

# COMMENTARY ON THE REVELATION

## PART 1

By [David Kroll](#)

The English word Revelation is a translation of the Greek word *Apocalypse* which means to unveil, uncover or reveal. Just what is it that the book of the Revelation reveals? In this series of essays, we will examine the various dynamics that pertain to this book and look at its message within the context of when it was written and to whom it was addressed. We will begin by examining the authorship and time of writing of this document. We will then explore the four major methodologies used to interpret the Revelation. Lastly, we will do a verse by verse study of the Revelation within the framework of the two most currently popular interpretative approaches.

### Who authored The Revelation?

The author identifies himself four times simply as "John," (Rev. 1:1,4; 21:2; 22:8). Historically, most theologians identify this "John" with the John who was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, and who it is believed also wrote the Gospel of John and the three letters attributed to him.

Some recent scholarship has questioned the identity of Apostle John as the author because it has been determined that the Greek grammar of Revelation is much inferior to the grammar seen in the Gospel of John and the three letters attributed to Him. It is therefore felt that the "John" who authored the Revelation cannot be the same John who authored the other four documents.

Defenders of Apostle John's authorship of the Revelation point out that John is shown to be unschooled in Acts 4:13. It is concluded that John may have had his Gospel and letters dictated to a scribe and edited whereas he would not have had an editor available while a prisoner on the island of Patmos where he wrote The Revelation. It is also pointed out that the poor Greek grammar found in the Revelation could be reflective of John having to rapidly write down visions as he saw them, thus making it difficult to give much attention to proper grammar.

Defenders of the Apostle's authorship point out that there are concepts and expressions found in the Revelation that are not found elsewhere in the New Testament (NT) except in the other writings of John. For example, the Greek word *logos* is found 330 times in the NT scriptures but only in John's Gospel and in Revelation is this word used to describe Christ (John 1:1 & Rev. 19:13). The Revelation repeatedly refers to Christ as the Lamb of God. Of the four Gospel writers, only John refers to Christ as the Lamb of God.

It is this kind of internal evidence that has most Biblical scholars believing that John, the Apostle of Jesus Christ, is the author of the Revelation and not someone else

named John. We will approach the Revelation as having been written by John the Apostle.

## Dating of the book of Revelation

Establishing the time frame during which the Revelation was written is critical to understanding its message. While we don't know the date of John's death, it is fairly certain he died before the end of the first century. Therefore his writing of the Revelation would have occurred in the first century. The question is, when in the first century was this document written? We see from the first chapter of Revelation that its message is directed to seven churches that history shows physically existed in Asia Minor in the first century. It is important to our understanding of this message to determine whether this message was delivered to these churches before or after the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. If it was given before A.D. 70, it is possible to see its meaning and fulfillment in the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem in the war of approximately A.D. 66 to A.D. 73. If it was given after this destruction, we would have to look for events after the fall of Jerusalem for meaning and fulfillment. It is this "late" versus "early" dating issue we will now address.

While there have been a number of external "evidences" offered for both a late and an early dating of Revelation, these "evidences" have often been problematical. In view of this, scholars have sought to determine its dating by looking at how what is written in this document itself corresponds to the historical events of the first and second century. The first and second centuries are chosen to establish date of authorship because the Revelation begins by making specific time frame statements as to the expected fulfillment of what is written.

Revelation 1:1: *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place.*

Revelation 1:3: *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.*

Revelation 22:6: *The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."*

## Evidence for a late date:

A number of current scholars believe the Revelation was written during the reign of Domitian who was emperor over the Roman Empire from A.D. 81 to A.D. 96. This would place the events of the Revelation after the fall of Jerusalem. Belief in a post A.D. 70 authorship of Revelation is based on two primary considerations, one scriptural and the other external to scripture.

### Consideration #1:

There was a superstition that developed after Nero's death in A.D. 68 that he would return from the dead and rule Rome again. Because of his similar behavior, Domitian,

who began his reign in A.D. 81, was widely regarded as a “second Nero” and therefore was looked upon as being the “mortal wound that was healed” spoken of in Revelation 13. It is also felt by many interpreters that emperor worship is alluded to in Chapter 13. It is believed, however, that such worship was not enforced until the reign of Domitian. It is therefore believed the Revelation pertains to the time of Domitian and thereafter.

While these are interesting observations, they do little to establish when the Revelation was written because even if John did have Domitian in mind in chapter 13, he still could have written the Revelation prior to A.D. 70. These observations have no direct bearing on when John wrote the Revelation.

### Consideration #2:

The church leader Irenaeus, who wrote in the middle of the second century A.D., made a statement that could be interpreted as saying that either John’s vision or John, himself, was seen toward the end of Domitian’s reign.

The statement by Irenaeus is considered problematical in so much as scholars are not certain as to the meaning of his statement. If Irenaeus did mean the Revelation was received toward the end of Domitian’s reign, it would make the idea that Chapter 13 is prophetic of Domitian a mute point as his reign would have been practically over when John wrote the Revelation and could not be considered prophetic of his reign.

In this same statement by Irenaeus, he also alludes to there being “ancient copies” available of the Revelation. This is thought to be a puzzling statement by Irenaeus if he also said the Revelation appeared during the end of Domitian’s reign. Since there are historical indicators that John lived into the A.D. 90’s, it would appear more evidential to conclude that Irenaeus is talking about John being seen near the end of Domitian’s reign and not the Revelation being written at that time.

There is one interesting piece of history that may explain the confusion surrounding the dating of the Revelation. Historian G Edmundson in a series of lectures given in 1913, entitled “The Church in Rome in the First Century,” speaks of Domitian, the younger son of Emperor Vespasian, actually acting as Roman Emperor in early A.D. 70 on behalf of his Father who was occupied at the time with affairs in Alexandria. The young Domitian was relieved of his duties upon the return of his father and later became Emperor after his father’s death. It could be that Irenaeus was referring to John being seen during the time of this temporary reign of a young Domitian and not during the time of Domitian’s reign after A.D. 70.

### Evidence for an early date:

Advocates of a pre A.D. 70 dating of the Revelation provide a variety of scriptural evidences for their position. They will turn to Revelation 17:9-10, where seven kings are spoken of with five having fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. In actual history, five Roman emperors had come and gone (Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, Caligula, and Claudius Caesar) with Nero being the sixth. It is therefore believed that the “one is” refers to Nero. Since John speaks of this Emperor being in power as he writes, it can be safely concluded that he is writing prior to A.D. 70 as Nero’s reign ended in A.D. 68.

Pre A.D. 70 defenders believe the number 666 applies to Nero. In Latin, Greek, Hebrew and other older languages, letters were used to represent numbers. It is believed that John wrote in code to hide the meaning from the enemies of first-century Christians. John was a Jew and understood Hebrew and yet wrote the Revelation in Greek. To identify the beast numerically in Greek would have been too easy to recognize by the enemies of the Christians. It is believed what John did was to identify Nero in Hebrew letters. The reader would have to know the Hebrew equivalents to the Greek letters in order to arrive at the proper meaning, the same way we have to know English equivalents to the Greek letters in order to understand the meaning. Nero's full title name as Roman Emperor was *Nero Caesar*. In Hebrew, translated into Greek, Nero Caesar is rendered (in English characters) as: NRWN QSR. In Hebrew it is pronounced "Neron Kaiser." The numbers associated with these letters are N=50, R=200, W=6, N=50, Q=100, S=60, R=200. This totals 666. It is felt that what gives greater evidence to Nero's being the beast of Revelation 13 is that in several very early copies of the Greek New Testament, the number 616 is given which is the Latin numerical equivalent of the name Nero Caesar. What this suggests is the copiers knew that 666 in the Greek represented Nero and were simply using the Latin numerical designation they were well aware of.

It is pointed out that in Revelation 13:5-7 John writes that the beast was given authority for forty-two months and given power to make war against the saints. History shows Nero's persecution against the Christians began in November of A.D. 64, and continued until June of A.D. 68. It was in June of A.D. 68 when Nero committed suicide. The period of November A.D. 64 to June 68 is a period of forty-two months.

In Revelation 9:5 &10, the fifth angel sounds and locusts are seen as given power not to kill but to torment for five months. It is pointed out by historians that the Roman siege of Jerusalem began on the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan (April) of A.D.70 and ended on the 8<sup>th</sup> of Elul (September) A.D.70., a period of 134 days which is just short of a normal five month period. The inhabitants of Jerusalem held out against the Romans during this five month period while suffering greatly from internal strife and starvation.

In Revelation 11:1-2: John is told to measure the temple, altar and inner court but to exclude the outer court because it has been given to the Gentiles. It is then recorded that the Gentiles will trample the Holy City for 42 months. It is pointed out that the Temple is seen as still standing at the time of John writing the Revelation. The statement about 42 months which equals approximately three and one-half years, is viewed as corresponding to the period of early spring A.D. 67, when the Roman General Vespasian began his march against Jerusalem, and the early fall of A.D. 70 when the temple was destroyed.

It is this apparent correlation between what is written in the Revelation and actual historical events involving the Roman/Jewish war that is felt by early date advocates to be confirmation of a pre A.D. 70 authorship.

In addition to the scriptural evidence presented, defenders of a pre A.D. 70 authorship also point to some external evidence to support their position. Clement of Alexandria, a much respected second/third century leader in the church at Alexandria Egypt, wrote that apostle John moved from the island of Patmos to Ephesus after the death of the tyrant. While late date advocates believe Clement is speaking of Domitian as the tyrant, history shows Nero to fit the description far better. Nero was called a

tyrant by various first century historians. Some histories actually refer to Nero as a beast. All indications are that John left Patmos way before Domitian became emperor in A.D. 81.

The evidence thus far presented would favor a pre A.D. 70 dating for the Revelation. The time statements showing imminency and the seeming alignment of historical events with what is written in the Revelation are instructive. Many well-known scholars have held to the pre A.D. 70 dating. Dr. Kenneth Gentry, author of *Before Jerusalem Fell, Dating the Book of Revelation*, lists over 130 notable scholars and commentators who favor the pre A.D. 70 dating of Revelation.

It must be pointed out that many scholars who believe in a pre A.D. 70 dating don't necessarily see all the events described by John as corresponding to the destruction of Jerusalem. Many see some fulfillment of the Revelation in the destruction of Jerusalem while seeing additional fulfillment as future from that event. Those who embrace the late date perspective see fulfillment in certain events during the time of the Roman Empire but also see future fulfillment. Still others see the Revelation entirely fulfilled in the first century while some see it as being totally fulfilled in the future. We will now examine the four most prominent of the various interpretive approaches to the Revelation.

### The Historicist Approach:

The historicist believes that God revealed the entire church age in advance through the symbols of the Revelation. This approach makes great use of the "year for a day" principle. It advocates that God revealed exact time frames for various events but cast them in symbols that represent a year for a day. According to this methodology, the 1260 days of the Revelation would equal 1,260 years in actual fulfillment.

The historicist sees a great deal of the Revelation fulfilled in events associated with the Roman Empire. For example, the breaking of the seven seals is seen as the barbarian invasions that brought the Western Roman Empire to its knees. The Arabs attacking the Eastern Roman Empire is seen as associated with the locusts that come out of the bottomless pit. The papacy is considered the antichrist under this system.

Like all interpretive systems, historicists disagree among themselves as to how certain prophecies are fulfilled. For example, whereas many historicists agree among themselves that the seven trumpets are associated with the Arabs attacking the Eastern Empire, they disagree among themselves as to whether the seven seals relate to the fall of the Western Empire or the fall of Jerusalem. Like several other interpretive systems, historicists tend to see the culmination of history occurring during their lifetime which over and over it fails to do. A major problem with the historicist approach is that its interpretations are of such nature as to leave little applicability to those to whom the Revelation was initially addressed. It primarily focuses on the period of the Middle Ages and the Reformation. Yet the original audience to whom the Revelation was addressed was told that the time was near and the events prophesied in the Revelation must soon take place.

The historicist approach has been around to one degree or another since the second century to the beginning of the nineteenth century. This interpretive approach has been somewhat discredited and is not currently in vogue within the Christian community. Therefore we will not include it in our verse by verse study of the Revelation.

## The Preterist Approach:

The term preterist means past fulfillment. This approach is sometimes referred to as realized or fulfilled eschatology. Eschatology is the study of last things. Preterism has been around in one form or another since the second century and continues to the present. In fact it has experienced a significant resurgence in recent years. There are partial preterists and full preterists. Partial preterists believe significant portions of the Revelation were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem but prophecies found in the last several chapters of this document are still future in their fulfillment. Full preterists believe that all of the Revelation was fulfilled in the events surrounding the Roman/Jewish war in the first century.

Preterists believe that the seventy weeks prophesy found in Daniel 7, the Olivet Discourse found in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 and the prophecies of the Revelation are all tied together. It is believed that all these prophecies pertain to judgment upon Israel which is seen in the catastrophic events of the Roman/Jewish war which led to the destruction of the temple, the city of Jerusalem and much of the land of Israel and its peoples. It is believed this judgment completed the transition from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

Preterists view the Revelation as a letter written to first century Christians regarding first century events that John says were about to come to pass. Therefore, this interpretive approach places great emphasis on the Revelation being relevant to those to whom it was originally addressed. Since the Preterist approach is a growing perspective in the Christian community, we will include it in our examination of the Revelation.

