Revelation

Chapter 1

1:3 “the who reads and those who hear.” One person would read aloud, and others, who probably could not read, would listen. See commentary 1 Timothy 4:13.

“keep.” The Greek word is tereō (#5083 τηρεω), and it has several distinct meanings. One is to “obey,” and some English versions think that is the definition here. However, it also means “guard,” “safeguard” “watch,” or “pay attention to,” and that seems to be more the meaning in this verse. Note the following examples, which have tereō used in that sense (OT verses are from the Septuagint; all these examples are from the NET translation): Proverbs 2:11: “Understanding will guard you.” Proverbs 3:21: “safeguard sound wisdom and discretion.” Proverbs 4:6: “Do not forsake wisdom…and she will guard you.” Proverbs 4:23: “Guard your heart with all vigilance.” Ecclesiastes 11:4: He who watches the wind will not sow [the seed]. Matthew 27:36: “Then they [the guards at the crucifixion] sat down and kept guard over him there.” John 2:10: “You have kept the good wine until now!” Acts 12:5: “So Peter was kept in prison.”

1:4. “the seven spirits that are before his throne.” The best we know on the seven spirits before God is that they must be seven spiritual beings who are of great rank and authority, and help God administer the spiritual/physical world. Trinitarians have postulated that these seven are actually just one spirit, "The Holy Spirit," but that is not good exegesis of the text and is only suggested because of their Trinitarian doctrine. E. W. Bullinger, at one time the secretary of the Trinitarian Bible Society in England, wrote: “This fact that they are ‘before’ or in the presence of, God’s throne, shows that they occupy the position of servants (see 1 Kings 10:8), and of created beings (4:5, 10; 7:9, 15; 8:2; 11:4, 16; 12:10; 14:3, 5, 10; 20:12). This one fact ought to have precluded the idea that these seven could be one, and that one Divine! ...On the other hand, angels are constantly represented as occupying this position. And angels are again referred to in 4:5 under the symbol of seven lamps (to which other spiritual creatures are likened in Ezek. 1:13).”

Revelation 3:1 says that Jesus Christ “has” the seven spirits of God, which makes perfect sense if these seven are angels and he is Lord of all creation. Revelation 4:5 once again mentions that the seven spirits are “before” the throne of God, and 5:6 mentions them in the context of being connected to Jesus Christ. Revelation 8:2 then mentions “the” seven angels who stand before God, but up to that time there were no “seven angels” mentioned, only “seven spirits.” Thus the use of the definite article is a good reason to identify the seven spirits with “the” seven angels. It is possible that these seven are, or are somehow connected to, the “chosen angels” in 1 Timothy 5:21. God and Jesus work closely with angels, even though they would not have to. Similarly, Jesus told his apostles that when he came into his kingdom, they would sit on thrones judging the tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). God tells us that there is safety in a multitude of counselors, and apparently He takes His own advice.

1:5. “by.” The Greek word is en (“in”), and this is the instrumental dative, well translated as “by.”
1:7. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ιδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“mourn.” This is not a mourning of repentance, because by the time every eye sees Jesus it will be too late for repentance (not that the unbelievers would repent anyway, even at seeing Jesus), but rather mourning “because of” him, that is because of the loss they will suffer because of his justice. Nyland (The Source NT) has, “grief-stricken because of him.”

1:8. “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God.” These words apply to God, not to Christ. The one, “who is, and who was and who is to come” is clearly identified in the context as God, not Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:4, 5 reads: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.” The separation between “the one who was, is and is to come” and Jesus Christ can be clearly seen. The one “who is, and who was and who is to come” is God.

This verse is made slightly more ambiguous in the KJV than the REV because the word “God” is left out of the Greek text from which the KJV was translated. Nevertheless, modern textual research shows conclusively that it should be included, and modern versions do include the word “God.”

The phrase “the Alpha and the Omega,” has caused many people to believe this verse refers to Christ. However, study of the occurrences of the phrase indicates that the title “Alpha and Omega” applies to both God and Christ. Scholars are not completely sure what the phrase “the Alpha and the Omega” means. Lenski (The Interpretation of St. John’s Revelation) concludes, “It is fruitless to search Jewish and pagan literature for the source of something that resembles this name Alpha and Omega. Nowhere is a person, to say nothing of a divine Person, called ‘Alpha and Omega,’ or in Hebrew, ‘Aleph and Tau.’”

Although there is no evidence from the historical sources that anyone is named “the Alpha and Omega,” Bullinger (Commentary on Revelation) says that the phrase “is a Hebraism, in common use among the ancient Jewish Commentators to designate the whole of anything from the beginning to the end; e.g., ‘Adam transgressed the whole law from Aleph to Tau’ (Jalk. Reub., fol. 17.4).” That would make the expression the figure of speech, polarmerismos, similar to ‘and there was evening, and there was morning,” which stands for the whole day, in Genesis 1. The best scholarly minds have concluded that the phrase has something to do with starting and finishing something, or the entirety of something. Norton writes that these words, “denote the certain accomplishment of his purposes; that what he has begun he will carry on to its consummation” (A Statement of Reasons for Not Believing the Doctrines of Trinitarians; 1877, pp. 479, 480).

Since both God and Jesus Christ are “the Alpha and the Omega” in their own respective ways, there is good reason to believe that the title can apply to both of them, and no good reason why this title makes the two into “one God.” The titles “Lord” (see Rom. 10:9 above), “Savior” (see Luke 1:47 above) and “king of kings (see 1 Tim. 6:14-16 above) apply to both God and Christ, as well as to other men. As with “Lord,” “Savior” and “King of kings,” this title fits them both. God is truly the beginning and the end of all things, while Christ is the beginning and the end because he is the firstborn.
from the dead, the Author and Finisher of faith, the Man by whom God will judge the world, and the creator of the new ages to come (see Heb. 1:10 above).

The opening 8 verses of Revelation are very choppy, as are the openings of many of the Epistles. The multiple doxologies make the opening choppy. As we read we notice: the first two verses explain a couple things about the book of Revelation. Verse 3 changes the subject, and is a blessing upon those who read and those who hear. Verse 4 and the first half of verse 5 are the “to whom” the book of Revelation is addressed. The last half of verse 5, and verse 6, are a doxology to Christ (this would have been easier to see if verse 6 had started with “To him who loves us,” in the middle of verse 5). Verse 7 is an exclamation to the people that Jesus Christ is coming. Verse 8 is a doxology to God, who is “the Power” behind the Return of Jesus Christ. That verse 7 is about Jesus’ coming while verse 8 is a doxology to God should not confuse us; as we have just seen, the opening verses change subjects a lot.

For more on this verse, see J. S. Hyndman, *Lectures on the Principles of Unitarianism*, 1824; available from Spirit & Truth Fellowship; and Donald Snedeker, *Our Heavenly Father Has No Equals*, 1998.

1:9. “Patmos because of the Word of God and the testimony about Jesus.” John was banished to the small island off the coast of the Roman province of Asia (now Turkey) because of his Christianity, which Nero had made illegal. Patmos is a small, irregularly shaped island about 6 by 10 miles (10 by 16 km), and it served as a place of banishment during the Roman Empire. John would have been banished to Patmos during the reign of Domitian, and there received the revelation of the Book of Revelation. Some have suggested that John was not banished there, but went there to teach, but that is most unlikely: for one thing, the island did not sustain a population fitting for that.

1:10. “the Lord’s Day.” This is “the Day of the LORD” that is so often mentioned in the Old Testament. It is not “Sunday,” which always in the New Testament is referred to as “the first day of the week” (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2, 9; Luke 24:1; John 20:1, 19; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2). It would be strange indeed if this were a reference to Sunday, but the only place in the Bible where Sunday is called “the Lord’s Day.” Actually, there is no evidence that Christians called Sunday “the Lord’s Day” for centuries after the NT was written, and even then it is because they assumed that John saw the vision on Sunday. Some people argue that if this was referring to the Day of the LORD, then the grammar would match the grammar of the Hebrew OT, but that is not a valid argument. The Hebrew language has no adjective equivalent to “Lord’s,” but has to use the double noun, “day of the LORD.” The Greek does not have to follow that construction. There are places in the NT where the construction “day of the Lord” is similar to the Hebrew (1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess. 2:2; 2 Pet. 3:10), but the construction in Greek does not have to follow the Hebrew construction to communicate the same meaning.

There is a reason that the Greek construction of “the Lord’s day” is the way it is in Revelation 1:10. In the Greek text, “the Lord’s day” of Revelation 1:10 is directly contrasted with “man’s day” in 1 Corinthians 4:3, which reads literally, “and to me it is for a very little thing that by you I may be judged, or by man’s day…” (YLT). Sadly, many translations have the reading, “a human court,” in 1 Corinthians 4:3, which misrepresents the Greek text and misses the connection God is trying to make between “man’s day” when man does the judging and man vents his wrath, and “the Lord’s day,” when the wrath of God will be poured out upon mankind.
Lastly, there is no reason in the text or context for the Bible telling us John saw his vision on “Sunday.” Why would the Bible tell us that? In contrast, we think John saw his vision what we know as the book of Revelation about 90 AD, during “man’s day,” but by the spirit he was taken into the future to “the Lord’s day,” and thus he recorded for us to read and understand what will happen during that great Day of the LORD when God judges the earth.

1:11. “and…and…and,” etc. This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list (cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

1:12. “the voice.” This is the figure of speech metonymy, the “voice” is put for the person speaking. Without the figure of speech, we would say, “I turned to see the one who was speaking to me.” This is also the figure of speech catachresis, a forced and incongruous use of language. A “voice” is invisible, so we cannot “see” it.

1:14. “as white wool.” This is a good example of how a simile can communicate a lot of information in a little phrase. Many things are brought into mind by Jesus’ hair being described as “white as white wool.” One is that is the way God is described in Daniel 7:9. White hair was a sign of age and wisdom (Prov. 16:31), and elders were to be respected (Lev. 19:32). We do not see a reference to age here, but rather the wisdom that usually comes with age. Also, white was a symbol for holiness and righteousness. Important to the book of Revelation is that Jesus is called “the Lamb” 26 different times, while in all of the four Gospels, he is only called “the Lamb” twice (John 1:29, 36). Here in Revelation 1:14 the imagery of the Lamb is brought forward and Jesus is said to have hair “as white wool.”

1:15. “his feet were like burnished brass, when it has been made to glow in a furnace.” The word we translate as “burnished brass” (chalkolibanon; #5474 χαλκολίβανον) does not occur in any known Greek writings except the Book of Revelation. Scholars have suggested different possible meanings, but “burnished brass” (or bronze or copper) is very likely, especially due to the symbolism that brass had in the Tent of Meeting (Tabernacle) and Temple. The phrase “when it has been made to glow in a furnace” is also likely given the symbolism of the Book of Revelation itself. Although it can also perhaps refer to brass “that has been refined in a furnace,” the fact that Revelation deals with God’s wrath and judgment makes Jesus’ “burning feet” more likely.

When Jesus comes in judgment, he tramples the enemies underfoot, and those enemies become ashes underfoot of Jesus and the righteous ones: “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing (Isa. 63:3 NIV84). “Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things,’ says the LORD Almighty” (Mal. 4:3 NIV84).

Brass (or bronze) played a very important part of both the Tent of Meeting and the Temple. Both were considered holy, and it was dangerous to ignore God’s commands concerning those sacred places. Not only were the altar and washing basins of bronze, but also the bases, or “feet” of the posts that supported the outer wall of the Tent of Meeting (Exod. 38:10, 11).
The glowing brass feet of Jesus Christ remind us of his holiness and that he is coming in judgment, and also intimately connect us with the fact that he is the “meeting place,” where we meet God.

“many waters.” That is the deep and powerful sound of a rushing river, like the Colorado, a huge waterfall, like Niagra, or crashing ocean breakers. It is a sound so deep and powerful that you don’t just hear it, you “feel” it. It would be nice to be more specific here than just “many waters,” but that is the way the Greek text reads. Since John was writing on the island of Patmos, he likely quite often heard the surf of the Aegean Sea when it was roaring.

1:16. “out of his mouth came a sharp, two-edged broadsword.” This sword is the Word of God (cp. Eph. 6:17), in this case prophecies that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentary on Rev. 19:15; 1 Cor. 14:12; 2 Thess. 2:8).


1:17. I am the First and the Last.” The phrase, “the First and the Last,” is a title that is used five times in the Bible, twice in Isaiah of God (44:6; 48:12), and three times in Revelation of the Son (1:17; 2:8 and 22:13). Trinitarians sometimes make the assumption that since the same title applies to both the Father and the Son, they must both be God. However, there is no biblical justification on which to base that assumption. When the whole of Scripture is studied, we can see that the same titles are used for God, Christ and men. Examples include “Lord” (see commentary on Romans 10:9) and “Savior” (see commentary on Luke 1:47) and “King of kings” (see commentary on 1 Timothy 6:14-16). If other titles apply to God, Christ and men without making all of them into “one God,” then there is no reason to assume that this particular title would mean God and Jesus were one God unless Scripture specifically told us so, which it does not.

In the Old Testament, God truly was “the First and the Last.” The meaning of the title is not specifically given, and so scholars debate it, but it seems that a key to its meaning is given in Isaiah 41:4, in which God says He has called forth the generations of men, and was with the first of them and is with the last of them. Isaiah 41:4 says, “Who has done this and carried it through, calling forth the generations from the beginning? I, Yahweh—with the first of them and with the last—I am he.” Thus, the Bible connects the phrase “the First and the Last” with calling forth the generations.

