

COMMENTARY ON REVELATION PART 2

Chapters 6 – 18

What happens later

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A horseman goes forth to conquer (6:1-2)

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

Zech 6:1-5 I looked up again, and there before me were four chariots coming out from between two mountains – mountains of bronze. The first chariot had red horses, the second black, the third white, and the fourth dappled – all of them powerful. I asked the angel who was speaking to me, "What are these, my lord?" The angel answered me, "These are the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world."

The imagery of the four horsemen of the apocalypse comes from the prophet Zechariah, where they are portrayed as chariots. All the latter Jewish prophets made predictions about the last days and the Messianic kingdom, especially Isaiah and Zechariah. The four chariots with their different colored horses (Zech 6:1-8) represent four winds (destructive forces), sent out from God into the world. They are agents of divine judgment, sent to punish the nations who have oppressed God's people. Behind the mysteries and judgments of life on earth, the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient God is at work, but a closer look will expose evil rulers, false messiahs, and evil spiritual forces as the real cause of the problems. The four horses are personifications of war, bloodshed, famine, and death.

In Rev 6:8 the four horsemen are described as having been given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine, and plague,

and by the wild beasts of the earth. They are to bring about the death of one-fourth of mankind. Each time the Lamb opens a seal, one of the living creatures says, 'Come', a command for the horse and its rider to come. The living creatures, who represent the living creation, are initiating the divine commands from the throne.

Some interpret the rider of the white horse as the Antichrist. Others see him as Christ, who goes out into the whole world to proclaim the gospel and save people from every nation, tribe, people, and language. He said that the gospel must first be preached to every nation (Mk 13:10). In this case the white horse is identified with the white horse of Rev 19:11. Christ is building his Church, but he doesn't go himself; he sends his servants out to do the work. And he is never associated with a bow! The four horsemen fit better together, as agents of divine judgment. The first horseman represents a victorious warrior or dictator.

A comparison can be made between the horsemen and the preliminary signs of the end of the age that Jesus gave in Mt 24, Mk 13, and Lk 21, which included false Messiahs (white), wars (red), earthquakes, and famines (black). Jesus said that these are only the beginning of birth pains. Rev 6-18 are prophecies about the great tribulation which occurs during the seven years preceding the return of the Messiah.

Two horsemen bring war and famine (6:3-6)

When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men kill each other. To him was given a large sword. When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "Two pounds of wheat for a day's wages, and six pounds of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

The color of the horses does not exactly match the four horses of Zech 6, but they have the same significance. The white horse represents conquest, the red horse bloodshed, the black horse famine, and the pale horse death. The word for pale is a yellowish-green color, which is used to describe a sick or dead person. They represent destructive forces, and they will affect everyone on earth, not just unbelievers.

Wars have been constant throughout the ages at different times and in different places. Jesus said that when we hear about wars or rumors of wars, we should not be alarmed. That will happen, but it's not the end. There will be wars and earthquakes and famines in different places, but that is just the beginning (Mk 13:7-8). The four horsemen symbolize these sufferings, but more especially under the rule of Antichrist, the last great dictator.

The pair of scales represents famine, which results in inflated prices for basic foodstuffs. The price of grain is ten to twelve times the normal. Famine often follows wars and earthquakes. If the sufferings are due to war and follow war, man is responsible, but if it is from an act of God, then God is responsible. To understand these severe judgments, we need to take note of Paul's words in Rom 1:18-20,

where he said that God will express his anger against man's godlessness and wickedness because, in their wickedness, they suppress the truth about him and his creation. God's eternal power and divine nature can be clearly seen in all that he has been made; atheists don't have an excuse.

The destiny of the world won't be disclosed until all the seals are opened, all the trumpets are blown, and all the bowls of God's wrath are poured out.

A fourth horseman brings death to a quarter of the world's population (6:7-8)

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

Ezek 5:17 I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I the LORD have spoken.

The pale horse is a personification of death and Hades, Hades being the underworld, the place of the dead. They will kill a quarter of the world's population by warfare, famine, plague, and wild beasts. We need to ask ourselves how and why a quarter of the world's population should be killed in this way. Not only that; in chapter 9 after the sixth trumpet is blown, a third of mankind is said to be killed, while in chapter 16 after the blowing of the seventh trumpet all the cities of the world collapse. Imagine all those skyscrapers and multi-story residential buildings collapsing and the carnage that would produce.

