

# The Book of Revelation

Adult Bible Study

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*God gave Noah the rainbow sign.*

*No more water, the fire next time!*

–African American Spiritual

# The Book of Revelation

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## Part One: Introductory Remarks

- I. Impact - In the modern age, the Book of Revelation is perhaps the most used and the most abused book by many Christians. There is a glory to the book that cannot be denied. No book perhaps more evokes the imagination by its sweeping vision. But there are great pitfalls hidden as well. Some have fallen into serious error by failing to keep the book in a proper biblical perspective. Some have even been led over a precipice into bizarre, anti-social and even deadly interpretations. One basic principle that will at work in this course is to seek to understand Revelation in its wider biblical setting. The Book of Revelation borrows heavily from Old Testament prophecy, especially Daniel and Ezekiel. Too many today, even many scholars, tend to view the Book of Revelation as a book radically set apart and unparalleled in its style. This leads to a method that interprets the book in a vacuum or at least a extra-biblical world view. Much is made, for example, of Jewish Apocalyptic literature of the time and the anti-Roman sentiments among many Jews. But as this study will attempt to show, The Book of Revelation has enormous roots in both the Old and New Testaments and it is best to understand it in reference to that background while not ignoring the extra-biblical context. It is true for example that there were strong anti-Roman sentiments among many Jews but they were far from unanimous in this. Is this then the only way to see the Book of Revelation...as an anti-Roman diatribe on the part of the early Church? Perhaps not and that is why this study will try to explore other possibilities as well.
  
- II. Authorship - At first glance there might be surprise at the appearance of this as a question. Of course, John the Evangelist, the same John who wrote the Gospel of John, wrote Revelation. This will be our understanding in terms of this course. But it is important to address the question of authorship because it is an object of scholarly discourse and because we will from time to time show similarities between the Gospel of John and the Book of Revelation. briefly stated then here are the two essential positions and points regarding the question of the authorship of the Book Revelation.
  - A. **Position 1: The author was John, the Apostle.** The chief argument here is the argument from Antiquity. The oldest sources are unanimous that John the beloved Apostle was the author of the Book of Revelation. St. Justin Martyr, writing in the Second Century writes that it was "a man named John, one of the Apostles of Christ" who received the revelations contained in the Book of the Apocalypse.<sup>2</sup> St. Melito, Bishop of Sardis is quoted by Eusebius of Caesarea in the Second

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<sup>1</sup>These notes are substantially based upon the work of Dr. Scott Hahn who presents a significant majority of the material contained herein in a set of Audio tapes entitles The End: A Study of the Book of Revelation (St Joseph Communications, West Covina CA, 1-800-526-2151) . I have included his material along with a number of other commentaries and sources to produce these notes. - Rev Charles Pope.

<sup>2</sup>Dialogue with Trypho, 81.3.

Century and attributes authorship to the Apostle John.<sup>3</sup> Both these sources are important since Justin lived in Ephesus and Melito in Sardis, both cities among the seven Churches to which the book is addressed. Other Second Century sources are: Papias, Bishop of Hieropolis<sup>4</sup>, St. Irenaeus<sup>5</sup>, and the Muritorian Fragment. Third Century testimony supporting the authorship of John the Apostle includes Origen who says it was the same author of the Fourth Gospel who wrote Revelation.<sup>6</sup> Tertullian agrees.<sup>7</sup> However, about this time opinions begin to differ regarding authorship. It should be noted that the misuse of the book by numerous heretics soured many of the Easter Fathers on the book and this tended to influence their views on authorship (see discussion on canonicity below). Again, the strength of this argument is that the earliest sources are unanimous on attributing the authorship to John the Apostle. It was only after the book found wide use among heretics that the opinions begin to diverge.

B. **Position 2: The author was some other John.** Although this argument will refer to the opinion of some of the Fathers from the mid-Third Century on, the crux of the argument is probably strongest when stated from an internal textual analysis. The steps to this argument are set forth below.

1. The author identifies himself merely as John. He does not call himself an Apostle and gives no hint that he has any administrative or authoritative role. He tends to speak of the apostles, not as one of them, per se but somewhat from afar: *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*(21:14)
2. If he calls himself anything it is a prophet and he emphasizes the office of prophet, not the office of apostle: *And behold, I am coming soon." Blessed is he who keeps the words of the **prophecy** of this book. {8} I John am he who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed them to me; {9} but he said to me, "You must not do that! I am a fellow servant with **you and your brethren the prophets**, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God." {10} And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the **prophecy** of this book, for the time is near..I warn every one who hears the words of the **prophecy** of this book: if any one adds to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book, {19} and if any one takes away from the words of the book of this **prophecy**, God will take away his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. {20} He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!...(Rev 22:7-21)*
3. He was well versed in the Old Testament and makes extensive use of the prophetic books especially. Thus, he was likely a Jew.
4. He was also probably a Jew from Palestine who came to Asia Minor late in life. This is deduced from the kind of Greek he writes. It is vivid,

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3Eccles. History. IV 26.2

4Cf. Andrew of Caesarea, Commentary on Apoc. Prologue.

5Adversus Heres. 4.20

6In Joann. Comm. 1.14

7Against Marcion 3.14; De Resurrectione Carnis, 25.

powerful and pictorial but it is easily the worst Greek in the New Testament. He makes mistakes that no schoolboy who knew Greek would make. Greek was thus not his likely mother tongue! It is often clear that he is thinking in Hebrew and writing in Greek.

5. The difference in Greek style and proficiency is likely the strongest argument that the authors of the fourth Gospel and Revelation are different. The Greek of the fourth Gospel is simple but it is correct. Further, the writer of the fourth Gospel carefully avoids mentioning his name whereas Revelation's John repeatedly mentions his name.
- C. The arguments from position two are compelling though not convincing. We should not presume that the earliest sources, most all of whom spoke and wrote Greek as their mother tongue were unaware of the stylistic differences and poor grammar in Revelation. Despite these facts however they attribute it to John the Apostle. Thus, the strongest case (i.e. textual evidence) arguing against John the Apostle's authorship (and it is a strong case) must have been over-ridden by knowledge and testimony these early Fathers found very compelling.
- D. Hence, we shall opt for the Apostle John as the author of Revelation. Noting that not all scholars agree. Nevertheless many do agree<sup>8</sup> and we are back to the old problem: the scholars are divided. Hence, an additional reason to favor tradition which ascribes Revelation to John the Apostle.
- III. Canonicity - the Term canonicity refers to whether a given book is considered the divinely inspired Word of God or a work merely of human origin. If it is considered divinely inspired then it is on "the list" of biblical books (Hence the word canon which comes from a Latin word for "List"). The book of Revelation is one of the "deuterocanonical books" (deutero=second, thus deuterocanonical means "secondary canon.") It's deuterocanonical status, like all the books on deuterocanonical list, stems from the fact that it was not accepted as sacred by all the Christian communities in the earliest days of the Church. Some books, such as the four Gospels, were accepted widely by most if not all Christian communities. With some books however, there was disagreement as to their sacred status early on, and only later, did they come to be accepted as so and declared as sacred by the Church. The authenticity of the Book of Revelation was suspect by some of the early Fathers of the Church (specifically the Eastern Fathers of the School of Antioch) because it was used widely by heretical sects in support of their teachings. St. Cyril of Jerusalem, St. John Chrysostom, and Theoderet are among the notable Fathers who did not consider Revelation a sacred work. In the West however, there was almost unanimous agreement as to the sacred authorship of the work. By the 6th century, with the abatement of some of the early heresies, the work's sacred status came to be undisputed. Several early Councils of the Church (Hippo, 393; Carthage, 397; Toledo, 633) listed the Book of Revelation as canonical (i.e. on the list of sacred books) but these were regional councils not binding on the universal Church. Only with the councils of Florence (1438) and Trent (1545-1562) did the Church actually formally declare, without doubt that Revelation was a sacred work and therefore canonical in a way that bound every believer to accept it as so. This did not mean that

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<sup>8</sup>For example Fr. Andre Feuillet, a French Scripture scholar argues very persuasively for John the Apostle's authorship by comparing the unique themes in John's Gospel to that of Revelation.

there was uncertainty as to its status. As indicated, from the 6th Century on there was no dispute. But by the 15th Century new doubters arose. In the 16th Century Martin Luther rejected the book but later changed his mind. It was largely in response to the Protestant revolt and the tendency of its leaders to reject particular books of the Bible that the Church solemnly defined the Canon of Sacred Scripture.

#### IV. Place and date of Composition

- A. **Place:** the text itself gives us the place with little ambiguity: Patmos is a small Island on the Aegean Sea, one of a group of islands known as the Dodecanese (see map). John attests to the fact that he had been exiled there due to his preaching of the gospel.
- B. **Date:** there is the majority opinion and the minority opinion
1. The Majority of modern scholars would place the date of the work between 90-110 AD. There are good reasons for this not the least of which is the testimony of several Fathers of the Church. Irenaeus Places the work at 96 AD. Victorinus places the writing in the context of the Persecution of Domitian and indicates it was thus that John was imprisoned on Patmos. Jerome and Eusebius say the same. This date of composition flows well with modern theories of biblical dating which tend to favor later dates as a general rule.
  2. The Minority report places the date of composition before 70 AD during the persecution of Nero<sup>9</sup>. (This was the first and the worst persecution of the Church in the first century<sup>10</sup>). Although this view is clearly in the minority, it is gaining adherents. Well what of the Fathers? The most significant Father to attest to a mid-nineties date is Irenaeus. It is on him that most other Father's based their conclusion. It must be said, that in terms of dating Irenaeus is a bit unreliable. For example, he argues that Jesus was 50 when he was crucified. Thus, though Irenaeus gives us a lot of good biblical insight, he is less reliable for historical testimony. Likewise, the grammar of the Greek sentence wherein Irenaeus states the date of 96 AD is unclear. It can be translated two ways: 1- "John had this vision, near the end of his life during the reign of Domitian" or 2- "John had this vision and lived on to the reign of Domitian"<sup>11</sup> Thus the testimony of the Fathers is not disregarded but it is understood by these scholars as more vague. The final reason for leaning to the earlier date is that it gives a clearer context for the persecutions being endured by the Christians that flows more from the biblical evidence wherein the persecution derives

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<sup>9</sup>That Nero is a primary antagonist (rather than Domitian) is shown in the identity of the one beast as "666" which is quite universally accepted as referring to Nero. Even those who favor the later date accept this. But why would there be a reference to Nero if Domitian is was actually the Emperor and it is his persecution that is the context of Revelation? Here then is an additional reason to favor the earlier date: the reference to Nero (who ruled from 54-68 AD) gives us important evidence as to date the composition of Revelation to his reign, *i.e* prior to 70 AD.

<sup>10</sup>There is actually little evidence that Domitian every persecuted the Church. Cf. in *Biblica* "When was Revelation Written?" R.B. Moberly

<sup>11</sup>cf "The Fallacy of the Domitian Hypothesis." Barclay Newman.

more from fellow Jews than Romans and the Christian faith is not presented as a political force at war with a pagan government persecuting religious followers it sees as a threat. Thus, these scholars seek to integrate the Book of Revelation with what has already been set forth in Acts and the Epistles as the central area of dispute rather than to set Revelation radically apart from the other books as to its focus.