## The Futurist Approach:

Futurism is by far the dominant interpretive perspective in today's Christian community. The leading version of futurism is dispensational premillennialism, inaugurated by J.N. Darby in 1830. This view sees the history of man set in seven God ordained dispensations of time with the final dispensation being a thousand year millennial reign of Christ. This view embraces a rapture of Christians followed by a seven or three and one-half year (depending on who you talk to) tribulation followed by the return of Christ to a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem from where He will reign with the resurrected saints for 1000 years.

Futurists see most of the Revelation as future in its fulfillment and take a much more literal approach to interpreting the symbols found in this prophecy. As with the Preterists, Futurists tie the seventy weeks prophesy and the Olivet Discourse to the prophecies of Revelation but see them as future in fulfillment rather than having been fulfilled as is the case with Preterism. Some futurists mix in a little bit of Historicism in

their approach. For example, some may see the seven headed, ten horned beast of Revelation 17 as a continuum of world empires beginning with the Babylonian Empire of 635 to 538 B.C. and running all the way to a projected revival of the Roman Empire sometime in our future.

Futurism has always been an interpretive method. Prophecy, by its very nature, requires a futuristic approach as all prophecy, by definition, is the foretelling of future events. The key to understanding prophecy is to determine how future from the time a prophecy is given does its fulfillment take place. Preterism sees the Revelation being fulfilled shortly after the prophecy was given. Futurism sees the Revelation largely being fulfilled thousands of years after it was given.

A major problem with modern futurism is that it virtually ignores audience relevance. By seeing most of the Revelation as future in fulfillment, it removes any significant meaning for those to whom the message was originally addressed. The first century readers of the Revelation were told the events they were reading about would soon take place. If indeed these events were meant to take place thousands of years after these first century readers were all dead, what possible meaning could such statements as "the time is near" and "must soon take place" have for these people? Futurists must find creative ways to deal with the time statements found in the Revelation which all indicate that the prophesied events were soon to take place.

Since futurism is the primary methodology in current use among interpreters, we will give it appropriate attention in our examination of the Revelation message.

## The Spiritual Approach:

The Spiritual approach is sometimes referred to as the Idealistic approach. This interpretive method sees in the symbols of the Revelation a variety of spiritual lessons and principles which may have recurrent expression and applicability in history. This approach sees the overall theme of Revelation as the triumph of good over evil, Christ over Satan, good religion over bad religion and the victory of the righteous over the wicked. This approach would see the Babylon of Revelation as descriptive of all that is evil down through time as opposed to it symbolizing a particular evil entity such as a revived Roman Empire or rebuilt Babylon, which is the Futurist interpretation, or symbolizing the city of Jerusalem, which is the Preterist interpretation.

While the Spiritual approach offers some interesting analogies, it fails to identify specific entities and events which it should be obvious John is writing about. John repeatedly refers to time frames in which certain things are to happen. The Spiritual approach virtually ignores the identity of these specific entities and time frames. First century readers of the Revelation would not have understood this message in terms of spiritual principles when John tells them from the start that they need to take this message to heart because the time for its fulfillment is near.

While the Spiritual approach is sometimes found mixed in with the historicist, preterist and futurist approaches, it does not draw much attention as a separate interpretive methodology in today's Christian community. Because of this, and the

drawbacks cited above, we will include the Spiritual interpretative approach only as it may interface with the Preterist or Futurist approach.

## Summary of the four approaches:

We have reviewed the four approaches historically used to interpret the Revelation. Some believe that all four approaches have validity. There is no question one can draw parallels between historical events and what John wrote. This is what the historicist, preterist and futurist do. There is no question you can create spiritual analogies from what John wrote. This is what those who take the spiritual or idealistic approach do. The challenge we have is determining what the intention of God was in revealing this prophecy to John. While drawing historical parallels and spiritual analogies can make for interesting interpretations, such interpretations can stray far from the intended meaning of the Revelation and thus lead to invalid conclusions. The Revelation means something. It can't mean everything. The four interpretive approaches will have validity only to the extent that what they offer can be documented by reasonable evidence. Our goal in this series is to seek a preponderance of evidence for any conclusions we may draw.

## Examination of the Revelation:

We are now ready to begin our examination of the Revelation. Our approach will be systematic, practical and evidence oriented. We will make every effort to allow Biblical scripture, wherever possible, to guide our understanding of what John wrote. We will strive to understand how the original recipients of John's letter would have understood this message. We will consider the social, cultural, political and religious context in which John wrote. Lastly, we will frame our discussion within the two currently popular interpretative approaches, Preterism and Futurism, and bring in Historicism and Idealism only as they may interface with Preterism and Futurism. Let's begin our journey.

### Chapter One:

*Rev 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.*

These first three verses speak of John in the third person suggesting an editor may have inserted this introduction as descriptive of how this message came about. On the other hand, John could have simply been speaking about himself in the third person. We sometimes talk this way ourselves. For example, I, Dave could say, "the information that Jim gave to Tim to show his employee Dave, etc." Here I would be talking in the third person about myself having received information from my boss Tim who got the information from Jim.



We see God giving the Revelation to Jesus Christ to show His servants what must soon take place. Christ is shown as being given this message and making it known to His servants by sending it via an angel to John. John then testifies to what he saw as the word of God and confirms Christ testified of this word to John through the angel. So we see this message coming from God to Christ, given to an angel who gives it to John who gives it the intended recipients who we are told are the servants of God.

John says those who read the words of this prophecy and take to heart what is written are blessed. John says they are blessed because the time is near. John said from the start that God gave this Revelation to Christ to show His servants what must soon take place.

It is here where we will begin to look at the views of the Preterist and the Futurist.

### The Preterist view:

The Preterist takes this passage to mean exactly what it appears to say. This is seen as a prophecy of events that would soon take place and the time was near for them to indeed take place. The Preterist will look at how the Greek words translated into our English words soon and near are used throughout the New Testament narrative. They will find that these words, when looked at in context, always mean something about to happen. It is therefore concluded that there is no grammatical, linguistic or contextual reason to believe these words suddenly change their meaning when John uses them in the Revelation. Since most preterists believe the Revelation was written prior to A.D. 70, it is concluded that the events which John says were near and would soon take place were the events defined by the Roman/Jewish war of A.D. 66 to 73 when Jerusalem fell, the temple was destroyed and much of Israel was left in shambles.

### The Futurist view:

The Futurist will counter the Preterist by saying that the Greek word for soon can also mean "quickly" and therefore it's concluded that John is saying that when the prophesied events of the Revelation begin to happen they will happen quickly but these events could first begin to happen many years removed from this prophecy. The Preterist will respond by pointing out that the servants being addressed are those belonging to seven churches existing in the province of Asia Minor in the first-century. It is these servants of God who are being addressed and asked to take heart because the time is near. It is argued that such admonition would have been meaningless to these servants of God if John is speaking of events that were to take place thousands of years after they were all dead.

The futurist will contend that God is speaking in terms of how He measures time, not how man does. They will quote 2 Peter 3:8 where Peter writes that a day to God is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day. The Preterist will counter by saying that if you are going to apply 2 Peter 3:8 to define soon and near in the Revelation you will have to do so throughout the scriptures which would result in rendering absurd meanings to hundreds of passages where soon and near are seen by context to mean soon and near as we understand those terms. Preterists acknowledge that there is a good deal of symbolism and metaphor in scripture but point out that words like soon and

near are basic straightforward, terms of human communication. Preterists contend that if we can't take such plain statements to mean what they normally mean, then Scripture, as a vehicle for communicating God's message to man, becomes impossible to understand.

Preterists point out that scripture is not written in "double-speak" where words mean opposite of what they normally mean.

Some futurists, recognizing the apparent strength of the Preterist argument will agree that John is speaking here of imminent judgment upon Israel but will contend these statements are dual in nature and what is written in the Revelation will have a greater fulfillment in the future. The Preterist responds by asking where the evidence is for such duality. The futurist answers by pointing to Old Testament prophecies that appear to only have meaning to the original audience addressed but when cited in the New Testament are applied to the Christ event. For example, in Matthew the second chapter, we are told that Herod's decree to kill all male children less than two years old fulfilled a prophecy of Jeremiah,

Matthew 2:17-18: *"Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more'"*

This prophecy is quoted from Jeremiah 31:15. A careful reading of Jeremiah 29 through 31 will reveal that Jeremiah is dealing with the problem of Judah's dispersion created by the Babylonian captivity and their returning from that captivity. It's an entire message of hope and not one of mourning. Jeremiah is reflecting on the plight of the Israelites in captivity but also showing they would be released from their captivity. There is nothing in this passage that is predictive of Herod killing the children in Bethlehem. Yet Matthew applies duality to what Jeremiah said by applying it to the Christ event. The futurist sees this kind of dual application as proof that duality is found in the scriptures.

The Preterist will agree that such dual application is found in scripture, but will point out that there is no such type/anti-type found in the Revelation. The Revelation simply gives an account of events that John claims are about to take place. There are no passages in the Revelation or anywhere else in scripture that point to a dual application of what John wrote. The Preterist points out that you can't assume duality when there is no indication of such duality. Similar events happen all the time. This doesn't mean such happening of similar events is an extended or greater fulfillment of some ancient prophecy.

Preterists will point to the Olivet Discourse where Christ answers the disciple's questions about when the temple would be destroyed. In this prophecy, Christ speaks of wars, famines and earthquakes. The Preterist will show that a number of wars, famines and earthquakes occurred in the Roman Empire just prior to the temple's destruction. The preterist will ask; Is there duality here? Can wars, famines and earthquakes since the first century be considered fulfillment of this prophecy? Nothing in scripture would suggest such duality. All Christ is doing is telling his disciples what was going to happen in anticipation of the temple being destroyed. Preterists are telling the futurist to

simply see things in context and not assume duality unless such duality is clearly expressed in scripture.

## PART TWO

Rev 1:4-6 *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 for ever and ever! Amen.*

### Futurist view:

Futurists see this passage as predictive of a future to us coming of Christ at the end of our present age when the saints will be resurrected, and join Christ in defeating the forces of evil, establishing His Kingdom and beginning the millennial reign. Some futurists see duality in this prophecy in believing Christ came in some sense in the A.D.70 event but believe the main thrust of this prophecy is a future to us second coming. No scriptural evidence is offered to validate a duality of this passage.

Futurists will acknowledge that John's message was addressed to seven existing first century churches but often express the belief that these seven churches represent the church throughout history. Others believe these seven churches represent seven eras of church history culminating in the final era leading to the return of Christ. While some historical parallels are given for this position, these parallels are usually presented within the context of some particular group claiming to be the one true Church and then tracing their supposed history through these assumed church eras. There is no reason from the scriptural text itself to hold to either of these views.

### Preterist view:

Preterists simply acknowledge John's message as being directed to seven first century Churches. Preterists see no applicability beyond the first century other than learning spiritual lessons from what these Churches experienced. Preterists see Christ's coming being a near to occur event in the first century and take as literal John's statement that these things were to soon take place. This coming is seen as establishing a spiritual Kingdom into which one can enter through resurrection which is seen as passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life.

This coming is seen as associated with the events surrounding the first century Roman/Jewish war when it is believed God judged Israel for failing to accept Jesus Christ as Messiah. Preterists will reference many scriptures to support this view including Luke 19:42-44 where Christ is seen as approaching the city of Jerusalem, weeping over it and saying:

"If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-- but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and encircle you and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

Preterists point out that history records the Romans built an embankment around Jerusalem during the war and killed anyone who tried to escape. The temple was totally leveled and became a farm field. This is the coming that Preterists believe is spoken of and anticipated throughout the NT writings.

### Additional comments:

In John's greeting to the seven churches, he speaks in verse 4 of grace and peace from "Him who is, and who was, and who is to come," from the seven spirits before His throne and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness. In 1:8, we read, "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty." In verse 3, Christ is identified as the faithful witness subsequent to John identifying "Him who is, and who was, and who is to come." Does the "Him" refer to God the Father who gave the Revelation to His witness Jesus Christ or is the "who is, and who was, and who is to come" a divine title for both the Father and the Son?

In Revelation 11:16, we read: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign." "Have begun to reign" could equate with "is to come." This passage would appear to refer to Christ.

In Revelation 22:13, we find it written, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End." In verse 16, we read: "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." Here it appears Christ is saying He is the Alpha and Omega which could equate with Revelation 1:8 where the Alpha and Omega is equated with "who is, and who was, and who is to come."

It would appear that "who is, and who was, and who is to come," is a divine title that applies to the God head and is used interchangeably to refer the Father and the Son as seen in the following scriptures.

Isaiah 44:6: "This is what the LORD says-- Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God."

Revelation 1:17: "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."

Who or what are the "seven spirits before his throne." There has been much speculation about this. The best observation appears to be that these seven spirits represent a composite of the Holy Spirit. This conclusion is based on a passage in

Isaiah where six attributes of Gods Spirit are mentioned along with the Spirit itself which equals seven.

Isaiah 11:1-2: *A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him-- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

The phrase "first born from the dead" in reference to Christ is somewhat puzzling. If being born from the dead is to be equated with resurrection, Christ would not be the first person born from the dead. Lazarus was resurrected as well as several others. Some feel John is not speaking of physical resurrection but of Christ having been raised from a spiritual death which He incurred when He took our sins upon Himself and experienced a momentary separation from God. Since Apostle Paul shows Christ became sin for us, it is felt He experienced a temporary sin death when He cried out on the cross, "My God, My God, Why have you forsaken me." Therefore, Christ is seen as the first to be born from spiritual death.

