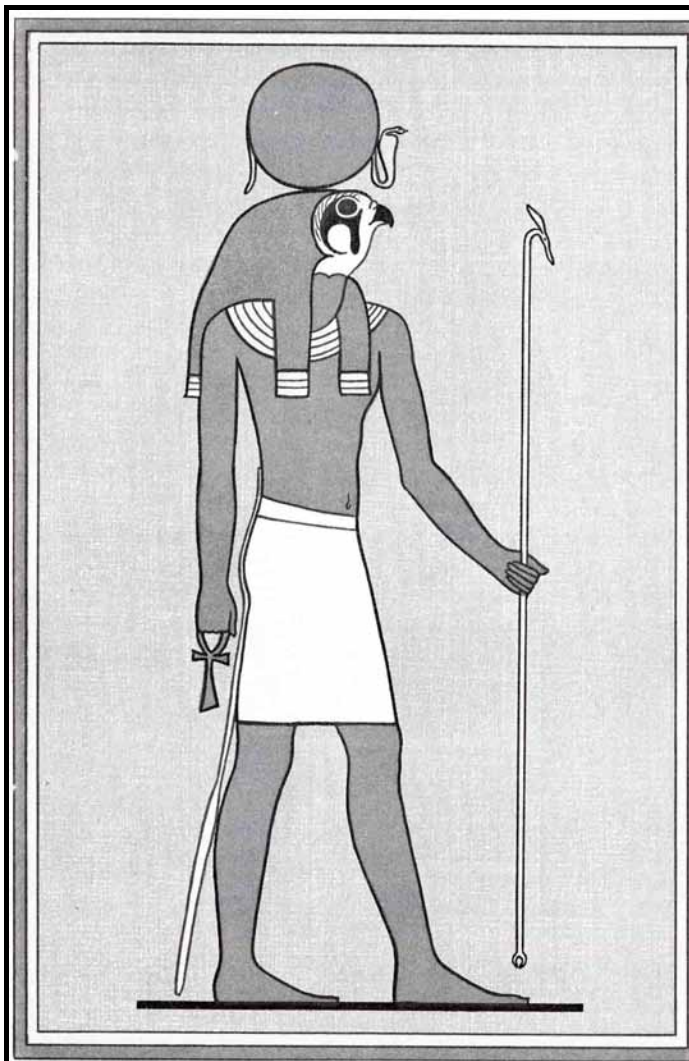


“The Angel of Death Passing Through the Land of Egypt” by Arthur Hacker

“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.” - With the outpouring of the fifth bowl of God’s wrath, the focus of the attack upon the realm of the devil sharpens. Now the very ***“throne of the beast”*** itself is assaulted and ***“his kingdom was plunged into darkness.”***

A throne is the official seat of the monarch. It represents the royal power and authority of the king. Nothing is more precious or sacred to a royal ruler than his throne. The language here recalls ***“the throne of Satan”*** in the letter to the church at Pergamum (Revelation 2:13), a reference to the seat of Roman power in the province of Asia and the center of the imperial cult throughout the province. ***“The throne of the beast”*** in this instance is no mere object or place. It is a symbol which represents the entirety of the antichrist’s kingdom - all of his power and authority in this world. This is consistent with the vision of the beast from the sea which had informed us that ***“The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority.”*** (Revelation 13:2).

Darkness was the ninth of Egypt's plagues (Exodus 10 :21-23). This was no ordinary absence of light, but a darkness so profound that ***"No one could see anyone else or leave his place for three days."*** (Exodus 10:23). . The *"Wisdom of Solomon,"* from the Old Testament Apocrypha, presents the darkness that fell upon the land of Egypt as a symbol of the spiritual darkness of a nation cut off from God and lost in idolatry, a harbinger of the eternal damnation that was to come for those who had chosen to turn their backs on the light of God. The apocryphal book describes the abject terror and psychological torment of those who endured this supernatural darkness graphically and at great length :



***"Amun-Ra, God of the Sun - Father of the Gods
and Protector of the Land of Egypt"***

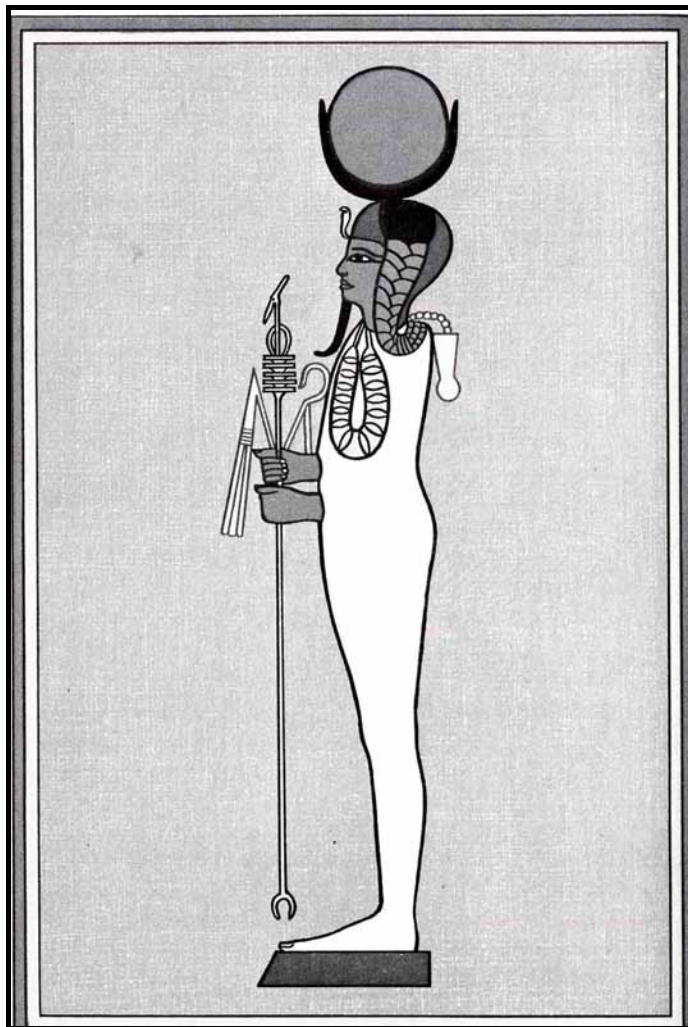
"For when lawless men supposed that they held the holy nation in their power, they themselves lay as captives of darkness and prisoners of long night, shut in under their roofs, exiles from eternal providence. For thinking that in their secret sins they were unobserved behind a dark curtain of forgetfulness, they were scattered, terribly alarmed, and appalled by specters. For not even the inner chamber that held them protected them from fear, but terrifying sounds rang out all around them, and dismal phantoms with gloomy faces appeared. And no power of fire was able to give light, nor did the brilliant flames of the stars avail to illumine that hateful night. Nothing was shining through to them except a dreadful, self-kindled fire, and in terror they deemed the things that they saw to be worse than the unseen appearance. The delusions of their magic art lay humbled, and their boasted wisdom was scornfully rebuked. For those who promised to drive off the fears and disorders of a sick soul were sick themselves with ridiculous fear. For even if nothing disturbing frightened them, yet scared by the passing of beasts and the hissing of serpents, they perished in trembling fear, refusing to

look at the air, though it nowhere could be avoided... But throughout the night, which was really powerless and beset them from the recesses of powerless Hades, they all slept the same sleep and now were driven by monstrous specters, and now were paralyzed by their souls surrender, for sudden and unexpected fear overwhelmed them. And whoever was there fell down, and thus was kept shut up in a prison not made of iron; for whether he was a farmer or a shepherd or a workman who toiled in the wilderness, he was seized and endured the inescapable fate; for with one chain of darkness they were all bound...over those men alone heavy night was spread and the image of the darkness that was destined to receive them.” (Wisdom of Solomon 17:2-10, 16-17,21)