- V. Context - What is the setting for the Book of Revelation? As we have noted, this question is tied very directly, though not absolutely, to the question of the date of composition. In terms of the question of context there are numerous and varying views. But overall there is a majority view on the context and a minority view.
- A. **The Majority view** holds that the context of this book is the persecution against Christians by Domitian and the Roman Empire which he headed. John has been arrested and exiled to the Island of Patmos. Hence, the chief antagonist is the Roman Empire seeking to force Christians to emperor worship and apostasy from the Christian faith in the one true God. Further, the harlot city is defined in this point of view as Rome.
- B. **The Minority view** holds that the primary antagonist is not Rome but is a more complex reality of Jews and Romans in concert together against the early Christians. Recall how Jesus was put to death by Pontius Pilate and the Romans but that this was due to the provocation of fellow Jews against Jesus. Peter and John, likewise Paul all suffered from the same collusion. Fellow Jews who did not accept Christ stirred up trouble for the early Church and provoked the Roman authorities to arrest, punish and even put to death early Christians. Minority position sees this as the primary historical context of the persecutions in the Book of Revelation which presents the primary antagonist as a horrible Red Dragon. He is clearly the devil. But this Red Dragon gives birth to two beasts which antagonize the Church. This is the double threat experienced by the early Christians. Roman authorities were generally indifferent to Christian teachings. However, when Jews who rejected Christ entered into open conflict with Christians they did so in such a way as to involve, often unwillingly, Roman officials. Once provoked, these officials would often be fair but could also be ruthless. Later in the Book of Revelation, the double enemy against the Christians is described as a beast and a harlot. The minority view holds that the harlot city is really Jerusalem, not Rome. "Jerusalem" here symbolizes Jews but not all Jews. Remember that many Jews did in fact become Christians. "Jerusalem" here is understood as those Jews who emphatically rejected the Messiah. It especially represents the leadership centered in the Temple. Thus the city that is destroyed is in fact Jerusalem. Now, this corresponds to what happened historically in 70 AD to Jerusalem and thus the minority view holds that the Book dates from the period before 70 AD. The year 70 was a crucial year for the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish Zealots for it was year that the war with the Romans was concluded. In this year, Jerusalem was sacked and burned and the Temple destroyed. Not one stone was left on another and the whole area (except for a few dwellings on Mt. Zion) was abandoned. Survivors were carried into slavery or killed. The destruction and abandonment was total. The minority view holds that

the book of Revelation was a prophecy of these events and actually served to warn the Christians of the signs that would precede the destruction that they flee before Jerusalem's doom was sealed. The minority view therefore holds that the historical context of the Book of Revelation is the persecution of Christians by unbelieving Jews in partnership with Roman officials and the destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

VI. The chosen context of these notes shall be the minority view. Although it is a minority view it is growing in acceptance and is compelling for the following reasons:

A. **It links the Book of Revelation to the "mini-Apocalypse" which has a clear context: the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple.** and similar prophecies of Christ in the Gospels. For example, (Mat 24:1-44) *Jesus left the temple and was going away, when his disciples came to point out to him the buildings of the temple. {2} But he answered them, "You see all these, do you not? Truly, I say to you, there will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down." {3} As he sat on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?" {4} And Jesus answered them, "Take heed that no one leads you astray. {5} For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am the Christ,' and they will lead many astray. {6} And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not alarmed; for this must take place, but the end is not yet. {7} For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places: {8} all this is but the beginning of the birth-pangs. {9} "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation, and put you to death; and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. {10} And then many will fall away, and betray one another, and hate one another. {11} And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. {12} And because wickedness is multiplied, most men's love will grow cold. {13} But he who endures to the end will be saved. {14} And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world, as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come. {15} "So when you see the desolating sacrilege spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), {16} then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains; {17} let him who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house; {18} and let him who is in the field not turn back to take his mantle. {19} And alas for those who are with child and for those who give suck in those days! {20} Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. {21} For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. {22} And if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened. {23} Then if any one says to you, 'Lo, here is the Christ!' or 'There he is!' do not believe it. {24} For false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. {25} Lo, I have told you beforehand. {26} So, if they say to you, 'Lo, he is in the wilderness,' do not go out; if they say, 'Lo, he is in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. {27} For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of man. {28} Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together. {29} "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of*

*the heavens will be shaken; {30} then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; {31} and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. {32} "From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. {33} So also, when you see all these things, you know that he is near, at the very gates. {34} Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things take place. {35} Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. {36} "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only. {37} As were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of man. {38} For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, {39} and they did not know until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of man. {40} Then two men will be in the field; one is taken and one is left. {41} Two women will be grinding at the mill; one is taken and one is left. {42} Watch therefore, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming. {43} But know this, that if the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched and would not have let his house be broken into. {44} Therefore you also must be ready; for the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.*

1. Note the similarities to the prophecies of Revelation.
2. Note too that the context is the destruction of the temple and the signs that precede it, not the persecution of the Christians. In this context the "close of the age" and "the sign of your coming" would be understood as the end of the Temple and its sacrifices, once and for all and the establishment of the New and Eternal Covenant in the establishment of the Church, the Bride of Christ.

**B. It links the Book of Revelation to prophetic books of the Old Testament and maintains their historical meaning and focus.** Most of the Book of Revelation is drawn directly from Old Testament Prophets such as Joel, Daniel and Ezekiel. Since this is done it is important to learn what their historical context and concerns were. Most of the sources from which John draws have the historical context of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple which took place in 587 BC. If that was the context of the texts from which John borrows then it is strongly probable that John is saying, what happened then will happen again unless there is Jewish repentance and faith. This is what the passages meant in the Old Testament time and now John borrows them for the current time of 70 AD wherein the Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed again. Thus parallel events are being described and we can deduce the context in which John writes. The minority view fits nicely with this historical perspective. Consider the following quote from Ezekiel and the comments that follow it *In the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house, with the elders of Judah sitting before me, the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me. {2} Then I beheld, and, lo, a form that had the appearance of a man; below what appeared to be his loins it was fire, and above his loins it was like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming bronze. {3} He put forth the form of a hand, and took me by a lock of my head; and the Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven,*

and brought me in visions of God to Jerusalem, to the entrance of the gateway of the inner court that faces north, where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provokes to jealousy. {4} And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was there, like the vision that I saw in the plain. {5} Then he said to me, "Son of man, lift up your eyes now in the direction of the north." So I lifted up my eyes toward the north, and behold, north of the altar gate, in the entrance, was this image of jealousy. {6} And he said to me, "Son of man, do you see what they are doing, the great abominations that the house of Israel are committing here, to drive me far from my sanctuary? But you will see still greater abominations."...And he brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD; and behold, at the door of the temple of the LORD, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men, with their backs to the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east, worshiping the sun toward the east. {17} Then he said to me, "Have you seen this, O son of man? Is it too slight a thing for the house of Judah to commit the abominations which they commit here, that they should fill the land with violence, and provoke me further to anger? Lo, they put the branch to their nose. {18} Therefore I will deal in wrath; my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity; and though they cry in my ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."(Ezek 9) Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, "Draw near, you executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand." {2} And lo, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, every man with his weapon for slaughter in his hand, and with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing case at his side. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. {3} Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherubim on which it rested to the threshold of the house; and he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing case at his side. {4} And the LORD said to him, "Go through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark upon the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it." {5} And to the others he said in my hearing, "Pass through the city after him, and smite; your eye shall not spare, and you shall show no pity; {6} slay old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one upon whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were before the house. {7} Then he said to them, "Defile the house, and fill the courts with the slain. Go forth." So they went forth, and smote in the city. {8} And while they were smiting, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face, and cried, "Ah Lord GOD! wilt thou destroy all that remains of Israel in the outpouring of thy wrath upon Jerusalem?" {9} Then he said to me, "The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice; for they say, 'The LORD has forsaken the land, and the LORD does not see.' {10} As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity, but I will requite their deeds upon their heads." {11} And lo, the man clothed in linen, with the writing case at his side, brought back word, saying, "I have done as thou didst command me."(Ezek 8:1-6; 16-18; 9:1-18).

1. Note first of all how similar this passage is to the Book of Revelation. Revelation draws heavenly on the Prophecy of Ezekiel it this point is obvious
  - a. There abominations being committed in the Temple, not by the pagan but by the people of Israel.
  - b. The difference between the groups of righteous and righteous is

signified by a mark on the forehead.

- c. The destruction which overwhelms the wicked is not from a foreign power, nor is it toward a pagan empire. Rather the destruction that is wrought is by God himself who allows the wicked to taste the full consequences of their sin.
- d. It seems unlikely that John would draw so heavily from Ezekiel (and as we shall see, other prophets) and then introduce a radically different scenario (one that has nothing to do with Jerusalem and the call to faith and fidelity among fellow Jews). With Ezekiel, there was an invasion on the horizon from the Babylonians but the real cause, and the real enemy was within. The persistent stubbornness and sinfulness was the real enemy and the Babylonians merely the agent by which God would hold Judah accountable. But the majority view on Revelation would have us radically rework this: Now the enemy is not from within but is merely a political foe from without. The context in the Majority View is no longer the sin within the hearts of the chosen people and their failure to believe. Now it is merely the sin of a pagan empire who will and do attack Israel without cause.

C. **It maintains the tradition of prophets in terms of the use of the word "harlot".** In the Old Testament Jerusalem, and the people of Israel are called the harlot since they have forsaken the Lord and gone after false gods. Nowhere in the Old Testament is Rome or any pagan city<sup>12</sup> called a harlot, but Jerusalem repeatedly is. Thus again it seems unlikely that Revelations would depart so suddenly and steeply from a biblical tradition and assign the title "harlot" to the pagan city Rome rather than to its traditional referent in the prophetic school: Jerusalem. Here are some examples of the use of the word from the prophets

1. (Isa 1:20-21 RSV) *But if you refuse and rebel [O, Israel], you shall be devoured by the sword; for the mouth of the LORD has spoken." {21} How the faithful city has become a harlot, she that was full of justice! Righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers.*
2. (Jer 2:19-20 RSV) *Your wickedness will chasten you, and your apostasy will reprove you. Know and see that it is evil and bitter for you to forsake the LORD your God; the fear of me is not in you, says the Lord GOD of hosts. {20} "For long ago you broke your yoke and burst your bonds; and you said, 'I will not serve.' Yea, upon every high hill and under every green tree you bowed down as a harlot.*
3. (Ezek 23:28-30 RSV) *For thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will deliver you into the hands of those whom you hate, into the hands of those from whom you turned in disgust; {29} and they shall deal with you in hatred, and take away all the fruit of your labor, and leave you naked and bare, and the nakedness of your harlotry shall be uncovered. Your lewdness and your harlotry {30} have brought this upon you, because you played the harlot with the nations, and polluted yourself with their idols.*

D. **It also fits with the most direct references as to the identity of the persecutors in the Book of Revelation.** In Rev 2 & 3 there is reference to a synagogue of Satan there it is indicated that they consider themselves Jews.