### Continuing in Revelation:

Rev 1:7-8 *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.*

### The Futurist view:

The Futurist takes "coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see him," quite literally. They will reference Acts 1:9-11 where Luke reflects on the circumstances of Christ's ascension and return:

"After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why do you stand here looking into the sky? 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."

Futurists will point out that there is no record of Christ coming in the clouds, every eye seeing Him or all the peoples of the earth mourning. Therefore the return of Christ must be an event yet to occur. The statement in Acts about Christ returning in the same way He left is felt to confirm what John said about the manner in which Christ would return.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists contend that these statements in Revelation and Acts address the manner of Christ's return not the timing of His return. The timing was established by John as an event that was near and must soon take place. Coming in the clouds refers to the manner of Christ's coming not the timing. Preterists view John's description of the manner of Christ's coming as figurative language. They contend that "coming in the clouds" is a common expression for God intervening in the affairs of men. Various scriptural examples are provided:

Isaiah 19:1: *An oracle concerning Egypt: See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt.*

Deuteronomy 33:26: *There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty.*

2 Samuel 22:10: *He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet.*

Psalms 68:4: *Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds.*

Psalms 104:3: *He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind.*

Preterists maintain God is not literally riding on clouds anymore than He is literally riding on the wings of wind. These are all figurative expressions of God revealing Himself in power and glory as He facilitates His will among men. In the case of the Revelation, "coming in the clouds" is seen as an expression of God coming in judgment against Israel no different than when He is seen as riding a swift cloud when coming in judgment against Egypt. Every eye seeing Him is taken as an expression of the collective eyes of those being judged seeing God's power and glory being manifested through the vehicle of the Roman armies. Preterists point out that in the OT God is often seen as bringing judgment upon one nation through the armies of another nation.

The phrase "those who pierced Him" is seen as referring to those who were directly responsible for Christ's death, thus dating Christ's coming to the first century. The phrase, "all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him," is seen as further identifying the first century nature of this event. The Greek word translated "peoples" is the Greek word for tribes and is used throughout the NT to identify the tribes of Israel. The Greek word for earth is often translated land. Preterists believe it was first century tribes of Israel in the land of Israel who were mourning because of the judgment that came upon them. Preterists point to Matthew 24:30-34 where these same Greek words are used when Christ said the tribes of the earth (land) would mourn when they see Him coming in the clouds. Christ then says all this would take place before the generation He is addressing passes away.

Finally, preterists will point to Matthew 26: 63-64 where the high priest said to Christ:

*"I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God." "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "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."*

It is pointed out that the Greek for future is *arti* which denotes a near occurrence. The word relates to time closely connected with the present as can be seen in the 35 other passages where it is found in the NT. The Preterist concludes that Christ was addressing the High Priest and his associates and saying it was they who would see Christ coming in the clouds as the Greek *arti* implies.

### Continuing in Revelation:

*Rev 1:9-11 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."*

### The Futurist view:

Futurists see John participating in the same suffering being experienced by other Christians of the time and having been banished to Patmos for his preaching about Christ. The Lord's Day is either seen as Sunday or as "The Day of the Lord" an expression associated with a still to occur return of Christ in judgment to establish His reign on this earth. Being in the spirit signifies being directed by the spirit of God relative to the writing of the Revelation or being carried in the spirit into the "Day of the Lord" and witnessing the events that would take place. The seven churches are seen as seven existing churches in the first century but also as representative of successive and/or ongoing conditions of the Church throughout all ages until Christ returns at some time yet future.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists see John's sufferings as witness to the tribulation that was going on at the time. His banishment to Patmos was simply an extension of such tribulation. Patmos is a rocky island in the Aegean Sea about 40 miles southwest of what today is the nation of Turkey. Preterists treat as a matter of fact the scriptural account of John being directed to write on a scroll what he was about to see and send it to the seven churches. Preterists do not see these churches as representative of successive or ongoing conditions of the church throughout history as they see no scriptural evidence to support such a conclusion.

12-16: 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.

The Futurist and Preterist view this passage in much the same way. In Revelation 1:20, the seven golden lampstands are identified as the seven churches and the seven stars are identified as the angels of the seven churches. We therefore see symbolism being used in this passage. The person John sees is identified as Christ in verse 17 and 18. The description of Christ appears symbolic of His power and glory and not a literal description of what Christ looks like. Christ is shown as having a double-edged sword coming out of His mouth. Ephesians 6:17 and Hebrews 4:12 indicate the word of God is like a double-edged sword. White hair is a token of wisdom. Eyes of fire could portray Christ as able to see everything. Christ dressed in a robe reaching down to His feet with a golden sash around His chest is representative of how the High Priest was dressed. Scripture shows Christ to be our High Priest. John may have literally seen a figure with the characteristics recorded but we shouldn't necessarily assume this is the way Christ looks in an objective sense.

Rev 1:17-19 *When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.*

### The Preterist view:

The Preterist sees Christ identified as the person talking to John and instructing him to write about what he has already seen, what was then taking place and what would take place later. Preterists point out that the phrase "what will," as in "what will take place later," is the Greek word *mello*. The primary meaning of this word involves something about to happen. This word appears 110 times in the NT and over and over again can be seen by context to mean something about to take place. It is therefore pointed out that Christ is not telling John to write about things that will take place hundreds or thousands of years in the future but of things that will take place in a short period of time.

### The Futurist view:

The Futurist sees Christ's instruction to John to write about things that will take place later as indicative of events that will take place far into the future. The Futurist does not consider the definition of the Greek word *mello* and its impact on this passage. The Preterist maintains that the use of *mello* in this passage negates any possibility of the word future being elasticized into thousands of years and counting.



Rev 1:20 *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.*

As already referenced, the seven stars and golden lampstands are associated with the seven churches to which John is writing.

The Greek word translated "angels" is *angelos* which means messenger or envoy. This word appears 186 times in the NT and by context can be seen to almost invariably refer to a non physical, spirit messenger sent by God. The Revelation comes from God to Christ and from Christ to an angel who gives it to John. John gives it to the angels of the seven churches. There is question as to the identity of the angels of these churches. It is felt that John, a physical human being, would not be writing a letter to deliver to spiritual messengers. It is therefore felt *angelos* in this context refers to human leaders of these seven churches to which John was delivering this message. There are several other NT passages where by context the Greek *angelos* can be seen to mean human messengers. We cannot ascertain for sure from the context of Revelation whether it is human or spirit messengers that are being spoken of in this passage. Understanding it one way or the other does not impact on our examination of the Revelation.

## Chapter two:

### Ephesus:

Rev 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 golden 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 forsaken 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 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.*

First century Ephesus had a population of around 250,000 and was the largest city in Asia Minor. Much of the population worshiped the multi-breasted Goddess Artemis, also known as Diana. The city contained a temple to Artemis which at the time was considered one of the Seven Wonders of the World. Paul founded the church at Ephesus and spent three years ministering there. It's unclear as to what is meant by the accusation that the Ephesians had lost their first love. Their first loves

appears to be tied to things they did at first and were apparently not doing now. Therefore it could relate to anything from behavioral issues to doctrinal considerations.

It's noted that they hate the practices of the Nicolaitans. Some early church fathers speculate the Nicolaitans were followers of Nicolas, who was one of seven men ordained as a deacon as recorded in Acts six. It is speculated that he later became a heretical teacher. The Nicolaitans are mentioned again in connection with the church at Pergamum. Nothing is known about the Nicolaitans for sure. It is apparent that whoever the Nicolaitans were, they were perverting the Gospel of Christ.

### The Futurist View:

Some Futurists view the letters to the seven churches as representing specific time frames of church history beginning with Ephesus representing the apostolic church period and running until approximately A.D.100. Other Futurists see these letters addressed to the actual historical churches of record with the warnings to these churches being applicable to all ages of the church where similar conditions may exist. Futurists see Christ's coming to remove the Ephesian lampstand as conditional upon their failure to repent. If they repent, Christ doesn't have to come and remove their lampstand. Therefore, it is believed that it is not Christ's second coming that is referenced in this passage but instead a provisional coming involving judgment for failing to repent of drifting from their first love. Futurists view Christ's promise of the tree of life as taking place at a yet future return of Christ.

### The Preterist View:

Preterists see John's letter addressed to seven churches as dealing with issues germane to those churches. The Preterist sees no scriptural or historical reason to believe these churches represent church eras or conditions extant throughout church history.

When Christ speaks of coming to remove the lampstand of the Ephesian church if they don't repent, He is seen as referencing His second coming. Christ tells the Ephesian church to repent or have their lampstand removed. He also tells them if they overcome they will be given the right to eat from the tree of life. Preterists point out that Revelation 22 shows the tree of life is associated with the return of Christ. Preterists point out that to the Philadelphia church Christ said "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." Philadelphia is one of the seven first century churches being addressed and it is told by Christ that He is coming soon. Therefore, Preterists conclude that all references to Christ's coming in the letter to the seven churches pertain to His second coming which is seen by scriptural reference as being imminent to those being addressed in the first century.

### Smyrna:

Rev 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.*

Smyrna was located about 40 miles north of Ephesus. It was considered a very beautiful city with a population of around 200,000. Smyrna was very loyal to Rome and had built a temple to Dea Roma, the goddess of Rome. Of the seven messages addressed to the churches, this one is the shortest and contains no rebuke or call to repentance. This message speaks of impending persecution and possible death for members of this church. Smyrna had the largest Jewish population of any city in Asia Minor at the time. Scripture shows that Christians are Jews circumcised in the heart and not in the flesh. The reference to Jews that say they are Jews but are not could reflect Jewish converts to Christ who still believed you must be circumcised in the flesh and follow the Mosaic regulations. The NT shows that persecution from such Jews against both Gentile and Jewish converts to Christianity was rampant and intense. The fact that the Smyrna Christians are seen as being in physical poverty in a city that was economically rich implies economic sanctions against Christians. Some Futurists see Smyrna as representing the church through a series of persecutions from A.D. 100 to A.D. 313. Preterists view this persecution as occurring prior to A.D. 70 as it is Jews apparently spearheading this persecution which would not have been the case after A.D. 70 when much of the Jewish population had been killed or dispersed.

#### Pergamum:

Rev 2:12-17 *"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.*

Pergamum (Pergamos) was located about 30 miles north of Smyrna and was the seat of Roman government for the entire region of Asia Minor. It had temples to Caesar Augustus, Zeus and the serpent god Asclepius. Christ identifies Himself to this church as the one having the sharp, doubled edged sword. Commentators point out this may have been in response to the fact that the Roman Proconsul had "power of the sword" and Christ was reminding the church that it is He who has ultimate power of the sword and he will use the sword of His mouth to eliminate false doctrine. Pergamum is shown to be located where Satan lives. This appears to be a symbolic reference to Pergamum being the seat of Roman government for Asia. There is no other historical reference to the martyrdom of Antipas.

The Nicolaitans are again mentioned along with those who hold to the doctrine of Balaam. As recorded in Numbers 25, Balaam is seen as, for a price, offering advice to the Moabite King Balak, which Balak used to entice Israel to sin. Balaam thus became a symbol of someone willing to do or say anything for personal gain. In 2 Peter, chapter two, we see Peter speaking of false teachers infiltrating the church for personal gain and following the ways of Balaam. Apparently this was occurring in the church at Pergamum. As there are a variety of interpretations relative to the meaning of hidden manna, white stone and new name, I will not address them here as none appear to be definitive.

Some Futurists see Pergamum as representing the Church between A.D. 313 and A.D. 500. Preterists see Pergamum strictly as a first century church which was suffering persecution at a seat of Roman government. False teachers are identified and told to repent or face judgment at the soon to occur return of Christ.

## PART THREE

### Thyatira:

*Rev 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.*

Thyatira was located around 45 miles east of Pergamum. While not a great city, it was known for commerce in wool, linen, and dyed cloth. It had an extensive network of trade guilds each having its own patron deity accompanied by feasts and festivals which included sexual revelries. Act's 16:14 mentions Lydia from Thyatira, a maker of purple cloth.

Christ identifies Himself as the Son of God and congratulates this church on doing more now than at the beginning. Christ then shows His great displeasure at this church for allowing the women Jezebel to pervert the church. It is generally felt that use of the name Jezebel is symbolic of the infamous Jezebel of OT history who led Israel into idolatry. It is theorized that because Thyatira was virtually dominated by trade guilds, you had to be a member of such guild in order to work. These guilds all had patron deities to which you were expected to give honor and participate in their worship practices which included sexual misconduct. It is felt that there was someone in the Thyatira church encouraging accommodation to such practices which led to moral sin and idolatry. Christ is seen as facilitating judgment upon those doing these things and promising ruling authority to those who remain faithful.

### The Futurist view:

Some Futurists view the Thyatira church as representative of the Christian Church between A.D. 500 and A.D. 1500 which is the time the papacy became a powerful influence. While Futurists see evidence for a literal first century application of the conditions extant at Thyatira, they also see prophecy of events that they feel can only be realized at a yet future return of Christ to establish His Kingdom with the resurrected saints.

Futurists see Christ promising Thyatira power over the nations and ruling them with a rod of iron and dashing them as a potter's vessel. They look at the present and past state of the world and conclude there is no evidence that this has taken place and therefore it must still be future in fulfillment.