Darkness in Scripture is often a symbol of death, damnation, and separation from God. Thus, Jesus describes the fate of the damned - **“they will be thrown outside into the darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”**

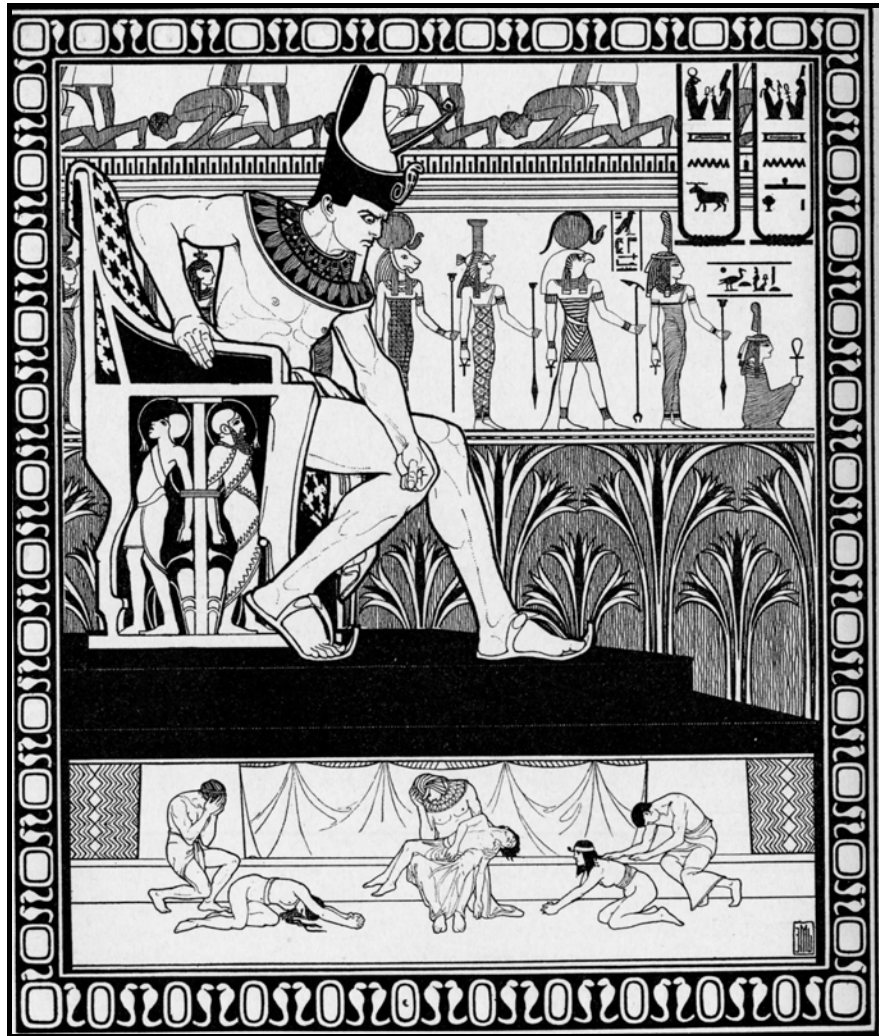
(Matthew 8:12; cf. also Matthew 22:13; 25:30; 2 Peter 2:17; Jude 13). In Jeremiah 13, the prophet urges Israel to give glory to God - **“before He brings the darkness, before your feet stumble on the darkening hills. You hope for light but He will turn it to thick darkness and change it to deep gloom.”** (Jeremiah 13:16; cf. also Psalm 23:4) So also in this text, the darkness into which the Antichrist’s Kingdom is plunged is not merely the absence of physical light but the lostness, the anguish, the terror and the torment of those whose defiant sin has separated them from God and doomed them death and eternal damnation.

“Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven...” - The cumulative impact of the first five plagues is not humble repentance but obstinate, bitter rejection of the judgement of God. The imperfect tense of the verb **“gnawed”**



“The Egyptian Moon God - Aah”

denotes continuous, ongoing action. The phrase *“gnawed their tongues in agony”* is intended to describe the most excruciating pain and suffering. But even in the face of this torment, they will not yield nor turn from the way of sin. Like Pharaoh and his heathen priests, they recognized this judgement as *“the finger of God”* (Exodus 8:19) but rather than bow before Him, they curse His Name and stubbornly refuse to repent.

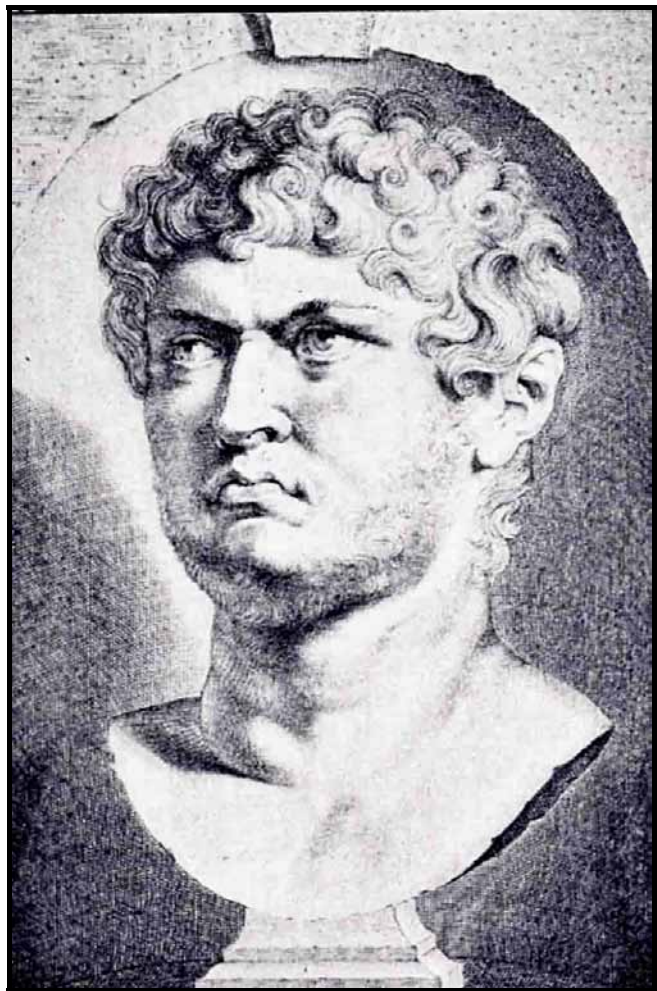


“The Hardening of Pharaoh’s Heart” by E.M. Lilien

“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 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 the Lord Almighty.” - The

outpouring of the sixth bowl of God's wrath depicts the final culmination of the age old conflict between good and evil, God and Satan. The imagery parallels that of the sixth trumpet vision in which four angels bound the mighty Euphrates River to enable the invasion of a grotesque horde of demonic riders to slaughter a third of mankind. (Revelation 9:13-19) This is not a prophecy of a specific or a particular battle. As the end of time draws near, Satan's opposition to God and His Gospel will grow increasingly desperate and increasingly successful. It will finally come to the point where the true Church is driven to virtual extinction. The imagery of this scene in the vision depicts the crescendo of this intensifying warfare throughout the latter days.