The first horseman *was given* a crown; God permits conquerors and dictators. The second and fourth horsemen *were given* power to kill, again by God's permission. We will inevitably ask ourselves why God is portrayed as wanting to kill one-quarter of mankind, billions of people. God knows everything and he is a God of love, so his decisions can be trusted. In Isa 13:12, God said he would make man scarcer than pure gold. In the context of the need for persistence, Jesus asked if he would find faith on earth when he came (Lk 18:8).

We naturally love God's kindness, but we don't like to talk much about his severity. Paul said we should consider both the kindness and severity of God (Rom 11:22). Part of the divine character may seem to us to be severe, hard, or harsh. It is the opposite of his goodness, kindness, or grace. God is kind to those who take refuge in him, and he is severe with those who reject him. This is the wrath of God which makes his deity manifest in merited punishment. God is just, and according to justice, evil must be punished. The Lord works out everything for his own purpose, even the wicked for a day of disaster (Prov 16:4). God didn't make people wicked; he made them capable of wickedness, and they decided for it and will be punished. At the end of the age, the wicked are punished on the Day of the Lord and those who die are held for punishment a thousand years later on judgment day (2 Peter 4:9). Authority is given to Death and Hades to kill a quarter of the world's population (Rev 6:8). Because of God's sovereignty, the Scriptures see God as the cause behind all events. What he allows, he wills.

In 2 Peter 3:9, we read that the Lord is being patient with us; he doesn't want anyone to perish; he wants everyone to come to repentance.

Martyrs for Jesus (6:9-11)

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

Deut 32:43 Rejoice, you nations, with his people, for he will avenge the blood of his servants; he will take vengeance on his enemies and make atonement for his land and people.

Ps 119:84 How long must your servant wait? When will you punish my persecutors?

The four apocalyptic horsemen have ridden forth portraying the troubled times that precede the consummation of this present age. When Jesus opens the fifth seal, John sees a vision of Christian martyrs. Every year of every century there have been faithful Christians sacrificing their lives for their Lord. Worldwide each year, Christian martyrs number in the tens of thousands. According to a leading human rights watchdog, Open Doors USA, 100% of Christians in 21 countries around the world experience persecution for their faith in Christ and over 215 million Christians faced high levels of persecution in 2016. Most of these countries are in the Middle East, but it also happens in North Korea, Vietnam, India, Kenya, and Nigeria.

John saw the martyrs under the altar. This doesn't mean they had bodies; it is a vision. In the Mosaic sacrificial rituals, the blood of the slaughtered animals was poured out at the base of the altar. It is a way of saying that their premature deaths on earth are from God's

perspective a sacrifice on the altar of heaven because the life of a creature is in the blood (Lev 17:11).

It is a part of every Christian's calling to be prepared for martyrdom. Jesus said, that if anyone wants to follow him, he must deny himself and take up his cross and then follow. If you are intent on hanging on to your life, you will lose it. If you are prepared to lose your life for Jesus' sake, you will save it (Mt 10:38-39). They were slaughtered because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. In other words, because they were Christians who believed in the Bible.

They were crying out to God to take vengeance on 'the inhabitants of the earth', which in Revelation always refers to mankind in its hostility to God. White robes are for believers who through faith have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb (7:14). They are usually referred to as the saints (holy ones), or God's servants. They are to wait until the day when their number will be complete; the day when Jesus will return to earth as victorious king, the day when God's people will be resurrected.

The martyrdom of the saints is also regarded as a judgment. Peter said, that if we suffer as Christians, we should not be ashamed but praise God that we bear his name. For it is time for judgment to begin with the family of God (1 Pet 4:16-17). Persecutions and martyrdom are divinely sent judgments intended to purify and perfect God's people.

The Day of the Lord (6:12-14)

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll, being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

Isa 34:4 All the stars of heaven will be dissolved, and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

Ezek 38:19-20 In my zeal and fiery wrath I declare that at that time there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel. The fish of the sea, the birds in the air, the beasts of the field, every creature that moves along the ground, and all the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble, and every wall will fall to the ground.

Joel 2:30-32 I will show wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD.