### The Preterist view:

The Preterist sees no evidence to conclude that Thyatira or any of the seven churches addressed by Christ are representative of specific Church ages, or the Church as a whole throughout history up to the present. Preterists see Christ addressing seven churches that history shows existed in the first century. They see Christ addressing problems that history indicates match well with the particular cultural, political, religious and environmental circumstances these churches found themselves in.

Preterists point out Jesus told the Christians at Thyatira to “hold on to what you have until I come.” He told the Philadelphia church “I am coming soon.” The Preterist asks what relevance this would have to these first century Christians if Christ wasn’t coming for thousands of years after they all died. The Preterist believes that Christ came as He said He would and established not a physical but a spiritual Kingdom which began in the first century as a “mustard seed” and has continued to grow through the ages, increasing in power and rule over the nations as promised to the Thyatira church.

Preterists also believe that a first century return of Christ in judgment of Israel brought to an end the Old Covenant system and gave immediate power to Christians to finally remove the yoke of Jewish persecution off their collective back. This is believed to be the “end” spoken of by Christ to Thyatira as well as on numerous other occasions in the NT narrative.

## Chapter 3

### Sardis:

*Rev 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 blot out 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."*

Sardis was located around 30 miles south of Thyatira. It was a prosperous city and had a temple to Artemis situated on the acropolis, an 800 foot high rocky elevation on the north side of the city. The city was known for its red dye and woolen industry. Its population was taken up with luxurious living which led to moral decadence.

The scriptures do not reveal what was going on in Sardis for Christ to label them as dead. They were living in a city of wealth and relaxation and may have been simply going through the motions of Christianity but not really maintaining the kind of separation from the world that Christ requires.

### The Futurist view:

Futurists view Christ's statement in this passage about coming as a thief as a statement of unannounced judgment upon those members of the Sardis church who fail to change their ways. Futurists feel Christ's statement here about coming as a thief is unrelated to statements elsewhere in scripture about His second coming being like the coming of a thief.

Some Futurists see Sardis as representing the church age during the reformation period of A.D. 155 to A.D. 1700. Other Futurists see the conditions extant in Sardis and all seven churches as representative of conditions within the church throughout history. Since each message to the churches ends with promises associated with events seen as related to the second coming, it is felt that these promises won't be realized by the church until the "church age" ends with the return of Christ in the future.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists see the statement about Christ coming as a thief as parallel to what He said about his second coming being as the coming of a thief in Revelation 16:15. Preterists point out that the second coming is discussed by Jesus within the context of coming as a thief in the Olivet Discourse. Paul, in his second letter to the Thessalonian church (2 Thessalonians 5:2-4), characterizes Christ coming as a thief and Peter does the same in 2 Peter 3:10. Since it is the second coming and not some other coming that is associated with coming as a thief throughout the scriptural narrative, Preterists conclude it is the second coming that is alluded to in the message to the Sardis church. Preterists see Jesus Christ addressing first century Christians and telling them to wake up so his coming won't surprise them. Preterists point out that the entire Revelation is about the second coming of Christ. That being the case, Preterists ask why would Jesus speak of some other kind of coming in his admonition to the Sardis church or any of the seven churches. It's pointed out that Jesus plainly said at the beginning of the Revelation that His message to his servants was about what must soon take place (Revelation 1:1). The second coming was the major event that was to soon take place.

### Philadelphia:

*Rev 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.*

Philadelphia was located about 25 miles southwest of Sardis. It was founded between 189 and 138 B.C. and named after King Attalus 2<sup>nd</sup> of Pergamum who had been given the name "Philadelphus" (brother lover) because of his love for his brother. The city was prosperous and associated with textiles, leather works and wine making.

Christ seen as holding the key of David appears to be associated with the account of Eliakin who was given the responsibility of determining who could enter the Kings residence and who would be denied entrance. In reference to Eliakin, Isaiah quotes God as saying, "I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open." (Isaiah 22: 22). Some commentators feel what Christ is saying to the Philadelphia church is that he has placed before them an open door to the Kingdom and since He controls the door no one can open or shut it without His approval. It is speculated that Judaizers were infiltrating the Philadelphia church teaching Christians that only through keeping the Mosaic regulations could they enter the Kingdom. Christ looks upon these Judaizers as belonging to the synagogue of Satan just as in His directives to the Smyrna church.

### The Futurists view:

Futurists see the Philadelphia church as representative of a period of time shortly before a yet future return of Christ. Some Futurists see Christ's open door statement as not pertaining to entering the Kingdom but as an invitation to spread the gospel message to the world. Those futurists who believe in church eras feel the Philadelphia church represents the period from around A.D. 1700 to the present as a period of great evangelism. Christ's statement about keeping them from the hour of trial that will come upon the whole world is seen as being a yet future event as Futurists do not see this historically occurring. Futurists conclude Christ is telling the Philadelphia church that He will remove (rapture) them from the earth and therefore cause them to avoid the great tribulation.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists respond by again pointing out that this message is written to an existing first century church and must have relevance to that church. It's pointed out that the Revelation was given to show the servants of God what must soon take place. This message was written 2000 years ago and directed to first century servants of God residing in seven different churches existing at that time. The Preterist will turn to dozens of NT scriptures which show expectation of an imminent return of Christ. Preterists will point to a very instructive statement made by the writer to the Hebrews.



Hebrews 10: 36-37: *You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay.*

Preterists see no delay in what Christ tells the church at Philadelphia. They had patiently endured and were about to be protected from the coming tribulation and judgment upon Israel and receive the promised salvation and entrance into the Kingdom. Preterists see Christ's statement about the hour of trial coming upon the whole world as referring to the Roman world of the first century which was going through severe political, cultural and social turmoil. It was also a time of great tribulation for the church which had to withstand persecution from the Judaizers and martyrdom at the hands of Rome.

Christ tells the Philadelphians He is coming soon. Preterists see this as being addressed to the first century church in the city of Philadelphia and not to a twenty-first century representation of that church. Christ's coming is therefore seen as imminent to first century Christians. Preterists see no scriptural or historical justification for elasticizing Christ's statement about coming soon to thousands of years into the future and counting.

#### Laodicea:

Rev 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 anyone 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."*

Laodicea was located about 45 miles southwest of Philadelphia. It was a banking center and known for production of black woolen products. It had a famous medical school and was known for the production of an effective eye salve made from Phrygian powder mixed with oil. The city was considered wealthy and had a sizable Jewish population. Despite its wealth, its water quality was poor. The city's water supply originated from hot springs six miles away and in the process of traveling through aqueducts to the city, the water became tepid, neither hot nor cold.

The parallels between what Christ said to this church and the actual physical circumstances of the residents of this city are striking. Being neither hot nor cold corresponds to the drinking water of the city. The acquisition of wealth reflects the wealthy status of the city. The admonition to buy gold refined in fire so they could wear white clothes is in contrast to the black wool clothes that were worn. The counsel to apply spiritual eye salve associates with the physical eye salve for which this city was known.

Preterists see these parallels and find them to be very strong evidence for a first century application of this scripture to the church at Laodicea. The Futurist sees the first century application but feels it also applies to conditions extant in the church just before a yet future return of Christ. The Preterists asks what justification is there for such futuristic application.

## THE SEVEN CHURCHES IN REVIEW:

### The Futurist view:

Futurists view the message to the seven churches as representative of conditions within the church in specifically defined periods of church history or representative of the church in general throughout its history. While acknowledging the historical existence of the seven churches in the first century, it is believed that the directives to those churches are prototypes or shadows of what would be extant within the church right up to the time of a yet future return of Christ.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists see Christ addressing seven first century church congregations about problems relevant to them. Preterists point out that Christ repeatedly speaks of the imminent fulfillment of the events of which He writes. Preterists see no scriptural or historical evidence to turn plain statements of imminency on their head and make them to mean the opposite of what they mean. Preterists acknowledge that some conditions extant in these seven churches can be seen in the Church throughout its history. Drawing such parallels, however, does not equate with Christ's statements being predictive or intended prototypes of such parallels. Parallels are stand alone comparisons and do not require any causal association with their antecedents.

Preterists see Futurists as assuming the thing to be proved by postulating future fulfillment of the message to the seven churches in order to maintain their expectation of a yet to occur return of Christ. Preterists see Futurists assigning "double speak" to statements of Christ in concluding that when Christ says near He really means far and when he says soon He really means distant.

Preterists, admonish Futurists to simply take the statements of imminency to mean what they say, place the scriptures in their historical context and let the chips fall where they may.

## PART FOUR

### Chapter 4:

We now begin to look at the prophetic core of what was revealed to the seven churches. Futurists are divided as to how events described in the Revelation will be fulfilled. For example, we find three basic views expressed by Futurists regarding the millennium. While all three views include belief in a yet future to us return of Christ, there is divergence as to when this will occur relative to the millennium.

Some believe that Christ will initially return to “rapture” Christians off the earth. Following such “rapture” will be a time of great tribulation involving catastrophic world events as depicted in the Revelation. Christ will then return to establish His Kingdom and begin a literal thousand-year millennial reign. Those who believe in this approach are called Premillennialists or Dispensational Premillennialists. Other Futurists believe that the millennium is to follow the evangelizing of the world, leading to a period of peace on earth for a thousand years or more. Christ will then return after this period of time. This position is known as the Postmillennial view. A third view is called Amillennialism. This view postulates that the present church age is the millennium and Christ will return at some future point to facilitate resurrection and a final judgment.

Since these three views involve different interpretations of the Revelation, we will look only at the view of the Dispensational Premillennialist as this view is the most representative of current day Futurism.

Preterists also have divergent views as to how the Revelation is fulfilled. There are Partial Preterists who mix in some Futurism in believing that much of the Revelation was fulfilled in the events associated with the Roman/Jewish war but believe Christ will return in the future to facilitate resurrection and final judgment. Full Preterists believe the entire Revelation was fulfilled when Christ returned in judgment upon Israel resulting in the destruction of the temple, the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish religious system extant at the time. It is believed this event brought the Old Covenant system of death to an end and fully established the New Covenant system of life which corresponds to establishment of a spiritual Kingdom represented by the New Jerusalem. Resurrection is viewed as passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life.

Since Full Preterism presents the best contrast with Dispensational Premillennialist Futurism, we will only consider the full Preterist view in these essays.

**IMPORTANT:** Since the primary purpose of these essays is to contrast the Futurist and Preterist view as to when the Revelation is fulfilled, we will examine the details of this prophecy only as they have direct bearing on the timing of the fulfillment of events prophesied.

Rev 4:1-11 *After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." 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 God 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 for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being.*

### The Preterist view:

Preterists see John saying that after delivery of the messages to the churches, he is invited to be spiritually present in the throne room of God where he is given vision of what would soon take place. The expression "after this" (Greek *meta tauta*) is the same as "take place later" as seen in 1:19 and literally means "after these things." The expression in 1:19 is preceded by the Greek *mello* which signifies something about to take place. The Preterist believes what John was about to see were things that were about to take place on the heels of the messages sent to the seven churches.

### The Futurists view:

Futurists view the phrase "after these things" as things that will happen after the "church age." Since Futurists view the message to the seven churches as pertaining to seven different eras of the church or as conditions extant in the church throughout its history. It is believed that what John is now about to see pertains to what will occur after true Christians are raptured and the "Laodician Christians" are left behind to face the tribulation along with the rest of the world.

## Chapter 5:

Rev 5:1-14 *Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. 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, for ever and ever!" The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.*

### The Futurist view:

Futurists see Christ being given the scroll to open the seals as an event yet future to us which will usher in the end time tribulation and the second coming. Being made a Kingdom of priests to reign on the earth is viewed as looking forward to the time of the millennium when Christ will rule with the saints from the physical city of Jerusalem.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists see the opening of the scrolls seven seals as occurring shortly after John is given the Revelation as this harmonizes with the imminency statements

repeated several times in chapters one, two and three. Becoming a Kingdom of priests and reigning with Christ on the earth is viewed as participation in the spiritual Kingdom which becomes fully established when the temple is destroyed and the means to facilitate the Old Covenant system is removed. Thus the Old Covenant period is consummated and the new Covenant is established. Establishment of the New Covenant is equated with establishment of the Kingdom which is equated with establishment of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is seen as a spiritual representation of the New Covenant Church.

## Chapter 6:

*Rev 6:1-17 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. 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 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 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 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. 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 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. Then 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 on 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 Futurist view:

The Futurists sees the unveiling of the six seals as picturing the tribulation that will occur just prior to a yet future return of Christ. Parallels are seen with what Christ said in the Olivet Discourse as recorded in Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The white horse and its rider holding a bow, having a crown, and riding out as a conqueror bent on conquest is seen to represent what Christ said about false christs arriving on the scene and deceiving many. Some feel the "anti-christ" is represented here. The fiery red horse and its rider who is given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other, is associated with Christ saying, "You will hear of wars and rumors of wars and nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom." The black horse and its rider who is holding a pair of scales in his hand is compared to Christ's observation that there would be famines. The pale horse is associated with pestilence that Christ said would occur.