The pivotal role of the Euphrates River in the history of the Israelites and the other nations of the Fertile Crescent, its significance as the far north-eastern boundary of civilization, and the manner in which the prophets used the lands beyond the Euphrates as the symbolic abode of evil from which the enemies of God would one day arise have been previously noted (cf. pp. 256-265). As John wrote the Book of Revelation, the Euphrates formed the boundary between Rome and the great empire of the Parthians which posed a constant threat to the peace and security of the entire eastern Mediterranean basin. This may well be the context for the reference to unidentified "*kings from the East.*" There was a popular legend, currently prevalent throughout the region that emperor Nero had not truly died but had fled to the East to escape his foes. Nero would one day return, the legend declared, leading hordes of Parthian warriors to retake his throne and bring death and devastation to his enemies. The tale is reported in the 1st century



*"The Emperor Nero"
19th Century Engraving*



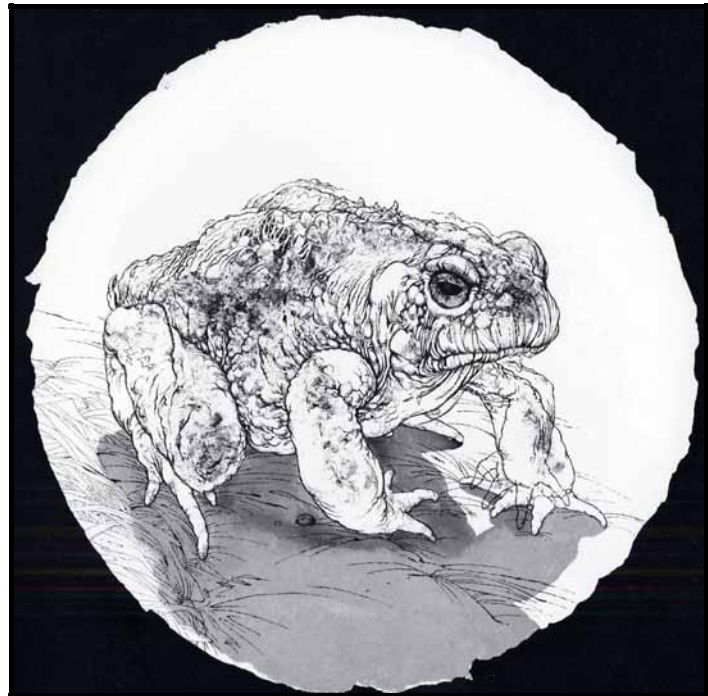
“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls of God’s Wrath” by Hans Burgmair - 1523

apocryphal writing *“The Sibylline Oracles:”*

“Then a great king will flee from Italy like a run-away slave unseen and unheard over the channel of the Euphrates...and when he runs away beyond the Parthian land, many will bloody the ground for the throne of Rome...Then the strife of war being aroused, will come to the West, and the fugitive from Rome will also come, brandishing a great spear, having crossed the Euphrates with many myriads.”
(“The Sibylline Oracles” 4:115-150)

“Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs...” - The Satanic anti-trinity - ***“the dragon,” “the beast,”*** and ***“the false prophet”*** now come forward as their hosts are mustered for battle (cf. Revelation 12 & 13). This is the first use of the title ***“the false prophet”*** (Greek - *“pseudo prophetou”*) in reference to the Beast from the earth (Revelation 13:11ff.) It will recur in Revelation 19: and 20:10. It serves to highlight the central role of deception and false doctrine in the realm of the Antichrist. The

nature of the impending conflict is clearly indicated by the demonic spirits which spring forth from their lips. This is not merely a military engagement or campaign. This is spiritual warfare waged in the hearts and minds of men. The goal of the anti-trinity is not merely military or political domination but eternal damnation. In the imagery of the vision the demons ***“looked like frogs.”*** The allusion is to Egypt’s second plague (Exodus 8:5). Frogs were unclean animals which were to be detested by the people of God (Leviticus 10:10-11,41). Frogs and toads have historically been associated with Satanism and the practice of witchcraft. It was traditionally believed that the devil would bestow a demonic servant upon witches who dedicated themselves to him. These demons would empower the witch’s magic. But in order to remain in the physical world the demons, or *“familiar spirits,”* as they were called, needed to possess the body of an animal. Frogs or toads were often chosen for this role. In the imagery of this vision, these are not actual frogs but hellish creatures ***“that looked like frogs.”*** These frog-like creatures represent the deceptive speech (***“they came out of the mouth”***) and false miracles that comprise the arsenal of hell. The text explains: ***“They are the spirits of demons performing miraculous signs and they go out to the kings of the whole world to gather them for battle on the great day of God Almighty.”*** The ***“miraculous signs”*** of these demonic spirits are the ***“lying signs and wonders”*** which St. Paul had warned would characterize the realm of the Man of Lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:9-11). The choice of frogs jumping out of the mouths of the anti-trinity may also

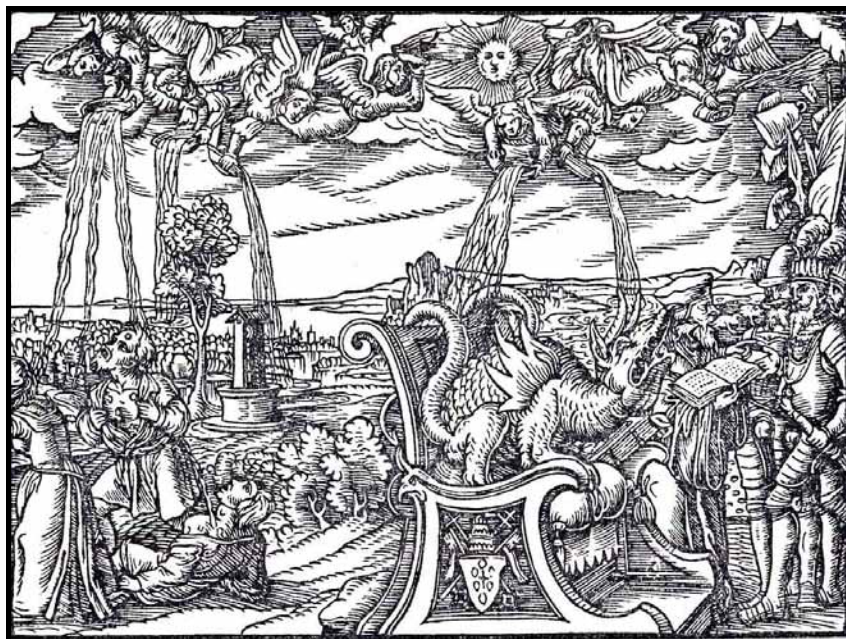


“The Frog - A Witch’s Familiar”

be linked to the frogs characteristic croaking sound which is loud but meaningless. In rabbinic tradition, the frogs’ croaking represents the confusion and consternation brought about by deception. This view originates with the plague of frogs in Egypt. The plague of frogs was one of the two plagues which the Egyptian magicians were able to duplicate. The rabbis taught that the magicians were only able to accomplish

this feat with the assistance of the demon goddess Heket, the Egyptian deity of birth and resurrection, who was typically depicted as a frog. This connection serves John well because of the resurrection imitation which figures prominently in the beast visions of Chapter 13. *“The deceptive activity is appropriately portrayed as frog-like, since the evil triumvirate are attempting to deceive people about the purported fact of the beast’s resurrection.” (Revelation 13:1ff).”* (Beale, p. 833) The anti-trinity sends forth its legions to deceive and deny so that the minds and hearts of men might continue to be held in bondage to evil and sin. They will enlist the support of all the powers of this world - social, political, economic, intellectual and spiritual - ***“the kings of the whole world.”*** The time will come when their victory seems nearly complete, when they are poised to eliminate the true Church altogether and destroy the people of God once and for all. Our Lord warned: ***“For false christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - if that were possible.”*** (Matthew 24:24) But at the very moment which seems to hold their greatest triumph, our Lord will return and ***“the great day of God Almighty”*** will finally come. This is the day of which the prophet Joel had written:

“Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on My holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming. It is close at hand - a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and darkness...The day of the Lord is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?” (Joel 2:1-2,11)



“The Outpouring of the Seven Bowls” by Hans Lufft - 1522

Many of the prophets had foretold a time when all the might of sinful men, from every nation upon the face of the earth - ***“the whole world”*** -will gather together against God and His people. Zechariah had prophesied:

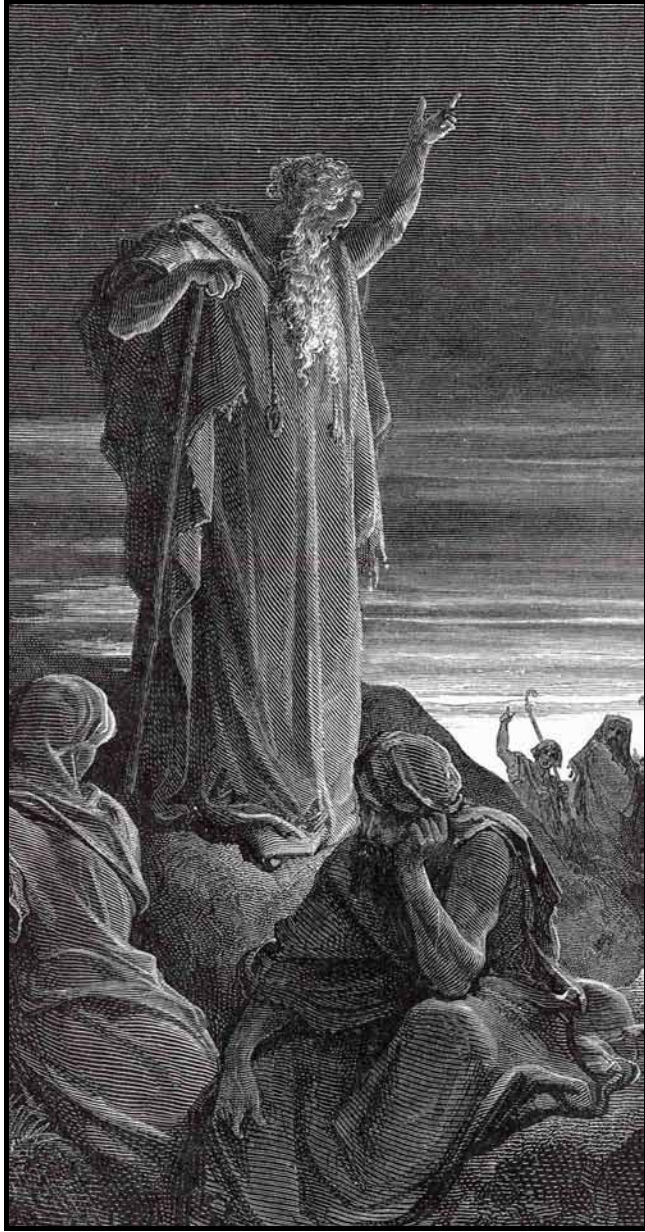
“A day of the Lord is coming...I will gather all the nations to Jerusalem to fight against it...Then the Lord will go out and fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle. The Lord will be King over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and His Name the only name.” ((Zechariah 14:1-9)



“The Prophets Zephaniah, Joel, Obadiah and Hosea” by John Sargent

God’s spokesman Zephaniah had confronted the nation of Judah with this grim prediction of the coming of the great day of the Lord:

“The great day of the Lord is near - near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on that day of the Lord will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there. That day will be a day of wrath, a day of distress and anguish, and day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a



“The Prophet Ezekiel” by Gustave Dore

day of clouds and blackness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the corner towers.” (Zephaniah 11:4-16)

Ezekiel also included all of the heathen nations of the world among the hordes of **“Gog from the land of Magog”** and warned that they will descend upon the people of God with dreadful destructive power. (Ezekiel 37-38) And yet, the prophet Micah assured the faithful that even this mighty gathering was by God’s design to accomplish His judgment purpose:

“But now many nations are gathered against you. They say, ‘Let her be defiled, let our eyes gloat over Zion!’ But they do not know the thoughts of the Lord; they do not understand His plan, He who gathers them like sheaves to the threshing floor.” (Micah 4:11-12)

That confidence in God’s sovereign control was echoed by Zephaniah through whom the Lord declared: **“I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour**

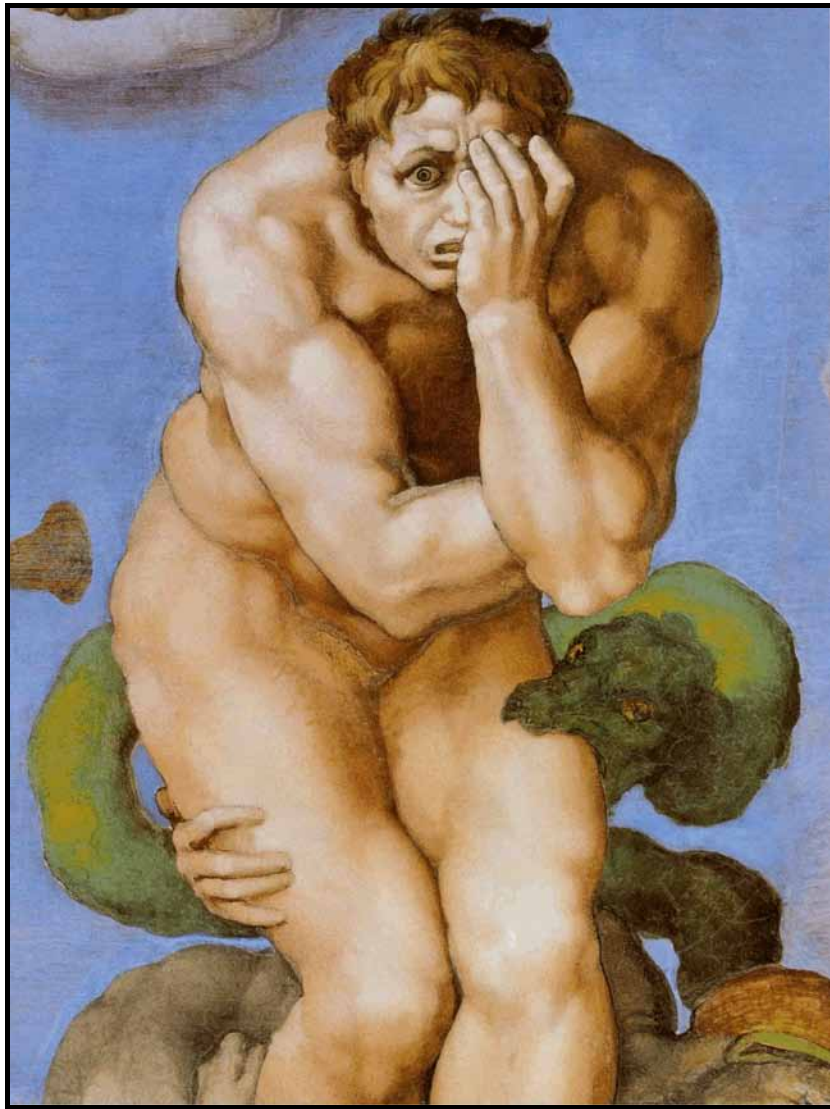
out My wrath on them - all My fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed by the fire of My jealous anger.” (Zephaniah 3:8)