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<sup>12</sup>Actually Tyre is once referred to as a harlot but here too the accusation is still directed at Jerusalem which has become like Tyre, a harlot.

Romans would surely not have considered themselves such. Hence we ought to take the text at face value: the primary persecutors are Jews. But the persecutor is not Jews alone, but also the Gentiles responding to the complaints of Jews against the Christians. (This is the precise formula of adversity that both Jesus, the Apostles and Paul all faced). Thus the enemy is also identified as Caesar Nero: Here are the texts

1. (Rev 2:8-9) *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: 'The words of the first and the last, who died and came to life. {9} "I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not<sup>13</sup>, but are a synagogue of Satan.*
2. (Rev 3:9) *Behold, I will make those of the synagogue of Satan who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie -- behold, I will make them come and bow down before your feet, and learn that I have loved you.*
3. In terms of the identity of the harlot, a text from Rev 11 comes closest to identifying the harlot city as Jerusalem (not Rome): (Rev 11:8) *and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which is allegorically called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified.* The city described as the place where their Lord was crucified can be no other place than Jerusalem.
4. The other aspect of the enemy is the Roman Empire as personified by Nero (Rev 13:18) *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.*<sup>14</sup>
5. It will be noted that there are two beasts described in Revelation 13, one from the land and one from the sea. Hence there are two adversaries: Unbelieving Jews (The beast from the Land) and Rome (the beast from the Sea). Both of these beasts emerged from a red dragon that has 7 heads (there were 7 Herods) and ten horns (there were ten Caesars who interacted with the 7 Herods). Thus a complex, double-enemy seems to be described.

E. **It Links the Book of Revelation to the Historical context of the time** leading up to 70 AD wherein the two enemies who conspire against the early Church turn on one another. This historically happened:

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13In the early days of the Church, there was a moving away from the idea that was a Jew merely because he had a Jewish mother and was circumcised. Rather the privilege of Jewish status (i.e. a member of the chosen people) was to be understood as a spiritual reality, grasped by a circumcision of the heart. Paul elaborates the insight in the Letter to the Romans (Rom 2:28-29) *For he is not a real Jew who is one outwardly, nor is true circumcision something external and physical. He is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart, spiritual and not literal. His praise is not from men but from God.* This is likely the tradition behind the phrase, "who say they are Jews but are not." Further, the debate about who is a Jew is treated at length in Romans 11 by Paul. Lastly, here is a summary of the polemic of Paul who makes a distinction between Israel of the circumcision and the "Israel of God": (Gal 6:15-17) *For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God. Henceforth let no man trouble me; for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.*

14As we shall see when we study the text, 666 is a pretty clear reference to Nero. If this be the case, then here is more internal evidence to date the work to the earlier period of persecution under Nero rather than later under Domitian.

1. In Revelation (Rev 17ff) The complex enemy is described as a beast and a harlot. The harlot city rides upon the beast. The beast later turns and devours the harlot with fire and total destruction. This in fact happened when Rome (which had a partnership with Jerusalem through the Herodian dynasty) turned against Jerusalem and totally destroyed it by fire killing 1.2 million. Thus the Book of Revelation seems to describe an enemy that is a complex combination of two enemies who conspire against the early Church and later turn on each other. This was historically the fact at the time of 70 AD when the Jews and Rome went to war against one another.

F. **It flows well from the fuller context of the New Testament.** through the bulk of the New Testament the antagonists are fellow Jews who do not accept Christ as the Messiah It is they who involve Roman authorities in exacting punishment on Christians. Those these Roman officials are often hesitant to become involved, they are not thereby absolved of responsibility any more than Pilate can be absolved for his actions. Notice the consistent Biblical context of the double enemy face by Christians:

1. It was fellow Jews who handed Jesus over. In particular it was fellow Jews who had much invested in the Temple and its rituals who were most threatened by him who handed him over. Pilate, though unjust in his final action, was reluctant and it was only when He perceived that the Jewish leaders would lead a riot that he relented and had Jesus put to death.
2. In the Acts of the Apostles, it is always fellow Jews who attack and pursue Paul. The Romans, far from being Paul's enemy are in fact his protectors on more than a few occasions. Even when he Romans do arrest Paul it is once again due to the insistence of fellow Jews and the threat of civil unrest it Roman officials did not comply. Again, the final arrest of Paul centered on a perceived defilement of the Temple that he supposedly committed. This was not in fact the case but was the pretext by which the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem handed him over.
3. In the Epistles of Paul, once again, it is fellow Jews and Judaizers (So-called Christians who wanted to bring the whole Jewish ceremonial law into the Church and make it binding on all Christians) who are the real enemies. Paul does not preach social unrest against Roman authority (Nor did Jesus). In fact, Paul counsels respect for authority and prayers for all in authority. Likewise, Jesus strongly resists any attempts to draw him into political zealotry and any conception of the Messiah that would understand him as military savior.
4. None of this is to render the New Testament anti Semitic. Remember, most of the early converts were Jews. Jewish Christians made up a sizeable percentage of the early Church. The question here is not ethnic hatred but of a clear distinction between those who would accept Jesus as Lord and those who would not. The division was not some mere intellectual debate. It was a volatile clash between absolutely different understanding of the basic questions, who is God? Who is supreme? Who is to be worshiped?
5. It therefore seems unlikely and unusual that, very suddenly, the context changes radically in the final book of the New Testament. All along, the context was of the passing away of the Old Order of the Law and the

Temple and the passionate fear and hatred that this caused. It seems more likely that the final book of the Bible would prophesy the conclusion to this clash.

- G. Hence, for the purpose of this study, we shall take the "minority" view that the context of this book is the clash between Jews and Christians (which drew in the Romans) and caused the persecutions against the Church which is described in Revelation. The context is prior to 70 AD and the events that lead up to the destruction of the Temple and the full establishment of the Church as the new locus of the worship of God. Jesus had promised the Samaritan woman (John 4) that authentic worshipers would not worship on Mount Gerazim or in Jerusalem per se but in Spirit and in Truth. He had also prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple during his public ministry. It is the fulfillment of this prophecy which it will be argued constitutes the immediate context of the Book of Revelation.
  - H. This does not mean that there is no value in the majority opinion, (namely that the beast (Harlot) is Rome and the context is a Roman persecution of the Church). Since this is the majority view it would be wrong not to present that view. Hence, it will be presented as well as this minority view.
  - I. But it is hoped that making through use of the minority view will enable us to have a far richer biblical study experience since we will see the Book of Revelation as a part of the whole Bible rather than as merely an apocalyptic work that radically stands apart from the other biblical views.
- VII. Is the Book of Revelation primarily about the past events, Future events, or present events? There are different views on this question among scholars:
- A. Praeterists - these scholars hold the meaning of the Book of Revelation is primarily understood as relating to the First Century and has a First Century fulfillment.
  - B. Historicists - the Book of Revelation provides a sweeping panorama of all the various stages of history the church would pass through.
  - C. Futurists - the Book of Revelation is primarily concerned with the end of the world. This view is very common among fundamentalists today.
  - D. Idealist view - the Book of Revelation is essentially a description of the on-going struggle in the life of the Church and the lives of individuals down through the ages. Hence it is about every age and every individual. This view is most common among the fathers of the Church.
  - E. All these views have a value. Each can offer us insights. Thus we need not choose one and reject all the others. But again, our primary approach will be to use the praeterist viewpoint. One of the strongest reasons for choosing this approach is that it squares with the time frame given in Revelation itself which sees the fulfillment of what is written as "soon"
    - 1. (Rev 1:1 ) *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must **SOON** take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John,*
    - 2. (Rev 1:3 ) *Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the **TIME IS NEAR.***
    - 3. (Rev 2:5 ) *[To the church at Ephesus] Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to*

- you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.*<sup>15</sup>
4. (Rev 2:16 ) *Repent then. If not, I will come to you **SOON** and war against them with the sword of my mouth.*
  5. (Rev 3:11 ) *I am coming **SOON**; hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. He who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.*<sup>16</sup>
  6. (Rev 22:12 ) *"Behold, I am coming **SOON**, bringing my recompense, to repay every one for what he has done.*
  7. (Rev 22:20 ) *He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming **SOON**." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!*

VIII. Style - Much has been made of the apocalyptic influences of this book but there are essentially three major influences on the style of this work

- A. apocalyptic - is a prophetic style with seeks to understand history in its cosmic significance. Such a style was used in many writings of the time. In addition, the apocalyptic style through the use of images emphasizes what must take place "soon."
- B. prophetic books - of 404 verses at least 278 contain at least one reference to an Old Testament verse. John specifically calls this work a prophecy in many places. (the term apocalypse is used only once). The books which have special influence
- C. epistolary form - The book is framed with the customary epistolary formulas. The messages to the seven churches takes the form of a letter.

IX. Symbolism

- A. The Book of Revelation like many works of the apocalyptic genre, makes use of many symbols. Yet it must be noted that most of these symbols are borrowed from the prophetic tradition.
- B. A brief survey of these symbols might be helpful here. The list that follows is neither exhaustive nor are the descriptions complete. As we encounter these symbols in the text we will say more of them. We will also encounter other symbols not listed here and, once again, we will cover them as they appear in the text.
  1. A woman - represents a people (12:1ff), or a city (17:1ff). The virgin Mary is also symbolized though it must be understood that she is also an image for the Church, the bride of Christ. Mary's motherhood also symbolizes the motherhood of the Church
  2. horns - speak of power (5:6, 12:3)
  3. eyes - symbolize knowledge (1:14; 2:18; 4:6; 5:6).
  4. wings - symbolize mobility (4:8; 12:14)
  5. trumpets - the superhuman, divine voice (1:10; 8:2ff)

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<sup>15</sup>The point here is that Ephesus did have its lampstand removed. There is no church in Ephesus today. The Turkish Government does not even permit the celebration of Mass there, much less the existence of a formal church.

<sup>16</sup>This text also helps to understand what events are referred to. What is to take place soon? The coming of the New Jerusalem, the spiritual Jerusalem, where true believers would not worship on a particular mountain but in spirit and in truth (John 4). Thus it is not the second coming per se but the ushering in of the New Covenant and the suspension of the old, due to the loss of the Temple and the inability to perform the prescribed sacrifices.

6. a sharp sword indicates the powerful Word of God which judges and punishes the wicked (1:16; 2:12,16; 19:15,21).
7. white robes - signify the world of glory (6:11; 7:9, 13ff)
8. palm leaves - a sign of triumph (7:9)
9. crowns - dominion and kingship (2:10; 3:11; 4:10; 6:2; 12:1; 14:14)
10. the sea - the symbol of chaos and evil, insecurity and death. (13:1; 21:1)
11. colors
  - a. white - the joy of victory (1:14; 2:17; 3:4ff; 4:4)
  - b. purple - luxury and kingship (17:4; 18:12,16)
  - c. black - death (6:5, 12).
12. numbers
  - a. seven (54 times) - signifies fullness or perfection, seven letters to the seven churches from the seven spirits, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls, seven blessings.
  - b. twelve (23 times) - recall the twelve tribes of Israel and indicates that this dignity has accrued to the new people of God in the Church, through the apostles
  - c. four (16 times) symbolizes the universality of the world

X. Bookends- It is interesting to present the Book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible in counterpoint to the first book of the Bible, Genesis. We find certain similarities and fulfillments as we do so.