With the opening of the seventh seal (8:1), there is silence in heaven for half an hour. The final consummation of the world is not revealed at this point, but we know that it involves the establishment of the Messiah's kingdom on earth described in chapters 19-20. The opening of the sixth seal reveals the Day of the Lord as prophesied by many of the prophets. There have been various days of the Lord; times when

God entered earthly affairs with judgment. But the final Day of the Lord is the great day of God's wrath on mankind at the close of this age.

On opening the sixth seal, John sees a vision of cosmic catastrophes that happen before the Messiah descending from heaven in glory with his angels. Mark describes those days following the distress. He says the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken. It's at that time that people will see Jesus coming in clouds with great power and glory, and he'll send his angels and gather his elect from all over the earth (Mk 13:24-27).

So, the opening of the sixth seal reveals the turbulent events immediately preceding Jesus' return, the resurrection of the righteous, and the rapture of the living saints. Events associated with the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of God's wrath will help us interpret what this cosmic disturbance is all about, but for now, the focus is on physical disturbances. There will be a great earthquake, the greatest the world has ever known (16:18), which causes the cities of the world to collapse (16:19). The sun and moon are obscured by smoke, and the stars no longer shine. John's vision shows us how people will see things in the sky; the heavenly bodies themselves will not be affected. The stars won't fall to earth, although there may be meteorites or great boulders dropping down to earth from volcanos. The removal of every mountain and island from its place may refer to landslides and the submergence of islands following the great earthquake which is felt worldwide. There will be great tsunamis. The passage from Joel speaks of blood and fire and billows of smoke. Imagine the loss of life when cities collapse with the resulting fires. It will be a day of darkness and chaos.

World leaders cower before the Messiah (6:15-17)

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and everyone else, both slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can withstand it?"

Psalms 76:7 Who can stand before you when you are angry?

Isaiah 2:19 People will flee to caves in the rocks and to holes in the ground from the fearful presence of the LORD and the splendor of his majesty, when he rises to shake the earth.

Hosea 10:8b Then they will say to the mountains, "Cover us!" and to the hills, "Fall on us!"

Zephaniah 1:14-15 The great day of the LORD is near – near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the LORD is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath - a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness.

Malachi 3:2 But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?

The Day of the Lord may not be a single day, although a mighty earthquake only needs a few minutes to wreak havoc upon the world. This day also includes the arrival of the Messiah, the resurrection, and victory over the armies that surround Jerusalem. It will take months for the armies of the world to converge on Jerusalem, and we will see details of these events in chapters 9 and 16. But Jesus' coming will be the climax. Who can stand when he appears?

After the opening of the sixth seal, John sees the reaction of the world population to these chaotic events and the coming of the Messiah. Influential people can usually manage to escape from disasters, but not from this one. Kings and princes, political and military leaders, all the rich and mighty will try and hide from God on that day, to save themselves from the wrath of the Lamb, who now arrives as king. They will look for anywhere to hide. They will even ask the mountains and hills and rocks to fall on them. Such will be their terror before the splendor of the Lord. Only the saints will stand tall on that day.

Jesus has opened six of the seven seals, and they do not reveal a pretty picture, but rather judgment on a sinful world. A similar but even more severe picture will be painted as the seven trumpets are blown and the seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out. It is the climax of the battle between God and Satan, between good and evil, between the rulers of the earth and the servants of God.

144,000 of “Israel” sealed (7:1-8)

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

Isa 11:12 He will raise a banner for the nations and gather the exiles of Israel; he will assemble the scattered people of Judah from the four quarters of the earth.

Jer 49:36 I will bring against Elam the four winds from the four quarters of heaven.

Ezek 9:4 Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all detestable things that are done in it.

The sixth seal brought us to the very end of this present age when the Messiah will come. This chapter goes back a little in time, but still within the final years. It concerns God's servants, some of whose souls John had seen under the altar when the fifth seal was opened. The word

‘servants’ occurs ten times in Revelation. Twice it refers to God’s servants the prophets, and everywhere else it refers to believers in general (Rev 1:1). Four angels are restraining destructive forces that will come from all directions. These ‘four winds of the earth’ are the same as the ‘four winds of heaven’ that Zechariah spoke of (6:5), a final and more destructive manifestation of the four horsemen. In anticipation of the judgments that will follow the blowing of the trumpets in chapters 8-9, God protects his servants, not by removing them from the earth, but by sealing them (Eph 1:13-14), marking them as the possession of the Lamb and the Father (Rev 14:1, 22:5). The destructive forces that are restrained by the angels are conquest, war, famine, and death. When released, these (probably nuclear) forces will destroy land, sea, and vegetation. The trumpet judgments add rivers and springs and heavenly bodies to the list of affected areas.