The details and locations of the battle sites vary widely in the imagery of the prophets. This indicates the symbolic nature and universal application of the prophecies. The Great Day of the Lord does not merely involve one nation or an individual place. It is for all of humanity everywhere. Joel places the conflict in the

Valley of Jehoshaphat (Joel 3:2). Zechariah indicates that the battle will occur on the Mount of Olives east of Jerusalem (Zechariah 14:4). Ezekiel sites the assault of Gog and the hosts of Magog across all the mountains of Israel (Ezekiel 38:21; 39:2). Elsewhere in Revelation, John places the final battle around the walls of Jerusalem itself (Revelation 14:20; 20:8-9). These references are not to be understood as literal geographic sites but as significant historical places in the history of God's people which have become universal. The term "Armageddon," which John will introduce shortly, is still synonymous with ultimate catastrophic conflict. In more recent history, battlefields like "Appomattox" (equated with surrender) or "Waterloo" (equated with decisive defeat) have come to be used in the same way.

The battle described in these scenes is not an individual military conflict fought out on a particular battlefield. This warfare is cosmic not local. It is the final settlement of the age-old warfare between good and evil, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Satan. All of the enemies of the Lord and His people will finally be called to account. Their pomp and pretense of power will be revealed for the falsehood that they have always been and faithless men and fallen angels will quail in terror before the Almighty Judge.

"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. - In the midst of these prophecies of doom upon the unbelieving world, John inserts a parenthetical word of exhortation and benediction for the people of God. It is the Lord Christ Himself who declares "Behold, I come as a thief!" (cf. Revelation 3:3-5) The image is familiar. Jesus had warned His disciples: "If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You must also be ready because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you least expect Him." (Luke 12:39-40; cf. Matthew 24:43). St. Paul reminded the date setting, prediction prone Thessalonians: "You know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night." (2 Thessalonians 5:2). St. Peter used similar language in his admonition: "But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare." (2 Peter 3:9) The image is obviously intended to emphasize that sudden unexpectedness is of the essence of the coming of the Great Day of the Lord. The apostles therefore summon the people of God to watchful preparedness. "The kind of spiritual preparedness that Christ requires is the spiritual discernment which cuts through the deceptive propaganda of Satan and his henchmen." (Mounce, p. 301)



*“The Shame and Despair of the Damned”
Detail from “The Last Judgement” by Michelangelo*

“Blessed is he who stays awake...” - The warning of the thief in the night is followed by the third of Revelation’s seven beatitudes: *“Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.”* The language here is clearly figurative, although in the great judgement frescos of the Renaissance the humiliating nakedness of the damned often became an effective visual means of conveying their shame and despair in contrast to the glorious vesture of the redeemed. For example, in Michelangelo’s magnificent *“Last Judgment”* in Rome’s Sistine Chapel, the damned are stripped of their clothes as they tumble down toward Hell, gleefully exposed and abused by the demons swirling around them. The *“clothes”* to which the Lord refers in this text are a metaphor for salvation by grace through faith. The only defense when He comes again will be the

pure white robes of Christ's righteousness, cleansed for us in His blood (Revelation 7:14). Apart from those precious garments of salvation, the shameful deeds of all men will be exposed before the righteous Judge.

The image of nakedness and shameful exposure as the consequence of idolatry and spiritual unfaithfulness may be an allusion to Ezekiel 16:36-39 where the prophet compares the idolatry of Israel to the adultery of a prostitute and warns that appropriate punishment will be forthcoming:

“Therefore I am going to gather all of your lovers, with whom you found pleasure, those you loved as well as those you hated. I will gather them together from all around and will strip you in front of them and they will see your nakedness...Then I will turn you over to your lovers and they will tear down your mounds and destroy your lofty shrines. They will strip you of your clothes and take your fine jewelry and leave you naked and bare.” (Ezekiel 16:35-42)



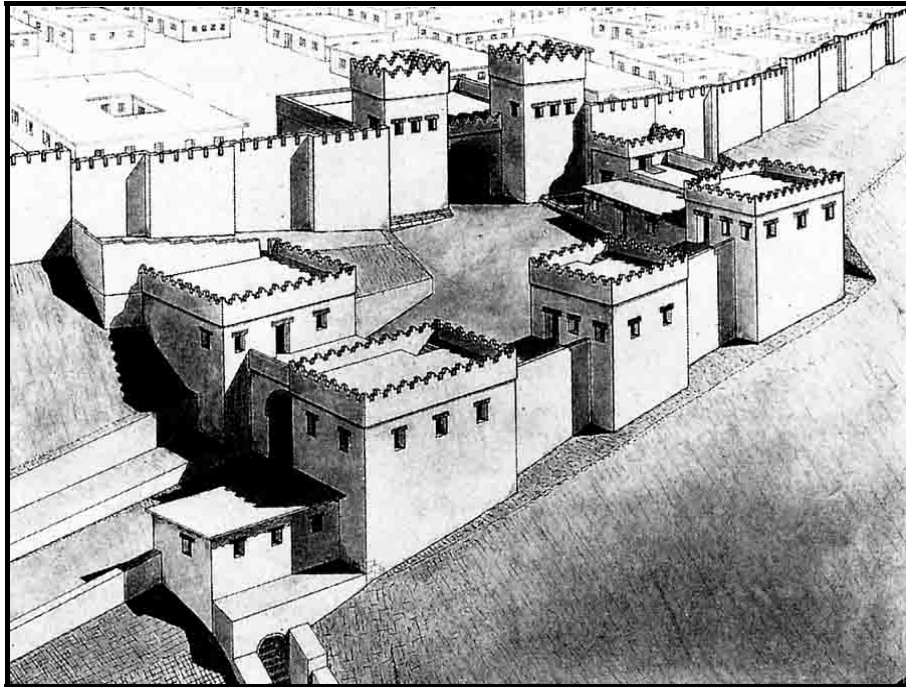
“The Torments of the Damned” - Detail from “The Last Judgement” by Luca Signorelli, The San Brizio Chapel, Orvieto

“Then they gathered the kings together to the place that is called in Hebrew Armageddon.” - The emphasis upon the unholy trinity as the motivating and empowering force in this muster of the armies of evil continues. The hosts of this world are gathered ***“to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.”*** The Greek transliteration *“harmageddon”* is based upon the Hebrew compound *“har-megiddo”* - literally *“the mount of Megiddo.”* The ancient city of Megiddo, situated on the north slope of the ridge of Mt. Carmel, commanded the strategically crucial Valley of Jezreel which passes through Palestine’s rugged central mountains to connect the coastal plain of Sharon with the trade routes to Mesopotamia. Conquerors across the centuries have recognized that Megiddo was essential for control of central Palestine. Pharaoh Thutmose III captured Megiddo in 1468 B.C. and made its Canaanite king a vassal of Egypt. The Egyptian ruler is heroically depicted on the wall reliefs of his tomb, leading the chariots of Egypt on the battlefield at Megiddo, his bow drawn to strike the enemies of the two lands.