A.	Genesis	Revelation
B.	The Devil's doom is announced	It is carried out
C.	There is no devil in the 1 <sup>st</sup> two Chapters	There is no devil in the last two Chapters
D.	The seedbed of all theology	The Culmination of all theology
E.	The 1 <sup>st</sup> Adam established on earth	The Last Adam established in glory
F.	The night, darkness + the sea created	No more night, No more sea
G.	A bride presented to Adam	A bride (the Church) presented to Christ
H.	The tree of life in the garden	The tree of life in God's new creation
I.	Sin as it begins and brings death + curse	Sin has been put down and death is no more. No sighing, dying, crying, no pain or pang, no moan or groan, the former things are passed away.
J.	Satan appears for the first time	Satan appears for the last time
K.	Man is driven from God's face in sin	Man beholds God's face in glory
L.	Satan utters the first lie (shall not die)	There is a city no liar can enter into



# The Book of Revelation

## Outline

Summary statement: The Book of Revelation is the Apostolic Kerygma<sup>17</sup> transferred into the apocalyptic key in order to provide a theology of history for the Church. Its basic message is that the risen Lord Jesus Christ is Lord of history.

- I. Introduction
  - A. Superscription (1:1-3)
  - B. Epistolary Salutation (1:4-8)
  - C. Inaugural Vision (1:9-20)
- II. The Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1-3:22)
  - A. To Ephesus (2:1-7)
  - B. To Symrna (2:8-11)
  - C. To Pergamum (2:12-17)
  - D. To Thyatira (2:18-29)
  - E. To Sardis (3:1-6)
  - F. To Philadelphia (3:7-13)
  - G. To Laodicea (3:14-22)
- III. The Eschatological future
  - A. The seven seals (4:1-8:1)
    - 1. The heavenly court (4:1-11)
    - 2. The book with the seven seals and the Lamb (5:1-14)
    - 3. The opening of the first six seals (6:1-17)
      - a. The opening of the first four seals (6:1-6)
      - b. The fifth and sixth seals (6:9-17)
    - 4. Double interlude describing the Church (7:1-17)
      - a. The Church on earth preserved by God (7:1-8)
      - b. The Church in heaven glorifies God (7:9-17)
    - 5. The opening of the seventh seal (8:1)
  - B. The Seven Trumpets (8:2-11:19)
    - 1. The seven angels with seven trumpets (8:2-6)
    - 2. The first four trumpets (8:7-12)
    - 3. An eagle warns of the last three trumpets (8:13)
    - 4. The fifth trumpet (9:1-12)
    - 5. The sixth trumpet (9:13-21)
    - 6. Double interlude (10:1-11:14)
      - a. The angel with the little open scroll (10:1-11)
      - b. The meaning of the temple and the two witnesses (11:1-14)
    - 7. The seventh trumpet (11:15-19)
  - C. The Dragon and the Lamb (12:1-14:20)
    - 1. The dragon seeks to destroy the woman and her Son. (12:1-6)
    - 2. Michael's victory over the dragon (12:7-12)
    - 3. The dragon vainly pursues the woman (12:13-18)
    - 4. The dragon confers his power on the beast rising from the sea (13:1-10)
    - 5. The second beast: the false prophet from the earth (13:11-18)

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<sup>17</sup>Kerygma refers to the content of the Good News preached by the Apostles.

6. The vision of the Lamb with his own (14:1-5)
7. The proclamation of imminent judgement (14:6-20)
- D. The seven bowls (15:1-16:21)
  1. The conquerors of the Antichrist sing the canticle of Moses and the Lamb in heaven (15:1-4)
  2. Seven angels receive the bowls of God's wrath (15:5-8)
  3. The seven bowls are poured out (16:1-21)
- E. The judgment and the fall of Babylon (17:1-19:10)
  1. The vision of the harlot seated upon the beast (17:1-6)
  2. The interpretation of the vision (17:7-18)
  3. The doom of Babylon (18:1-24)
    - a. An angel proclaims the fall of Babylon (18:1-3)
    - b. The faithful are warned to leave the condemned city (18:4-8)
    - c. Lamentation over the ruins of the city (18:9-19)
    - d. A symbolic action signals the disappearance of Babylon (18:21-24)
  4. Songs of joy in heaven (19:1-10)
- F. The coming of Christ and the consummation of history (19:11-22:5)
  1. Victory of Christ over the beast and the false prophet (19:11-21)
  2. The thousand-year reign (20:1-6)
  3. Victory over Satan, freed from his prison (20:7-10)
  4. The universal judgement (20:11-15)
  5. The new world and the new Jerusalem (21:1-8)
  6. The spouse of the Lamb, the heavenly Jerusalem (21:9-22:5)
- IV. Epilogue (22:6-21)
  - A. Witness of the angel (22:6-9)
  - B. The time of retribution is at hand (22:10-15)
  - C. Witness of Jesus (22:16-20)
  - D. Salutation (22:21)

# The Book of Revelation

Adult Bible Study

## Part Two: Textual Commentary

### I. Chapter 1

A. Superscription (1:1-3) *The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants what must soon take place; and he made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, {2} who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. {3} Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.*

1. Notice how the first sentence serves as an extended title and the second sentence serves as a kind of dedication, or blessing on the reader.
2. Notice too four cardinal points about the book that are made in the extended title:

a. **CENTRAL PURPOSE - *The revelation of Jesus Christ***

- (1) Jesus is the hero and the center of this book.
- (2) It is the revelation (unveiling) of Jesus. He is doing the revealing and he is the one revealing
- (3) When he came the first time at Bethlehem his glory was veiled. When he comes again, it will be in all his glory! Note the following contrasts between his first coming and his second coming:

(a)	Crucifixion	Coronation
(b)	Tree (cross)	Throne
(c)	Shame	Splendor
(d)	Redeem	Reign
(e)	Suffering Servant	Splendid Sovereign
(f)	Savior	Sovereign
(g)	Justifier	Judge
(h)	Redeemer	Ruler

- (4) The central person of the Book of Revelation is Jesus Christ. It is He who is revealed. Some are more preoccupied with the coming, rather than the one who comes! Think of two people at a train station. One is the station master who is preoccupied with the arrival and departure schedule, destinations and descriptions of the train, it's capacity and the like. The other is an engaged woman who awaits the arrival of her fiancé, arriving home after a journey. Both are interested in the arrival of the train but one awaits the train, the other a person on the train. Which one are you in terms of the second coming of Jesus. Is your focus on signs, symbols, trumpets, bowls, seals, numbers, descriptions of end time events and schedules, or is your focus on Jesus?

b. **CLEAR PURPOSE - *which God gave him to show to his servants***

***what must soon take place***

(1) The Book of Revelation seeks to help us understand the struggles and vicissitudes of our life in the light of Christ. We are not to walk through life blind, but with the light of faith. *Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* (Psalm 119:105) The vision of this book is clear: what ever the struggles and no matter how bloody the warfare, Jesus is the victor. Don't give up, don't give in, with Jesus Christ, you're gonna win.

c. **COMFORTING PROMISE - *Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein***

(1) Note the blessing of reading and hearing these words! Bit note too that the blessing does not come to those who merely hear these words but to those who heed (keep) these words. *Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.* (Matt 7:24-27)

d. **CERTAIN PROMPTNESS - *for the time is near***

(1) As we have discussed already in these notes, we need not interpret these words in a way that interprets "near" and "soon" as a relative term. For the people of that time, the time was near. The world as they knew it (with Jerusalem and the temple as the center of the universe) was about to pass away. The nearness thus refers not only to the end of the world, but to the end of an era.

3. ***revelation*** - The Greek word here is *Αποκαλυψις* and it is from this word that we get our English word Apocalypse. The word means "revelation" and thus we usually see this book called Revelation but it is sometimes called the Book of the Apocalypse. This means the same thing but it looks more to Greek than Latin roots. Two things may be additionally noted regarding this first word of the book.

a. Many scholars emphasize this word since it is obviously related to the word which describes the genre of this work: Apocalyptic. But it must be noted that this has tended to cause an emphasis to fall on the apocalyptic genre which may not be entirely appropriate. Revelation does have many of the qualities of an apocalypse. The apocalyptic literary came into use about 100 years before the birth of Christ. We see other examples of it the Old Testament in the Book of Daniel and parts of the Book of Zechariah. The Apocalyptic genre is a form of literature that is somewhat

prophetic. It does prophesy about the future but it does so in a way that is very different from the standard prophetic books of the Old Testament because the prophecies found in apocalyptic genre are always filled with cataclysmic imagery. It does not just describe the conditions of God's people here below but it always looks at their struggle in terms of the heavenly condition of God's people and the behind-the-scene struggle between angels and devils. It is also catastrophic in that it stresses that the end of history is drawing near. Scholars differ as to whether apocalyptic is either a different form of literature from prophecy or it is a different style of prophecy. We shall adopt the second point of view. Namely that the apocalyptic genre is a form a prophecy: Apocalyptic is the style of prophecy that studies history in view of its cosmic significance. This helps us to keep the Book of Revelation in a proper perspective. Namely, it has apocalyptic qualities but it is essentially in the prophetic tradition. It helps to explain the ways that Revelation is different from other apocalyptic writings. If we were to survey the average Jewish apocalypse they are almost always political tracts aimed at stirring up frenzies against Rome or political enemies. And yet Revelation is intended to help us to see the spiritual significance of our own suffering of the suffering, persecuted Church. This is an important distinction and it tends to get lost when the Book of Revelation is merely called an apocalypse and viewed from that light.

- b. It is also helpful to explore one aspect of the historical use of the word *apocalupsis* especially in terms of its 1st Century use among Jews and Jewish Christians. *apocalupsis* was an ordinary word among 1st century Greek speakers It meant unveiling or uncovering. But it also had a special use in wedding ceremonies. The typical Jewish wedding ceremony lasted a week(!). For a week the festivities lasted and the two families and the whole town celebrated. The real high point of the wedding would occur on the 7th day. The day would begin with elaborate festivities. The Bride and groom were dressed up as king and queen. The groomsmen would actually carry them aloft in a kind of parade. They were lowered in front of a very large tent designed as a kind of a honeymoon suite. The groom might carry the bride across the threshold into the inner part of the tent. Then the crowd would separate itself at a distance from the tent and the bride and groom were alone for the first time. At this point there was the *apocalupsis*. This was the time when the bride took off her veil (and usually more than her veil). Thus *apocalupsis* signifies the moment that the bride and groom enter into the closest and most personal union in the natural order: The two become one flesh. This same word with its marital overtones is used to begin the Book of Revelation and thus we see an important context for the word. Now we have more than an unveiling of history by Jesus for the Church. We also have an unveiling between Christ and his Church which is the bride of Christ. This shows the love of Christ for his

Church and how close he desires to be with her. Likewise, at a personal level for each of us, Christ is the bridegroom of our soul. This personal relationship with Christ is to be deeply personal, intimate and fruitful. Hence it is a marital relationship in the symbolic order. Understanding the marital overtones of this word also helps to signal a theme that is developed throughout the book but especially at the end. For example

- (1) *Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals, crying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. {7} Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; {8} it was granted her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure" -- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. {9} And the angel said to me, "Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb." And he said to me, "These are true words of God." (Rev 19:6-9)*
- (2) *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; {3} and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; (Rev 21:2-3)*

c. Hence we can see that the word *apocalupsis* is significant. The Book of Revelation describes the marital union of Christ and his Church as the wedding feast of the Lamb. The marital covenant imagery used in the Old Testament (wherein Israel was the spouse of God) is now applied to Christ and his bride the Church. The purpose of revelation (i.e. scripture) is not merely to give us information about God but to bring us into an intimate union with him.