While God was the one who called forth the generations in the Old Testament, He has now conferred that authority on His Son. Thus, it is easy to see why the Lord Jesus is called “the First and the Last” in the book of Revelation. It will be Jesus Christ who will call forth the generations of people from the grave to enter in to everlasting life. God gave Jesus authority to raise the dead (John 5:25-27). His voice will raise all dead Christians (1 Thess. 4:16, 17), and he will change our bodies into new glorious bodies (Phil. 3:20, 21). However, even when Jesus said he had the authority to raise the dead, he never claimed he had that authority inherently because he was God. He always said that his Father had given authority to him. While teaching about his authority, Jesus Christ was very clear about who was the ultimate authority: “The Son can do nothing by himself…the Father…has entrusted all judgment to the Son…For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in himself. And He has given him authority to judge” (John 5:19, 22, 26, 27). If Jesus had the authority to raise the dead because he was in some way God, he never said so. He said he had his authority because his Father gave it to him. With the authority to raise the generations came the title associated with the
existence of the generations, and so that is a major reason that after his resurrection Jesus Christ is called “the First and the Last.”

Another way that we can tell that the title “First and Last” does not make Jesus God is simply the way Jesus used it. Note what the verse in Revelation says: “I am the first and the last, and the Living One, and I was dead, and Look! I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of death and of the grave” (Rev. 1:17, 18). Patrick Navas observes:

“Jesus is the one who ‘was dead’ but now lives.... In two out of three instances where Jesus describes himself as ‘the First and the Last’ in the book of Revelation, the statement is made in association with his death and subsequent resurrection. ...If ‘the First and the Last’ in this case means, or unlimately implies, ‘God (Almighty), the Eternal One,’ in what way would it make sense for Jesus to say, in effect, ‘I am the Eternal God, I died but came to life’? How strange and how unlikely—if not impossible—would it have been for God to have died or said that he died? Even many Trinitarians teach that ‘God,” or the ‘divine nature/aspect of Christ,’ did not die, in any way. ...So Trinitarians would have to argue, ultimately, that Jesus is identifying himself as God by calling himself ‘the First and the Last’ and, immedaiately after, swichting to, or speaking out of, his ‘human nature,’ due to the fact that he died. This would clearly be a case of ‘playing fast and loose’ with Scripture. (Divine Truth or Human Tradition, pp. 585, 586).

The fact that when Jesus used the title, the First and the Last he connected it with his death and resurrection shows us that, far from a claim to being God, it showed how, as the Son who obeyed his Father all the way to the cross and death, Christ now had the authority of God, even to rasing the dead, especially since he finished 1:18 by saying that he had the keys to death and the grave (which, by the way, would only make sense for him to say if having those keys was not inherently part of his nature. If he were God, why say it in this context? Of course it would be true..

[For more discussion on this verse, see Charles Morgridge, True Believer’s Defense Against Charges Preferred by Trinitarians, Boston, Benjamin Greene, 1837, reprinted by Spirit & Truth Fellowship, p. 122; The Racovian Catechism, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818, available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 157-161; Patrick Navas, Divine Truth or Human Tradition, Authorhouse, 2011, pp. 585-588].

1:18. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

1:19. “the things.” The Greek is more properly “what,” (“Write what you saw”), but in Greek the “what” is plural, indicating that John saw a number of things. In contrast, in English “what” is often singular, so if the English said, “Write what you saw,” people might think he only saw one thing. Saying, “Write the things you saw” brings out the plural meaning of the Greek text.

“signify.” The book of Revelation is in the future. The events in it have not yet happened. Many commentators who believe the book of Revelation is about the past, or partially about the present, read Revelation 1:19 and interpret it as dividing the book of Revelation into three parts: the things which were seen (past), the things that are now (present) and the things that will happen (future). However, that is not the proper way to
understand the verse. The early introduction of Revelation, 1:2, notes that the book is about what John “saw.” John got the vision by revelation, and after he had seen it, was told to write it down. In contrast, Paul got some of the vision also, but was forbidden to write it down (2 Cor. 12:3-7). A careful reading and understanding of 1:19 shows that John was to write what he saw and “what they signify,” or “what they mean.”

The Greek word translated “signify” is eimi (#1526 εἰμί, pronounced ā-me', like the girl’s name, Amy, but with the accent on the last syllable). It is the “to be” verb in Greek, translated “is,” “are,” etc. However, in many cases in Greek (and in English as well), the “to be” verb is used for what something “means” or “signifies.” Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon says the “to be” verb can express, “what does it mean?” Thayer’s gives Luke 8:9 as an example, which literally translated reads, “what this is, the parable,” but which we usually translate as “what this parable meant.” In Matthew 9:13, Jesus told the religious leaders, “Go and learn what this ‘means.’” The literal Greek is, “Go and learn what this ‘is.’” Similarly, in Matthew 12:7, Jesus told the religious leaders, “If you had known what these words mean.” A more literal translation would be, “If you had known what these words are.” Other examples of when the Greek “to be” verb is used for “means,” or “signifies,” include, Luke 15:26; 20:17; John 16:17; Acts 2:12; and 10:17. Adding weight to the argument that the “to be” verb in Revelation 1:19 means “signifies,” or “means,” is the fact that in the next verse, Revelation 1:20, the “to be” verb is used twice, and both times means “signifies.” The seven stars “are,” that is, signify or mean, the messengers of the seven churches, and the seven golden lampstands “are,” that is, signify or mean, the seven churches.

The Emphasized Bible by Rotherham translates the verse, “Write, therefore—what things thou hast seen and what they are….” Alford (The Greek Testament) translates, “and what things they signify.” Alford acknowledges that the Greek text can mean either “and what they signify” or “the things which are [now],” and references scholars on both sides of the argument, but he concludes that the weight of evidence is with “signify.” English, like Greek, uses “is” and “are” to mean “signify” or “mean.” For example, if someone hears a loud siren going off at an odd hour, he might say, “What is that?” Of course he knows it “is” a siren, but he is asking, “What does that siren mean? Does it mean there is a tornado, a nuclear attack, or is it just a system test?”

Many commentators assert that the book of Revelation is past, and the events described are symbolic and apocalyptic. Others say that although Revelation is not about the past, it is about what “is” or “is now.” Neither of these interpretations is correct. The book of Revelation is about the future. Revelation 1:19 is not about the things that have taken place, and “what is now and what will take place later.” Rather, it is about “What you saw and what they mean, even those things that are about to happen.”

Many of the commentators who say that Revelation is about the past make their case by saying that the book of Revelation is symbolic. However, although there are some symbolic elements in the book of Revelation, the meaning of those symbols is often easily discerned. Furthermore, we must remember that the symbols tell us about things that are real. For example, the Four Horsemen (Rev. 6:1-8) are not literal flesh horses, but they are spiritual forces that are unleashed at that specific time. Furthermore, horses were a well-established symbol of strength and speed. When we see the effects of the seal-plagues, it is clear they are future.
When we read the book of Revelation and look at the events it portrays, it makes much more sense that they are future than past or present. We need to examine all the evidence of Scripture. We look first at the Old Testament. It foretold a time of worldwide distress and destruction, not just the destruction of Jerusalem, and Daniel mentioned this happening over a period of seven years. For example, Isaiah speaks of the Day of the Lord, and says it will be a “cruel day,” when He “will punish the world for its evil” and people will become “scarcer that pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir” (Isa. 13:9-12). Daniel says there will be a time of distress such as has never been known on earth, and after that will be the resurrections (Dan. 12:1, 2). Joel says the Day of the Lord is “a day of darkness and gloom,” and that there will be an army so large, it “never was of old, or ever will be in the ages to come, and at the sight of them, nations are in anguish.” (Joel 2:1, 2, 6). Zephaniah says the Day of the Lord will be wrath, distress, anguish, trouble, ruin, and gloom (Zeph. 1:15), and there will be judgment upon not only Israel, but Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Ethiopia, and Assyria (Zeph. 2:4-15). Zechariah 14:3 says that in the Day of the Lord the Lord will fight against the nations that attack Jerusalem. That is not a description of Jerusalem being attacked by Rome in 70 AD. That is a description of the wrath of the Lord on the world for all its sin.

When we look at the Four Gospels, we find the Apostles asking Jesus when “the end of the Age” would be (Matt. 24:3). They did not expect, nor ask about, the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. That was not the end of the Age, and it did not immediately precede the Messianic Kingdom on earth they were so anxiously awaiting. Jesus’ answer indicted that there would be a time of distress (Matt. 24:29), and that nation would fight against nation, and there would be famines and earthquakes in various places (Matt. 24:4-7). Furthermore, after that tribulation, the Son of Man would come from the sky and there would be a gathering of people, including resurrecting the dead (Matt. 24:30, 31). This is certainly not the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. It is the end of this Age and the beginning of the Messianic Kingdom.

Then, when we read the book of Revelation itself, we can see the wrath of God being poured out over a seven-year period, and the seal-judgments, trumpet judgments, thunder-judgments, and bowl-judgments occurring in succession and including the entire world. Although there are symbols interwoven into these judgments, it is also true that most of them can be simply read and understood for what they are: a number of judgments that kept increasing in severity. Revelation 19 portrays Jesus coming from heaven and the Battle of Armageddon, then Revelation 20 shows the Resurrection of the Righteous and the 1000 year Messianic Kingdom on earth. These records flow in such a way that we can see what is coming in the future. To make them “symbolic” is to leave us with no description of the future, and the question, if they are symbolic, what do they symbolize?

“even.” The Greek word kai can be translated “and” or “even,” and in this case, “even” is the meaning before the last phrase, which emphasizes that fact that these future things are about to come to pass. E. W. Bullinger, in Commentary on Revelation, does a very good job explaining this verse.

1:20. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]
“messengers.” The messengers of the synagogues. See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

Chapter 2

2:1. “messenger.” The Greek is aggelos (#32 ἄγγελος; pronounced an-ge-los). The word means “messenger,” and can refer to either human messengers (Luke 7:24) or divine messengers, which we usually call “angels” (Matt. 1:20). Usually in English Bibles, when aggelos refers to divine messengers, the word is not translated, but is transliterated as “angel.” In Revelation 2:1, the “messenger” is human. There are a number of reasons to believe that this “letter to the seven assemblies” is a letter to the Jewish assemblies after the Rapture of the Christian Church (see commentary on Revelation 2:1, “church,” below. When Jesus Christ wants a letter communicated to the Jewish congregations after the Rapture, he writes to the “messenger” of the congregation. Bullinger writes about this “messenger.” After saying that there is no “angel” or “messenger” connected with the Christian Church, he says:

“But we do meet with the word Angel in connection with the Synagogue (though not in the Old Testament). There, there was an officer, who was called Sheliach Tzibbur...Tzibbur meaning the Assembly; and Sheliach, the Angel or Legate of the Assembly, and the Leader of Divine worship, from...shalach, to send. The chief officer [of the Synagogue] was the Archisynagogos, or “Ruler of the Synagogue”; and after him came the Sheliach Tzibbur; or “Angel of the Assembly,” who was the mouthpiece of the congregation. His duty was to offer up public prayer to God for the whole congregation. Hence his title; because, as the messenger of the assembly, he spoke to God for them.” (E. W. Bullinger, Commentary on Revelation (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1984), pp. 66, 67).

The reason that Jesus would write his letter to the “messenger” of the Synagogue was that the messenger of the synagogue would then communicate the letter to the people. The use of “messenger of the congregation” is more supporting evidence that the Rapture occurred earlier, and Jesus was writing to Jews who were left on earth after the Rapture. The Church Epistles of Paul were written to the believers, because the Christian Church did not have the type of structure that the synagogue did, and any Christian in the congregation who could read could read Paul’s letter to them. In contrast, when Jesus wanted his letter read in the Jewish synagogue, he addressed it to “the messenger,” the Sheliach Tzibbur, the one who was charged to read such letters to the people assembled together.

“congregation.” This is a Jewish congregation after the Christian Church has been Raptured into heaven. Christians who believe in the Rapture have long been divided over the issue of to whom this “Letter to the Seven Congregations” is written. Some, like E. W. Bullinger, say the Rapture happens before any event in the book of Revelation, and that this Letter is addressed to the Jews who live on earth after the Rapture, guiding them in the Faith just as the Seven Church Epistles of Paul guide Christians in the Faith. Other Christians, including those who believe in a mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, or post-tribulation Rapture, say this letter is written to Christians before the Rapture. We side with
Bullinger, and assert that the evidence in the Letter to the Seven Congregations shows that it is not to Christians, and even contradicts some of the things that Paul wrote to the Christian Church in his epistles. We assert that the nature of this “Letter” shows that it has the same nature as the writings to the people in the Old Testament and Gospels, before the Christian Church started in Acts 2.

One thing that has confused Christians about this “Letter to the Seven Congregations” is that almost every English version has, “to the…Church in Ephesus,” and later, to the “Church” at Smyrna, the “Church” at Thyatira, the “Church” at Sardis, and so forth. The translation “Church” is very misleading. The Greek word that most English versions translate as “Church” is ἐκκλησία (#1577 ἐκκλησία; pronounced ek-clay- see’-ah), and it refers to an assembly or gathering of any kind. The specific kind of gathering has to be determined by reading the context (see commentary on Matthew 16:18).

By far the most common use of ἐκκλησία in the New Testament is the “congregation” or “assembly” of the Christian Church (cp. Acts 8:1; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:2; etc.), but that is clearly because the majority of the times ἐκκλησία is used, it is in Acts or the Epistles of Paul, which are written to the Christian Church. But ἐκκλησία is also used of other, non-Christian assemblies. For example, ἐκκλησία is used for a Jewish congregation in Acts 7:38. Stephen was speaking about the history of Israel and spoke of Moses, who led the ἐκκλησία, the “congregation,” in the wilderness. Of course, the ἐκκλησία that Moses led was an assembly of Jews. Also, in Acts 19:32 we see a secular use of ἐκκλησία. The “congregation” in Acts 19 started as a mob of Gentiles in Ephesus who assembled together to defend their goddess Artemis, but as they got noisy, more and more people joined them, and eventually the majority of “the congregation” did not even know why they were assembled. In conclusion, ἐκκλησία does not always refer to a Christian “Church,” and using the word “Church” in the “Letter to the Seven Congregations” has misled many Christians.