“Pharaoh Thutmose II Leading the Egyptian Assault at Armageddon”

During the Israelite conquest of Canaan, Joshua defeated the King of Megiddo but failed to occupy the city (Joshua 17: 11-12; Judges 1:27). Deborah and Barak defeated the armies of Hazor ***“by the waters of Megiddo”*** but again the town and its



“A Reconstruction of Solomon’s Fortifications at Megiddo”

strategic citadel remained under Canaanite control (Judges 4:15, 5:19). At the height of Israel’s power, Solomon made Megiddo the capital of one of his twelve districts, a major fortress center with stables to accommodate 450 horses and chariots (1 Kings 4:12). After the division of the kingdom, Pharaoh Shishak took the city from Solomon’s son Rehoboam in 926 B.C. Both Ahaziah, the King of Judah and Joram, the King of Israel, died at Megiddo during the rebellion of Jehu (2 Kings 9:14-29). In 609 B.C. Pharaoh Necho II led the armies of Egypt north through Palestine in a desperate attempt to rescue his Assyrian allies from the rising power of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar. King Josiah of Judah unsuccessfully attempted to halt the Egyptian advance at Megiddo. Josiah died there under a hail of Egyptian arrows (2 Kings 23:29-30). His effort, although futile, caused enough of a delay to prevent Egypt from coming to Assyria’s aid in time. Nebuchadnezzar met the Egyptian army alone on the bloody battlefield of Carchemish and dealt them a devastating defeat. Babylon then became the dominant power in the region. The death of good King Josiah was particularly significant because, in effect, it marked the end of the existence of Judah as an independent nation. Josiah’s death on the bloody ground of Megiddo was an event which *“burnt itself into the memory of the Jewish people.”* (Swete, p. 209) With this long and varied history of conquest and warfare, Megiddo had come to be associated in the Hebrew mind with desperate battle and catastrophic



*“King Josiah Rediscovered the Book of the Law”
by Rudolf Schäfer*

defeat. This is the sense in which Megiddo appeared in its final Old Testament reference, Zechariah 12:11. The prophet used the mourning of Megiddo as a metaphor of the bitter lament of the Church before the cross: ***“On that day, the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad-rimmon on the plain of Megiddo. The land itself will mourn.”*** Dr. Theodore Laetsch places the prophet’s words in their historical context:

“Hadad-rimmon was a city near Jezreel on the plain of Megiddo...At Megiddo pious King Josiah was slain by Pharaoh Necho. He was the first king of Judah to fall in battle and leave his country at the mercy of foreign conquerors. His death was a catastrophic loss for Judah for with him had passed away the last bulwark against the flood of wickedness which now swept through the land and carried it to its destruction. The entire nation lamented Josiah’s death and by official decree an annual day of mourning was appointed, still observed when the Book of Chronicles was written (cf. 2 Chronicles 35:24). Hadad-rimmon is named as the place or one of the places of such mourning, perhaps because it afforded a view of the battlefield, or, Josiah may have actually died here, when, mortally wounded, he was being rushed to Jerusalem. (2 Kings 23:29ff.; 2 Chronicles 35:22ff.) (Laetsch, p. 485)

So it was no accident that John chose this ancient place whose very name was laden with historical and emotional significance for God's people as the symbolic site for the climactic confrontation in the age old battle between God and Satan. G. K. Beale aptly summarizes:

“Like the place names ‘Babylon’ and ‘Euphrates,’ so ‘Armageddon’ does not refer to a specific geographic locale, but the whole world. The battles in Israel associated with Megiddo and the nearby mountain become a typological symbol for the last battle against the saints and Christ which occurs throughout the earth.” (Beale, p. 838)

In the “Premillennial” theology so prominent among conservative American evangelicals, Armageddon must be a literal battle which will occur on the actual ruins of ancient Megiddo in the modern State of Israel at the end of a seven year tribulation period. This pernicious misunderstanding of the Biblical prophecies has resulted in an endless series of erroneous applications to current events. In his insightful study *Armageddon Now*, Dwight Wilson, himself a premillenarian, describes the unfortunate pattern in this way:

“The premillenarian’s history, however, is strewn with a mass of erroneous speculations which have undermined their credibility. The current crisis was always identified as a sign of the end, whether it was the Russo-Japanese War, the First World War, the Second World War, the Palestine War, the Suez Crisis, the June War, or the Yom Kippur War. The revival of the Roman Empire has been identified variously as Mussolini’s Empire, the League of Nations, the United Nations, the European Defense Community, the Common Market, and NATO. Speculation on the Antichrist has included Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, and Henry Kissinger. The Northern Confederation was supposedly formed by the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, the Rapallo Treaty, the Nazi-Soviet Pact, and then the Soviet Bloc. The ‘Kings from the



“God’s Judgement Upon Gog” by Asher Durand

East' have been variously the Turks, the lost tribes of Israel, Japan, India and China. The supposed restoration of Israel has confused the problem of whether the Jews are to be restored before or after the coming of the Messiah. The restoration of the 'latter rain' has been pinpointed to have begun in 1897, 1917 and 1948. The 'end of the times of the Gentiles' has been placed in 1895, 1917, 1948 and 1967. Russia as Gog has been an impending threat since the Crimean War, both under the czars and the communists." (Wilson, pp. 216-217)



"The Destruction of Babylon the Great" Luther Bible Woodcut - 1534

"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.” - The outpouring of the seventh bowl brings us to the completion of God’s judgement, the Last Day and the end of time. Like its predecessors, which struck the land, the waters, and the heavenly bodies - this plague is directed at one of the basic components in the world of nature, *“the air.”* In the verses which follow, the details of the plague are provided, all drawn from previous manifestations of God’s presence and His power recorded in the Old Testament. The lightning, thunder and earthquake of Sinai (cf. Exodus 19:16-19) are combined with the hail which was the sixth plague of God upon the land of Egypt (Exodus 9:13-35). The imagery also parallels that of Ezekiel’s description of the final judgement:

“In My zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at My presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble and every wall will fall to the ground. I will summon a sword against Gog on all My mountains, declares the Sovereign Lord. Every man’s sword will be against his brother. I will execute judgement upon him with plague and bloodshed. I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones, and burning sulphur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him. And so I will show My greatness and My holiness, and I will make Myself known in the sight of many nations. Then they will know that I am the Lord.” (Ezekiel 38:19-23)

“And out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne...” - The unidentified voice from the throne within the temple is certainly that of God Himself (cf. Revelation 21:5-6). *“The throne”* within the temple is probably a reference to the sacred Ark of the Covenant. The inspired authors of the Old Testament commonly described the Lord as *“enthroned between the cherubim,”* the majestic angel guardians carved upon the lid of the Ark. (1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Samuel 6:2; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalm 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16)

“It is done!” - The declaration from the throne announced that God’s judgement purpose had been realized and fully accomplished. All that is necessary has been done. Not one single detail has been overlooked or omitted. Now the end can come. Lenski emphasizes the perfect tense of the Greek verb, indicating action completed:



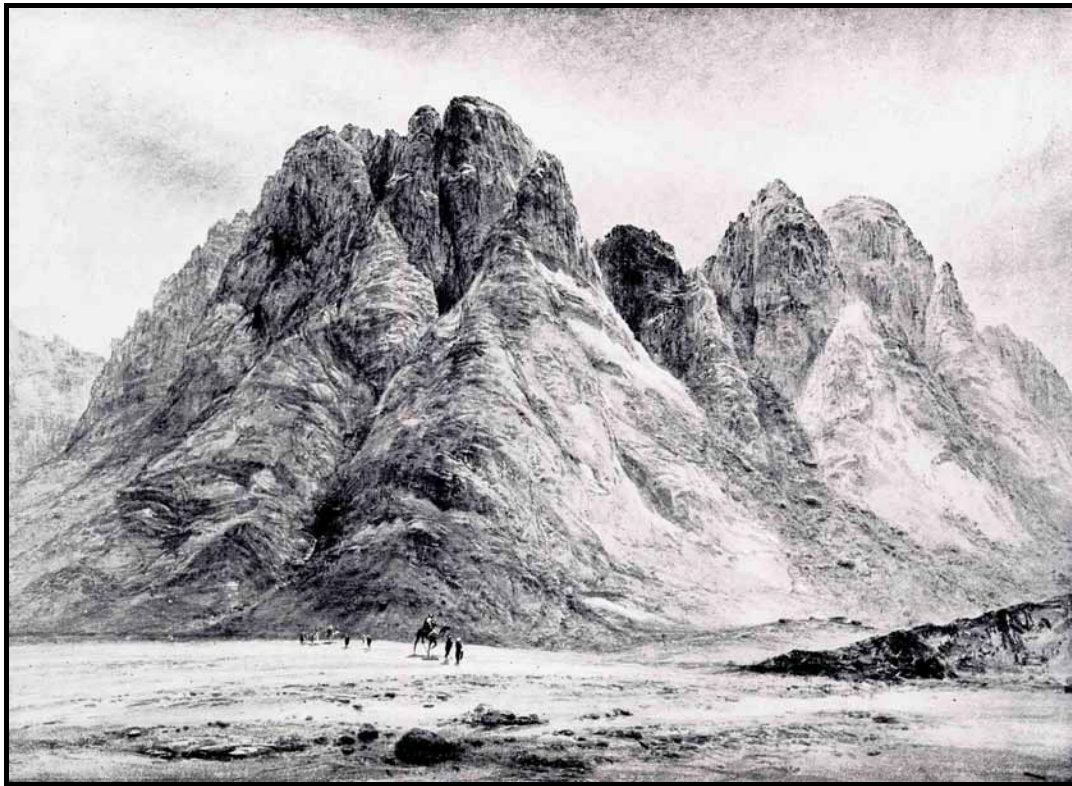
“The Glory of the Lord Upon Mt. Sinai” by Rudolf Schäfer

“The perfect is like that one word of Jesus on the cross ‘telesthai!’ - ‘It has been finished!’ The tense means that the climax has come to be and so remains now and forevermore...The perfect means that what has been developing during a long time in the past has now occurred as in a final explosion. The sword of Damocles which had for so long a time been trembling on a thread now breaks the thread, and, point down, plunges into Babylon.” (Lenski, pp. 482-483)

“Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder...” - The language closely parallels that of the theophany at Sinai: ***“On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast...The smoke billowed up from it like the smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently.”*** (Exodus 19:16-18; cf. Revelation 4:5; 8:5; 11:19) These physical phenomena are the signs of the coming of the holy, majestic God and His righteous judgement. The earthquake which signals

the end is of a magnitude unprecedented in the long history of humanity - ***“No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on the earth, so tremendous was the quake.”*** The words recall those of our Lord as He described the global upheaval which will immediately precede the Day of Judgement: ***“Those will be days of distress unequalled since the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again.”*** (Mark 13:19; cf. Daniel 12:1)

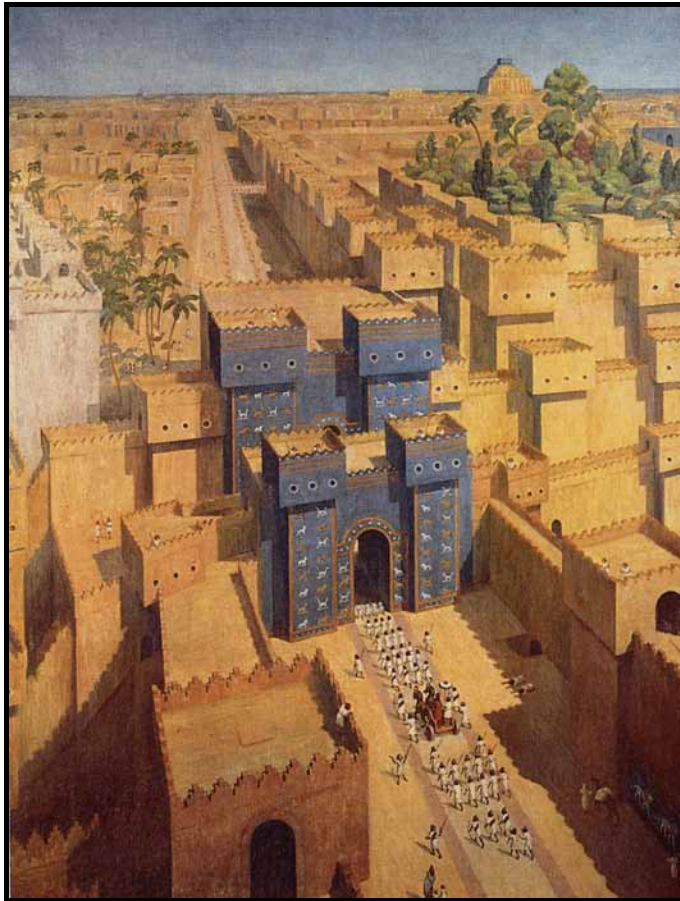
“The great city split into three parts and the cities of the nations collapsed.” - Prophets and apostles had long foretold the coming of a worldwide earthquake as the Lord returns in judgement. ***“He stood and shook the earth; He looked and made the nations tremble. The ancient mountains trembled and the ancient hills collapsed.”*** (Habakkuk 3:6) ***“On that day, His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the Mount of Olives will be split in two from east to west, forming a great valley, with half the mountain moving north and half the mountain moving south.”*** (Zechariah 14:4; cf. also Hebrews 12:26-27) In the imagery of St. John, ***“the great city”*** which is ***“the cities of the nations”*** is the specific object of divine judgment. ***“The great city”*** is identified as ***“Babylon the Great”*** - the personification of all of the wickedness and corruption of mankind. Dr. Brighton explains that Babylon here represents:



“Mount Sinai” by Elijah Walton

“The Satanic powers opposed to Jesus and His Church...in particular, political, economic, and social orders, and pagan spiritual philosophies which under the dragon’s influence attempt to destroy God’s saints on earth.” (Brighton, 428-429)

John is explicit in defining the representative role of **“Babylon the Great”** **“the great city”** with the appositive phrase **“the cities of the nations collapsed.”** **“Babylon the Great”** is not one city: it is every