4. ***of Jesus Christ*** - The grammar of this phrase can be understood in two ways
  - a. as a subjective genitive. In the phrase "the city of Washington" we do not mean "the city which belongs to Washington." Rather, we mean "the city which is Washington." The phrase here is not the possessive genitive but a subjective genitive. Thus it can be understood as "The revelation which is from Jesus Christ."
  - b. as an objective genitive. Thus it could be understood as "the revelation which is Jesus Christ." Hence Christ shows himself as the king of glory and Lord of history.
5. ***which God gave him*** - We might wonder why God is giving something to Jesus. Is not Jesus God? How then God give something to Jesus when Jesus is God? It would be like saying "I give something to myself." Here we must understand the Bible speaks of Jesus from two perspectives: his Divine nature and his human nature. In terms of his human nature we can speak of Jesus receiving something from God. In effect what we are saying is that Jesus receives something from the Godhead within himself

6. **servants** - In the Old Testament this word referred to the prophets (cf Amos 3:7). But here it seems more to mean, all the Church Communities.
7. **what must soon take place** - note the immediacy of the text. We have already commented on the interpretive principle we shall use. Namely that the Book of Revelation saw a First Century fulfillment. These words help to underline the immediacy of the fulfillment. It is also a characteristic of apocalyptic writings (cf Dan 2:28)
8. **made it known by sending his angel** - Angels are God's messengers. In the ancient world there was a much more highly developed notion of the transcendence of God. Although the incarnation helped to bring us close to God, there was still the notion that God in all his unveiled glory could not be seen by mere mortals on this side of the grave. Thus when John did behold Christ in verse 17 he fell to his face. There is still the need for angels to be intermediaries. A proper balance is thus expressed and needed. By his incarnation Christ and closed the distance between God and man. Thus as Scripture elsewhere says, *For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (1 Tim 2:5). Wherefore we see how Christ speaks directly to John. And yet, as we have described in this verse and will see in future verses some of the manifestation is still left to the angels. Theologians express the balance necessary between the transcendence and immanence of God as *fascinosum et tremendum*. What this phrase describes is the beauty and glory and mercy of God which draws the believer in (*fascinosum*) and the holy and worshipful awe that leads the believer to draw back in holy reverence (*tremendum*). In terms of our spiritual life a balance is necessary. God is awesomely holy and totally "other" and this inspire our deepest respect and worship. And yet he also beckons us and we are instructed to call him Abba in the Holy Spirit.
9. **to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.** - i.e. John the beloved Apostle. (But see notes on authorship above). That this is John the Apostle seems verified by these words. As if to say: "John the same one who bore witness to the Word of God and to all he saw in the Gospel he wrote." These words however can also be understood as referring only to the visions herein. Note too, that he does not call himself apostle but rather, servant.
10. **Blessed is he who reads aloud...those who hear, and who keep what is written therein.** - To read God's holy word is in a small but very real way to enter into the heart and mind of God. This is blessed indeed. For God makes known to us what is and what is to be. We begin to love as he loves and to think as he thinks. But notice that reading and hearing are not enough. We must keep the words of God. This means to base our life on what is proclaimed not merely to hear an interesting point of view. Thus, to be truly blessed is to have a life that is transformed by these holy words: a life that is faithful to what is heard, filled with hope and set afire by love.
11. **for the time is near** - see notes above on the soonness of it all. Note here however the way in which these words make urgent the choice before us. Either accept these word and base your life on them or don't but decide

quickly for the times are at hand: seek the Lord while he may be found...!

B. Salutation (1:4-8) *John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, {5} and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood {6} and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen. {7} Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen. {8} "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*

1. The first three verses amounted to a lengthy title and acknowledgement. Now, in verse four the letter actually begins. We do not think of Revelation as a letter per se. Most think of it as a book. Indeed, the text between Chapters 4 and 22 give no indication that we are reading a letter. But in these opening chapters and at the end, Vs 22:21<sup>18</sup>, there are the characteristics of a letter. Just as we have a common way of starting a letter (Dear so and so...) so too did the ancient world. Thus, the opening lines contain the author of the letter (John) and the intended recipients (the seven churches that are in Asia). Then there is the standard greeting which is seen in the Letters of Paul as well: Grace to you and peace. Some scholars would use this letter-like format of the first four chapters to indicate that we actually have two works that were later woven together. There is no way to prove such an assertion however so it remains in the realms of an interesting theory.
2. *the seven churches that are in Asia* - they are listed in verse 11. "Asia" here refers to Asia Minor, known today as Turkey. But why these seven? There are several possible explanations
  - a. These churches might be regarded as the center of seven postal districts. Letters delivered to the seven Churches would easily circulate to the surrounding areas. All but Sardis were on a kind of ring road that circled the interior of Asia Minor. (see map).
  - b. These Churches might also be linked to John in a special way. If he were the Bishop of Ephesus (as Tradition assigns him) it follows that these other six Churches might also be under the authority of the bishop of Ephesus as well. This is the case today where dioceses are ethnically under the jurisdiction of a Metropolitan (or Archbishop).
  - c. A third reason is that these seven were picked merely to fill out the number seven. See # 2 just below. In this context, if seven is seen as the perfect number or the number which symbolizes completeness and the fullness thereof then John in writing to seven churches writes to the whole Church.
3. *seven* - there are two things to say with reference to this number.
  - a. As was said just above, the number seven was the "perfect" number. It symbolized the fullness of something. Hence the "seven" churches represent all the churches, i.e. the Church considered in her fullness.

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<sup>18</sup>The Letter ends with another salutation found commonly in Paul's letters, *The Grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all.*

- b. Seven is also a covenant number. A covenant is made by swearing an oath. And the Hebrew word (SHAVOT) "to swear an oath" is literally translated "To seven oneself" The number seven was essential to Hebrew oath swearing ceremonies. Seven ewe lambs were frequently slaughtered to solemnize an oath. Thus to break an oath was to bring seven-fold vengeance upon oneself. The curses that befall the wicked in this book are thus understood in covenant terms as the sevenfold vengeance due those who violated an oath. Leviticus 26<sup>19</sup> & Deuteronomy 28 may well serve as the background for the sevenfold punishments (seven woes, seven bowls, seven trumpets, seven seals etc.) that descend from the heavens. This also helps us to underscore the premise of these notes that the harlot is Jerusalem and the unbelieving Jews who persecuted the Jewish and Gentile Christians. Rome was not in a covenant with God and could thus not break oaths or vows. Therefore sevenfold punishments as the penalty due those who broke a covenant oath would not apply. Scholars who hold that that the harlot is Rome would thus not accept the connection to the covenant made here in reference to the number seven. They would hold that seven means essentially the fullness of something. Hence

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19Lev 26:14-34 reads: [The Lord God says] *"But if you will not hearken to me, and will not do all these commandments, {15} if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my ordinances, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, {16} I will do this to you: I will appoint over you sudden terror, consumption, and fever that waste the eyes and cause life to pine away. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it; {17} I will set my face against you, and you shall be smitten before your enemies; those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. {18} And if in spite of this you will not hearken to me, then I will chastise you again **sevenfold** for your sins, {19} and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like brass; {20} and your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit. {21} "Then if you walk contrary to me, and will not hearken to me, I will bring more plagues upon you, **sevenfold** as many as your sins. {22} And I will let loose the wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number, so that your ways shall become desolate. {23} "And if by this discipline you are not turned to me, but walk contrary to me, {24} then I also will walk contrary to you, and I myself will smite you **sevenfold** for your sins. {25} And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant; and if you gather within your cities I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. {26} When I break your staff of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and shall deliver your bread again by weight; and you shall eat, and not be satisfied. {27} "And if in spite of this you will not hearken to me, but walk contrary to me, {28} then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and chastise you myself **sevenfold** for your sins. {29} You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. {30} And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols; and my soul will abhor you. {31} And I will lay your cities waste, and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odors. {32} And I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be astonished at it. {33} And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you; and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste...."*

the sevenfold punishments to which we just referred would merely symbolize the fullness of punishment and the perfection of just retribution given the disobedient and wicked. Seeing the covenant connection however does provide us a richer context and help us to see this Book of Revelation as part of the wider biblical tradition.

4. ***Grace to you and peace*** - this is a form of a liturgical greeting. Both words were also important to the Jewish people and had counterparts in the Hebrew language. They were also a part of the covenant and family language of Israel
  - a. Grace (χάρις) - corresponded to the Hebrew word HESED which was steadfast love, mercy, faithfulness, and divine favor. HESED was the heart of the covenant. It's what people give each other when they share the same family bond. It's what a mother gives a child, it is what spouses are to give each other.
  - b. peace (εἰρήνη) corresponded to the Hebrew word SHALOM. SHALOM meant more than an absence of conflict. It means the harmony and inner serenity that comes from being in a right relationship with God, family and friends. This peace comes to us fully from the Lord Jesus Christ
5. ***from him who is and who was and who is to come*** - This description of God proceeds from a long tradition that goes back to Exodus 3:14<sup>20</sup>. From the Exodus text we learn that the Name of God is I AM. The name captures the truth about God who is eternal, unchanging, and ever-present. The description in this verse draws on this teaching and tries to express the eternity of God by means of the human category of time. John has slightly altered the formula here by substituting the phrase "who is to come" for "who will be." He likely does this to suit his purpose in this letter to show that the Lord is coming soon to establish his reign. Thus the phrase "who is to come" emphasizes the imminent arrival of the Lord of Glory. To say that God is eternal is more than to say God has existed for a long, long, long time. Eternity is the fullness of time. In other words, past, present and future are equally before God in an all-encompassing "now." God is the eternal "I AM" and the future already is and has always been for God. This is a great mystery for us since our only experience of time is serial and chronological. The diagram on the next page can help us understand and see where God lives in relation to us. He exists in eternity, (the fullness of time) where past, present and future are equally before him. Every point (A, B, C or D) in the diagram on the edge of the circle is equidistant from the center and equally before it. No part of the edge of the circle (chronological time) is nearer or farther from the center point than any other part. This is how past present and future are equal and "at

(Exo 3:13-15) *Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" {14} God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" {15} God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you': this is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.*

once" to God.