Since we have seen that we must determine the nature of the “congregation” from the context in which ἐκκλησία is used, we have to carefully read the “Letter to the Seven Congregations” to determine what kind of “congregation” it is written to. We will see that there are many pieces of evidence that the ἐκκλησία mentioned in Revelation 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, and 14 are Jewish congregations that we would find in a synagogue; they are not Christian congregations.

• The Christian Church is in the “Administration of Grace” (Eph. 3:2), and we can clearly see the special grace given to Christians when we read the Seven Church Epistles. For example, the Christian Church has so much glory from God that the Law of Moses had “no glory” in contrast to it (2 Cor. 3:10). In contrast to the grace that the Christian Church lives in, when we read the Letter to the Seven Congregations, we can see that it was written in a time of wrath, not a time of grace. The guidance in the Letter is for a time of Tribulation, the time of “Jacob’s trouble” (Jer. 30:7), a day of wrath and burning anger (Isa. 13:13), so terrible that God says, “Woe to you [Jews] who long for the Day of the LORD…that day will be darkness, not light” (Amos 5:18).

The Old Testament prophets, John the Baptist, and Jesus, foretold that a time of great wrath would come upon those people who were not faithful to God,
and the Letter to the Seven Congregations echoes that theme over and over (see commentary on Revelation 6:17). For example, Revelation 2:16 says Jesus will make war against the Jews in the congregation who did not repent of their sin. This is in complete contrast to the information in the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, which say that Christ, who justified us, will not condemn us, and that nothing will separate us from the love of Christ (Rom. 8:31-38). To understand this contrast between the “Church Epistles” and the “Letter to the Congregations,” we need to remember that Christians are born again children of God and are guaranteed salvation, while the people after the Rapture are not, and if they turn against Christ, they will be destroyed (this is also what we see in the Old Testament; cp. Ezek. 33:11-13).

- It was prophesied in many places in both the Old Testament and the Gospels that the “Tribulation” would be a specific time of great distress that would be worldwide and come upon one generation (for the time of God’s wrath on earth, see commentary on Revelation 6:17). This specific time of God’s wrath is spoken of in Revelation 3:10, which speaks of the “hour of trial” that will come upon the whole world. In contrast, the Christian Church is never told that Christians will go through a specific time of Tribulation, and the most logical reason for that is the Rapture. At the Rapture, all Christians will be taken from the earth, and that will happen before the Tribulation occurs. It seems certain that if one generation of Christians were going to go through the Tribulation, there would be some mention of it somewhere in the Seven Church Epistles, but there is no mention of any such specific time of trial. So while Christians are never told about going through a specific time of trial, these Jewish believers are told they will go through it, but will be “kept” during that period of time.

- Jewish believers of the Old Testament and the Gospels are told they will live forever on earth, and neither the Old Testament nor the Gospels mentions them being in heaven at any time. They are raised from the dead and go back to the land of Israel (Ezek. 37:11-14). The Letter to the Seven Congregations, like the Old Testament and the Gospels, has no hint of a heavenly hope, but says that those who overcome will then get to be in “Paradise,” which is always on earth (2:7; see commentary on Luke 23:43), ruling the nations of earth (2:27), and being pillars in the Temple in the New Jerusalem that comes to earth (3:12).

In contrast to the Jews who have a hope of being in Paradise on earth, part of the Christian’s hope is spending time in heaven. Christians are citizens of heaven (Phil. 3:20), will be seated in heaven (Eph. 2:6), and are waiting for the Lord from heaven who will Rapture them into heaven (1 Thess. 4:16-18). We Christians will come back to earth with Jesus when he comes, but from the Rapture until that time we will be in heaven. Thus part of the hope of the Christian Church is spending time in heaven, but that hope presented in the Letter to the Seven Congregations is the same hope given in the Old Testament to the Jews, and this is good evidence that the Letter to the Seven Congregations is addressed to Jews.
- When Paul wrote the Seven Church Epistles (Romans through Thessalonians), he wrote them directly to the “holy ones” (translated “saints” in many English versions), who are the Christians. Any Christian who knew how to read would then read the epistle to the congregation. However, the Letter to the Seven Congregations of Revelation is written to the “angel” of the congregation. In a Jewish congregation, the term “angel” was used of a specific man who was charged with certain responsibilities, including reading letters to the congregation (see commentary on Revelation 2:1, “angel”). The fact that the Seven Church Epistles were written directly to Christians, while the Letter to the Seven Congregations was specifically addressed to the “angel,” is very good evidence that the “Epistles” and the “Letter” were written to two different groups of people.

- The Church Epistles teach that faith in Christ results in New Birth, which is permanent and guarantees salvation [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. In contrast, the Letter to the Seven Congregations reverts to the teaching of the Old Testament and the Gospels, that a person had to be faithful until death or until “the End” to be saved (ep. 2:10, 11, 25; 3:5). There is no mention in the Letter to the Seven Congregations that salvation comes by faith in Christ alone, and no teaching that once a person is saved he is guaranteed salvation. Quite the opposite. Revelation 2:16 says that if the people in the congregation do not repent, Jesus will make war against them with the sword from his mouth, which is not a sword of correction or discipline, but a sword of destruction (Rev. 19:15, 21. See commentary on Revelation 19:15; 1 Corinthians 14:12; and 2 Thessalonians 2:8). In short, Christians have guaranteed salvation through faith in Christ, while the believers in the Tribulation period have to be faithful throughout their life, just as the Old Testament believers did.

- The tone of the Letter to the Seven Congregations is totally different than the tone of the Seven Church Epistles. While the Seven Church Epistles open and close with “Grace to you, and peace,” the Letter to the Seven Congregations does not contain the word “grace” or “peace” even one single time. Instead, each of the seven segments of the Letter to the Seven Congregations has the stern warning: “Anyone who has an ear had better listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations!” This sharply worded warning never occurs in the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, but does appear in the Gospels, before the Christian Church started.

- In the Seven Church Epistles of Paul, there is neither Jew nor Gentile, but One Body in Christ, with every Christian being a “brother” to every other Christian (the term “brothers” is general and includes women). People who are not saved but have infiltrated the Christian congregation, and Christians who have turned against Christ, are called “false brothers” (2 Cor. 11:26; Gal. 2:4). At the Rapture, the One Body is taken to heaven and God again deals with two groups, Jews and Gentiles. Thus, the pretenders who have infiltrated the congregation in the Letter to the Seven Congregations are never called “false brothers,” but instead are “those who say they are Jews, but are not” (2:9; 3:9).
• Calling part of the group in the Letter to the Seven Congregations a “synagogue” shows us that the group is a group of Jews. The Christian Church is a new creation made up of both Jews and Gentiles, and as a group they are called “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12). The Christians who oppose Paul, such as those who were promoting circumcision or preaching Christ out of selfish ambition, are never called a “synagogue.” The word “synagogue” is never used in the Seven Church Epistles because the synagogue was a gathering of, or gathering place for, Jews. Similarly, in the Gospels and Acts, no gathering of Gentiles was ever referred to as a “synagogue.” Thus, when Revelation twice refers to those people who were part of the congregation but who opposed the Lord as “a Synagogue of Satan” (2:9; 3:9), it is clearly referring to Jews, not Christians.

• In the Seven Church Epistles, eating food offered to idols is only a problem if it is a stumbling block to those whose conscience is weak (1 Cor. 8:1-13). However, after the Rapture, the grace about eating food offered to idols is removed and believers are again under law about it, so twice the Letter to the Seven Congregations mentions that it is wrong to eat food sacrificed to idols and Jesus is upset with the believers for doing that (2:14, 20). If we do not understand that what Paul wrote to the Christians applied specifically to Christians, and what John wrote was to the believers after the Rapture and applied specifically to them, we would have to concede that Paul and John contradict each other. Only by knowing that Paul wrote to Christians in the Age of Grace, and John wrote for Jews after the Rapture, are we able to see how the Word of God fits together.

When we study the Seven Church Epistles and the Letter to the Seven Congregations side by side, it is clear that they cannot both be guidance to the same group of people. They have to be written to different groups, and they are. The Seven Church Epistles are to the Christian Church. The Letter to the Seven Congregations is to the Jewish congregations in synagogues after the Rapture. Of course, many of the things in both sets of letters apply to every believer. For example, there are things that please the Lord and things that do not; there are rewards for obedience and faithfulness; there is a goal that every person should aspire to, which is everlasting life with the Lord. However, we must not let the similarities blind us to the fact that the differences between the Epistles of Paul and the Letter that John wrote are so stark that it is clear they are written to different groups of people.

2:7. “Anyone who has an ear had better listen to what the Spirit says to the congregations!” The verb “hear” is in the imperative mood, and is too weakly translated by “let him hear.” This is not just an invitation from Jesus for us to hear what he says. Jesus is Lord of all, and there will be rewards for hearing and obeying, and consequences for ignoring what he says. For this phrase and the imperative mood, see commentary on Matthew 11:15.

“the Spirit.” The Greek word for “Spirit” is pneuma (#4151 πνεῦμα), and it has many meanings, including “spirit,” “wind” and “breath.” It is used to refer to many different things, including God, angels, demons, and to the gift of holy spirit that God gives to people. After his resurrection, Jesus Christ also became known as “the Spirit,” as
we see here in Revelation. So, “the Spirit” is one of the names of Jesus Christ, just as he is also called, “the lion of Judah,” “the root of David,” “lamb of God,” etc.

This use of “Spirit” clearly refers to the Lord Jesus Christ. In Revelation 1:9-17, Jesus Christ appeared to John and began talking to him and telling him what to write. It is clear that it is Jesus who appeared to John, especially since he describes himself in 1:18 as “I was dead, and Look!, I am alive for evermore.” It is also clear that Jesus is “the Spirit” because in 2:17 (and other places) it is “the Spirit” who “says” things to John, but in the very next verse, 2:18, we read, “These things says the Son of God.”

What Jesus tells John to write takes up Revelation chapters two and three. Jesus commanded John to write a letter to the congregations of Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, and what we refer to as Revelation 2:1 is simply the continuation of the conversation between Jesus and John that started in Chapter 1.

Jesus refers to himself as “the Spirit.” We can understand this because when Jesus was resurrected, his body was still flesh and bone (Luke 24:39), but it was spiritually empowered; powered by spirit, not by “soul” as our mortal bodies are. 1 Corinthians 15:44-46 says Jesus was raised “a spiritual body,” and because of that he began to be called, “the Spirit” (see commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:44). 2 Corinthians 3:17 clearly confirms this, saying, “Now the Lord is the Spirit.”

When Jesus first appeared to his disciples, they thought he was an incorporeal being, a “spirit” (pneuma), as if Jesus was some kind of ghost (Luke 24:37). But he told them he was not a “spirit” but was flesh and bone, and he proved that by having them touch his body to feel his flesh. However, as we have seen, because Jesus’ new body was spiritually empowered, Jesus is called “the Spirit” in many places in the NT. These include Acts 2:4; 10:19; Romans 8:16, 26, 27; 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18; Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22; 14:13; and 22:17. (also, see commentary on Acts 2:4 and Romans 8:26, and the book, The Gift of Holy Spirit: The Power to be Like Christ).


“the First and the Last.” For information on this phrase, which occurs three times in Revelation (1:17; 2:8; 22:13), see commentary on Revelation 1:17.

2:9. “defaming speech.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφηµία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

“The Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

2:10. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“The Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the
Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“the crown of life.” The Greek is, “the crown of the life,” but it clearly involves a genitive of apposition, thus, “the crown, which is the life.” This can especially be seen by the next sentence which refers to not being hurt by the second death. The crown is “the” life, that is, the well-known and wonderful everlasting life in the Kingdom. People who are faithful to death win the crown, the only crown worth having, everlasting life. Royalty can wear, or an athlete can win, any other crown, and no matter how massively made of gold or how ornately encrusted with gems it is, it is worthless if the person has not also won the true crown, which is everlasting life.

2:11. “Anyone who has an ear.” See commentary on Revelation 2:7 and Matthew 11:15.

“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.


2:13. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σάτανας), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on 2:9.

2:16. “the broadsword from my mouth.” This sword is the prophecies that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentary on Rev. 1:16; 19:15; 1 Cor. 14:12; 2 Thess. 2:8).


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.


2:19. “and…and…and.” This repetition of “ands” is the figure of speech Polysyndeton (“many ands”), and the purpose is to give emphasis to each member of the list (Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*).

2:22. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“am throwing.” The Greek is ballo (#906 βάλλω), to cast or to throw, and the verb is in the present tense, active voice, indicating that this punishment is, to some extent, going on at the present. Almost all translations put the verb in the future tense “will cast,” and it certainly is true that her punishment will be more acute in the future. However, sexual sin always has harmful effects in the present.

“a bed of suffering.” The Greek simply reads, “a bed,” and the suffering is implied from the context. This is great irony. Jezebel has ruined the lives of many through sexual sin, so God will cast her onto a bed, where she will suffer.

2:23. “her children.” The word “children” is the plural of teknon (#5043 τέκνον), “child.” Jezebel’s “children” are not the children of her adultery, but her followers, her disciples. In the biblical culture, a person who was a father figure, mentor, and guide, was called a “father.” Thus, Joseph said he had become a “father” to Pharaoh (Gen. 45:8), the prophet Elisha referred to the elder prophet Elijah as his “father” (2 Kings 2:12), and the king of Israel referred to the prophet Elisha as his “father,” his spiritual mentor and guide (2 Kings 6:21). Similarly, the word “mother” was used literally of mothers, but it was also used of those women who were respected and had nurtured or guided the “child” in some way. Thus Jesus pointed to his disciples, some of whom were obviously women,
and said, “Look! My mother and my brothers” (Matt. 12:49; Mark 3:34). Paul referred to Rufus’ mother as his mother also (Rom. 16:13). In Revelation 17:5, Babylon is called “the mother of prostitutes” because she influenced people to become prostitutes.