The fifth seal, which addresses martyrdom of the saints, is seen fulfilled in what Christ said about the faithful being handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and hated by all nations because of Him. The sixth seal which speaks of earthquake and signs in the sun moon and stars is paralleled to Christ speaking of earthquakes and the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light, the stars falling from the sky, and the heavenly bodies being shaken. John showing that people living on the earth will call for the rocks to fall on them is seen as reflective of what Christ said in Luke 28:30. "Then " they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" "

By tying the sayings of Christ in the Olivet Discourse to the opening of the six seals, the Futurist sees Christ speaking of the same events in both the Discourse with His disciples and in his Revelation to John in the message given to the seven churches. All this is viewed as being still future in fulfillment.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists agree with Futurists as to the parallels between the opening of the six seals and what Christ said in the Olivet Discourse. Preterists however, sees the Olivet Discourse as undeniable evidence for the six seals of Revelation 6 pertaining to the first century Roman/Jewish war and not to some yet future fulfillment as Futurists conclude. Preterists point out that the Olivet Discourse is Christ's response to the disciples question as to when the temple would be destroyed. The temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. Futurists respond that there is duality here and the temple will be rebuilt. Preterists ask the Futurists to provide scriptural evidence for such duality and the rebuilding of the temple. The Futurist responds by saying the events Christ spoke of in the Olivet Discourse and the Revelation have not yet occurred. Therefore they must still be future to us.

Preterists point to a great deal of historical data from first century historians such as Josephus, Tacitus, Suetonius, Pliny the elder and others who all attest to a

number of false messiahs, wars, famines, earthquakes, and martyrdoms occurring before and during the Roman/Jewish war. Preterists point out that when Christ finished explaining all that would take place leading up to and including His return, He said, "I tell you the truth, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened" (Matthew 24:34). Preterists believe it is the generation Christ was addressing at the time that would not pass away until these things happen. Futurists counter by saying Christ was referring to the generation existing at the time these things would take place which Futurists believe is our current generation or one still to arrive in the future. Preterists point out the word generation by context is seen throughout the NT to always refer to the generation being addressed at the time and there is no grammatical reason to conclude the word suddenly changes its meaning in the Olivet Discourse to mean a generation thousands of years into the future.

Futurists will ask the Preterist when the signs in the heavens took place. When did the sun turn black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turn blood red, and the stars in the sky fall to earth? When did the sky recede like a scroll and every mountain and island get removed from its place? Preterists explain this is apocalyptic language and is used throughout the prophetic scripture to symbolize God powerfully intervening in the affairs of men to accomplish His will. Preterists will offer many OT examples of this kind of language being used to show Gods judgment upon various nations.

Finally, Futurists will ask where in history is there record of men calling for rocks to fall on them to hide them from the wrath of God. Preterists point to what Christ said on His way to being crucified.

Luke 23:28-30: *Jesus turned and said to them, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' Then they will say to the mountains, 'Fall on us!' and to the hills, 'Cover us!' "*

Preterists point out this is a first century context where Christ is telling first century women in Jerusalem not to weep for Him but for themselves because of what is to befall them. Preterists explain it is within this context of judgment upon Jerusalem that Christ speaks of people asking for the mountains to fall on them which is felt to parallel what is said in Revelation 6. This same imagery is seen in reference to previous judgment upon Israel. In Hosea 10:8, in reference to the Northern ten tribes being taken captive by the Assyrians, the prophet writes, "The high places of wickedness will be destroyed-- it is the sin of Israel. Thorns and thistles will grow up and cover their altars. Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!" It's pointed out the historian Josephus actually wrote about the rebel element in first century Jerusalem hiding in caves and caverns in an attempt to escape the destruction that was upon them.

### Additional comments:

Some in both the Preterist and Futurist camps see the white horse of the first seal as representing Christ conquering by taking the gospel to the world. In



Revelation 19, Christ is seen as riding a white horse and white is often associated with Christ in the scriptures. This view, however, is questionable in so much that the four horsemen appear to parallel the same series of events as depicted by Christ in the Olivet Discourse. The first event is the appearing of false christs, not the true Christ. The composite focus of the four horsemen is the bringing of judgment. To postulate that the rider on the white horse represents Christ preaching the gospel does not fit the context of the four horsemen. The rider on the white horse appears to more adequately represent a false christ by taking on the symbol of the true Christ as seen in Revelation 19. Josephus states that, "the country was full of robbers, magicians, false prophets, false messiahs, and impostors who deluded the people with promises of great events."

## Chapter 7:

*Rev 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 Zebulun 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 the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes--who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the lamb at the*

*center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."*

### The Futurist view:

Dispensational Premillennialists believe that the faithful of the Church will have been raptured before the sealing of the 144,000 and the great multitude. Those being sealed are those who turn to Christ during the great tribulation and are thus protected from the events associated with the seven last plagues. Other Futurists, who don't hold to the rapture idea, believe those sealed are the faithful of the church and they will be supernaturally protected from the tribulation. All Futurists believe the 144,000 represent Jews who will be converted to Christ just prior to His return. The great multitude is felt to represent gentile converts or a combination of both Jewish and Gentile converts. Some Futurists believe these converts represent martyred Christians who come out of the great tribulation and are literally standing before the throne of God. Others believe the language relating to their status before God is symbolic and speaks of the Christians spiritual relationship with God after being converted.

### The Preterist view:

Preterists see the sealing of the 144,000 and the great multitude as pertaining to God providing a way for the Christians to escape the city of Jerusalem and surrounding areas before the Roman invasion. Preterists point to what Christ said in the Olivet Discourse about seeing the abomination that causes desolation standing in the holy place being the signal to flee to the mountains. Preterists will show from both scriptural and secular history that this abomination standing in the holy place took place during the Roman/Jewish war. The historian Eusebius writes of the Jewish Christians being warned by a prophetic oracle to flee the city just before the Roman siege began. Historians show the Christians escaped to the city of Pella beyond the Jordan River.

Preterists also point out that the 144,000 could not pertain to Israelites becoming converted just prior to a yet future return of Christ. In Revelation 14:1-4, the 144,000 are identified as the firstfruits to God and the Lamb. Apostle James, in his letter addressed to the "twelve tribes scattered among the nations," said, "He chose to give us birth through the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created" (James 1:1, 18). James is addressing his contemporaries as the firstfruits. A reading of the New Testament scriptures clearly shows that the first converts to Christianity were from the tribes of Israel. Since the concept of firstfruits appears to be identified with those Israelites who became Christians in the first century, it would place the 144,000 in the first century. If the 144,000 are to first make their appearance in our future they could hardly be considered the "firstfruits." They more appropriately would be labeled the last fruits.

Preterists, as do some Futurists, believe the language relating to the status before God of those sealed is symbolic and speaks of the Christians spiritual relationship with God after being converted.

## Chapter 8:

Rev 8:1-13 *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. 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. 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 Preterist view:

Preterists view the representations associated with opening of the seventh seal as all pertaining to Gods judgment upon Israel which brought about the destruction of the temple and the downfall of Jerusalem along with much of Israel and communities of Jews living in various parts of the Empire. The prayers represented by incense are viewed as the prayers of first century persecuted Christians. The censer filled with coals of fire from the alter and hurled down to the earth is paralleled with the manner in which God instructed ancient Israel to take fire from the altar and burn a city against which God brought judgment. Preterists see judgment coming from the same censer that held prayers as indicative of Gods response to the prayers of the Christians for relief from the persecution leveled upon them by the Jews.

While Preterists view much of the wording associated with the seals as apocalyptic language so common in prophetic writing, they do see some parallels to what actually occurred. In reference to the trees and grass being burned up it's noted that Josephus laments about how the Roman armies cut down all the trees and leveled the gardens outside the city of Jerusalem in order to have materials to build ramps to scale the walls of the city. Josephus wrote that the beautiful suburbs outside the walled city were laid waste due to the war (Wars, V1:1:1).

In reference to events associated with the second trumpet, Preterists point to Josephus writing about a battle that took place on the Sea of Galilee where many Jews were killed and the lake was full of blood, dead bodies and shipwrecks (Wars, 111:10:9).

As to the mountain burning with fire being thrown into the sea, Preterists see this as symbolic of Jerusalem known as Mount Zion being burned by the Romans as gentile nations are sometimes referred to as the sea.

The third trumpet speaks of a star called wormwood making the waters bitter. Wormwood is used by OT prophets in speaking of judgment upon Israel for failure to do Gods will (See Jeremiah 9:13-25 & 23:15, KJV). Preterists take note of wormwood in the OT pertaining to judgment upon Israel and view its use in the Revelation as pertaining to judgment upon Israel in the first century.

Reference to the sun, moon and stars turning dark is viewed as symbolic language describing the fall of Israel. This same type of language was used by Ezekiel in describing judgment brought upon Israel by Babylon (Ezekiel 32:7-11).

This chapter ends with an eagle flying through the air pronouncing a triple woe upon the inhabitants of the Earth. The Greek word translated "earth" is *gee*. It appears 252 times in the NT and can mean either earth or land. Context best determines how this word should be rendered. By context, it is often seen in the NT to refer to the land of Israel. Since Preterists view the Revelation as pertaining to the first century judgment upon Israel, Preterists feel that *gee* is better translated as land in the Revelation.

The word "eagle" in this passage is translated from the Greek word *aetos*. The KJV and NKJV of the scriptures use Greek manuscripts that have the Greek *angelos* in place of *aetos* and therefore render it as "angel." Biblical scholars believe *aetos* to be the correct wording as it is found in most of the ancient manuscripts. This brings an interesting possibility relative to the Preterist view of the Revelation.

It is interesting to note from the writings of Josephus, that when the Romans burned the temple, they brought their ensigns to the temple area, set them up against the eastern gate and offered sacrifices to them. The Roman ensigns were eagles. In speaking of conditions extant at the time of His return, Christ said "Where there is a dead body, there the eagles (Greek *aetos*) will gather" (Luke 17:37). Some Preterists believe Christ is speaking metaphorically of the death of Old Covenant Israel at the hands of the Roman armies who are here represented by eagles. The reference in the Revelation to an eagle announcing three woes is seen as representative of the Romans involvement in the final destruction of the temple and

the city. Preterists cite Jeremiah 4:13 and Hosea 8:1 as examples of God referring to eagles as representing judgment against Israel.

### The Futurists view:

Futurists see the events associated with the seventh seal as representative of events yet to occur in our future. Some Futurists take a quite literal approach to what is written while others view what is written as symbolic. Futurists view use of the censer in the same way the Preterists do but believe it is Gods judgment upon the entire earth at the end of the church age in response to the prayers of the saints.

Many Futurists see the hail, fire and burning of grass and trees as literal events orchestrated by God. Some Futurists see all this as the result of nuclear warfare. The mountain falling into the sea is felt by some to be representative of a modern Babylon made up of a revived Roman Empire headed by the antichrist and a false religious system. This system is seen as thrown into the sea of nations and creating great havoc on the earth. Futurists point out that in Jeremiah 51:25, ancient Babylon is referred to as a "destroying mountain." Some futurists point out that the Revelation speaks of "something like a huge mountain" and not an actual mountain. It therefore could be an enormous meteor or represent a nuclear bomb. A nuclear bomb exploded in the ocean could easily destroy many ships and kill a great deal of marine life, turning the water red with blood.

Futurists see the star called wormwood as symbolic of a political or religious leader misleading the people of the earth or viewed more literally as an actual heavenly body of some sort or a nuclear device contaminating the waters. One Futurist claims that the name for the Russian nuclear power plant Chernobyl, which experienced a meltdown, is the Russian word for wormwood and therefore sees in this a foreshadowing of what is prophesied in the Revelation.

Some Futurists see the darkening of the sun moon and stars as symbolic of judgment upon the political/religious powers of the revived Roman Empire. Some see the darkening due to nuclear warfare while others see direct interference by God in the normal operation of these heavenly bodies.

Like Preterists, most Futurist commentators agree that eagle and not angel is the proper translation in this passage. Futurists, however, do not view the eagle as representing Rome bringing judgment but simply as a messenger, possible the fourth living creature who is described as an eagle and is seen before the throne in chapter 4:7.

## PART FIVE

### Chapter 9:

*Rev 9:1-21 The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man.*

*During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.*

*The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. 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 Futurist View:

Futurists see the events described in chapter 9 as yet to be fulfilled in the future. Some Futurists see the falling star as a literal star whereas most see it as Satan or a representative of Satan descending to open the pit of hell to release demons upon the earth which are represented by locusts. Some see the locusts as armies of men influenced by Satan and the demons. Some Futurists see in this passage fulfillment of Ezekiel 38 where Gog and Magog release great military power against the land of Israel. Gog and Magog are felt to refer to the modern nations of China and the Soviet Union. The recent breakup of the Soviet Union may do damage to this perspective. The king over the locusts is felt to be Satan which in turn indicates the locusts are either demons or demon possessed humans.

Releasing of the four angels bound at the Euphrates is seen as the release of a great army in the east to descend upon Israel. Some Futurists see the number of the mounted troops of two hundred million as figurative of a large army. It is pointed out that the former Soviet Union had an army of around three million and China's army is around 2.3 million. An army of two hundred million would surpass the combined armies of every nation of the world. Some futurists believe the two hundred million refers to demons. Most Futurists see the descriptions presented here as representative of modern weaponry. Failure of the human race to repent after such great devastation is felt to reflect the great influence of demonic control over the world and its population.