6. **and from the seven spirits who are before his throne** Who are these seven spirits? It is difficult to say and scholars advance different explanations.

a. **The Holy Spirit.** On the one hand there is again, recourse to the number seven as indicating the fullness thereof. Thus, the "seven spirits" means, the "fullness of the spirit" i.e. the Holy Spirit. Some of the Fathers of the Church also saw a link to Isaiah 11:1-3a wherein the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are set forth: *There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.* The seven spirits represent the seven gifts which symbolize the Holy Spirit Himself. The advantage of this explanation is that we end up here with a Trinitarian salutation: *grace and peace to you from Him who is, who was and who is to come* (the Father), *and from the seven spirits who are before his throne* (the Holy Spirit), *and from Jesus Christ...* However, as we have seen, there can be a bit of an overemphasis on seven as the number of fullness and perfection that can lead us to overlook other possibilities which follow.

b. **Seven Angels.** Another explanation is that this is a gloss on a reference from the Book of Tobit 12:15 wherein the archangel Raphael said to Tobit, *I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the saints and enter into the presence of the glory of the Holy One.* Hence by this explanation, the seven spirits are seven angels. This explanation helps to link the text to what will follow: seven letters addressed, not to the seven churches per se, but to the seven angels of the churches. (e.g. *To the angel of the church in Ephesus write...*)

c. **A symbol of the omniscience of God.** There is also an echo from the Book of Zechariah: *And the angel who talked with me came again...And he said to me "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it and seven lamps on it..." The angel said, "These seven are the eyes of the Lord, which range through the whole earth."* Hence, the seven spirits represent the omniscience of God who sees and knows all. This also fits the context regarding the lampstands that will shortly be mentioned. There may be a link also to Revelation (5:6) *I saw a Lamb, standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent into all the earth. He went and took the scroll...* The text from chapter five refers to the scroll which, as we shall see contains the knowledge of what is to be and the knowledge and secret of all history. The problem with this link is that the text identifies this omniscience with the Lamb, i.e. Jesus. But in this verse before us we have, *and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ.* If the seven spirits are identified with Jesus himself, then why does John wish us grace and peace from the seven spirits, and

from Jesus? Hence the link to verse 5:6 is problematic. But the seven spirits could still represent the omniscience of God.

- d. We need not choose only one explanation in exclusion to the others. However, the best bet seems to be that the Holy Spirit is intended here.<sup>21</sup> In a secondary sense there is meant the seven angels of the seven churches for as we said earlier, the ancient emphasis was that God worked through his angels. Hence, each explanation has insights to offer and reminds us of the potential richness of a single image.

7. ***Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the first-born of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth*** Here is an allusion to Psalm 89; specifically 89:27 *And I will make him the first born, the highest of the kings of the earth.* There are likely two levels at work here if we understand Revelation as a polemic against Jewish persecutors of the Christians. On one level we have a reference to Jesus as the perfect fulfillment of David. What David was imperfectly as described in this psalm, Jesus is perfectly. At another level, there is a warning to Israel. Psalm 89 spoke of the promises made to David and to all of Israel if they remained faithful to the covenant with God. If they did not, terrible ruin and sorrow would overtake them. Hence we do well to refer to the whole of Psalm 89 (see endnotes<sup>1</sup>) and behold how it is a mini-rehearsal of sorts for the Book of Revelation. This provides further evidence for the position that the harlot is not Rome but Jerusalem herself.<sup>22</sup> It is unlikely that John has used a text here to evoke the fidelity and lordship of Christ without also evoke the shame and disgrace experienced by Israel in Psalm 89 as a result of her breaking of the covenant.

- a. Here is Psalm 89 : *I will sing of thy steadfast love, O LORD, for ever; with my mouth I will proclaim thy faithfulness to all generations. {2} For thy steadfast love was established for ever, thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens. {3} Thou hast said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: {4} 'I will establish your descendants for ever, and build your throne for all generations.'" Selah {5} Let the heavens praise thy wonders, O LORD, thy faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! {6} For who in the skies can be compared to the LORD? Who among the heavenly beings is like the LORD, {7} a God feared in the council of the holy ones, great and terrible above all that are round about him? {8} O LORD God of hosts, who is mighty as thou art, O LORD, with thy faithfulness round about thee? {9} Thou dost rule the raging of the sea; when its waves rise, thou stillest them. {10} Thou didst crush Rahab like a carcass,*

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<sup>21</sup>This could also embrace explanation C because the Holy Spirit is the wisdom and knowledge and love of God.

It also reminds us of an important rule of thumb in scripture study: When there is a quote or an allusion to an Old Testament text, the whole context of the verse is usually intended. It is rare that we merely have a proof-text being advanced. This is because the both reader and writer knew the Old Testament too well to get away with quoting a text but violating its original context. To quote a text was to recall the whole original setting.

thou didst scatter thy enemies with thy mighty arm. {11} The heavens are thine, the earth also is thine; the world and all that is in it, thou hast founded them. {12} The north and the south, thou hast created them; Tabor and Hermon joyously praise thy name. {13} Thou hast a mighty arm; strong is thy hand, high thy right hand. {14} Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne; steadfast love and faithfulness go before thee. {15} Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance, {16} who exult in thy name all the day, and extol thy righteousness. {17} For thou art the glory of their strength; by thy favor our horn is exalted. {18} For our shield belongs to the LORD, our king to the Holy One of Israel. {19} Of old thou didst speak in a vision to thy faithful one, and say: "I have set the crown upon one who is mighty, I have exalted one chosen from the people. {20} I have found David, my servant; with my holy oil I have anointed him; {21} so that my hand shall ever abide with him, my arm also shall strengthen him. {22} The enemy shall not outwit him, the wicked shall not humble him. {23} I will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him. {24} My faithfulness and my steadfast love shall be with him, and in my name shall his horn be exalted. {25} I will set his hand on the sea and his right hand on the rivers. {26} He shall cry to me, 'Thou art my Father, my God, and the Rock of my salvation.' {27} And I will make him the first-born, the highest of the kings of the earth. {28} My steadfast love I will keep for him for ever, and my covenant will stand firm for him. {29} I will establish his line for ever and his throne as the days of the heavens. {30} If his children forsake my law and do not walk according to my ordinances, {31} if they violate my statutes and do not keep my commandments, {32} then I will punish their transgression with the rod and their iniquity with scourges; {33} but I will not remove from him my steadfast love, or be false to my faithfulness. {34} I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips. {35} Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. {36} His line shall endure for ever, his throne as long as the sun before me. {37} Like the moon it shall be established for ever; it shall stand firm while the skies endure." Selah {38} But now thou hast cast off and rejected, thou art full of wrath against thy anointed. {39} Thou hast renounced the covenant with thy servant; thou hast defiled his crown in the dust. {40} Thou hast breached all his walls; thou hast laid his strongholds in ruins. {41} All that pass by despoil him; he has become the scorn of his neighbors. {42} Thou hast exalted the right hand of his foes; thou hast made all his enemies rejoice. {43} Yea, thou hast turned back the edge of his sword, and thou hast not made him stand in battle. {44} Thou hast removed the scepter from his hand, and cast his throne to the ground. {45} Thou hast cut short the days of his youth; thou hast covered him with shame. Selah {46} How long, O LORD? Wilt thou hide thyself for ever? How long will thy wrath burn like fire? {47} Remember, O Lord,

*what the measure of life is, for what vanity thou hast created all the sons of men! {48} What man can live and never see death? Who can deliver his soul from the power of Sheol? Selah {49} Lord, where is thy steadfast love of old, which by thy faithfulness thou didst swear to David? {50} Remember, O Lord, how thy servant is scorned; how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples, {51} with which thy enemies taunt, O LORD, with which they mock the footsteps of thy anointed. {52} Blessed be the LORD for ever! Amen and Amen.*

8. **ruler of kings on earth** - This also advances a theme in Revelation. Jesus is Lord of history. Nothing "surprising" happens for he knows it before it happens. Hence he rules the kings of the earth and they can never lay a hand on his beloved unless he wills (i.e. allows) it. Hence, Christians should be of good cheer and confidence for the Lord is already in our future and is working his purpose out. He is never caught unaware!
9. **To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood {6} and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.** - Instead of re-inventing the wheel here, we do well do merely quote the Second Vatican Council - *Christ the Lord, high priest taken from among men (cf. Heb. 5: 1-5), made the new people "a kingdom of priests to God, his Father" (Apoc. 1:6; cf. 5:9-10). The baptized, by regeneration and the anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated to be a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, that through all the works of Christian men they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the perfection of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light (cf. 1 Pet. 2:4-10). Therefore all the disciples of Christ, persevering in prayer and praising God (cf. Acts 2:42-47), should present themselves as a sacrifice, living, holy and pleasing to God (cf. Rom. 12:1)...Though they differ essentially and not only in degree, the common priesthood of the faithful and the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood are none the less ordered one to another; each in its own proper way shares in the one priesthood of Christ. The ministerial priest, by the sacred power that he has, forms and rules the priestly people; in the person of Christ he effects the eucharistic sacrifice and offers it to God in the name of all the people. The faithful...by virtue of their royal priesthood...exercise that priesthood by the reception of the sacraments, prayer and thanksgiving, the witness of a holy life, abnegation and active charity...freely uniting themselves to the passion and death of Christ (cf. Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:24; Tim. 2:11-12; 1 Pet. 4:13).*<sup>23</sup> The essence of all priesthood is to offer sacrifice to God. Hence all the faithful, through the grace received at baptism enter into this holy action of Christ, each in his own way.
10. **Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.** There are two Old Testament texts referred to here:
  - a. (Dan 7:13-14) *I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. {14} And to*

*him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.*

- b. *(Zec 12:10-14; 13:1) And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of compassion and supplication, so that, when they look on him whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a first-born. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadadrimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself...On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness.*
  - c. Again the context of both these passages is supportive of our theory that the harlot, the persecutor is Jerusalem. The context is one of an offer of mercy to Jerusalem who has been punished for her iniquity. The New Testament context is that Jesus who was crucified by his fellow Jews shall be seen by them (who pierced him)<sup>24</sup>. If they can repent from their sin and uncleanness they shall receive mercy and avoid the ruin that is to come as predicted in this Book.
11. Liturgical insights - We have already noted that there seems to be a liturgical context to the verses before us. The first clue is the ancient liturgical greeting, "Grace to you and peace." And yet there are other clues to examine. The verses before us take the form of a liturgical dialogue or antiphon if we see it in the following format:
- a. **Lector** - Grace to you and peace from him who is, who was, and who is to come and from the seven spirits before his throne; and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and ruler of the kings of the earth.
  - b. **Congregation** - To him who loves us and has loosed us from our sins with his blood and has made us a royal house of priests to his God and Father - to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen
  - c. **Lector** - Behold: he comes amid the clouds and every eye will see him even those who pierced him and all the tribes of the earth will wail because of him.
  - d. **Congregation** - So be it. Amen
12. Other liturgical notes - Numerous liturgical overtones are also ahead of us in the verses and chapters ahead
- a. Incense
  - b. White Robes
  - c. Altars
  - d. Candles
  - e. Thrones

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<sup>24</sup>This is not to deny that all sinners crucified the Lord of glory. We cannot blame "the Jews" for crucifying Christ. But the context here emphasizes that he was handed over by his own. Repentance and faith are essential to avoid the coming ruin.