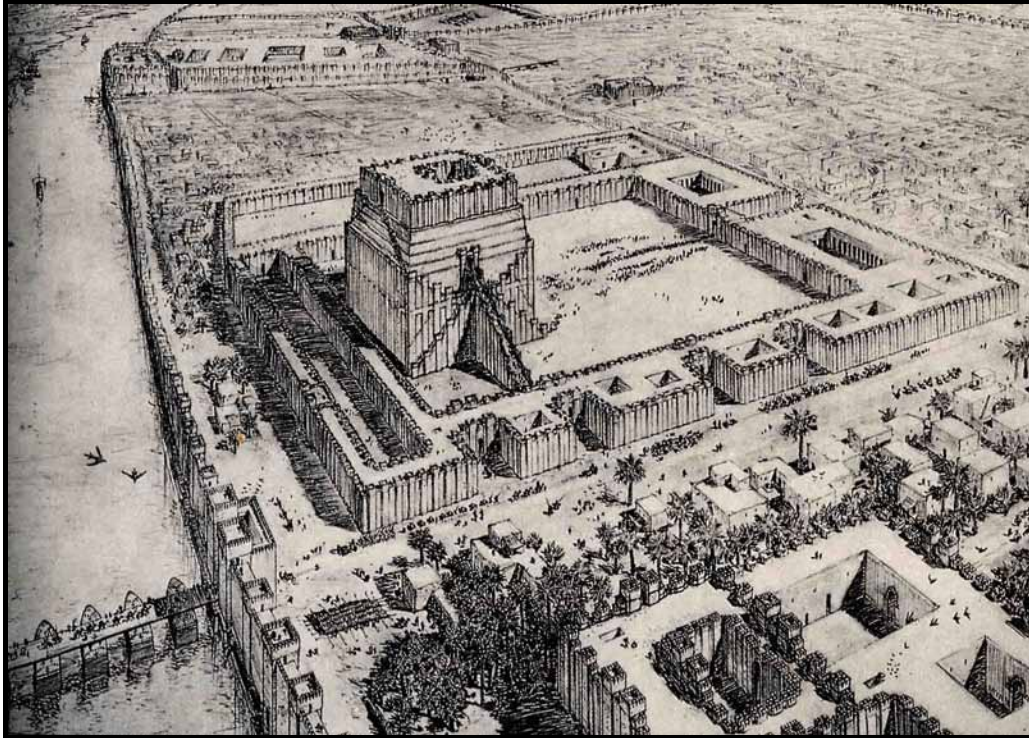
“The Ishtar Gate of Ancient Babylon”

city. The destruction presented here is not local: it is global. In Revelation 11:13 only **“one tenth of the city fell.”** Now the destruction is total. John uses the phrase **“split into three parts”** to describe the city’s complete collapse. The image of a three part division for total destruction is an idiomatic Hebrew expression. Lenski presents the Hebrew idiom:

“The language is idiomatic; it does not mean that great rents in the earth divided the city into three parts, but that the whole city and every structure in it fell in a heap in utter ruin. Every structure collapsed, one wall falling to the right, another to the left, the roof and the floors falling down between them. Three parts indicates this form of disintegration.” (Lenski, p. 483-484)

In this instance, the language may well be drawn from Ezekiel Chapter 5 where the Lord separates the citizens of Jerusalem into three parts to emphasize their total destruction: **“A third of your people will die of the plague or perish from famine inside you; a third will fall by the sword outside of your walls; and a third I will scatter to the winds and pursue with a drawn sword.”** (Ezekiel 5:12)

“God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath.” - The concept of God’s punitive remembering emphasizes



“The Temple of Marduk in Ancient Babylon with Its 300 Foot Step Pyramid”

that the just and righteous God cannot overlook the sinful wickedness of men forever. His just punishment for sin is absolutely inevitable. Speaking through His prophet Hosea, God had warned the Northern Kingdom of Israel:

“They do not realize that I remember all of their evil deeds. Their sins engulf them; they are always before Me...They offer sacrifices given to Me and they eat the meat but the Lord is not pleased with them. Now He will remember their wickedness and punish their sins...They have sunk deep into corruption as in the days of Gibeah. God will remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.” (Hosea 7:2; 8:13; 9:9)

Jeremiah had issued a similar warning to the Kingdom of Judah:

“This is what the Lord says about His people: ‘They greatly love to wander; they do not restrain their feet.’ So the Lord does not accept them; He will now remember their wickedness and punish them for their sins.” (Jeremiah 14:10)



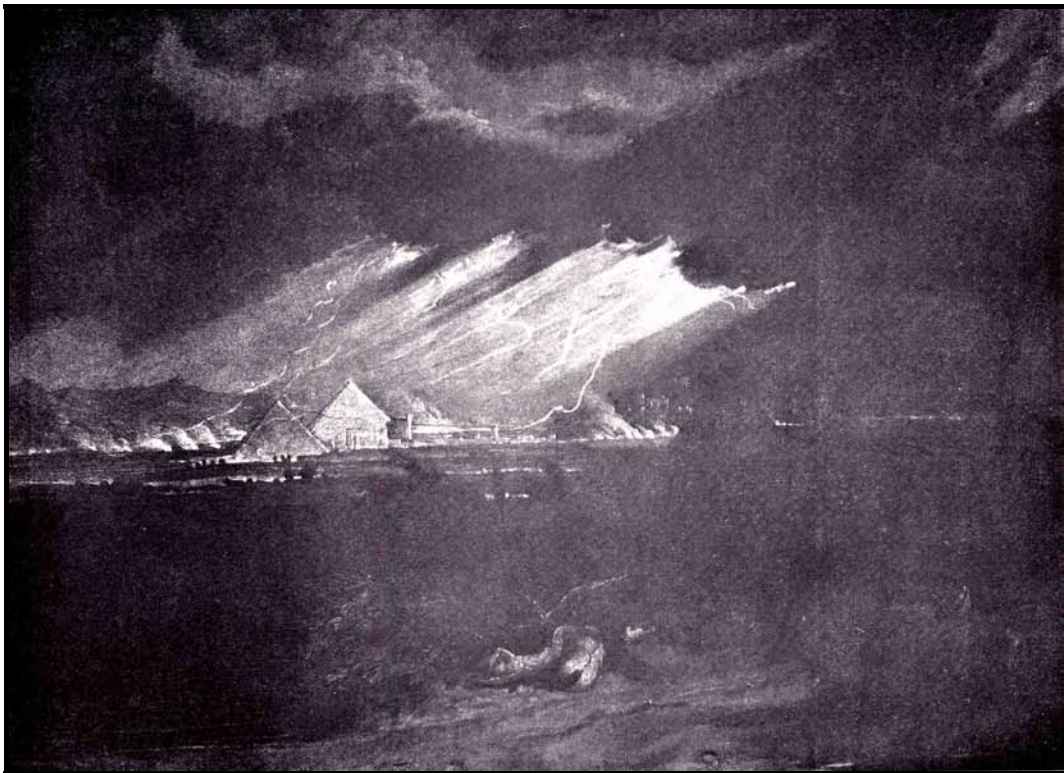
“The Madness of Nebuchadnezzar” by G. Rochegrosse

In the same way, the final reckoning for the whole world cannot be avoided. The day will finally come when God will ultimately and permanently render justice to all of mankind. On that great day, those who have misunderstood the patient longsuffering of God as forgetfulness will all be condemned (cf. 2 Peter 3:3-6). The pretentious title *“Babylon the Great”* occurred previously in Revelation 14:8. The designation is drawn from Nebuchadnezzar’s proud boast *“Is this not great Babylon which I have built!”* (Daniel 4:30) The king was struck with madness by God as punishment for his arrogance (Daniel 4:31-37).

The image of God's judgement as bitter wine poured out from the cup of divine wrath - ***“and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of His wrath”*** - is also drawn from the Old Testament. It occurred previously in Revelation 14:8-10.

“Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found.” - The message of universal judgement is reinforced by images of cosmic upheaval. Virtually identical language is used in Revelation 6:14 and 20:11 to describe the demise of the old order. There will be no escape or refuge for the sinner from the awesome justice of the holy God. Neither the most distant island nor the tallest mountain will be able to provide safety. On that great and terrible day, only those who stand by grace through faith upon the Rock of Ages shall prevail.

“From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds...” - The sixth plague of Egypt is replicated on a massive world-wide scale (cf. Exodus 9: 13-35). The image is one of nature gone mad, raining death and destruction down upon the world of men. But the response of condemned mankind to this irrefutable demonstration of the power and glory of God is only further defiance, rage and blasphemy - ***“And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.”***



“The Plague of Thunder, Lightning, and Hail” by J. W. Turner