### The Preterist View:

Preterists see the events of chapter 9 fulfilled in conditions extant in first century Israel just prior to and during the war with Rome. Preterists see the falling star and release of the locusts as representative of demonic activity that had taken control in Israel during this period of time. Much death and destruction was caused by Jews fighting Jews before the full brunt of the Roman invasion occurred. Historians such as Josephus show virtual anarchy in Israel prior to their destruction. Preterists believe this fulfilled what Christ prophesied as recorded in Matthew 12.

Matthew 12: 43-45: *"When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first. That is how it will be with this wicked generation."*

Some Preterists see the locust's five month period of activity corresponding to the five months the Roman armies surrounded Jerusalem before actually entering the city.

Historians show this phase of the Roman siege of Jerusalem began on the 14th. of Nisan (April) of A.D. 70 and ended on the 8th. of Elul (September) A.D. 70., a period of 134 days which is just short of a normal five month period. The inhabitants of Jerusalem held out against the Romans during this five month period while suffering greatly from internal strife and starvation. In this case the king over the locusts is felt to be the Roman general Titus.

The release of the four angels at the Euphrates representing the mounted troops is seen as invading Roman legions and their allies coming against first century Israel. Josephus records that the 10<sup>th</sup> legion which participated in the attack had been stationed near the Euphrates. Some Preterists see in this passage fulfillment of the final curses upon Israel for their failure to obey the Covenant (see Deuteronomy 28:49-68). The number of two hundred million is seen as figurative. Preterists see Israel's refusal to repent as reflective of having given themselves over to demons as Christ predicted would happen. The Roman general Titus repeatedly offered the Jews opportunity to surrender and avoid total destruction but they refused.

## Chapter 10:

*Rev 10:1-11 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 for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets." Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."*

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

## The Preterist view:



Most Preterists see the mighty angel as Christ. The Greek *angelos* means messenger. The description of this messenger matches the description of Christ as seen in other scriptures. Christ standing on the land is believed to represent Israel and His standing on the sea the Gentiles. Scripture uses land and sea in this respect. Since the book is open, some Preterists identify it with the seven sealed scroll which was earlier opened. The announcement of no more delay in association with the seventh seal and the mystery of God being accomplished is seen as the Old Covenant system of exclusion of Gentiles being brought to an end in the destruction of the means to facilitate that system. Apostle Paul is seen as clearly identifying the mystery of God in his letter to the Ephesians:

Ephesians 3:4-6: *In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

The action of eating the little book is seen as reminiscent of Ezekiel eating a scroll which was sweet in the mouth but left a bitterness. This event was associated with judgment of Judah in the destruction of Jerusalem at the hands of the Babylonians (Ezekiel 3:1-3, 14). Preterists now see Jerusalem being destroyed for its failure to embrace the covenantal change that Christ brought.

## The Futurist view:

Some Futurists see the mighty angel as Christ. Others see the angel as representative of Christ. Futurists have little definitive to say about the meaning of the little book. Some Futurists see the mystery of God as His allowance of Satan to have rule in the world but now that rule will come to an end with the return of Christ. Other Futurists see this mystery as various truths about God and his purpose being revealed at the time of Christ's return. The sweet and bitter motif is seen to represent the word of God being a mixture of God's message of grace and judgment. Fulfillment of events recorded here is seen as occurring in our future.

## Chapter 11:

Rev 11:1-19 *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 waters 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 street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*

*For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.*

*The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great-- and for destroying those who destroy the earth." 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 Preterist view:**

Preterists tend to see John's measuring as symbolic of identifying those who would be protected from the imminent destruction of Jerusalem and reflective of what Christ said about Jerusalem being trampled down by the Gentiles in Luke 21:24. The temple is seen as the literal temple standing in the first century or symbolic of the spiritual temple of the church. The outer court is seen to represent apostate Israel

The forty-two months, as well as the 1,260 days, is seen as the period of time corresponding to the three and one-half years the Roman armies held Jerusalem under siege before destroying the city along with the temple. The account of the two witnesses is generally felt to symbolically represent the work of the church during this time of upheaval. The church is seen as being very proactive in spreading the gospel message but suffering great persecution and martyrdom. The saints are vindicated when Christ returns to bring the salvation promised and facilitate spiritual resurrection to all those who remained faithful. Some Preterists see the two witnesses as Peter and Paul who history indicates were both killed during Nero's persecution. Peter and Paul are seen as being raised to spiritual life at the time the temple is destroyed signifying the end of the Old Covenant system of death and establishment of the New Covenant system of life.

The "beast" is seen as representing Nero or the Roman Government in general. The earthquake is seen as representing the fall of part of the holy city Jerusalem. It is pointed out the historian Josephus writes of there being violent storms accompanied by the earth quaking during the war. This may provide some literal application to what John wrote.

Christ is seen as establishing His spiritual Kingdom as He assumes rulership by bringing to termination the Old Covenant system and fully implementing the New Covenant system which provides for passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life. Resurrection is viewed as a passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life for those saints living when Christ returned and the physically dead saints being ushered into eternal life as well.

## The Futurist view:

The measuring John is told to do is seen in a similar fashion to that of the Preterists. The temple, however, is seen as a rebuilt temple at a yet to occur future return of Christ. The forty-two months and 1,260 days are generally seen to reflect the last three and one-half years of a seven year tribulation period yet future to us.

Some Futurists see the two witnesses as Moses and Elijah or as two individuals coming in the spirit and power of Moses and Elijah much as John the Baptist was seen as coming in the spirit of Elijah. Others take a position similar to Preterists in believing they represent the witnessing of the church, but unlike Preterists, believe this event is still future.

The "beast" is seen as a revived Roman Empire or its ruler. The resurrection of the witnesses is seen as a literal physical resurrection. The seventh trumpet is seen as the second coming of Christ to establish His millennial Kingdom on earth. Since a resurrection of the dead is indicated in this passage, it does present some problems for Futurists who believes that the saints were raptured before the tribulation and the rest of the dead are not resurrected unto the end of the millennium. Some Futurists get around this problem by postulating that the resurrection occurring when Christ returns to establish His Kingdom is a resurrection of Old Testament

saints, and those who turned to Christ and were martyred during the tribulation. This still allows for a final resurrection after the millennium.

Another school of thought extant in some Futurist circles discounts the idea of a rapture before the tribulation but believes that the dead saints will be resurrected when Christ returns and rule and reign with Him during the millennium. After the millennium, those who never had a legitimate opportunity to accept Christ will be resurrected and given that opportunity after which there will be a resurrection of the incorrigibly wicked.

## Chapter 12:

*Rev 12:1-17 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 have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short." When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the*

*torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring--those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

## The Futurist view:

Most Futurists view the woman as Israel and the child as Christ. The woman's description parallels the description of the family of Jacob who became the nation of Israel (Genesis 37:9). Christ is easily identified as the child as it is Christ that is prophesied to rule all nations. The dragon is Satan as clearly identified in verse 9. The seven heads and ten horns are identified with a succession of revivals of the Roman Empire beginning with the Empire existing at the time the Revelation was written and extending to the time of Christ's return yet in our future.

The dragon casting a third part of the stars to the earth is seen as reflective of a third of the angels being cast to the earth at the time of Satan's rebellion. The attempt of the dragon to devour the child is seen as Herod's slaughter of the children in Bethlehem and the child being caught up to God's throne is viewed as the ascension of Christ.

The woman fleeing into the wilderness is seen as a yet future event when spiritual Israel (the church) or a remnant of physical Israel flees to a place of safety (some think it to be Petra in Jordan) during the last three and one-half years of the tribulation or 1,260 days. The war in heaven is seen as occurring at the time of the tribulation and is reflective of Daniel 12:1 where Michael is seen as protector of the people. Satan having a short time is seen as Satan being active during the tribulation but facing banishment before the beginning of the millennium. The flood is interpreted in a variety of ways as is the dragon returning to make war with the rest of those that have the testimony of Christ.

## The Preterist view:

Preterists see the woman crying out in pain as she gives birth as the culmination of the labor and pain of historical Israel awaiting the birth of the promised Messiah. The seven heads and ten horns are seen as a composite of the four beasts of Daniel 7 which had a total of seven heads and ten horns. This is believed to represent the four major empires of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome. Greece was split into four territories following the death of Alexander the Great. All these empires were under the sway of Satan. The dragon casting a third part of the stars to the earth and the attempt of the dragon to devour the child is seen in much the same light as that of the Futurist.

Michael is believed to actually represent Christ as the one who casts out Satan. This event is seen as occurring at the time of the death and resurrection of Christ as indicated by Christ who right before His crucifixion said, **"Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out"** (John 12:31). Once Satan is

cast to the earth, knowing he has but a short time, he is seen as persecuting the woman who is viewed as the developing Christian church which is also viewed as spiritual Israel. This persecution goes on for approximately 40 years and leads to much suffering and martyrdom but Christians are seen as overcoming through Christ. The flight of the women into the wilderness during the 1,260 day period is seen as the escape of the Jerusalem Christians to Pella before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Edomite and Roman invasions during the three and one-half year siege of the city. This is seen as a direct response to Christ's command in the Oliver Discourse to flee when they see the abomination that causes desolation standing in the holy place. Being carried by the wings of a great eagle is felt to be the anti-type of ancient Israel being carried out of Egypt on eagles wings (Exodus 19:4). Jerusalem is seen as a type of Egypt in Revelation 11:8.

Satan casting out a flood to destroy the women is paralleled to the Egyptian Pharaoh attempting to destroy the fleeing Israelites only to be thwarted in doing so. Satan enraged at the women and making war with the rest of her offspring is seen as the continuing persecution of Gentile Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire.

## Chapter 13:

*Rev 13:1-18 And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven.*

*He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast--all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. 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.*

*Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.*

## The Futurist View:

Most Futurists associate the beast rising up out of the sea with the fourth beast of Daniel seven which is commonly understood to represent the Roman Empire and consists of an amalgamation of the first three beasts seen by Daniel. Many commentators view scripture as designing the sea as representative of Gentile nations and land as representing Israel. Dispensationalist futurists see this beast as representing a revived Roman Empire yet to occur in our future. The deadly wound is seen as an actual resurrection of a leader of the beast power or as symbolic of the Roman Empire of old being revived. The period of forty-two months is associated with the last three and one-half years of the tribulation to occur just before a yet future second coming of Christ.

The little horn is associated with the little horn of Daniel seven and is viewed as the rise of a religious leader who will be in alliance with the beast power. This religious leader is viewed as the "antichrist," the man of sin mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:4. Many futurists see the image of the beast as a literal image that the religious leader will cause people to worship. The mark of the beast is often viewed as some kind of identification required in order to buy and sell. No definite application is given to the number 666 by futurists. Because this number has been seen to apply to various individuals throughout history, futurists are reluctant to take a stand on this issue.

Some Futurists take a historicist approach and see the first three beasts of Daniel seven as representing the Babylonian Empire of 625 to 538 B.C., the Medo-Persian Empire of 558 to 330 B.C., and Greece under Alexander the Great which began in 333 B.C. After the death of Alexander, Greece was divided into four kingdoms which are felt to represent the four heads of the third beast. Rome became the seventh beast (seventh head) of Daniel seven and existed from 31 B.C. to A.D. 476. This seventh head of Daniel's beast is the beast John sees in Revelation

thirteen. The deadly wound is seen as the fall of Rome in 476 A.D. and the first three horns are seen to represent the transition rulership of the Vandals (A.D. 429 to 533), the Herulli (A.D. 476 to 493) and the Ostrogoths (A.D. 493-554). The deadly wound is seen as being healed by the restoration of the Empire under Justinian in A.D. 554 who is seen as the fourth horn. The Empire is seen as experiencing four more restorations and continuing until 1814 which is seen as the period of forty-two months from the beginning of the Roman Empire in 31 B.C. or 1,260 years based on the day for a year interpretive methodology. Horns five through seven are explained in the commentary on chapter seventeen.

## The Preterist view:

Preterists identify the Roman Empire as the beast having the seven heads and ten horns. This Empire represents the seventh head of Revelation 12 and Daniel 7. The ten horns are felt to represent the ten provinces of Italy, Achaia, Asia, Syria, Egypt, Africa, Spain, Gaul, Britain and Germany over which Rome ruled. The first five heads are seen as Julius Caesar, Augustus Caesar, Tiberius Caesar, Caligula, and Claudius Caesar with Nero being the sixth and the one John sees in power at the time. This is seen as corresponding with the seven headed, ten horned beast of Revelation 17:9-10, where the beast is identified as seven kings of which five having fallen, one is, and the other has not yet come. The one that is, is felt to be Nero.

Nero, as head of the Roman Empire at the time John wrote, is considered the personification of Roman rule and therefore the beast of Revelation 13. Preterists point to much historical evidence to substantiate this position. The Roman historian Tacitus (A.D. 55-117) tells of how Nero initiated the persecutions against the Christians with horrible tortures, crucifixions, beheadings, burning them alive and using them as human torches. Pliny the elder (A.D. 23-79) describes Nero as "the destroyer of the human race," and "the poison of the world." The writer Thana (4 B.C. - A.D. 96) actually called Nero a beast, comparing him with wild beasts of the field. The writer Lactantius, speaks of Nero as "an execrable and pernicious tyrant" and a "noxious wild beast."