In turn, just as a mentor was called a “father” or “mother,” a disciple was called a “son” (huios, #5207 οἱός), or a “child” (teknon, #5043 τέκνον). Although huios means “son,” it is sometimes translated as the gender neutral “child,” and although the Greek word teknon is gender neutral and means “child,” if the context is clearly about males or females, it may legitimately be translated as “son” or “daughter.” A clear example of the word “son” being used for disciples occurs in the Old Testament when the disciples of the prophets were called “the sons of the prophets” (1 Kings 20:35; 2 Kings 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1, etc.). When the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out demons by Beelzebul, he said, “If I cast out demons by Beelzebul, by whom do your sons cast them out? (Matt. 12:27). The “sons” of the Pharisees were the disciples of the Pharisees. The Apostle Paul referred to Timothy as his “child” (1 Tim. 1:2), and also Titus (Titus 1:4), and Onesimus (Philemon 1:10). At the last supper, Jesus referred to the apostles as his “little children” (John 13:33; teknon, #5040 τεκνίον, the diminutive of teknon.)

In this case, the “children” of Jezebel are the ones she has mentored in her sexual immorality. [For more information, see commentary on Matthew 12:27].

“kidneys.” The Greek is nephros (#3510 νεφρός and literally means “kidneys.” We get our modern word nephrology, the study of the kidneys, from the Greek word. The Word of God points to the fact that our kidneys, bowels, and belly (or womb) are part of our mental/emotional life, not “just physical organs.” Our “gut,” including our intestines, bowels, kidneys and stomach contain as many nerve cells as our brain, and studies are now showing that our “gut” contributes significantly to our emotional life and health. We have “gut feelings,” get upset stomachs upon hearing bad news or have an upset stomach or irregular bowels when facing emotionally difficult times. Bible commentators used to think that “kidneys,” “bowels,” and “belly,” were in the Bible because the ancients did not know what they did and assumed they were the center of human emotion. Now we know that the ancients, and the Word of God, were correct all along, and the arrogance of “modern” medicine, upon discovery of the brain, had just assumed the ancients were ignorant.

Other words to study besides “kidneys” are “bowels” and “belly.” Although in our modern world, we use “mind” to place and emphasis on our thoughts and “heart” for our emotions, biblically, the word “heart” was more closely associated with the mental life while “bowels,” “kidney,” and “belly” (which is the same word as “womb”) were more associated with the emotional life. The Old Testament reveals the same truth that the New Testament does. The Hebrew word for “kidney” is kilyah (Strong’s #3629).

Below is a list of some pertinent verses showing the relation of the kidney to our emotional life.

- Psalm 7:9 (KJV): …God trieth the hearts and reins [kidneys].
- Psalm 16:7 (KJV): …my reins [kidneys] also instruct me in the night seasons.
- Psalm 26:2 (KJV): Examine me, O LORD, and prove me; try my reins [kidneys] and my heart.
- Psalm 73:21 (KJV): Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins [kidneys].
• Jeremiah 11:20 (KJV): But, O LORD…that triest the reins [kidneys] and the heart....
• Jeremiah 17:10 (KJV): I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins [kidneys]....
• Jeremiah 20:12 (KJV): But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins [kidneys] and the heart....

2:24. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on 2:9.

2:27. Quoted from Psalm 2:9. This is an incomplete quotation from Psalm 2:9. Missing in the Greek is the subject of the sentence, which is, who it is that will be smashed to pieces like pottery. It is the figure of speech ellipsis, in which something in the sentence is omitted so that the part that is included gets a greater emphasis. (Some scholars refer to this as an anacoluthon, but in an anacoluthon the subject abruptly changes, but here the quotation simply leaves out the subject of the sentence).

The ellipsis catches our attention and reminds us that Jesus will rule with a rod of iron, and as a righteous judge, will punish those who deserve punishment. This picture of Jesus is totally different from the “namby-pamby, love-and-accept-everyone-no-matter-how-they-behave” picture of Jesus that many Christians have in their minds today when they think of Jesus. Jesus came to earth the first time as the sacrifice for the sins of mankind, and to show us what it means to be humble and obedient. He was not a king at that time in the sense of having earthly authority. When he rules over the earth as king, he will not be tolerant of sin.


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Chapter 3


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

“messenger.” See commentary on Revelation 2:1.
3:8. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).
3:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. See commentary on 2:9.

“bow down” See commentary on “pay him homage” Matthew 2:2.
3:10. “from the hour.” The Greek preposition ek can mean “out from” in the sense of “through,” or “out from” in the sense of “away from.” Many people who believe in a pre-Tribulation Rapture still think that this “Letter to the Seven Churches” is to Christians, and thus they say that being kept “out from” the Tribulation is because of the Rapture.
However, the letter is the “Letter to the Seven Congregations,” and they are Jewish congregations (see commentary on Revelation 2:1). The Rapture is past, the Christians are in heaven, and now these Jewish congregations on earth are having to stand fast in their faith. Even during the Great Tribulation, however, God protects many of His faithful ones (Rev. 12:13-17).

3:11. “take your crown.” This verse is one of the many that shows that we have to remain faithful to the end to receive a full reward (see commentary on 2 Cor. 5:10, “good or worthless”). In the Tribulation Administration salvation was not guaranteed, so it is possible that, since “crown” refers to everlasting life in Revelation 2:10, that here it refers to a believer turning from Christ and losing his salvation.


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

3:14. “ruler” The Greek archē (#746 ἀρχή) can and should be translated “ruler” in this verse, as the NIV does. [See One God & One Lord Appendix A].

“messenger.” See commentary on Revelation 2:1.

3:19. “are my friends.” The Greek word we translate as “are…friends,” is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). It is hard to translate the Greek verb phileō in this context and keep the English as a verb. If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of phileō here, and confuse it with agapē love. Phileō love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while agapē love does not necessary have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (agapē) our enemies. Jesus takes a special interest in those who have taken a special interest in him (“You are my friends if you do what I command” John 15:14), and he reproves, disciplines, and prunes those with whom he has a special friendship relationship. In the REV we could have tried to stick with a verb and used “friendly” or “fond,” but these seem to weak. Also, the Greek verb phileō is in the present tense. Given that, it seemed that using the phrase, “are…friends” was the best way to bring the meaning of the Greek into the English. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.

3:20. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


“the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

Chapter 4

4:1. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

4:2. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

“someone was sitting on the throne.” The context (chapters 4 and 5) makes it clear that this is God, who is taking on human form so we can better relate to Him. See commentary on Acts 7:55.
Chapter 5

5:1. “written on the inside and on the back.” The fact that the document mentioned in this verse is written “on the inside” and “on the back” lets us know that in this case the word biblion (#975 βιβλίον) refers to a scroll and not a “book,” although the first books were being published by the time John was writing. A scroll is written “on the inside,” which is the first side written on before the scroll is rolled up, and then “on the back” when more room was needed and the back of the scroll was written on also.

5:2. “break” The Greek is luo (#3089 λύω). Normally, “loose,” but here it refers to breaking the seals, the only way to open and unroll the scroll. That was, in fact, the purpose of the seal. One could tell the scroll had been opened if the seals were broken.

5:4. “cried and cried.” Cp. NIV, HCSB. The literal is “cried much,” with polus (#4183 πολύς) meaning “much,” and the word for cry, klaio (#2799 κλαίω), in the imperfect tense. The imperfect tense of the verb shows that John began crying and kept on crying. This taken together with the word for “much” is painting a picture of John continuing to cry and cry, while no one “was able” (also imperfect, v. 3) to open the scroll. For more on the word klaio, see entry on Matthew 2:18.

Much crying is indeed an appropriate response, because John was faced with the fact that with no one to open the scroll and start God’s judgment, the world would continue in sin and under the control of the Devil, and that misery on earth would continue indefinitely. People, and the world itself, groan as if in the pains of childbirth (Rom. 8:22, 23). If no one can bring about the righteous judgment of the earth and complete the redemption of mankind, then like Paul says, “We are of all people the most to be pitied.” One thing this shows is that the world is totally unable to save itself or bring itself into a righteous state. All of man’s boasting about how we are going to improve the world is just empty words. If God and Christ do not act on our behalf, we are doomed, and crying is certainly appropriate. Thankfully, the angel stopped John’s crying by pointing out “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”

5:5. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Shoot from David.” See commentary on Romans 15:12.

5:6. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδοú), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“the middle of the throne and of the four living creatures.” Jesus Christ is the “middle,” the central figure. He is in the middle of the throne, living creatures, and elders. All attention is on him.

“standing.” Though the lamb had the markings of one that had been killed, the fact that Jesus is standing points to the fact that he is in all his authority, similarly to when Stephen saw him standing at the right hand of God in Acts 7:56.

“looking as if it had been slain.” The particle “as if” is often used in Revelation to point out what John saw. This phrase is not throwing doubt on the death of Jesus, but rather pointing out that Jesus looked as if he had been slain. He did the same when he appeared to Thomas and showed his hands and side to Thomas (John 20:27). This one picture of Jesus tells in short form the essence of the Gospel: victory through sacrifice.
The most profound reason for the wounds of death being now visible is so that everyone can see the way to victory is through sacrifice.

5:9. “singing a new song.” The believers are singing to Jesus Christ, a way of honoring and worshipping him. [For more on singing to Jesus, see commentary on Ephesians 5:19].

Chapter 6

6:2. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

6:4. “earth so that.” The Greek has a kai (and) between the words “earth” and “so that,” which places more emphasis on the last phrase. The sentence would then read, “…to take peace from the earth, even so that they would slay one another.” The kai (and, even) makes the English more difficult to read without really changing the meaning, and so many versions omit it.

6:6. “a voice.” We are not told who is speaking.

“A measure of wheat for a denarius.” The “measure” is the Greek word choinix, which was about is about 2 pints, and was the measure of grain given to slaves for food for a day, which was barely enough to sustain them. A denarius was a day’s wage (cp. Matt. 20:2, 9). Ancient records show us that a denarius would buy 16 choinix in the time of Cicero, and 20 in the time of Trajan. So this would have been a great famine even by ancient standards, but for us in the USA today, it would be a huge famine indeed if a day’s wage only bought two pints of wheat or 6 pints of barley.

6:8. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδοù), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Death and the Grave.” Both Death and the Grave are personified in this verse, and likely refer to real demons by those names, as well as the concepts their names represent. The Adversary holds the power of death, so it is no surprise that there are demons called “Death” and “Grave.”


6:10. “they cried with a great voice.” This is the figure of speech, “personification,” whereby inanimate things are said to speak. These souls (people) are dead.

“Master.” The Greek is despotes (#1203 δέσποτης) means master or lord, and it refers to someone who has legal control and authority over others, such as subjects or slaves (cp. 1 Tim. 6:1; Titus 2:9). It is used both as a title for God (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24), and a title for Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 2:1; Jude 1:4). Here it is used of Jesus Christ, since he is the one breaking the seals and they speak to him in response to his actions. See commentary on Luke 2:29.

“the holy and true One.” Both “holy” and “true” are substantives, adjectives used as nouns. [For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matthew 5:37].

6:12. “sackcloth.” The Greek is sakkos (#4526 σάκκος). “Sackcloth” is the rough cloth from which sacks for carrying things or storing things was made of. It is quite similar in texture to burlap. It was made of “hair,” but culturally it was made from goat hair, which was long and black. [For more on goats and goat hair, see commentary on Matt. 25:32].
6:17. “the great day of their wrath has come.” Since the Fall of Adam and Eve, people have had troubles, trials, and tribulation in life. However, because of the sins against God that mankind has committed, God foretold that there would be a relatively short and specific time during which the wrath of God would be poured out upon the whole world. This time of wrath, which many Christians refer to as “the Tribulation,” is referred to by many names in the Bible, often as “the Day of the Lord,” which is sometimes just called, “the day,” or “that day.” Although the references to this specific time of wrath are far too many to list here, a sampling includes: Isaiah 13:9; 63:1-6; Ezekiel 30:3; 38:19-23; Daniel 12:1; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 31; Amos 5:18-20; Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zechariah 14:1-6; Malachi 4:1; Matthew 3:7; 13:37-43; and 24:4-14. The book of Revelation is the clearest picture of the time of the wrath of God in the Bible. The whole period of tribulation will take place over seven years, and will be a time of judgments that increase in severity. There are the seal judgments in Revelation 6, the trumpet judgments in chapters 8 and 9, the thunder judgments in chapter 10, the bowl judgments in chapter 16, and finally the Battle of Armageddon in chapter 19.

Chapter 7

7:9. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).
7:14. “made them white in the blood of the lamb.” This is a paradox. Washing in blood makes a garment red, so the paradox catches our attention and forces us to think about how the blood of the Lamb could make garments white. The truth is even more profound than that, because the only why to be white and clean is by washing in the blood of the Lamb.

Chapter 8

8:9. “soul life.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), often translated “soul.” The Greek word has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here psuchē refers to the physical life of the body, which is why most versions translate it “life.” We translated it “soul life.”

We felt that if we translated it as just “soul,” that would be confusing, because almost every Christian wrongly believes that animals and fish do not have “soul,” even though the Bible says they do. We also think that translating it “life” is not correct because it makes the verse say too much. The Greek word zōē (#2222 ζωή; pronounced zō-ā'; from which we get words like zoo and zoology), means “life,” the state of being alive versus being dead. It is not 1/3 of everything that had “life” died, but 1/3 of those things like whales and fish, that have “soul” died. There is no verse in the Old or New Testament that indicates that plants have “soul;” they have another kind of life that animates them. Although it is possible that 1/3 of the plant life in the ocean died too, that
is not stated in this verse. This is one of the many verses that shows that *psuchē*, soul, is not immortal, and is used for the physical life of the body, similar to Romans 11:3 and 1 Peter 4:19. [For a more complete explanation of *psuchē*, “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

8:13. “high overhead.” The Greek *mesouranēma* (#3321 μεσουράνημα) literally means “middle heaven,” and it refers to the highest point in the sky, in other words, straight overhead. It is the point the sun occupies at noon. The eagle was not far off at the horizon, but directly overhead, where his voice could be clearly heard by those on earth.