- f. Scrolls/books
  - g. The Gloria
  - h. The Sanctus
  - i. The promises to give the hidden manna
  - j. All of this takes place on the Lord's day
- C. Opening Vision (1:9-20) *I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance, was on the island called Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. {10} I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet {11} saying, "Write what you see in a book and send it to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea." {12} Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, {13} and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; {14} his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, {15} his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; {16} in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. {17} When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, {18} and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades. {19} Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter. {20} As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*
1. Now that we have seen the title and the dedication, we turn to the vision proper.
  2. There is a glorious portrait of Jesus Christ presented in these verses (8-20) which can be joyfully examined here before we get into the academic particulars. Here is a portrait of the risen Christ in all his glory. The vision is of a high Christology. The Christ that is encountered here is the Lord of glory who has attained to his glorious kingdom and who is the Lord of history and King of the Universe. Let us look at the ten-fold description of Jesus the Christ.<sup>25</sup>
    - a. The recapitulating Christ 8 *"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.*
      - (1) To recapitulate means to subsume many things under one heading. Thus the Bible says of him: Eph 1:9-10 *Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to*

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<sup>25</sup>The alliterated list contained in this section of notes is from Adrian Rogers, Pastor of Bellview Baptist Church in his radio message of 1995. The message is now available in a set of tapes entitled "Revelation" available through Love Worth Finding Ministries, 901-382-7900. The list and reflection is fundamentally his work though I have adapted and added to it for these notes. Note too that Adrian Roger's overall approach to the Book of Revelation is very much in the futurist point of view and typical of that of many more fundamentalist and many Evangelical preachers.

*his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him*

- (2) Alpha and omega really means more than beginning and end. If Christ were to speak this today he would say, "I am A and Z." In other words, "I am the alphabet of God." What is an alphabet? It is an ingenious manner of storing accumulated wisdom and knowledge. Jesus is the accumulated wisdom of God. He is the Word of God. He is the refulgence of all wisdom and knowledge. He knows all things.
- b. The Resurrected Christ - **12 *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man*** -
- (1) It had been some years since John had seen Jesus. Now he turns and sees him. But what is he like? ***One like a son of man***. Jesus is forevermore a man. Jesus was not a man before his incarnation. But at his conception he became a man. But not merely to wear his manhood for awhile then discard it. Jesus will keep his humanity for all eternity. There is a man in the glory. Truly his humanity is glorified but it is humanity as well as divinity. He was resurrected in a body, he ascended in a body, he is coming back in a body, literally and visibly. Here is the resurrected Christ, the Son of Man.
- c. The Reigning Christ - **13B *clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast*** -
- (1) Here are regal robes. The dress and splendor of a king, the dress and splendor of a magistrate or a judge
  - (2) The portrait here is not of Jesus Christ as savior *per se* it is Jesus Christ as judge.
  - (3) We must all face Jesus one day as Judge, the scriptures are clear:
    - (a) Romans 14:11-12 *For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So each of us shall give account of himself to God.*
    - (b) 2 Cor 5:9-10 *So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive good or evil, according to what he has done in the body.*
- d. The Righteous Christ - **14 *his head and his hair were white as white wool,***
- (1) This text speaks of his righteousness and purity.
    - (a) Isaiah 1:18 *Come now, and let us reason together,*

*saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.*

- (2) Jesus is purer and cleaner than new-fallen snow or bleached wool. Oh the holiness and the blessedness of this Christ
- e. The Revealing Christ - ***14b his eyes were like a flame of fire.***
- (1) The text means that he has a penetrating vision, like fire that penetrates and burns. Today we might say “He has eyes like an x-ray” He sees right through you. Everything you’ve ever done, he knows about. Every thought, every word, every deed. You can fool others but his eyes are like a flame of fire. He knows, you’ll not fool him.
  - (2) Heb 4:13 *Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.*
  - (3) You can fool an earthly judge but you will not fool this Judge. He sees through and through. He cannot be:
    - (a) Deceived
    - (b) Disbarred
    - (c) Disputed
    - (d) Discredited
  - (4) His eyes are like the flame of fire. He is the revealing Christ
- f. The relentless Christ - ***15 his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace***
- (1) This means his coming and his judgement will be unstoppable. Brass is a weighty and a hard metal.
  - (2) In the Old Testament brass was a symbol of judgement.
  - (3) In the temple all of the instruments were made of brass. There was the brazen laver, the brazen altar. Why? Because it was there that sin was judged
  - (4) Here then is burning judgement and strong feet. He is the relentless Christ. You cannot stop him. He is going forth to judge. He will judge. He must judge. “He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.”
  - (5) He is going to judge.
  - (6) John 5:22-23 *For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: That all men should honour the Son,*
  - (7) Many people have not understood that Jesus is not only the savior he is the judge.
- g. The regal Christ - ***15b and his voice was like the sound of many waters***
- (1) A likely background to this text is Psalm 29: 1-4 *Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength. Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness. The voice of the LORD is upon the waters: the God of glory thundereth: the LORD is upon many waters. The voice of the LORD is*

*powerful; the voice of the LORD is full of majesty. Oh the majesty of Christ. See how what is ascribed to God in the Old Testament is here ascribed to Christ. He is our majestic Lord and God.*

- (2) Some of the following texts also describe the mighty voice of our Lord
- (3) Psalm 47:5 *God has gone up with a shout, the LORD with the sound of a trumpet.*
- (4) Jeremiah 25:30-31 *The LORD shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar upon his habitation; he shall give a shout, as they that tread the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A noise shall come even to the ends of the earth; for the LORD hath a controversy with the nations, he will plead with all flesh; he will give them that are wicked to the sword, saith the LORD.*
- (5) 1 Thess 4:16-18 *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*
- (6) John 5:28-29 *for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.*
- (7) It won't do any good to talk back. Can you imagine standing at the foot of Niagra Falls and arguing with it?
- (8) How different this second coming will be from the time of his passion and death wherein the Bible says:
  - (a) Is 53:7 *He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth.*
  - (b) Is 42:1 *Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench: he shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.*
  - (c) Matt 27:13-14 *Then said Pilate unto him, Hearest thou not how many things they witness against thee? And he answered him to never a word;*

*insomuch that the governor marvelled greatly.*

- (9) When he comes again he shall speak and what power there shall be. He is the regal Christ. This verse speaks of his majesty.
- h. The Regulating Christ - ***16 in his right hand he held seven stars***
- (1) Jesus doesn't just have the whole world in his hand. He's got the whole universe in his hand. He is the one who regulates it all. He regulates, runs and rules all of creation.
  - (2) The Bible says of Jesus
    - (a) Col 1:15-17 *Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist.*
    - (b) Eph 1:9-10 *Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him*
  - (3) The book of revelation also defines the stars as the seven Churches. Rev 1:20 states: *The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches:* Thus we see here the governance over the Church which Christ has. He regulates and rules the Church as scripture says of him: (Col 1:17-18) *And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.* Thus, even in this context we can see how his regulation of the Church flows from his regulation of all things.
  - (4) Jesus Christ our regulator and ruler. All things are under his control. Fear nothing. There is no panic in heaven only plans.
- i. The revenging Christ - ***16b from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword.***
- (1) Here is a word picture that reminds of Hebrews 4:12 *12 For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.* The sword that is in his mouth is his Word.
  - (2) And what is he going to do with this sword? He is going to smite the nations with it. Jesus is not coming back only to receive his own. He is coming back to exact vengeance on his enemies. No this bothers some who cannot imagine

Jesus in this role. Yet Jesus is not just savior, he is judge and if you won't let him save you, then he must condemn you. There is no third way given. Either we accept the invitation of salvation Jesus give or we must accept condemnation.

- (3) Now the word of God is a sword that will cut. Either it will cut to bless (like a surgeon) or it will cut to bleed. We will be cut by it to be brought under conviction and to the Lord Jesus Christ or we will be run through and through by it in judgement.
- (4) Rev 2:16 *Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them [the Nicolaitians] with the sword of my mouth.*
- (5) Rev 19:11-15 *And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.*
- (6) 2 Thess 1:7-10 *And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.*
- (7) There is a different experience of the same reality. For those who love God there shall be vindication and triumph. For those who hate the truth and hide from the light, there shall be blinding glory that they experience as wrath and destruction. Thus, to speak of the wrath of God is not to say that God is mad *per se* or that he is in a foul mood. It is to say that in order to endure the day of his coming we must be brought up to the temperature of glory lest we melt like wax on that day. Thus the Word of God must act like a surgeon's scalpel and remove all that is putrefied in us. We must be healed by God's word and the sacraments of grace lest we perish on that day when his Word shall have it's full effect. Only he can do this for us. God is what and who he

is, he doesn't change. So, by his grace we must be changed. Then we can experience his presence as warmth and glory rather than wrath.

(8) He will speak and the battle is done. Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord. He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored. He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword. His truth is marching on. Glory Hallelujah.

(9) Vengeance belongs to God alone

(a) Romans 12:19 *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

j. The Resplendent Christ - **16c and his face was like the sun shining in full strength**

(1) Oh the brightness of his face! Oh the brilliance of his glory. For the saints his shining glory is a beauty to behold. They glory in the light

(a) Psalm 50:1-2 *The Mighty One, God the LORD, speaks and summons the earth from the rising of the sun to its setting. Out of Zion, the perfection of beauty, God shines forth.*

(b) Psalm 18:28 *Yea, thou dost light my lamp; the LORD my God lightens my darkness.*

(c) Psalm 27:1 *The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?*

(d) Psalm 36:9 *For with thee is the fountain of life; in thy light do we see light.*

(e) Psalm 37:6 *He will bring forth your vindication as the light, and your right as the noonday.*

(f) Psalm 43:3-4 *Oh send out thy light and thy truth; let them lead me, let them bring me to thy holy hill and to thy dwelling! Then I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy; and I will praise thee with the lyre, O God, my God.*

(g) Psalm 89:15 *Blessed is the people that know the joyful sound: they shall walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.*

(h) Psalm 97:10-11 *The LORD loves those who hate evil; he preserves the lives of his saints; he delivers them from the hand of the wicked. Light dawns for the righteous, and joy for the upright in heart.*

(i) Psalm 104:1-2 *Bless the LORD, O my soul! O LORD my God, thou art very great! Thou art clothed with honor and majesty, who coverest thyself with light as with a garment,*

(j) Psalm 112:4 *Light rises in the darkness for the upright; the LORD is gracious, merciful, and righteous.*

- (k) Prov 4:18 *But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day.*
  - (l) John 1:4-5, 9 *In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not.*
- (2) But for the wicked, the light is blinding and it exposes their wickedness:
- (a) Psalm 90:8 *Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, our secret sins in the light of thy countenance.*
  - (b) John 3:19-20 *And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.*
  - (c) Acts 22:6 *And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.*
- (3) Who can describe the glory of the coming savior. The light of Jesus is the very light of heaven: Rev 21:23 *And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*
- k. The reassuring Christ - 17 ***When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not, I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.***
- (1) Our world needs today a new vision of the holiness of God. Look at John. He knew Christ and lay his head upon his

chest at the last supper. But now, despite all their history, when he beholds the glorified Christ, he falls on his face as though dead. For as the Bible says, Exodus 33:20 *But," God said, "you cannot see my face; for man shall not see me and live."* Too frequently today God has been trivialized. Look at John's experience. Jesus will reassure him, but the glory is awesome, he is Holy, Holy, Holy. Here is the glorified Christ, awesome in power and majesty.