It's pointed out that when Nero committed suicide, the Empire was thrown into great disarray involving civil war and anarchy. Three would-be successors to Nero failed and died within the space of eleven months. The Empire appeared to be coming to an end when General Vespasian, at the insistence of his army, took control of the government and brought the empire back from oblivion. It was Vespasian's son Titus who led the siege against Jerusalem. In the historical overview of the Roman Empire given to John, some Preterists see this revival of the Empire as the deadly wound that was healed.

Preterists point out that Nero's full title name as Roman Emperor was *Nero Caesar*. In Hebrew and Greek, the numbers associated with these letters total, 666. It's pointed out that in several very early copies of the Greek New Testament; the number 616 is given which is the Latin numerical equivalent of the name Nero Caesar. It is believed this tells us the copiers knew 666 in the Greek represented Nero and were simply using the Latin numerical designation they were well aware of.



The forty-two months is associated with the Neronic persecution against the Christians which began in November of A.D. 64, and continued until June of A.D. 68, a period of three and one-half years. It was in June of A.D. 68 when Nero committed suicide. Worship of the beast is seen as reflective of Caesar worship which was common throughout the Roman Empire. History reports that Nero built a 120 foot high likeness of his head haloed with solar rays that identified him as Phoebus Apollo.

Some Preterists view the "little horn," that arises from the land, as the Jewish religious authority. It's pointed out that many New Testament scriptures speak of the Jewish hostility toward Christians and their complicity with the Romans in persecuting and putting Christians to death. It is felt that this persecution included attempts to prevent Christian's from buying and selling if they refused to express allegiance to Rome. At the trial of Christ the Jews said they had only one King and that was Caesar.

## PART SIX

### Chapter 14:

Rev 14:1-20 *Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth--to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." 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 of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.*

*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. 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.*

## The Preterist view:

The Preterists view of who the 144,000 are is detailed in the commentary on chapter 7. The new song being sung is felt to be a song of redemption. Not defiling themselves with women is seen as not joining in with apostate Israel in rejecting Christ and the New Covenant. The angel proclaiming the everlasting gospel is seen as representing the Church taking the gospel to the world as Christ said would occur before the end would come. The end is viewed not as the end of the world or of time but as the end of the Old Covenant age. Some Preterists see this angels proclamation as pertaining specifically to the about to occur judgment upon Israel.

Most Preterists view Babylon as Jerusalem which is representative of apostate Israel. This will be elucidated in the commentary on Chapter 17. Judgment is seen as coming upon all those who cooperate with the beast (Rome) in persecuting the Christians. The Christians are encouraged to endure and are looked upon as blessed for their patience even unto death. The first angel is seen as calling on Christ to reap the harvest of believers. Some Preterists associate this with the escape of Jerusalem Christians to Pella before the Roman invasion of Jerusalem. Other Preterists see this as representative of all those converted to Christianity before the judgment upon Israel. The second angel swinging his sickle is seen as God's judgment being poured upon Israel through the destruction brought by the Roman armies.

Grapes gathered and thrown into the wine press is seen as symbolic of judgment upon Israel. Preterists point to Isaiah chapter 5 and Lamentations 1 where Israel is compared to a vineyard and being trampled in a winepress. Outside the city is felt to relate to out side the city walls of Jerusalem

## The Futurists view:

The Futurist position on the 144,000 is elucidated in the commentary on Chapter 7. Not defiling themselves with women is viewed as Christians avoiding the corruptions of this world. The term "everlasting gospel" is somewhat problematic for Futurists because some Futurists believe there are two gospels (gospel of the Kingdom and the gospel of grace) taught in scripture while others feel only one gospel is taught. Most Futurist expositors, however, see the gospel proclaimed by the angel as representative of both the Kingdom and grace and as a general summons to repent.

Futurists view Babylon as representing the religious/political system of the ancient city by that name. Some Futurists see it as an actual rebuilt city of Babylon while most see it as symbolic of a resurrected Roman Empire that will bring judgment upon modern day Israel and be a major player in end time events still future to us.

Futurists are divided as to whether the two sickle events represent two separate actions as the Preterists believe or whether both sickles pertain to judgment. Some Futurists associate the vineyard and winepress with Israel as do Preterists while others see these symbols as God's judgment upon mankind in general. Some Futurists see the so called war of Armageddon coming into view here because of the degree of carnage described. The reference to outside the city is felt to relate to outside the walls of Jerusalem and the approximate territory of the country of Israel. Blood running to the horse's bridles is seen as figurative of the severity of events.

## Chapter 15:

*Rev 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 for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.*

### The Preterist view:

Preterists see the time frame for the seven last plagues as the overall period of upheaval in the Roman Empire and judgment upon Israel leading to the destruction of the temple and the city of Jerusalem. Singing the song of Moses is viewed as the saints rejoicing in the same manner as Israel did when leaving Egypt. Now Egypt had come to represent apostate Israel (Revelation 11:8). Singing the song of the Lamb is seen as rejoicing in the deliverance found in Christ. No one being able to enter the

temple until after the plagues are complete is viewed as entering the spiritual temple of eternal life once the earthly temple representing the Old Covenant of death is destroyed.

## The Futurist view:

The seven angels are seen as coming out of a heavenly temple. The sea of glass mingled with fire is seen as representing God's wrath. Those standing by the sea of glass are viewed as those martyred during the tribulation as other Christians would have been raptured prior to the tribulation according to the dispensationalist view. Singing of the songs is seen in much the same way as the Preterist view.

## Chapter 16:

Rev 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 on the earth." The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. 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 God 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 God 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 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 Futurist view:

Futurists believe these seven last plagues are yet future to us and will be God's judgment upon the world just prior to the return of Christ to begin a thousand year millennial reign. Futurists are divided as to giving a literal or a symbolic hermeneutic to these plagues. Those taking a literal approach are further divided as to whether these plagues are directly inflicted by God or inflicted through human warfare. For example, the sores of the first plague could be directly inflicted by God or be the result of chemical warfare or radioactive nuclear fallout. Literalists point to the plagues that came upon Egypt and see a number of parallels with what is found in the Revelation. Since the plagues upon Egypt are taken as literal occurrences, it is believed the same is true regarding the plagues at the end of the world. Those who hold to the symbolic approach see in the sores a representation of man's moral degenerateness which God allows to occur. Most Futurists mix literal and symbolic interpretations.

The drying up of the Euphrates River is seen as literal as it is believed this opens the way for the great armies from the East to descend upon the Middle East which leads to the "Battle of Armageddon." The apparent announcement by Christ that He is coming as a thief in relation to the impending battle of Armageddon is felt to show correlation between these two events. Armageddon is identified with Mount Megiddo which is located just south of Galilee and forty miles north of Jerusalem. It consists of a raised area overlooking a vast area of flat land. The final plague is seen as bringing a crushing defeat to the kingdoms of this world in anticipation of the coming of Christ.

## The Preterist view:

Many Preterists see these seven plagues as the culmination of judgment against Israel which is seen as the Babylon of the Revelation. Other Preterists see some of these plagues being directed against Rome as well. The plagues are seen largely as symbolic of the carnage of war. It is recognized, however, that the suffering experienced in association with these plagues may have been a literal reflection of the plagues description. Some Preterists see in the plagues the literal fulfillment of what Moses said would befall Israel for being unfaithful (See Deuteronomy 28).

The recipients of the first plague poured out upon those having the mark of the beast and worshiping his image is seen as those Jews who collaborated with the Romans in persecuting the Christians and possibly the Romans themselves. It is pointed out there was great upheaval in the Roman Empire during the reign of Nero and during the year that followed his suicide. Historians such as Josephus, Tacitus and others, record civil war and great calamity throughout the Empire including Rome itself as different men battled to replace Nero. Nero had set fire to Rome and blamed the Christians. During this period the Roman Government, aided and abetted by the Jews, came down hard on the Christians and many Christians were martyred

References to water turning into blood could be associated with the actual massacre of Jews in a battle on the Sea of Galilee by the Roman and Jewish forces. Josephus reports the lake was all bloody and not one of the Jews escaped. This judgment of water turning into blood is seen as applying to first century Israel as it is they who shed the blood of the saints and prophets in persecuting the Christians and now they are being given blood to drink. Preterists point to the following warning Christ gave to the religious leaders of his day as supporting this view:

Matthew 23:34-38: *I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. I tell you the truth; all this will come upon this generation. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing. Look, your house is left to you desolate.*

The plague upon the throne of the beast is seen as judgment against Rome. Rome itself was going through great turmoil at the same time it was destroying Israel. The Euphrates drying up is seen by some as Titus returning with allied armies from the eastern regions of the empire to facilitate the final siege of Jerusalem as Josephus writes of in his histories. Preterists see Armageddon as associated with the land area just to the north of Jerusalem where much slaughter of human life had occurred over thousands of years. It is seen as symbolically representing the final slaughter of the Jews as Jerusalem is taken and the temple destroyed. Christ coming like a thief is seen as a rhetorical statement as to His involvement with this entire period of judgment. The announcement "it is done!" is seen as the termination of the Old Covenant and the full establishment of the New Covenant. It is felt this is further signified by the great earthquake which is viewed as symbolically showing this change in Covenants as foreseen by the writer to the Hebrews. This writer associates the shaking of the earth at the giving of the Old Covenant with a greater shaking of the earth at the time the New Covenant is established (Hebrews 12).

The dividing of the city into three parts is seen as symbolizing Israel's three part judgment of being burned in the city, slain with the sword and taken captive. Some Preterists see it as reflective of the three warring factions in the city of Jerusalem that had largely devastated the city before the Romans came in. The hail stones each

weighing 100 pounds could pertain to the Roman catapults which were stone throwing engines of war. Josephus records these stones as weighing 100 pounds.

## Chapter 17:

*Rev 17:1-18 One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead: MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH. I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus. When I saw her, I was greatly astonished.*

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

*"This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. "The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings--and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers." Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing*



*to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."*

## The Futurist view:

Futurists see chapter 17 as a parenthetical look at events that occur prior to the pouring out of the bowls of chapter 16. Babylon is seen as a political/religious entity that will rise up at the time of the end and initially be in alliance with the beast power which is seen as a revived Roman Empire. Some futurists see Babylon as a literal rebuilt city of Babylon. Because the woman is described as dressed in purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls, some protestant interpreters see the Roman Catholic Church as the woman. Reference to prostitutes being children of this woman is felt to represent all of apostate Christianity. Reference to Babylon being drunk with the blood of the saints is viewed as this false religious system persecuting true Christians. Some view Babylon as representing all false religion from the beginning of the world.

The woman seen as riding the beast is viewed as this false religious system working in close association with the beast power. The reference to seven hills upon which the woman sits is felt by some to be a clear allusion to Rome as Rome from ancient times was called "the city on seven hills." Other futurists take the historicist approach and view the seven hills as representing the five empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia and Greece with Rome being the sixth as seen by John. The seventh is seen as yet to come.

Some Futurists, who view the woman as the Roman Catholic Church, take a historicist approach and see the seven headed beast of Revelation 17 as six consecutive resurrections of the Empire beginning with Justinian in A.D. 554 and followed by Charlemagne in A.D. 774, Otto the Great in A.D. 962, Charles the Great in A.D. 1520, Napoleon in A.D. 1805 and a united Italy under Garibaldi from 1870 to 1945. The seventh "resurrection" of the beast is believed will occur in our future and the ten horns represent ten kings who will be allied with the beast. It is believed the Roman Catholic Church and other apostate Christians will join this alliance. It's pointed out that all six of the proposed resurrections of the Empire submitted to the Popes of the Roman Catholic Church and four of the emperors were crowned by the Pope. It is believed the woman is identical to the little horn that appears after the third horn of Daniel seven and the two horned lamb that appears after the third horn of Revelation 13

Most Futurists equate the ten horns of Revelation 17 with the ten toes of Daniels image in Daniel 2 and the ten horns of Daniel's fourth beast in Daniel 7.

## The Preterist view:

Preterists see Revelation 17 as an overview of the dynamics surrounding the identity of the beast and Babylon. The beast is seen as representing the Roman Empire at the time John wrote and parallels the beast of Revelation 13, the dynamics of which were covered in commentary on chapter 13. Some Preterists see

the woman as representing the city of Rome during the reign of Nero because it was during his reign many saints were killed. This is seen as reflecting the statement about the woman being drunk with the blood of the saints and martyrs. Most Preterists, however, see the woman as representing Jerusalem and therefore the Babylon of the Revelation.

Preterists point out that John is seeing things that are said to shortly come to pass. Rome didn't fall for another 400 years. Therefore Rome could not be Babylon. In Revelation 11:8, "the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt," is identified with the place where Christ was crucified which we know was the area of Jerusalem. Jerusalem is therefore identified as the "great city." Jerusalem is characterized as Sodom and Egypt, both symbols of sin and corruption. This is seen to harmonize well with the description of Babylon. Babylon is called the "great city," in Revelation 17:18, 16:19 and several times in chapter 19. In Revelation 17:6 and 18:24 it's recorded that in Babylon was found the blood of prophets and of the saints. In Matthew 23:37: Christ said "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you." This chapter shows Christ promising judgment upon those He was addressing for all the righteous blood shed throughout Israel's history and concludes by alluding to the destruction of the temple.