Chapter 9

9:2. “smoke from the pit.” The Greek, “smoke of the pit,” is a genitive of origin, meaning smoke from the pit.

9:12. “Look!” The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδοὺ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

9:16. “the number of the armies of the horsemen was twice 10,000 times 10,000.” If literal, this would be an army of 200 million. However, it may be a figurative number or a hyperbole. It would not in any case be “exact.” Also, despite the number of commentators who believe this is a human army, it seem clear from the description in the next several verses that this is some kind of demonic army.

It has been estimated that at the time of Christ the population of the earth was between 200 and 300 million. If Revelation 9:16 is understood to be a human army, one thing it does show is that when John penned Revelation, he penned it as a future prophecy, not as the preterists believe, that the events of Revelation had already happened. By this time in Revelation at least 25% of the world’s population was already dead (cp. Rev. 6:8), so there is no way an army of 200 million could come from the area of Russia and Asia proper.

Chapter 10

10:7. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word *musterion* (#3466 μυστηρίον) as “sacred secret” because that is what *musterion* actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the “Sacred Secret” and the Administration of Grace, see Ephesians 3:9.]

Chapter 11

11:1. “sanctuary.” This is the Temple that will exist in the future, in between the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD and Armageddon. It is not the Temple described in Ezekiel, which will be the Millennial Temple. Although there is not a Temple in Jerusalem now, the Bible assures us that there will be a Temple during the time of the Book of Revelation. According to 2 Thessalonians 2:4, the Antichrist will enter into that Temple, and Jesus said that the Abomination would be in the Holy Place (Matt. 24:15).
In this case, the word “sanctuary” is correct. The Greek word is *naos* (#3485 ναός; pronounced nä-ős’), which refers to the “Temple proper,” consisting of the Holy Place and Holy of Holies. The word is not *hieron* (#2411 ἱερόν; pronounced he-err-on’), which refers to the entire Temple complex, including the Temple courts (cp. Mark 11:15).

A large number of scholars insist that this “sanctuary” is the Church (or believers), but that is not the case and there is no reason not to take the text literally. There will be a literal temple in Jerusalem at this time. We can see why people would want to make this temple into a figure of speech. Preterists, who believe the events of Revelation have already occurred, could not be correct in their interpretation if this referred to a literal Temple, because the Temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the time John wrote.

We do not need to invent allegories for the sanctuary, the altar, and the Temple courts. They are all literal and will all be present in the Temple during this time.

“**altar.**” The Temple has two altars: the altar of incense inside the Holy Place and the altar of sacrifice just outside it. Since we cannot see into the sanctuary to see the altar of incense, and John was not a priest and could not go in there, this must refer to the altar of sacrifice. Thus it seems clear that Jewish sacrifice will restart before or during the Tribulation.

**11:2. “42 months.”** Daniel 9 speaks of 490 years from the command to build Jerusalem until the Messiah (Dan. 9:25-27). This will consist of two periods of sevens, one for 62 and one for 7. The sevens are years. After the 69 sevens (483 years) the Messiah is killed.

After 483 years there was to be another 7 year period (verse 27). The "ruler who will come," the antichrist, will make a 7 year covenant with Israel. However, in the middle of the 7 years, he will break that off. The last 7 would have followed the first 69 sevens immediately except God intervened with the Administration of the Sacred Secret.

After 3 ½ years of the seven years of Tribulation, the Antichrist breaks his covenant with Israel and rules the world. During this last 3 ½ years, God protects some of the people of Israel from the antichrist. This 3 ½ year period is referred to in three different ways in Scripture.

1) Time, Times, and Half a time (i.e., a year, 2 years, and half a year): Daniel 7:25; 12:7; Revelation 12:14.
2) 42 months: Revelation 11:2; 13:5.
3) 1260 days. Revelation 12:6. (1260 days is 42 months of 30 days each).

Daniel 12:11 and 12 refer to an extension on the 1260 days needed to gather the nations for Judgment (probably 30 days), and then judge them (probably 45 days): (Matt. 25:31ff), Also, the 1260 days that the two witnesses prophesied (Rev. 11:3) started in the first 3 1/2 years and ends in the second, and does not equate to the 1260 days of Revelation 12:6. After the 1260 days, 42 months, or 3:1/2 years of the reign of the Antichrist, comes the battle of Armageddon.

11:8. **“Sodom.”** This is the figure of speech antonomasia, (“name change;” see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*) where the real name is not used, but another name is used in order to import the characteristics of that other name. Here, Jerusalem has been called “Sodom” to ascribe to her the sexual immorality and ungodliness of the city of Sodom in Genesis, which God destroyed by fire from heaven (Gen. 19). Jerusalem is called “Sodom” in Isaiah 1:10, and compared to Sodom in Ezekiel 16:46ff.
11:12. “the cloud.” We would expect the text to say “a” cloud. The word “the” ties this incident back to the cloud that appeared at historic events such as the cloud that covered the men at the Transfiguration (Matt. 17:5), and the cloud in which Jesus ascended to heaven (Acts 1:9).

11:13. “gave glory to the God of heaven.” The meaning of this verse is hidden in the use of “glory,” which often refers to the honor, power, or prestige that one gets who is the best at something. For example, a victor in the gladiator arena can get “glory” from the loser while being despised by him. In this case, the people on earth granted that God had the power to bring the earthquake, but in the honor-shame society of the first century, the fact that they gave God “glory” did not mean they believed and repented.

11:14. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

11:15. Quoted from Exodus 15:18 (cp. Ps. 146:10; Dan. 2:44).

“has become the kingdom.” This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect, the Greek using the aorist tense. The kingdom was not yet the possession of Christ and God, but it soon would be. [For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

Chapter 12

12:1. The “woman” in this chapter is different in different verses. The woman in verse 1 is the constellation Virgo, which on the night of Christ’s birth was indeed “clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet,” i.e., the sun was in the center of the constellation, with the moon just below her feet (Earnest Martin, The Star that Astonished the World). The woman in verse 4 about to give birth is Mary. The woman in verses 6 and 13, from whom the Messiah came, is Israel, whom the Dragon ruthlessly persecutes during the Tribulation.

12:3. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

“Dragon.” The Greek word drakōn (#1404 δράκων) means “dragon.” One of the New Testament names for the Devil is “the Dragon.” Since the Devil is not literally a dragon, this is the figure of speech hypocatastasis comparing the Devil with a dragon [For more on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Rev. 20:2]. The name “Dragon” emphasizes his fierce, ferocious qualities. Like a dragon, the Slanderer (Devil) is powerful, ferocious, pitiless, merciless, dangerous, and deadly. For more on Dragon and the other names of the Slanderer (Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“diadems.” The Greek is diadema (#1238 διαδήματα). The diadem is different from a “crown.” Diadem is an English loanword, “properly the sign of royalty among the Persians, a blue band trimmed with white, on the tiara, hence a symbol of royalty generally; royal headband (BDAG).

12:5. Quoted from Psalm 2:9.


12:7. “to make war with the rest of her seed.” This war is separate and distinct from the war that occurred when the Devil originally fought with God and dragged a third of the angels down with him (12:4). This war occurs in the time of the book of Revelation
when the Devil is cast out of heaven and no longer is able to come before God (cp. Job 1:6; 2:1; Rev. 12:10).

12:9. **“the Slanderer.”** This is “the Devil.” The Greek is *diabolos* (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word *diabolos* means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

12:10. **“Accuser.”** The Greek word is *katēgorēō* (#2723 κατηγορέω), and it means to accuse, to accuse before a judge. The Devil knows that God is righteous and just, so he uses people’s sin against them, and relentlessly accuses people. Often when tragedy strikes a person who has sinned, it is said that the person has “walked out from under the umbrella of God’s protection.” The teaching that God can do what He wants, when He wants, has completely obscured the truth that God wants to bless and help people, but He must be just, and if a person sins willfully over and over, eventually in the “heavenly court,” which is attended by angels and demons (cp, Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6), Satan will get to harm the person. Satan asked to harm Peter, but Jesus’ prayer stopped him (Luke 22:31). Because the Devil is the god of this world, there are apparently some evil things he can just do without God’s permission (Satan is a lawbreaker, liar, and generally dishonest), and the war between God and the Devil is a real war, not a fake war. For more information on the name of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”. For more on the control of the world that Satan has, see the commentary on 1 John 5:19.

12:11. **“souls.”** The Greek word often translated “soul” is *psuchē* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here, “soul” primarily means their physical life (which is why many English versions have “lives”), but it includes the core of their being and mental and emotional life as well. There was nothing in their life these martyrs loved more that God and the Lord, so they did not give up their testimony even though it cost them their life. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

12:12. **“the Slanderer.”** See commentary on verse 9.


Chapter 13

13:1. **“a beast coming up out of the sea.”** This beast, like the beasts of Daniel 7:2-8, is the figure of speech hypocatastasis, comparison by implication, and is an empire, but it is an empire ruled by men, one of which is the “horn” who is also the “little horn” (Dan. 7:8), who is the one we sometimes refer to as “the Antichrist.” Thus the beast is clearly
an empire in some verses such as 13:1, but refer to a person who is over it in 13:8. It is simply understood culturally that an empire has someone who is in charge.

The “sea” is a hypocatastasis for the people of the world (Rev. 17:15). That this beast comes out of the “sea” is indication that the Antichrist is a Gentile, not a Jew. This beast is much different from the beast in 13:11, who comes from the “earth.” The “earth” (ge; #1093 γῆ; pronounced “gay”) can refer to the whole earth, but is often associated with Israel. Thus, the beast that comes up from the “earth” and who is called “the false prophet” (Rev. 16:13; 19:20; 20:10) is almost certainly a Jew. [For more on hypocatastasis see commentary on Revelation 20:2].

“ten horns.” These are ten kings (Rev. 17:10), and are also the ten “horns” of Daniel 7:7. They are called “horns” because they are powerful. The horns, like the horns of a bull, represented power, and horns were an ancient symbol of power. When someone was exalted and feeling “on top of the world” (either rightly or out of arrogance), his horn was up. Thus Psalm 75:6 says not to raise your horn against heaven, and Psalm 89:7 says that by God’s favor (grace) our horn is exalted. When someone’s power was broken, their head was down and their horn went into the ground. Thus, Job, who lived about the same time as Abraham, said that he had “thrust his horn in the dust” (Job 16:15). Sadly, as people are less and less connected with animals and how they hold their heads, the image of the horn being up or down is lost, and so many modern versions omit the word “horn” altogether and find other ways to translate the verses that have the idioms with horns. However, that makes verses such as Revelation 13:1, which calls the kings, “horns,” much harder to understand.

“diadem” See commentary on 12:3.

“defaming.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3]. The very names of the evil described in this verse defame God.

13:5. “defaming words.” The Greek noun is blasphēmia (#988 βλασφημία; pronounced blas-fay-me'-ah), and was used of someone speaking against another. The primary meaning as it was used in the Greek culture was showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on blasphēmia, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

13:6. “utter defaming words.” The Greek verb blasphēmeō (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. This verse contains the verb, while 13:1, 5 have the noun [For more on blasphēmeō, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].

13:7. “every tribe and people and tongue and nation.” There is disagreement among commentators as to whether the antichrist will rule the whole world, or part of it. Although we lean toward the belief that he will rule the entire world, there is room for the possibility that he will not. The Bible often uses language referring to the whole world when it only means the whole world known at the time the Bible was written. Example of when references to the whole world only referred to the world that was known or controlled at that time include 1 Kings 4:34; Daniel 4:1; and Matthew 2:1. It is possible that there are places in the world that will not be directly controlled by the antichrist.
13:8. “slain from the foundation of the world.” The versions of the Bible are divided as to how the Greek text should be translated. The KJV, for example, translates the Greek the same way as the REV. In contrast, the NASB does not connect the word “slain” with the prepositional phrase, “from the foundation of the world,” but connects it with the phrase about being written in the book of life, thus having, “everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.”

Both of the above interpretations involve God’s foreknowledge and fore-planning. “Slain from the foundation of the world” is the natural reading of the Greek text, the phrases being in that order in the Greek. There should be no problem understanding this. First, we must remember that Jesus Christ is not only the redeemer of the human race, he is the redeemer of all of God’s creation. Ever since the fall of Satan the whole creation has been groaning (Rom. 8:22) and waiting for a redeemer. Thus, before God even created Adam, God had a plan for the restoration of His creation that involved the sacrifice of Christ.

God also planned for the fact that mankind would sin. Even if Adam lived without sinning, God would have known that at some point Adam’s progeny would sin, and thus He planned for their redemption. Thus, Jesus was both known, and we, the Church, were even chosen in him, before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20; Eph. 1:4). The Church, and Jesus did not literally exist before the foundation of the world, but were in the mind of God. God then revealed what He had in his mind via the prophecies He gave in the Old Testament.

The Church could not be said to be chosen in Christ if the plan of salvation was not plotted out beforehand, so Ephesians 1:4 makes no sense if the sacrificial death of Christ was not plotted out beforehand. Thus it makes perfect sense for the text to say that Jesus was slain before the foundation of the world—it was part of God’s plan for the salvation of His creation.

That being said, if the natural reading of the Greek text is “slain from the foundation of the world,” what would be a reason for moving the words of the Greek text around to create the reading in the NASB? The major reason is that the concept that the lamb was “slain” from the foundation of the world is “difficult,” and so some think that it is more natural that the Author meant the verse as the NASB has it. However, as we have seen, the death of Christ was part of God’s plan from the foundation of the world. Thus, there is really no problem at all if the verse says he was slain from the foundation of the world.