The number sealed is 144,000. It is symbolic (12 x 12 x 1000) and should not be taken literally. There will be more than 144,000 saints on earth. They are sealed with the seal of the *living* God, who intervenes on behalf of his people. We are told that they come from all the tribes of Israel, 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes. Most commentators interpret them as the ‘Israel of God’, a symbolic term that Paul used to refer to all of God’s people (Gal 3:29, 6:16, Phil 3:3).

Judah is mentioned first because royalty comes from this tribe. Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, became tribes, but Joseph is listed here as well, so Dan is omitted. Some interpreters see the 144,000 as the living servants of God on earth, while the great multitude of verses 9-17 are the martyrs and believing dead standing before God’s throne in heaven.

A multitude of saints before the throne (7:9-17)

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God forever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes - who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

Dan 12:1b There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered.

Isa 49:10 They will neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or the sun beat down on them. He who has compassion on them will guide them and lead them beside springs of water.

The previous scene was on Earth and relates to saints who will be still alive. This scene is before God's throne and relates to saints who have died, a great multitude of people, Christians from every nation and tribe, speaking all languages and from every cultural group. They wear white robes, being clothed in the righteousness that Christ provides. They are saints who have died, and they may be tribulation martyrs. They hold palm branches in celebration of their salvation, and they sing praises to God and the Lamb who saved them.

The angel tells John that this multitude came out of the Great Tribulation, which has not been mentioned in Revelation before, but they may include the faithful of all times. The tribulation refers to Daniel's 'time of distress' (12:1), and Jesus' words about the end of the age in Mt 24:21, where he says that there will be *great distress unequalled from the beginning of the world until now* – and never to be equaled again.

Heaven is not explicitly mentioned, but the scene is reminiscent of the heavenly throne room in chapters 4-5. Or, perhaps this is a vision of the resurrected saints in New Jerusalem; there are many parallels with Rev 21-22. The saints are before the throne of God and serve him day and night (Rev 22:3). God wipes every tear from their eyes (Rev 21:4), and he leads them to springs of living water (21:6). There is no more suffering. The saints are protected and fully satisfied, they have entered eternal life.

The Messiah opens the final seal (8:1-6)

When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God's people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God's people, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake. Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

When the seventh seal is opened, the contents are revealed. We have come to the climax of the world's destiny. There is silence in heaven for half an hour to mark its significance. We are not told anything yet; but the worship has ceased in anticipation of the climax, which of course, is the coming of the Messiah to establish his kingdom on earth.

Meanwhile, seven angels are given trumpets to blow. Trumpets are used to make announcements. If the four horsemen represent the destructive forces of sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts, the first four trumpets announce the effect they have on the world, and the latter trumpets describe the effect they have on unbelievers.

But the significance of prayer is made first. An angel with a golden censer, used for carrying hot coals, was given much incense, which he offered to God with the prayers of the saints. Then, in answer to those prayers, the angel hurls fiery coals down to earth. Final judgment commences with the awe-inspiring presence of thunder, lightning, rumblings, and an earthquake.

Apart from God and his Messiah, the saints are the most important actors in this book. They are referred to 12 times as saints, 8 times as servants of God, and 9 times as people dressed in white robes, or fine, bright linen. They are the faithful in the churches from all time, of

which the churches of chapters 2-3 are examples. They are the overcomers, the ones who endured, the recipients of God's salvation. It is their prayers that ascend to God, and it is their shed blood that God will avenge. Many are martyrs, but they will reign with the Messiah. They come from every nation, tribe, people, and language, and in their millions, they constitute the population of New Jerusalem. They are the bride of Christ, and they will reign with him forever and ever.

Angels blow trumpets, announcing judgment on land, sea, rivers, and heavenly bodies (8:7-13)

The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water - the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

Ezek 38:22 I will execute judgment on him (Gog) with plague and bloodshed; I will pour down torrents of rain, hailstones and burning sulfur on him and on his troops and on the many nations with him.

These apocalyptic visions are ones where you must use your imagination. Picture what John saw, and then imagine how it might be played out in the 21st century.