The woman described in Revelation 17 is adorned with precious stones and pearls. She is then identified as being adulterous and a prostitute. In Ezekiel chapter 16, we find an allegory about Jerusalem. Here the writer shows how Jerusalem was adorned with gold and silver and fine clothes and then squandered it all to become a prostitute and enter into adulterous relationships with other nations. The writer goes on to show how Jerusalem would be stripped of her wealth and beauty and the very ones she committed adultery with would turn on her. Jerusalem and the nation of Israel are identified as prostitutes and harlots many times in Scripture. In Mark 8:38, Christ refers to those He was speaking to as an adulterous generation.

Preterists see the waters where the prostitute sets as representing the many nations where the Jewish religious system was extant in the first century. The first century historian Philo writes that the Jewish people were diffused throughout every continent and over every island. The Roman historian Tacitus shows much destruction of Jewish society occurred throughout the Empire just prior to the destruction of Jerusalem. He writes that the entire Jewish population of Caesarea was massacred in one day. Similar atrocities happened in Scythopolis, Ascalon, Ptolemais, Tyre and other cities of the Empire. Tacitus writes that in Alexandria the whole Jewish quarter was deluged with blood and fifty thousand corpses lay in the streets. Preterists believe this all points to a great judgment upon first century Israel which culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem which was Israel's seat of Government and the designated Babylon of the Revelation.

## Chapter 18:

Rev 18:1-24 *After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt*

*for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. "When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!" "The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more-- cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. "They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "'Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" "Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.'"*

*Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The*

*sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."*

## The Preterist view:

Preterists see in chapter 18 a continuation of Jerusalem being identified as Babylon. Her becoming a home for demons and evil spirits is seen as reflective of what Christ said in Matthew 12 about the generation He was addressing becoming a haven for wicked spirits. The kings of the earth committing adultery with her is seen as reflective of what Jerusalem is seen as doing in Old Testament times as recorded in Ezekiel 16. The call to come out of her is seen as reflective of Christ in the Olivet Discourse telling His disciples to flee Jerusalem before its destruction. God's intention to pay back double for her sins is seen to reflect previous pronouncements against Israel as in Jeremiah 16:18, where God says "I will repay them double for their wickedness and their sin."

Some Preterists feel the descriptions of the commerce of Babylon are more apropos to Rome than to Jerusalem. Other Preterists point out that history shows Jerusalem to be a rich commercial center in the first century as she sat at the crossroads of several continents. A great deal of trade passed through Jerusalem and the land of Israel in general. The various Jewish festivals drew Jews and converts to Judaism from all over the Roman Empire as Acts 2:9-10 indicates. The magnificence of the temple was a virtual tourist attraction. When Jerusalem and much of the land of Israel was destroyed it was a big loss to the merchants of the Empire.

Descriptions of the "great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls" is again seen as reflective of Ezekiel's description of Jerusalem. The chapter ends with seeing this city as responsible for the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth." This is seen to clearly parallel what Christ said to the religious leaders in Jerusalem as recorded in Matthew 23:34-38.

## The Futurist view:

Some Futurists see the description of Babylon in Revelation 18 as a literal rebuilt city of Babylon in Iraq. Futurists who expect an actual rebuilding of Babylon refer to Jeremiah 50 and 51 where the prophet laments over the city of Babylon. It is felt that these prophecies were never historically fulfilled in the destruction of ancient Babylon. Other Futurists see Babylon as representative of a "resurrected Roman Empire that will be in alliance with the leadership of an apostate church often seen as the Roman Catholic Church. It is believed that this apostate church in alliance with the beast power will persecute and put to death anyone who does not adhere to its rule.

Some Futurists believe this revived Empire will be headed by Germany and be composed of ten European nations representing the seventh head and ten horns of Revelation 17, the seventh horn of Revelation 13 and the ten toes of Daniel's image in Daniel 2. It is felt this juggernaut will attack Israel and then be attacked by a huge armed force from the Eastern countries of China and Russia which will be the war of Armageddon. Christ will return at this point and defeat all forces and begin His Millennial rule. Lament over the fall of Babylon will be great as the world realizes the wealth and power of this great Empire has been destroyed.

## PART SEVEN

### Chapter 19:

*Rev 19:1-21 After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen, Hallelujah!" Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!" Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)*

*Then the angel said to me, "Write: `Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself.*

*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and*

*dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

*And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great." Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.*

## The Preterist view:

Preterists see the avenging of the blood of God's servants as judgment brought upon Israel for their persecution of the Christians, their history of shedding the blood of the prophets and their refusal to accept Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah. The description of Christ setting on a white horse coming with the armies of heaven and making war is viewed as God's intervention and manifestation of power in bringing about the destruction of Jerusalem, the temple and the Jewish religious system. This is seen as accomplished through the Roman armies and their allies.

The beast, along with the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse is seen as the Nero led Roman government's three and one-half massive persecution against Christians when many were tortured and put to death. The false prophet is seen as the religious leadership of the Jewish religious system which aided and abetted the Roman persecution of the Christians. The appearance of the bride having made herself ready is seen as the church persevering during the persecution and now being rewarded by having their persecutors killed and receiving entrance into the fully established Kingdom of God.

Being thrown into the fiery lake is seen as symbolic of the death of Nero and the Jewish priesthood. Birds seen as gorging themselves on the flesh of those killed is viewed as fulfillment of Christ saying *"Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather"* (Matthew 24:28).

## The Futurists view:

Futurists view the descriptions of this chapter as a future coming of Christ's to defeat the end time beast power and its religious affiliate and establish His millennial kingdom. The armies that come with Christ are seen as the raptured saints now returning to join Christ in the battle and be part of the millennial government. The "marriage of the Lamb" is seen as union between Christ and the church. Dispensationalists see this marriage occurring immediately after the rapture of the church. Being called to the marriage supper is seen by some as an event separate from the actual marriage and by others as coincident with it.

Some Futurists see the symbolism of a sword coming out of the mouth of Christ as the word of God and the only weapon involved in the destruction of His enemies. Others view the sword more literally as representing physical destruction upon those who have failed to repent and embrace the Christian message. In this case the sword is linked with Christ's power, rulership and authority.

## Chapter 20:

*Rev 20:1-15 And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth--Gog and Magog--to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.*

*And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

## The Futurist view:

Futurist views vary as to the meaning of Revelation 20 based on how the millennium is understood. The three major positions on the millennium are briefly defined in part four of this series. In keeping with our format for this series, we will contrast only the Dispensational Premillennialists view with that of the full Preterist view.

The Dispensationalist Premillennialists see Christ returning in a literal manner in our future to destroy His enemies represented by the beast power and the false prophet. Christ will then establish a literal 1000 year reign with His government headquartered at a rebuilt temple located in a refurbished city of Jerusalem. This coming will involve the change of the living saints from having physical bodies to having spiritual bodies and the resurrection of dead saints who also will receive a spiritual body. These saints will rule with Christ during this thousand year period during which time Satan will be bound. After the thousand years are over, Satan will be loosed for a short time and be successful in deceiving the nations of the earth whose armies will surround Jerusalem and be subsequently destroyed by Christ. Satan will be thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet were thrown. This is followed by the resurrection and judgment of all who have died throughout history.

A slight variation of this view is seen in the idea that the resurrection after the millennium will involve all those who have died not having had a legitimate opportunity to accept Christ. These will be given a 100 year period to accept and show commitment to Him. At the end of this 100 year period, there will be a final resurrection where the incorrigibly wicked will be sent to everlasting torment or permanently destroyed depending on ones view of the fate of the wicked.

## The Preterist view:

Throughout this series we have contrasted the Futurist view with the full Preterist view as these two views represent the greatest difference in how the Revelation is understood. A full Preterist believes the entire Revelation was fulfilled in the events surrounding the Judgment upon Israel in the first century. A Futurist, by contrast, sees most if not all fulfillment yet in our future. While all full Preterists believe the events of the Revelation were fulfilled in the first century, there are



some differences in viewpoint as to the nature of the millennium and the resurrection. We will provide the general viewpoint of Preterists on this chapter.

Preterists generally view the 1000 years as symbolic of the forty-years between the ascension of Jesus Christ and His return in Judgment upon Israel in A.D. 70. This is looked upon as the transition period between the demise of the Old Covenant and the establishment of the New Covenant. It was a time of resurrection from spiritual death unto spiritual life and is viewed as the first resurrection. Some Preterists believe the first resurrection is an actual “rapture” of Christians at the time of the return of Christ in A.D. 70. and the second resurrection takes place later.

Through the church Christ is seen as reigning and the saints were reigning with Him as a royal priesthood. Satan was bound in so much that he could not prevent the Church from developing. The saints are seen as suffering great persecution but being made spiritually alive in Christ. A number of Jewish rabbis, writing in the first and second centuries, believed that the days of the Messiah would be a transitional period of forty years between this present world and the world to come. Preterists believe that the present world was the Old Covenant world and the world to come is the New Covenant being established and fully consummated in the events of the Roman/Jewish war.

At the end of this symbolic thousand year period, Satan is let loose to ignite the Jewish revolt and the Roman response. Christ is viewed as coming in power and glory through the vehicle of the Rome armies to facilitate judgment upon Israel. This effectively terminates the Old Covenant system and the Jewish persecution of the Christians. Judgment is also poured upon the persecuting power of Rome as seen in the suicide of Nero and the tremendous upheaval in the Roman Empire at the time. This gives Christians reprieve from torturer and death. Resurrection of the rest of the dead occurs during this time. These resurrected are all who have died throughout history and now face a determination as to their future. This resurrection is viewed not as physical bodies coming out of the ground but as a resurrection of passing from spiritual death unto spiritual life or being eternally separated from God. Satan, Death and Hades (hell) being thrown into the lake of fire is considered symbolic of Christ having destroyed spiritual death and the perpetrator of such death, namely Satan.

Preterists see the spiritual Kingdom being fully established at this point and equated with what is considered a spiritual New Jerusalem coming down from heaven as described in Revelation 21. Those who accept Christ from this point onward pass from spiritual death unto spiritual life and upon physical death become part of the spiritual realm. Preterists don't have a unified perspective as to the fate of the unsaved dead. As is true of Futurists, some Preterists believe in eternal annihilation of the wicked while others believe in some form of eternal conscience punishment.

## Chapter 21:

*Rev 21:1-27 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!"*

*Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

*The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The*

*great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass. I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

## The Preterist view:

Preterists view chapter 21 as descriptive of the church washed in the blood of Jesus and appearing perfect and righteous before God. The old heaven and earth is believed to represent the Old Covenant system which is passed away and the new heaven and earth is believed to represent the New Covenant system which is now established. God is seen as dwelling within the church and facilitating eternal life and therefore freedom from spiritual death. The old order of things having passed away is seen as the Old Covenant of death having passed away and the making of all things new is seen as the New Covenant of life being established. Those who remain faithful to God are seen as inheriting eternal life and those who live contrary to what God requires are seen as experiencing the second death. This second death is viewed as eternal separation from the presence of God. The bride who is called the wife of the Lamb is seen as the church married to Christ through the provisions of the New Covenant and is represented in the glowing description of the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is also seen as representing the Kingdom of God and is open to all who are willing to embrace its message.

## The Futurist view:

Futurists see in chapter 21 a description of a literal new heaven and earth. The 1000 years reign has come to an end with the defeat of Satan and the enemies of God. This has effectively abolished the old world order. God has now established his headquarters on planet earth as represented by the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem is seen as a literal city lowered to planet earth from heaven.

## Chapter 22:

*Rev 22:1-21 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will*

*not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.*

*The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place." "Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book." I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy." "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.*

*"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star." The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.*

## **The Futurist view:**

Futurist see chapter 22 as a continued description of the blessed life found in the new world order. The river of life and the tree of life are seen to represent eternal life now inherent in those who were faithful to the end. There no longer being a curse is felt to refer to the curse of death that originated with the sin of Adam and Eve but now eliminated through the sacrifice of Christ. Reference to the wicked outside the city is seen as the wicked being forever separated from the

present of God. References to Christ coming soon are viewed as Christ saying when He comes it will be quickly.

## The Preterist view:

Preterists view the river and tree of life as representative of access to eternal life through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Removal of the curse is viewed as removal of the death penalty for sin. Additional descriptions of the city are seen as symbolic of the new life of a Christian in the Kingdom of God. Reference to the angel sent to show things that must soon take place is seen as evidence for the imminency of fulfillment of what has been given in the Revelation. Christ saying He is coming soon is seen as giving further evidence for this imminency. Preterists remind everyone that the Revelation is addressed to seven first century churches who are told at the start of this message and now again at the end of this message that what they are being told is about to come to pass. Preterists point out that John is told not to seal up the words of this prophecy because the time is near. Christ again says "I am coming soon" and repeats it one last time at the very end of this message. Preterists believe that all these references to imminency are irrefutable evidence for a first century fulfillment of the Revelation. Preterists will show in great detail there simply is no grammatical, linguistic, or contextual reason to view the word soon as referring to long periods of time or Christ coming quickly when He comes. Preterists see reference to the wicked existing outside the city as evidence that evil has not been removed, the world still exists and physical life goes on. The church, however, as represented by the city, is a spiritual organism which when entered provides for the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life.

## Conclusion:

We began our examination of the Revelation by showing the word Revelation is a translation of the Greek word *Apocalypse* which means to unveil, uncover or reveal. Hopefully this series has contributed to a greater revealing of what Jesus Christ said to the seven churches through John. We have pursued our study of the Revelation within the framework of the two most currently popular interpretative approaches. I trust the reader has carefully considered the reasoning presented by both viewpoints and will be able to determine which viewpoint offers the most convincing evidence.