- (2) Yet Jesus says, "Fear not!" He is the reassuring Christ. But notice that what he tells John not to fear: death and the power of evil one. Thus the awesome power and majesty of Jesus becomes the basis for fearing not. His resurrection is the source of his glory and also the reason we should not fear. Thus, Jesus does not hide his glory to reassure John, he lets his glory shine forth not to make John afraid, but to reassure. He has power to save. Hallelujah.
3. After this Powerful portrait we go on now on to a textual analysis:
4. ***I John, your brother, who share with you in Jesus the tribulation and the kingdom and the patient endurance*** - this verse contains a short synopsis of all that is to follow. Here are the three most prevalent themes of the Book of Revelation: suffering which we must patiently endure, a kingdom which we must see through the eyes of faith, and patient endurance which represents our lifestyle. The Book of Revelation is essentially a book of glory and hope. Jesus is the Lord of history. Just as Jesus suffered, died but was raised in glory, so too his mystical body the Church. We must share in the tribulation of this world and understand that the devil rages against God's holy ones. Nevertheless, we must have confidence since Jesus has overcome the world. His kingdom, though not of this world has already been re-established and will be made manifest to all. In the meantime, we must have faith and live in patient endurance.
5. ***Patmos*** - (see the map). A small, barren island (10 miles long and 5 miles wide) off the west coast of Asia Minor. John says he finds himself there because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Although tradition says that he was in prison there, it will be noted that the text here does not get that specific. It is also possible that he merely landed on Patmos to preach.
6. ***in the Spirit*** - Here is a reference to the gift of prophecy. In Acts 10:9-11 Peter also has a vision that uses similar language: *The next day, as they were on their journey and coming near the city, Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour. And he became hungry and desired something to eat; but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heaven opened, and something descending, like a great sheet, let down by four corners upon the earth.* hence a prophet is caught up in the Spirit to hear or see a message that God wants to convey.
7. ***the Lord's day*** - i.e. Sunday. From the earliest days, due to the fact that the Lord had risen on the first day of the week, Sunday was set aside for

Christian worship<sup>26</sup> and the celebration of the Eucharist, followed by an "agape" meal. The early Jewish Christians may also have continued to attend the synagogue on Saturdays but this was discontinued early on due to the bad relations that ensued between Jews and Christians. At that point, the Jewish synagogue service was attached to the first part of the Eucharist and there was brought together what we call today, the Liturgy of the Word (essentially a Jewish Synagogue service) and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Probably due to abuses<sup>27</sup>, the agape meal was dropped very early on as an essential component of the Christian observances of the Lord's Day.

8. ***a loud voice like a trumpet*** - In the Old Testament, loud sounds were frequently a symbol of the experience of being in the presence of God symbol. For example Ezekiel 3:12: *Then the Spirit lifted me up, and as the glory of the LORD arose from its place, I heard behind me the sound of a great earthquake; it was the sound of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the sound of the wheels beside them, that sounded like a great earthquake.* In the Old Testament the trumpet was a religious symbol associated especially with the liturgical rites of the temple.
9. ***the seven churches*** - As we saw before, the order of the listing of the seven Churches is significant. It amounts to a listing of the cities on a circular road through western Asia Minor. Hence we have here a circular letter that a messenger could carry to each of the Churches on the route. Perhaps each Church could hear it read and then write down a copy.
10. ***seven golden lampstands*** - This seems to suggest the seven branched lampstand (Menorah) described in Exodus 25:31-37<sup>28</sup> & Zech 4:2. But here the lamps are separate.
11. ***one like a son of man clothed with a long robe and with a golden girdle round his breast; his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters; in his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.***- This vision is quite similar to the one in Dan 7:9-10,13-14:

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26On the first day of the week we came together to break bread. Paul spoke to the people and, because he intended to leave the next day, kept on talking until midnight. (Acts 20:7).

27See 1 Cor 11:17ff.

2822. (Exo 25:31-38) "*And you shall make a lampstand of pure gold. The base and the shaft of the lampstand shall be made of hammered work; its cups, its capitals, and its flowers shall be of one piece with it; {32} and there shall be six branches going out of its sides, three branches of the lampstand out of one side of it and three branches of the lampstand out of the other side of it; {33} three cups made like almonds, each with capital and flower, on one branch, and three cups made like almonds, each with capital and flower, on the other branch -- so for the six branches going out of the lampstand; {34} and on the lampstand itself four cups made like almonds, with their capitals and flowers, {35} and a capital of one piece with it under each pair of the six branches going out from the lampstand. {36} Their capitals and their branches shall be of one piece with it, the whole of it one piece of hammered work of pure gold. {37} And you shall make the seven lamps for it; and the lamps shall be set up so as to give light upon the space in front of it. {38} Its snuffers and their trays shall be of pure gold.*

*As I looked, thrones were placed and one that was ancient of days took his seat; his raiment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came forth from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened...I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed" As for me, Daniel, my spirit within me was anxious and the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this. So he told me, and made known to me the interpretation of the things. It is interesting to note that many of the attributes that Daniel ascribes to the Ancient of Days (the Father) John attributes to Christ. Hence there is implied the divinity of Christ as well as the oneness of God. There are also incorporated here visions from Ezekiel.<sup>29</sup>*

- a. This passage is a fulfillment of something Jesus said. What Jesus foretold, John now sees: (Mat 24:15ff) *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory; Likewise Jesus also said in Matthew's Gospel: I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven."* (Mt 26:62-66)
- b. This passage also helps explain why Jesus used the title "Son of man" for himself. Although his disciples never call him this, it is the most common title Jesus uses for himself in the New

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**29(Ezek 1:24-28 )** And when they went, I heard the sound of their wings (the angels) like the sound of many waters, like the thunder of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of a host; when they stood still, they let down their wings. {25} And there came a voice from above the firmament over their heads; when they stood still, they let down their wings. {26} And above the firmament over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire; and seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness as it were of a human form. {27} And upward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were gleaming bronze, like the appearance of fire enclosed round about; and downward from what had the appearance of his loins I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness round about him. {28} Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. & **(Ezek 8:2):** Then I beheld, and, lo, a form that had the appearance of a man; below what appeared to be his loins it was fire, and above his loins it was like the appearance of brightness, like gleaming bronze.

Testament. Why? To our modern ears, the title "Son of Man" may sound like a lesser title than "Son of God" but this is not the case. The title "Son of God" is actually a very ambiguous term that would have had little impact on the people of the Lord's day. Thus, he makes no use of it. But he does use the more provocative and meaningful title "Son of Man" in reference to himself. It is good to look at each title separately to see their meaning to biblical ears.

(1) **Son of God:** in the scriptures, the title "son of God" is used of Israel itself (Ex. 4:22; Hos 11:1), of the Davidic King (Ps 2:7) and of the angels (Gen 6:2) Likewise, all humankind is called this since we are all created in God's image and likeness. And again, all the just and peacemakers are called sons of God since by divine adoption they have been called to be like unto him showing forth his Justice and Mercy and by knowing and loving him in a special way. Perhaps in view of the ambiguity of the term it is best understood why it is never explicitly recorded in the scriptures that Jesus said, "I am the Son of God." But He did better than this, by revealing explicitly the intimacy between his Father and himself. "The Father and I are one. Everything has been entrusted to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father; just as no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him." (Matt 11:27) Indeed, the anger and charges of blasphemy by many of the Jews at Jesus' claim show that Jesus was not merely speaking in a figurative or ambiguous way as might be implied if he merely used the term Son of God in relation to himself.

(2) **Son of Man:** With few exceptions (eg Acts 7:56) the title Son of Man is found only in the Gospels and only on Jesus' lips. There are actually three different uses of the phrase evident on the lips of the Lord:

(a) In regard to the Last Judgement: "When the Son of man comes on the clouds of heaven escorted by the angels..." (Mk 14:62 & Matt 25:31ff) The Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory as judge of the world (Matt 17:22 and Mk 8:31)

(b) In regard to his future sufferings, death and resurrection as the Messiah (Mt. 17:22 and Mk 8:31)

(c) Or finally to Jesus simply as an individual speaking in his own name (Mt. 5:11; 10:32; Lk 6:22; 12:8)

c. So, the title "Son of Man" is a clear profession of divine transcendence that can be traced to the prophecy of Daniel 7:13<sup>30</sup> which Christ appropriated to himself at the dramatic moment when

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30"...and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed."

his fate was being decided by the Jewish Sanhedrin. Caiphas the high priest was vexed with the savior and puzzled by his silence: "*I put you on oath by the living God to tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.*" *The Words are your own, answered Jesus. Moreover, I tell you that from this time onward you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the power and coming on the clouds of heaven.*" (Mt 26:62-66) Thus, of the two titles discussed, "Son of Man" is a far more clear and lofty title and it is this title which Christ takes for himself.

12. ***from his mouth issued a sharp two-edged sword*** - The sharp sword is an image of the Word of God. Another fine example of this imagery is in Heb 4:12-14 - *For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. {13} And before him no creature is hidden, but all are open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do. {14} Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession.*
13. ***When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead*** - Daniel had a similar reaction: Dan 10:5-12 - *I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, whose loins were girded with gold of Uphaz. {6} His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the noise of a multitude. {7} And I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, for the men who were with me did not see the vision, but a great trembling fell upon them, and they fled to hide themselves. {8} So I was left alone and saw this great vision, and no strength was left in me; my radiant appearance was fearfully changed, and I retained no strength. {9} Then I heard the sound of his words; and when I heard the sound of his words, I fell on my face in a deep sleep with my face to the ground. {10} And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. {11} And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly beloved, give heed to the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." While he was speaking this word to me, I stood up trembling. {12} Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words.*
14. ***But he laid his right hand upon me, saying, "Fear not.."*** - The whole vision is understandably terrifying. But just as Daniel was comforted, so is John. God is awesome and his glory cannot be measured or understood. Yet this awesome and transcendent God calls us by name and bids us call him "Abba" Jesus too, shows his love for us in his wounded heart from the cross.
15. ***I am the first and the last, and the living one; I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.*** Jesus does not deny his divine refulgence and glory for he declares that he is in fact the Alpha and Omega, the Divine, "I AM" But he reminds John that he died and rose for love of us. That death has no power over him and that in

regard to the thing we fear most (death) he holds the power of the keys. Hence, though John may fear for his life, he need not fear since the author and sustainer of life stands before him. And he offers life, life to the full.

16. ***Now write what you see, what is and what is to take place hereafter.*** This sovereign Lord does have a task for John and so he commands him after reassuring him.