Another reason some theologians like the translation as the NASB has it is that then it is more clearly espousing the Calvinist doctrine that people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, i.e., God predestines them either to salvation or damnation long before they are born. After all, if people’s names are written in the book of life before the foundation of the world, then God knows, and even determines, the fate of every person. This is not what Scripture teaches. God gives each person freewill to make his or her own choices. God wants all people to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4), and we are the ones who decide whether we are saved or not.

13:14. “deceives….by the signs.” Signs in the physical world are never in and of themselves proof of God or godliness. Both God and the Devil have power, and so throughout history, both good and evil “prophets” have demonstrated power. The power
must be in conjunction and agreement with the Word of God. Similarly, when it comes to the spoken Word, sincerity is no guarantee for truth. Many sincere people are wrong about what they believe.

Chapter 14

14:1. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδον), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


14:8. “fallen, fallen.” The word “fallen” is repeated twice for emphasis. It is the figure of speech epizeuxis (see Bullinger, Figures of Speech Used in the Bible). In the Greek text, “fallen” is in the past (aorist tense) even though the event has not happened yet. This is the idiom of the prophetic perfect “Babylon” was not yet fallen, but it’s fall was certain. [For more on the prophetic perfect idiom, see commentary on Ephesians 2:6].

“Babylon.” This is almost certainly not the literal city of Babylon. There have been many Babylons since Nimrod first built Babylon soon after Noah’s Flood (Gen. 10:8-10). The Devil is constantly promoting centers of power and influence through which he can work to corrupt others. Evil people cannot successfully work the soil (Gen. 4:12), which is why Cain, after killing Abel, went off and built a city (Gen. 4:17), and cities have been centers of evil ever since.

Nimrod’s Babylon was a center of evil, and was followed by many other Babylons, which promote cultural, commercial, spiritual, and personal rebellion against God and against righteousness. Literal Babylon lost influence as powers like Egypt grabbed the limelight, but it rose again in time to become a world power and destroy Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah, who wrote: “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD’s hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad” (Jer. 51:7). But Daniel’s prophecy of the succession of kingdoms (Dan. 2:36-45), made it clear that literal Babylon would fall again, then would come Persia, Greece, and then Rome. Rome was the clear frontrunner for the designation “Babylon” during its day, but its candle grew dim too.

The centuries have seen “Babylon” shift from place to place. In fact, “Babylon” does not even have to be a single city, it is intimately tied to the Devil’s purposes and can be a city, cities, or perhaps even an evil empire. The Devil is constantly working, always trying to spread hid evil across the globe. We do not know how long God will wait before the Great Tribulation and we can be sure that the fortunes of the cities of earth will continue to shift, but no matter which city or cities are “Babylon” when the End comes, the Devil is always the power behind the throne. Thus, one of the beauties of using the name “Babylon” here is that it reveals the evil power behind the city, but is not tied to a specific city.

“of the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.” The Greek text’s use of three genitives in a row, as well as vocabulary that is used in two different senses, has caused quite a division among commentators. The Greek word translated “passion” is thumos (#2372 θυμός; pronounced thoo-mos), and means “anger, wrath, passion,
excitement.” Because it is mostly used in Revelation to refer to anger, many commentators assume this is a mixed metaphor, somehow referring both to the Whore’s wine and sexual immorality, and God’s anger and wrath. But that mixed metaphor is unlikely and unnecessary. It is well established in Greek literature that thumos can to refer to passion or excitement, and there is no reason it cannot mean that here as well in the other verses in the Bible that refer to the passion of sexual immorality, especially as it is excited by wine. E. W. Bullinger says in his commentary on Revelation: “If we take the word thumos as meaning ‘inflammatory’ or ‘exciting,’ as it does when used of wine, all difficulty is taken away.” David Aune (the Word Biblical Commentary) says, “The term thumos is used here meaning ‘intense desire’ and in verse 10 meaning ‘fury, intense anger.’” Aune recognizes this shift of the meaning of the word thumos in this section of Revelation, and refers to it as one the many instances of a play on words in the book of Revelation.

Lenski points out that the phrase here in Revelation 14:8, and the same phrase in 18:3, and the very similar phrase in 17:2, all are governed by the pronoun “her.” Thus the introduction of the idea of God’s wrath simply from the vocabulary is not satisfactory, especially since there are other explanations of the phrase.

The two genitives, “passion” and “sexual immorality” can be constructed either as “passionate sexual immorality” or as “sexually immoral passion.” We favor “passionate sexual immorality” because throughout the Bible, “sexual immorality” was used both literally for the sin of sexual immorality and also used figuratively for idolatry and other immoral acts. When we keep in mind that some idolatry was intertwined with actual sexual immorality, it seems more consistent with the whole Bible that God is speaking against her “sexual immorality,” than “sexually immoral passion.” However, we should realize that that idea can be is basically the same.

It has been known for ages that wine inflames passions that lead people to set aside moral and physical restraints and behave immorally. Habakkuk shows us that the ancients understood the connection between wine and sexual passion: “Woe to him who gives drink to his neighbors, pouring it from the wineskin till they are drunk, so that he can gaze on their naked bodies” (Hab. 2:15 NIV84). Since it was well known that wine could lead to passionate sexual immorality, we can see why God used “wine” figuratively in Revelation.

The “wine” that has been flowing from Babylon is a figure that goes back into the Old Testament. Jeremiah 51:7 says, “Babylon was a gold cup in the LORD's hand; she made the whole earth drunk. The nations drank her wine; therefore they have now gone mad.” The nations and people who drink of Babylon’s wine act like insane people: they rebel against their Creator as if there was no consequence for it.

Actually, rebellion and idolatry did not start with Babylon in Jeremiah’s time, but were rooted in Babylon all the way back in Genesis, and spread all over the world. This fact is expressed in the use of the perfect tense of the verb “drink” in the Greek text, which is hard to exactly translate into English, because it implies a past action that is still going on. Lenski has, “has been making all the nations to drink,” that is, Babylon has been making people drunk with immorality for a very long time. From the Great Whore of Babylon flowed the wine that inflamed people and got them to participate fully, or passionately, in unrestrained behavior and rebellion against God.
What we see in this verse, and 17:2 and 18:3, is that the people of the world have been and are still today intoxicated by sexual immorality and rebellion against God. Indeed, following our sin nature and rebelling against God and “doing our own thing” can be intoxicating, whereas living an obedient lifestyle can sometimes feel very restricting. Galatians tells us that the “flesh sets its desire against the spirit” (Gal. 5:17). But in the end the people who join Babylon will be like Babylon: “Fallen, fallen,” and “will drink of the wine of the anger of God” (Rev. 14:10). God’s people need to honor God by following His commands and staying separate from the world’s way of doing things.

14:11. “to ages of ages.” The Greek is αἰῶνας αἰώνων αἰών; literally, “to ages of ages.” This is a hyperbole, an overstatement. The wording is similar to Revelation 20:10, see the commentary on that verse.

“day and night.” The meaning of this phrase can be seen by noticing how it is used in other verses. Paul preached “night and day” to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 2:9), and later prayed for them “night and day” (1 Thess. 3:10). First, we see it does not necessarily mean “constantly,” although it could in the context of future torment. Second, it does not mean it goes on forever. Both Paul’s preaching for the Thessalonians, and his prayers to see them, came to an end at some point. Similarly, the person who sows seed in the ground sleeps and gets up “night and day” while the seed is growing (Mark 4:27). In this example, as with the one involving Paul, the phrase “day and night” does not mean he sleeps and rises all day every day, but rather that there is a general pattern of sleeping and rising. Furthermore, there is an end to his activity. Another example is when Satan is said to be in heaven accusing the brothers “day and night” (Rev. 12:10), but we know that there were times he was on earth, not in heaven, so the phrase does not necessarily mean all day every day, and we know Satan’s accusations will come to an end. The point the verse is making is that those thrown into Gehenna have no guarantee of rest, and likely will have no rest at all, either day or night, until they are consumed and annihilated.

14:13. “the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

“let them rest.” (Cp. HCSB, NAB). We believe this should be taken as a command clause. See entry on John 9:3, “let the works of God be revealed in him.”

14:14. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἴδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

14:19. “the winepress, the great winepress of the anger or God.” The “winepress of God” is the Battle of Armageddon. This is clear from Revelation 19:15, which uses the same terminology, and from Isaiah, which refers to the battle the Messiah fights to conquer the earth and says, “I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing” (Isa. 63:3 NIV84).

14:20. “stadia.” A Roman stadia is about 607 feet. The total distance is about 180 miles (290 km).
Chapter 16

16:3. “soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is *ψυχὴ* (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay'), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it refers to the mammal, fish, or other sea creature that is animated, made alive, by *ψυχὴ*, “soul,” which is why many English versions say, “every living creature,” or “every living thing” in the sea died. This is one of the verses that shows us that *ψυχὴ* is the life that animates both humans and animals, and it is not immortal. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

16:9. “defamed.” The Greek verb *βλασφημέω* (#987 βλασφημέω) means showing disrespect to a person or deity, and/or harming his, her, or its reputation. [For more on *βλασφημέω*, see commentary on Matt. 9:3].


16:13. “frogs.” There are many fanciful guesses as to what the frogs refer to. Two ideas seem to be solidly founded: In 16:12 the angel struck the Euphrates and it dried up. When the Nile was struck by a plague of blood (Exod. 7:19ff), the next plague upon Egypt was frogs (Exod. 8:1ff). This seems clearly to be pointing back to this: the Euphrates dries up in verse 12 and then frogs go forth in verse 13. The second thing is that frogs were known for their loud croaking, and it would take some loud “croaking” to get the leaders of the earth to come to Israel to fight Jesus.

16:14 “spirits, namely demons.” Genitive of apposition.

16:15. “Look!” The Greek word is *ἰδοῦ* (#2400 ἰδοῦ), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

16:21. “talent.” The Greek is *ταλαντιαῖος* (#5006 ταλαντιαῖος) The Roman talent weight varied from place to place and also over time. Estimates range from over sixty to well over 100 pounds. Most scholars place this talent at somewhere in the neighborhood of 100 pounds.


Chapter 17

17:1. “the great prostitute that sits on many waters.” The Great Prostitute is called by the name “Babylon” in 17:5. The Great Prostitute is not a person or a kingdom, but a religious system of life and thought that starts in the heart of the Devil and makes its home in people who follow his ways and who then mold the world in their image. The Prostitute is false religion (many commentators refer to this as the “Apostate Church,” but that makes it seem like it is deceived Christians, when in fact it is deceived religious people). She is the pattern of the world in the robes of religion (cp. Rom. 12:2), stated in a concrete way, as if it was a woman. This is very Semitic. In Proverbs, both Wisdom and Folly are portrayed as women (Prov. 8:1; 9:13).

In this verse she “sits on many waters,” that is, on the masses of the people of earth (“waters” represent the masses of people, see Rev. 17:15. That “waters” or “the sea” means “people” is a well-known biblical figure; cp. Isa. 17:12, 13; Daniel 7:2; Rev.
In contrast, in Revelation 17:3, the woman sits upon 7 “mountains,” that is, seven empires ruled by kings.

The fact that she “sits” on the people of earth is profound, for some people she controls and oppresses, while others follow her willingly, lured by what she offers (see 17:4), e.g., her power (purple and scarlet), her wealth (gold, precious stones, pearls), sex (adulteries), and her self-indulgence and rebellion against God (her abominable things). All this can be seen in the “church” today and in history. Many are those “religious” people who are not godly.

That the Great Prostitute is successful “sitting” (the verb is a present participle) on the people of earth is a testament to the fallen nature of mankind. In general, the Devil would rather lure people to sin willingly than try to force people to sin. History shows us that there is an abundance of people who fall right into the Devil’s ways of thinking and acting if they are lured by power, money, sex, and self-indulgence. The Devil sets up the system, and people willingly become his sycophants, using and oppressing others. It should not be lost on us that it was not to the “sinners” of his time such as the prostitutes and tax collectors, but to the religious leaders that he said, “You are of your father the Devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (John 8:44).

17:2. “with the wine of her sexual immorality.” See commentary on Revelation 14:8.

17:3. “names that are defaming.” See commentary on Revelation 13:1.

17:4. “pearls.” Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued. [For more on pearls, see commentary on Revelation 18:12].

17:5. “Sacred Secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” because that is what musterion actually refers to: a secret in the religious or sacred realm. [For more information on the term “Sacred Secret” see Ephesians 3:9.]

The word musterion is a huge key to understanding “Babylon.” In the Greco-Roman world, a musterion was a secret in the religious sphere (a “secular” secret was a kruptos, “secret”). A musterion was not a “mystery,” but was a secret that was hidden from the general public until it was revealed. Here the “secret,” this secret which has dominated the religious realm, is called “Babylon.” Furthermore, she is called “the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth.”

That she is called “Babylon,” does not mean she is the literal city of Babylon (or even a literal city at all), which we can see from the full description of her in the chapter, but she is called “Babylon” because she relates to “Babylon” in an important way. In this case, “Babylon” was the first city built by Nimrod after Noah’s Flood (Gen. 10:10). It became a center of religious apostasy and rebellion against God, even though it likely looked “very religious.” Ever since Nimrod, “religion” has been a powerful force on earth, and sadly, there is usually a lot of evil at the center. This includes practices that are overtly ungodly, like human sacrifice, but the fact is that oppression, guilt, and control have been at the center of almost all religions.

That this woman is called, “the mother of the prostitutes and of the abominations of the earth,” points to the fact that she is the starting point and nurturer of the sexual immorality and godlessness in the world. She is the personalization of the Devil’s system of evil infiltrating religion and masquerading as truth, just as the woman “Wisdom” in Proverbs is the personalization of God’s way of doing things. The false religion is not an enemy to, but to a large degree works symbiotically with, the political systems of earth. Thus the “mountains” (kingdoms and kings) let her sit on them, and in a practical sense
they support one another. This is certainly true historically. The Bible has many examples of false prophets supporting evil rulers, just as Ahab and Jezebel had their false prophets (1 Kings 17, 18; cp. Ezek. 22:25-28).