The hail is reminiscent of the plague inflicted on Pharaoh in Ex 9, and the prophecy against Gog in Ezek 38. But here blood and fire are added, and the first four trumpets announce the effect that these plagues have on the environment, the earth, the sea, the rivers and springs, and the heavenly bodies. This is real global warming. It is judgment carried out by God's angels.

One-third of the earth and its trees are burnt, and all the grass. This isn't the result of violent hailstorms with lightning which starts bushfires that burn one-third of the earth's surface. It is more likely the result of nuclear warfare.

Then one-third of the sea is affected. Something *like* a huge mountain (*not* a mountain!), all ablaze, is *thrown* into the sea. Some intercontinental ballistic missiles weigh 100 tons. Is this a great naval battle? One-third of the sea becomes blood, possibly the result of saltwater algae called 'red tide'. It is on the increase with global warming, increased levels of carbon dioxide, and salinity, and it kills fish, even dolphins. One-third of the fish will die, and one-third of the ships will be destroyed.

John sees a blazing meteorite falling from the sky onto rivers and springs, and people die from drinking the water. Its name is Wormwood. Is it a coincidence that the meaning of Chernobyl is wormwood? This could represent nuclear radiation polluting water which becomes bitter or poisonous for people to drink.

The fourth trumpet is followed by a reduction of one-third of the light of both day and night, as one-third of the sun, moon, and stars is blotted out, presumably by smoke. The result is that one-third of the day and the night are without any light.

An eagle flying in the sky gives a warning about three more calamities. The birds of prey are going to have a feast. These latter woes fall upon 'the inhabitants of the earth', the unbelievers. The following verses only speak of two woes following the fifth and sixth trumpets. But the seventh trumpet heralds the arrival of the kingdom and the resurrection of the righteous, which for unbelievers will be a time of terror and judgment, the third woe.

Torturing unbelievers for five months (9:1-6)

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

Joel 1:4, 2:10-11 What the locust swarm has left the great locusts have eaten; what the great locusts have eaten the young locusts have eaten; what the young locusts have left other locusts have eaten. ... Before them the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty is the army that obeys his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?

The star that falls from heaven to earth may be Satan (Rev 12:9), or the angel of the Abyss known as Abaddon (Apollyon in Greek), which means Destroyer, or the destroying angel who is referred to several times in the Old Testament. He is given the key to the Abyss, which in ancient cosmology was the dwelling place of demons (Lk 8:31, Rev 20:1) in the depths of the sea. As the Abyss and demons are not part of the physical creation, the actions described here are symbolic rather

than literal but no less real. Smoke pours forth into the world, maybe from volcanoes or warfare, and it darkens the sun and the sky. The world during these final years will be a frightening place to live. Compare the fifth bowl that is poured out on the throne of the Antichrist (16:10), resulting in his kingdom being plunged into darkness.

Out of the smoke appear locusts, which are a symbol of destruction. Joel 2:1-11 pictures locusts as a large and mighty army, which sound more like myriads of tanks leaping over the hills, with their firepower leaving destruction behind them. The following verses suggest that this is the meaning here. These are not literal locusts that eat vegetation, nor are we told that they are demons. The pain they inflict is like a scorpion sting, one of the severest pains known to man. A modern non-lethal crowd-control weapon is the Pulsed energy projectile or PEP which produces a high level of pain. The torment is directed at the unbelievers who don't have God's seal for five months. This means that God's servants are still there; they haven't been raptured. The unbelievers will long to die to escape the torment, but death will elude them. The sun and the sky will be darkened by smoke. Jesus said that right after the troubles of those days, the sun and moon will be darkened, the stars will (appear to) fall from the sky, and the powers of heaven will be shaken or disturbed (Mt 24:29).

An army as numerous as locusts (9:7-12)

The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails, they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon. The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

Joel 1:6 A nation has invaded my land, a mighty army without number; it has the teeth of a lion, the fangs of a lioness.

Joel 2:2-5a A day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come. Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them a desert waste – nothing escapes them. They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle.

Locusts don't have a king or leader; we are not talking about literal locusts, but an army of another kind. They look like horses prepared for battle. The crowns of gold mean they are out to conquer, and the human faces mean they are controlled by men. They have long hair

(antennae), and teeth like lions; they are cruel and inhumane (Joel 1:6). In Joel 2:4-5 their breastplates of iron and thundering noise fit a description of armored tanks. Their tails may be guns that cause destruction and inflict pain.

The army of locusts in Joel chapter 2 is a harbinger of the great and dreadful day of the Lord (Joel 2:31) when the Lord gathers the nations to the Valley of Jehoshaphat to enter into judgment against them (3:2).

In Rev 11:7 the Antichrist is called the beast that comes up from the Abyss. In Rev 13:1 the beast comes out of the sea. Some believed the Abyss or bottomless pit was to be found in the depths of the sea. It seems that this angel of the Abyss, the destroying angel, will use the armies of the Antichrist to bring about this torment on unbelievers.

The events following the fifth bowl (16:10) cover the same events that follow the fifth trumpet, but it is described differently. When the fifth bowl is poured out on the throne of the beast (Antichrist), his kingdom is plunged into darkness. Men gnaw their tongues in agony, but it is not stated what is the source of their pain. The common points are the presence of the Antichrist, the darkness, and the excruciating pain experienced by unbelievers.

An army of 200 million kills one-third of humanity (9:13-21)

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The release of four demons who were bound at the Euphrates River reminds us that there are demonic forces behind these events. The Euphrates River is in Iraq, and this passage should be compared with 16:12, where the sixth angel pours out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water is dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.

After the blowing of the sixth trumpet, 200 million troops, mounted on horses, are released at the Euphrates River. One-third of mankind

is killed by the fire, smoke, and sulfur that come out of the mouths of their 'horses'.

The red, blue, and yellow breastplates match the colors of fire, smoke, and sulfur which comes out of the horses' mouths. John is seeing a vision of modern-day warfare; the horses and their riders may be tanks and their drivers. The lion's head symbolizes cruelty and destruction. The power in their mouths and tails are no doubt guns, fore and aft. As one-third of mankind is killed, the warfare must be nuclear. The context fits that of Ezek 38, which is an attack on a regathered nation of Israel (38:16) by hordes from the north, descendants of Japheth (Gen 10:2-5), and the south.

The pouring out of the sixth bowl (16:12-16) gives us more details of this battle. Demons are sent out by Satan, Antichrist, and the false prophet to gather *the kings of the whole world* for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. The place of the battle is identified as Armageddon (16:16) in Israel. Many of these leaders come from the East (16:12), and they will gather their armies under the Antichrist to make war against Jerusalem (Joel 3:2, Zech 14:2).

Dan 11:36-45 is interpreted by many to refer to Antichrist, and if so, the southern and northern kings will come not only to attack Jerusalem but also to fight against Antichrist. The world's Muslims are sworn enemies of Israel with a vehement desire to destroy the State of Israel. Over one billion Muslims live east of the Euphrates River, and many of them have traveled to fight in Iraq and Syria. There are radical Islamic cells in almost every province of Indonesia.

The similarity with the Egyptian plagues in the book of Exodus suggests that the purpose of these plagues is that people might repent of their stubbornness and idolatry, but rebellious mankind will not repent of their habitual sins summarized as idolatry (false worship), corruption, murder, and shameless immorality.

An angel announces Messiah's rule (10:1-7)

Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down." Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

Gen 9:9-12 I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you and with every living creature that was with you – the birds, the livestock and all the wild animals, all those that came out of the ark with you – every living creature on earth. I establish my covenant with you. Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth. And God said, "This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth."

We don't know the identity of this majestic angel; only that he is a messenger from God who announces that there will be no more delay. God's redemptive purpose as announced by the Old Testament prophets is about to be fulfilled with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. When the trumpet sounds in Rev 11:15, we are told that the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever. The Messiah will then reign on earth as announced by the prophets (Isa 9:6-7).

The rainbow is symbolic of God's faithfulness to his covenant with creation. He promised not to destroy creation again as he did with the worldwide flood. The angel's legs are like fiery pillars, which recall the pillar of fire that guided and protected Israel during their exodus from Egypt and their desert wanderings.

The little scroll is smaller than the scroll of the destiny of the world (5:1). This one contains details of the final three and a half years of that destiny. The angel roars like a lion to make his awesome, terrifying announcement. It is an act of judgment as well as an act of redemption. He stands above sea and land, emphasizing the total creation, or maybe the sea represents the nations and the land of Israel. He swears by God who lives forever and who created everything. The seven thunders sound from God's throne (4:5, 8:5, 11:19, 16:18) and express a decree of God which John was told to seal up. Daniel was also told to seal up a vision he had which concerned Antichrist and his destruction of the holy people in the distant future (8:26). Thunder expresses a warning that God's anger is about to burst forth in judgment.