Furthermore, although false religion has “sat” on the “waters” (people) of the earth (17:1), and on the kingdoms of the earth (17:3) for millennia, she will come to an abrupt end when Christ conquers the earth and sets up his kingdom.

17:6. “martyrs.” The Greek word is martus (#3144 μάρτυς; pronounced mar’-toose), which technically means “witness.” However, especially after 64 AD when Nero made Christianity illegal and the execution of Christians started, the most profound “witness” was to die for the faith. Thus martus came to be used of those who witnessed for Christ and those who died for the faith, and our English word “martyr” comes directly from the Greek martus. It is challenging to translate the word in this context because if we say “those who testified of Jesus” (NET), it may not be clear that they died for him, but if we say “martyr,” we might lose the connection with the fact that dying for the Faith was considered a very powerful witness.” That is why the English versions are split on the translation: “martyrs” (ASV, ESV, KJV, NJB, RSV), versus “witness, testify” (HCSB, NASB, NET, NIV, NLT, Rotherham).

17:7. “sacred secret.” We translate the Greek word musterion (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret. See commentary on 17:5.

17:9. “mountains.” This is the figure of speech hypocatastasis, a comparison by implication, and it refers to empires ruled by rulers. In the Bible, a “mountain” is one of the figures of speech used to represent a kingdom and by extension, the king who rules it. David called his kingdom a mountain (Ps. 30:7). Babylon was called a mountain (Jer. 51:25). The Messiah’s kingdom will be a mountain that will fill the earth (Dan. 2:35), and cp. Zechariah 4:7 as well. Thus here in Revelation we again see vocabulary being used in the way it was used in the Old Testament. [For more information on hypocatastasis, see commentary on Revelation 20:2].

The mountains are also immediately said to be “kings,” so in this case the empires are not “general,” but also include the kings who control them. The mountains cannot refer to Rome, although many commentators think they do (Cp. John Valwoord, The Revelation of Jesus Christ; Bullinger, Commentary on Revelation).

It is important that we notice that the woman sits upon the mountains. She is not a mountain, but sits on them. Bullinger thinks all the kingdoms are future, while other scholars think that the empires have existed through time. In any case, the empires are bewitched and controlled by the woman—not forcibly, but by the lure of what she offers. The Bible refers to this as them being “made drunk with the wine of her sexual immorality.”

17:15. “are peoples, and multitudes.” This verse is a huge key to understanding both the Old and New Testament. Daniel 7:2 speaks of the “four winds of heaven. In Hebrew, the word ruach (#7308 רוח) is used of both “wind” and “spirit.” In Daniel’s case, although he likely saw a vision of a great ocean being stirred by the “winds,” he knew his own language and the meanings it had, and would have understood that this was a vision meant to communicate that spirits (referring to both demons and angels) were stirring up the “great sea,” (the people of the world), and “beasts” (i.e., nations) were coming up out of the sea. That verse in Daniel is a great example of how the figure of speech hypocatastasis can be confusing and how important it is to understand the key words.
involved. In Daniel, the “winds” were spirits, the “sea” was masses of people, and the “beast” was an empire. So too, here in Revelation, the “sea” is clearly said to be the masses of people on earth.

**17:16. “hate the prostitute.”** In an amazing turn of events, the false religious system that has supported, and been supported by, the rulers of the earth will suddenly be attacked by them. The beast (the Antichrist) will no longer be content to share his glory with another false religion and will move to control the world’s religions and garner all worship for himself. Thus begins the universal, one-world religion controlled by the Antichrist that will dominate the final period of time before Armageddon.

**17:18. “the great city.”** Here, “Babylon” is called “the great city” although it is not a literal city, which we saw from 17:1, where she sits on many waters, 17:3, where she sits on empires, and 17:5, where we saw that she was, as a sacred secret, called “Babylon,” not because she was literally the city of Babylon, but because Nimrod’s Babylon was the source of all evil empires, having its origin in the Devil and ruled by people given over to the service of the Devil. However, in a sense she is “the great city” because she is the power that has dominated and directed all the cities of earth. In a sense, she is

**Chapter 18**

**18:2. “haunt.”** The Greek word phulake ( phíλακη) can mean either a prison or the prison guard, or the act of guarding or watching. In this case, the demons (unclean spirits or “birds”) are not in prison in Babylon, but live there and keep watch there. Thus “haunt” is a good translation to communicate that.

**18:3. “the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality.”** See commentary on Revelation 14:8.

**18:12. “pearls.”** Pearls are mentioned in a number of New Testament verses because in the biblical world pearls were incredibly expensive. The Roman historian, Pliny the Elder (23 AD – August 24, 79 AD), said this about pearls: “The topmost rank of all things of price is held by pearls.” Round, white pearls are amazingly rare. When pointing out that women should not dress extravagantly, 1 Timothy 2:9 says women should not dress with gold and pearls. Jesus told a parable about a man who found one very expensive pearl and sold everything he had to buy it (Matt. 13:46).

Part of the mystique about pearls in the first century was that people were not sure where they came from. Expensive pearls that came into the Roman world from the Persian Gulf and from India had traveled far and had an air of mystery about them. Although some pearls did come from shallow water, most pearls in the ancient world were brought up from quite deep in the ocean. In the Persian Gulf region, a fruitful source of pearls in biblical times, they were often at a depth of about 40 meters (about 45 yards or half a football field).

To get down to the oyster beds, pearl divers held a weight on a rope to make a quick descent to the bottom. Once the diver was on the bottom, he let go of the weight, which was pulled back up to the ship by the rope, while the diver swam back up after he put the oysters he had gathered into a sack he carried with him. Until the invention of scuba gear, this diving-with-a-weight method of pearling was the common way of pearling, with only slight improvements over the years, such as hand and foot protection.
from the sharp oysters and a face masks so the diver could see better and to protect the
eyes. This dangerous way of getting pearls was the major reason natural pearls were so
expensive until our modern times.

In the early 1900’s pearls lost much of their value and the pearl industry collapsed
because the Japanese invented a way to grow cultured pearls. Also, shortly after that
plastics and resins began to be used to produce very realistic looking pearls. Then finally,
the invention of the scuba diving system made getting the real pearls much easier, safer,
and more reliable. The result of all this was that pearls, which for millennia had been a
mark of high culture, social standing, and financial wealth, were suddenly being worn by
anyone and everyone, so they were less a status symbol and thus less attractive. As their
attraction wore off, they were worn by fewer and fewer people, even being ignored by
those who could afford the “real” ones.

18:13. “slaves, even the souls of human beings.” The word for “slaves” is actually
“bodies,” and slaves were referred to as “bodies” in the Roman Empire. God created
people to be relational and to interconnect with one another, so in order to be with other
people and treat them horribly it is almost a necessity to “dehumanize” them. This is very
common in war. Germans are not people, they were “Krauts,” Italians were “Wops,”
Japanese were “Nips,” and people from the Middle East are called “Towel heads” by
many in today’s armed forces.

This dehumanizing was done in Bible times as well. In the Bible, the Jews called
themselves “the People” (and you will see “People” with a capital “P” in the REV
translation), which meant that non-Jews were not “people.” Similarly, in ancient Egypt,
the Egyptians called themselves “people,” and the foreigners were specifically the “no-
People.” The ancient Greeks thought of themselves better than everyone else, and thus
everyone else was a “Barbarian,” an onomatopoetic word based on “ba-ba-ba-ba,” which is
what the Greeks thought everyone else’s language sounded like—just a bunch of “ba’s”
strung together. Thus it is no surprise that in the Roman Empire slaves were called
“bodies.” They were certainly often used that way.

“soul.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced
psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person
or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here
“souls of human beings” is a phrase that primarily refers to “people,” but by including the
word “soul” it includes the mental and emotional life. People were bought and sold, but
their thoughts and feelings were disregarded. Similar uses of psuchē are Romans 2:9 and
2 Peter 2:14. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of
‘Soul’”).
18:14. “soul.” The Greek word is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή). Here it refers to the seat of the
mental and emotional life. People did not just want the fruit, they wanted it from the core
of their being. [For more on “soul,” see commentary on Revelation 18:13].
18:22. “the sound of the mill.” When Jerusalem was about to be destroyed by the
Babylonians, Jeremiah prophesied that the sound of the millstone would not be heard in
her (Jer. 25:10). It was a happy sound that was a staple of family life. The women would
grind meal together and enjoy each other’s company, and there would be fresh bread to
eat. When the sound of the millstone is not heard, family life is pretty much non-existent.
18:23. “the voice of the bridegroom.” As in Verse 22 above, Jeremiah 25:10 also mentions the voice of the bridegroom.

Chapter 19

19:10. “the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” The testimony “of” Jesus (genitive of relation: testimony about Jesus; most likely also includes the sense of the genitive of origin, i.e., the words or testimony that Jesus gives) is the spirit (the general attitude, the essence, “the inner content” (Lenski)). In contrast to false prophecy, true prophecy will elevate Jesus.

19:11. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).


19:14. “armies.” Although the reason for the plural “armies” could be a plural of emphasis to show the large size of the army, it is more likely that it is plural because of the compound nature of Christ’s army, which includes spirit beings and Christians, who were Raptured into heaven and now are returning to earth with Christ. There are verses that indicate that we will participate in the destruction of Satan, such as Romans 16:20, which speaks of Satan being crushed “under your [the Christian’s] feet.” Also, 1 Corinthians 6:3 speaks of us judging angels, which almost certainly includes participating in the defeat of the fallen angels we know as demons. Also, 1 Thessalonians 4:17 speaks of us always being with the Lord after the Rapture, so it is unlikely that Christ could come to earth and fight without us participating.

19:15. “out of his mouth comes a sharp broadsword.” That there is a sharp sword coming out of the mouth of Jesus is also stated in Revelation 1:16 and 2:16. What this “sharp sword” is, is made clear in 2 Thessalonians 2:8, which says that the Lord will destroy the lawless one with the “spirit from his mouth,” where “spirit” is used for prophecies spoken by Jesus Christ (see commentary note on 2 Thessalonians 2:8, and 1 Corinthians 14:12). Christians should be used to thinking in terms of the Word of God being a two-edged sword from Hebrews 4:12 and Ephesians 6:17. Jesus Christ is not depicted destroying people with a physical sword, but rather with the “sword of the Spirit,” which is the Word of God (Eph. 6:17). Powerful words from God come out of Jesus’ mouth and destroy his enemies.


19:20. “sulfur.” The word “brimstone” is an old word for “sulfur.”

19:21. “broadsword.” We know from the context that this sword is the prophetic utterances that are spoken by Jesus Christ. (See commentary on Rev. 19:15). For commentary on the fact that this is a “broadsword,” see commentary on Luke 2:35).

Chapter 20

20:2. “dragon.” Names such as “dragon” and “serpent” are descriptive terms for the Devil, which is made clear in the verse. They are the figure of speech hypocatastasis
(pronounced: hī-poé-cā-tās'-tā-sis), a “comparison by implication.” In the Bible, there are many uses of the three common figures of speech of comparison, which are simile, metaphor, and hypocatastasis. These are commonly used in English speech as well, but only simile and metaphor are generally known by name. A simile is a “comparison by resemblance,” that is, the two things being compared resemble each other in some way. A simile in English usually uses “like” or “as.” If a person is a sloppy and noisy eater, someone might say, “You eat like a pig.” Psalm 1:3 uses a simile when it says a righteous person is like a tree planted by the water.

More intense than a simile is the figure metaphor, a “comparison by representation.” In a metaphor, one noun represents another. In the pig example above, a metaphor would be, “You are a pig.” Jesus used a metaphor when he said to his disciples, “I am the vine; you are the branches…” (John 15:5 NIV).

Even more intense than metaphor is the figure hypocatastasis, which is a “comparison by implication.” In the pig example, instead of comparing the messy eater with a pig by saying he is “like” a pig, or even using metaphor and saying the person “is” a pig, in hypocatastasis the comparison is just implied. One person says to the other, “Pig!” and the meaning, although it is just implied and not specifically stated, is effectively communicated.

Hypocatastasis is used very effectively in our everyday language. If a person helps us when we need it, we might say, “You angel!” If someone lies to us, we might say, “Snake!” When someone is being overly hesitant, he gets mocked by the hypocatastasis, “Chicken!”

The examples, “Pig,” “You angel,” “Snake,” and “Chicken” show us that in hypocatastasis, the person is being compared to something else, and by that comparison, the qualities of the pig, angel, snake, or chicken, are being assigned to the person. As long as the comparison is well known in the culture, the implied meaning is not confused.

Figures of comparison are helpful in communication because they quickly bring both meaning and emotional impact to a situation that would otherwise take a lengthy description. Imagine how long it would take to describe the way a person was eating and how it was affecting you emotionally, when all you have to say is, “Pig,” and the meaning is clear.

The figure of speech hypocatastasis can be confusing, however, for three major reasons. First, since the comparison is implied, it may not be clear who the subject of the comparison is. For example, in Ezekiel 19:5 a king of Judah is being called a “lion,” but which king is it referring to? The scholars are not sure. Most of them say either Jehoiachin or Zedekiah, but we do not know for certain.

The second reason hypocatastasis can be confusing is that sometimes it is not clear what meaning is being implied. It may be quite easy to figure out why the Devil is called a “serpent” (Rev. 20:2), but we may not understand what Jesus meant when he called Herod a “fox.” A study of the word “fox” in the biblical culture reveals that Jesus was calling Herod a destructive nuisance (cp. commentary on Luke 13:32).

The third reason hypocatastasis can be confusing is that the figure can be missed entirely, and people think that the hypocatastasis is literal. When Jesus used the figure hypocatastasis, sometimes even people who knew him well were confused. For example, Jesus told his apostles to beware of the “leaven” of the Pharisees, but they did not recognize the hypocatastasis and thought he was speaking of actual bread. He was using
“leaven” to represent “doctrine,” something he made clear to them after he realized they had misunderstood what he said. (Matt. 16:6-12 KJV).