The majestic angel is announcing the end of the world as we know it. There will be great destruction and at least a third of mankind will die, but the world and God's people will survive.

Glorification will follow suffering (10:8-11)

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land." So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

Ps 119:103 How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!

Ezek 2:8 – 3:3 But you, son of man, listen to what I say to you. Do not rebel like that rebellious people; open your mouth and eat what I give you. Then I looked, and I saw a hand stretched out to me. In it was a scroll, which he unrolled before me. On both sides of it were written words of lament and mourning and woe. And he said to me, "Son of man, eat what is before you, eat this scroll; then go and speak to the people of Israel." So I opened my mouth, and he gave me the scroll to eat. Then he said to me, "Son of man, eat this scroll I am giving you and fill your stomach with it. So I ate it, and it tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth."

At the beginning of his ministry, the prophet Ezekiel was offered a scroll to eat and it wasn't a sweet coffee scroll! It contained words of lament and mourning and woe, but it tasted sweet to him because it was the word of God. John, on the other hand, ate a smaller scroll that

tasted sweet to him, perhaps for the same reason, but afterward, he had a stomachache. The sweetness was also because of the glorious outcome, the coming of the Messiah, and the establishment of his kingdom upon the earth. But it resulted in a stomachache when he realized all the suffering God's people would have to go through before that glorious day. You can read through the book of Revelation and rejoice that Jesus is coming back and that he will have total victory over evil. But when you think about it more deeply, you will notice that the saints are handed over to Antichrist for three and a half years. They are not taken out of the world before the trouble begins, and it appears that there will be many Christian martyrs. That is why John got his stomach ache.

When Ezekiel ate his scroll, he was told to go to the house of Israel and speak God's word to them. He was also told to enact a siege of Jerusalem, as a warning to Israel. That event will be repeated during the Great Tribulation, so John's visions of Rev 11-12 seem to relate especially to Israel and the people of Jerusalem.

John is told he must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings. This relates to the rest of the book of Revelation. Chapters 19-22 would have been very sweet to him, but chapters 11-18 describe the persecution that the saints will have to undergo under the Antichrist and the destruction and suffering the world will suffer as God pours out his wrath. Christians who understand the book of Revelation are the only people who know how the world is going to come to an end. We have an obligation therefore to study this book carefully and be witnesses to its teaching. People want to know the answers as the time draws near.

John measures the temple (11:1-2)

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, with its worshipers. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months."

Dan 7:25 He (Antichrist) will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.

Dan 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And at the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him.

Dan 12:11 From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abominations that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1290 days.

Lk 21:24 Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

This vision continues from chapter 10 and is about the nation of Israel, which became a nation on May 14th 1948, Jerusalem, which became the official capital in 2018, and the temple which will be rebuilt in the holy city during the first half of the tribulation after the Antichrist has made a peace deal with Israel. Paul prophesied that the Antichrist would set himself up in the temple, proclaiming himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4). Jesus also spoke about the time when people will see standing in the temple, the abomination that causes desolation, spoken

of through the prophet Daniel (Mt 24:15). Daniel said this would happen in the middle of the tribulation period (Dan 9:27, 12:11). The Antichrist will make a covenant with ‘many’ for seven years, and then break it halfway through. He will invade it, put an end to sacrifice, and set up an image of himself in God’s temple proclaiming himself to be God.

Ezekiel had seen a vision (chapters 40-48) of a new temple for restored Israel and a man measuring it with a long measuring rod. Now John sees a vision of a temple and is told to go and measure it and the Jewish worshipers who were there. He is told to exclude the outer court, because it will be given over to the Gentiles, who under the Antichrist will trample the holy city for 42 months (Lk 21:24), the second half of the tribulation (Rev 13:5). Half the city would go into exile (Zech 14:2) and God would look after them in the desert (Rev 12:6,14).

The 42 months alludes to Dan 7:25 where it is expressed as ‘a time, times and half a time’. During this period of three and a half years or 1260 days, the Antichrist will slander God, his dwelling place, and the inhabitants of heaven and severely persecute the saints and conquer them (13:6-7).