Another good example of people mistaking the hypocatastasis for something literal is the way many Christians think that Genesis 3:1 is speaking of an actual snake when it refers to the Devil as a “serpent” by the figure hypocatastasis. The figure should be clear because literal snakes cannot talk, the Devil is referred to as the serpent in other verses of Scripture, and when 2 Corinthians 11:3 (KJV) says “the serpent” beguiled Eve, the context is Satan and his ministers (v. 14). Furthermore, Revelation 20:2 calls him, “that ancient serpent,” which refers to the “serpent” being very old, which is true, since “the serpent” of Genesis 3:1 is the very first reference to the Devil in the whole Bible. Nevertheless many people miss the hypocatastasis and think that the “serpent” in Genesis was some kind of actual snake, and artists do not help the situation when they paint pictures of a snake in the Garden of Eden. There are people who think that the snake was possessed by the Devil, but why would Eve believe a snake? She would be immediately suspicious of something so out of the ordinary. The Devil would have appeared to Eve in an unthreatening way as a wise and helpful being, but his crafty nature and intent are clearly set forth by the hypocatastasis: “serpent” (E. W. Bullinger has an extensive appendix (#19) on the serpent being the Devil in his Companion Bible).

The Bible has many examples of hypocatastasis. In Song of Solomon the Beloved is called a “dove” (Song of Sol. 2:14); destructive people are called “wolves” (Acts 20:29); the strong enemies of God are called “bulls” (Ps. 22:12); vicious and unclean people are called “dogs” (Ps. 22:16; Matt. 7:6) and also “pigs” (Matt. 7:6); the people of God are “sheep,” while unbelievers are called “goats” (Matt. 25:33). People are sometimes called “trees” or “plants” (Jer. 11:19; Matt. 15:13). Each of these terms imports a meaning into the text that is important for us to understand.

Sometimes very different people are compared to the same thing, as long as the comparison is valid. A lion usually typified irresistible power and destructive strength, and so many things were compared to a lion. These include God (Job 10:16; Isa. 38:13; Jer. 49:19); Jesus (Rev. 5:5); Israel (Num. 23:24; 24:9); the tribe of Gad (Deut. 33:20); wicked people (Ps. 17:12; 22:13); false prophets (Ezek. 22:25); Jehoahaz, king of Judah (Ezek. 19:3); the officials in Jerusalem (Zeph. 3:3); Babylon (Jer. 4:7); Egypt (Ezek. 32:2); the enemies of Israel (Jer. 2:15); and the Devil (1 Pet. 5:8). Hypocatastasis is a powerful figure in that it can bring a wide range of possible meanings to the text from just one illustration, and thus invites us into prayer, thought, and study. A good example of this occurs in Ezekiel.

Ezekiel 34:8

As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, because my flock lacks a shepherd and so has been plundered and has become food for all the wild animals, and because my shepherds did not search for my flock but cared for themselves rather than for my flock,....

In the above verse, God uses hypocatastasis to compare His people to sheep, calling them “My flock.” Then He again uses hypocatastasis to explain what has happened to them: they became food for the “wild animals.” If God had tried to explain in paragraph form who the “wild animals” were who had eaten His people (i.e., taken advantage of, hurt, and killed them), it would have taken Him at least a paragraph, and the punchy impact of the figure would have been lost. No doubt the list would include
cruel leaders, ungodly priests, ruthless businessmen, foreign enemies, and even demonic forces. God covers all these possibilities, forces us to think broadly about the verse, and brings emotion into the text, simply by using the figure hypocatastasis and saying “wild animals.”

Here in Revelation 20:2, the Devil is referred to by hypocatastasis as a dragon, comparing the Devil to a dragon and importing to him the characteristics of evil, fierceness, viciousness, etc. [For more names of the Slanderer (Devil), see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“Serpent.” The Slanderer (the Devil) is not a literal serpent, so his being called that is the figure of speech hypocatastasis (a comparison by implication; see entry on “dragon” above). Calling the Slanderer a “serpent” compares him with a serpent, and imports the characteristics of a serpent onto the Slanderer. Thus we can see that, among other things, the Slanderer is hard to see and recognize (he is very good at hiding), crafty, and deadly. Places the Slanderer is referred to as a serpent include Genesis 3:1,13,14; 2 Corinthians 11:3; and Revelation 20:2. [For more names of the Slanderer, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer,” the one who slanders others, and that is a primary characteristic of the Devil. He has no regard for a person’s reputation or the illicit means he uses to discredit and destroy people. Slander is a primary tactic of the Devil. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

“the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατάνᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”].

20:4. “souls.” The Greek word often translated “soul” is psuchē (#5590 ψυχή; pronounced psoo-kay’), and it has a large number of meanings, including the physical life of a person or animal; an individual person; or attitudes, emotions, feelings, and thoughts. Here it is primarily for the person himself, which is why the HCSB says, “I saw the people who had been beheaded because of their testimony.” However, by using the word “soul,” God includes their mental and emotional life, and helps us see these people as the committed people that they truly were. [For a more complete explanation of “soul,” see Appendix 7: “Usages of ‘Soul’”].

“beheaded.” This is the figure of speech synecdoche of the part, where a part of something is put for the whole of that thing [For synecdoche, see Bullinger, Figures of Speech]. In this case, only those believers who have been “beheaded” are said to get up, but in fact all believers from the Old Testament and Tribulation will get up. This is the “first resurrection, “the resurrection of the righteous,” when every righteous person will hear the voice of Christ (John 5:25-29) and get up from the dead (except those in the Christian Church, because they have already been raptured). This verse specifically says “beheaded” because it is in the context of the Great Tribulation, when believers will die horrible deaths, and because there is an emphasis that these people are the type of people who “did not love their souls—even to death” (Rev. 12:11). There is no reason to believe that beheading will not be reinstated as a way to execute the death penalty. It is already
occuring among some Moslem groups. [For more information on the Old Testament believers getting up at this time, see commentary on John 14:3].

“came to life.” The dead are dead, and not alive in any way. [See Appendix 4: “The Dead are Dead.”]

“1000 years.” Jesus Christ will come to earth and rule a kingdom scholars refer to as the “Millennial Kingdom” (from the Latin, mille, 1000, and annum, a year). As this verse says, it will last 1000 years. [For more on the Millennial Kingdom, see Appendix 3: “Christ’s Future Kingdom on Earth”.

20:7. “the Adversary.” The Greek word for Adversary is Satanas (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated into “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the note on Mark 1:13. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”.

“will be loosed.” The Adversary will be bound for 1000 years, allowing the restoration of Eden-like conditions on earth. Justice, no war, plenty of food, great weather, and more. In this Millennial Kingdom, the promises God made to Abraham and to Israel will be fulfilled. But after the 1000 years the Adversary and his demons will be loosed and apparently will deceive mankind in a similar way to the way he deceived Adam and Eve: by suggesting that what people have is not good enough. In this way he will amass an army of disgruntled people and attack Jerusalem (20:8, 9). On the Day of Judgment it will be clear that people’s happiness, or contentment, is less about what they actually have than what they think about what they have. People who “have everything,” can still be disgruntled and ungodly. The Old Testament alluded to the period when the demons would be imprisoned and then let loose (cp. Daniel 7:12; Isa. 24:21, 22; note that verse 22 is worded in such a way that after many days the demons will be “visited,” and the Hebrew word can mean either for good or bad, depending on the context. They can be released, punished, or both).

20:10. “the Slanderer.” This is “the Devil.” The Greek is diabolos (#1228 διάβολος). The Greek word diabolos means “slanderer.” See 20:2. [For information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 14: “Names of the Slanderer”]

“they will be tormented day and night to the ages of the ages.” This is usually translated as, “They will be tormented day and night forever.” This verse has been used to teach the eternal torment of the damned, i.e., that people who die “unsaved” burn forever in “Hell.” What the Bible really teaches is that people who die unsaved are not tormented forever, but are eventually annihilated in the flames of Gehenna. [For more information on annihilation in the lake of Fire, see Appendix 5: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

20:11. “great white throne.” What theologians refer to as “the Great White Throne Judgment” is the final judgment, and occurs at the “second resurrection.” The vast majority of the dead who are raised in this judgment will be condemned to annihilation in Gehenna (see commentary on Rev. 20:10). Jesus Christ will be the judge sitting on the throne (see commentary on Rom. 14:10).

Chapter 21
21:3. **“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

21:5. **“Look!”** The Greek word is *idou* (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!).

21:6. **I am the Alpha and the Omega.** For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:8.

   **“Beginning and the End.”** The phrase appears twice: here and Revelation 22:13. The exact meaning of the phrase “the Beginning and the End” is not given. Scholars give differing explanations of the phrase, but the meaning must be closely associated with the concepts of “Alpha and Omega” and “First and Last” because these titles are associated together (cp. Rev. 22:13). We have seen from the study of the title “Alpha and Omega” that it refers to the start and finish of something, and we have seen from the title “First and Last” (Rev. 1:17) that Christ will raise up the generations of people unto everlasting life. It is clear why Christ would be called the “Beginning and the End” in association with these concepts. He is the firstborn from the dead, and he will be the one to call the last people out of their graves, he is both the Author and Finisher of faith, he is the Man by whom God will judge the world and he is the one who will then create and bring to completion the next ages (see the notes on Heb. 1:10). There is no compelling reason to assume Jesus is God simply because of the title, “the Beginning and the End.” It is common for people of similar status to use the same title. [For more discussion on this phrase see *The Racovian Catechism*, in Polish 1605; in Latin 1609; in English 1818, available through Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, pp. 161-163.

21:9. **the bride, the wife.”** There is a lot of misinformation in Christianity about the “Bride of Christ.” There is no group of people such as Israel or the Church who are “literally” the bride. The term “bride” is one of the figures of speech God uses in His Word to bring specific meaning and emotion into the text. When we understand the subject, we can see that every saved person together is referred to as the “bride” or “wife” of Christ. [For more information on this subject, see Appendix 13: “The Bride of Christ”.]

21:16. **“stadia.”** A Roman stadia is about 600 feet. The distance is about 1,400 miles, or 2,200 kilometers. The city is probably a huge pyramid, with the throne of God and Jesus at the top. Thus it would be similar to the Holy Jerusalem in the Millennial Kingdom, with the Temple at the top of the mountain of the Lord (see Schoenheit, *The Christian’s Hope*, chapter 4).

21:18. **“The city was pure gold, like pure glass.”** This does not mean the gold is transparent, but rather that glass in the time of the apostle John could be made very pure and visibly so, and so he is saying that the gold will be pure also, not amalgamated or diluted.

21:21. **“pearls.”** Pearls were very expensive in the ancient world, and very highly valued. [For more on pearls, see commentary on Revelation 18:12].

**Chapter 22**
22:3. “and his servants will serve him.” Although the verse mentions both God and Jesus Christ, the pronoun “him” is singular, and refers to God, something that becomes clear from the rest of the verse in 22:4. Although both God and Jesus are on the throne, God has the primacy.

22:4. “and they will see his face.” Throughout history, the face of God was hidden. Moses was allowed to see God’s back, but not His face (Exod. 33:20-23). But God never wanted His people to be separate from Him, and in the Everlasting Kingdom, the saved will all see God.

“and his name will be on their foreheads.” The people in the Everlasting Kingdom will have the name of God and of Jesus on their foreheads (Revelation 14:1), but since this is singular, “his name,” it would refer to God.

22:7. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).


22:12. “Look!” The Greek word is idou (#2400 ἰδού), and it is used to get our attention. See commentary on Matthew 1:20 (“Look!”).

22:13. “Alpha and Omega.” For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:8.

“First and Last.” For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 1:17.

“Beginning and the End.” For information on this phrase, see commentary on Revelation 21:6.

22:15. “likes.” The Greek verb we translate as “likes” is phileō (#5368 φιλέω). If we say, “love,” as most versions do, we lose the meaning of phileō here, and confuse it with agapē love. Phileō love has a deep attachment, like the attachment of true friends, while agapē love does not necessarily have any feeling of attachment at all, which is why we can “love” (agapē) our enemies. The people in this verse do not “love” falsehood in the sense that they feel it is the right thing to do even though they do not enjoy it (that would be to confuse phileō with agapē), rather, the people being referred to in this verse have a deep connection to, and friendship with, falsehood. For a more complete understanding of phileō, see the note on John 21:15.


22:17. “the Spirit.” This refers to Jesus Christ. See commentary on Revelation 2:7.

22:19. “God will take away his part from the tree of life.” Tampering with God’s words, which is His communication to mankind, is a very serious sin and has serious consequences. Revelation 22:19 is part of the information the Bible gives us about the period of the book of Revelation, which directly applies to people after the Rapture, i.e., after the Christians have been caught up into heaven to be with Christ (1 Thess. 4:17). During the time of the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation, a person’s salvation was not guaranteed and thus a person could sin and not be saved. This is very clearly presented in the Old Testament, Gospels, and Revelation. It is especially clear in sections such as Ezekiel 33:12-16, and it is why when the man asked Jesus, “Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life,” Jesus answered, “If you want to enter life, obey the commandments” (Matt. 19:16, 17). It is also why the letters to the assemblies in Revelation 2:1-3:21 speak of people having to be faithful to overcome.
If a person living during the time of Tribulation takes away from the words of God, he will not receive everlasting life. In contrast, if a Christian, someone who is born again, takes away from the words of God, he is still guaranteed everlasting life [see Appendix 1: “The Permanence of Christian Salvation”]. Revelation 22:19 does not directly address Christians because Revelation is written to people left on earth after the Rapture, but we can assume that any Christian who takes away from the words of God would suffer serious consequences just as he would with many other serious sins [For information on rewards see commentary on 2 Corinthians 5:5].