2 Thess 2:4 and Mt 24:15 indicate that a temple will be built in Jerusalem. But the Antichrist will set himself up in it as God and demand universal worship. The false prophet will set up an image in honor of the beast in the temple and order the execution of those who don’t worship him (Rev 13:15-16).

Two Christians preach in Jerusalem (11:3-7)

And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth. They are “the two olive trees” and the two lampstands, and “they stand before the Lord of the earth.” If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. They have power to shut up the heavens so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them.

Ex 7:17b With the staff that is in my (Moses) hand I will strike the water of the Nile, and it will be changed into blood.

1 Kings 17:1b As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word.

Jer 5:14 Because the people have spoken these words, I will make my words in your mouth a fire and these people the wood it consumes.

Zech 4:3, 13 Also there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left. ... These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.

Mal 4:5 “See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes.”

The two witnesses are Christians who will proclaim God's word to Israel and the Jews in Jerusalem, where their Lord was crucified. They are metaphorically referred to as two olive trees and two lampstands. The olive oil used for anointing is symbolic of the Holy Spirit. The lampstands support lamps that burn the oil, and here symbolize two men who are empowered by God's Spirit. In Zech 3-4 the lampstands referred to the civil and religious leaders; the governor Zerubbabel, and the high priest Joshua, *whose job it was to complete the building of the second temple* in Jerusalem around 520 BC, and who were empowered by the Holy Spirit to do so (Zech 4:6). The two witnesses may be responsible for the rebuilding of the temple during the first half of the tribulation, but their witness is during the second half. They will be miraculously protected from harm until their ministry is finished.

The witnesses are modeled after Moses (Ex 7:17) and Elijah (1 Kings 17:1). They will be empowered to do miracles throughout the time of their ministry, similar to the way Moses and Elijah ministered. They will dress in sackcloth to symbolize their message of repentance. Fire will come from their mouths and kill their enemies. In Elijah's case, he called down fire from heaven (2 Kings 1:9-12). They will prevent rain from falling during their ministry as Elijah did for three and a half years (James 5:17). They will turn water into blood, as Moses did, and the effect of their ministry will be felt worldwide as they can strike the earth with every kind of calamity at will. There will be tension between these powerful, godly preachers and the powerful, godless Antichrist, who will overrun Jerusalem for the final three and a half years of the tribulation period. When they finish their work, the Antichrist is permitted to kill them.

The two witnesses are brought back to life (11:8-14)

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

Isa 1:10a Hear the word of the LORD, you rulers of Sodom.

The setting of chapter 11 is Jerusalem, which is here identified as a city figuratively called Sodom (immoral), and Egypt (oppressive), where their Lord was crucified. The witnesses are finally killed by the Antichrist, but after three and a half days they come back to life, stand up, and ascend to heaven. Unbelievers from every tribe and language will gaze at them (maybe on their mobile phones and televisions) and gloat over their downfall. But then there is a severe earthquake. A tenth of Jerusalem collapses and '7,000' people are killed. This may be the same 'severe earthquake' mentioned in Rev 6:12 and 16:18.

The survivors of the inhabitants of Jerusalem, glorify God. In Rev 14:7 'giving glory to God' is bracketed with fearing him and worshiping him, in Rev 16:9 it is bracketed with repentance. Here it prepares the way for Israel's conversion upon the Messiah's return as predicted by Zechariah. The Lord will pour out on the house of David and *the*

inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on him whom they pierced (crucified), and they will mourn for him. On that day a fountain will be opened to the house of David and *the inhabitants of Jerusalem*, to cleanse them from sin and impurity (12:10, 13:1). See also Isa 59:20 where the Redeemer comes to Zion, to those in Jacob who repent of their sins, and Rom 11:26 where all Israel is saved, as the deliverer comes from Zion and banishes ungodliness from Jacob.

The second woe has passed; the third woe is imminent. It is probably to be identified with the events following the blowing of the seventh trumpet, the arrival of the Messiah, and his victory over the armies that surrounded Jerusalem.

The arrival of the Messianic kingdom announced (11:15-19)

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your people who revere your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth." Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a severe hailstorm.

Ps 2:1-2 Why do the nations conspire, and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.

Dan 2:44 In the time of those kings, the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed, nor will it be left to another people. It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever.

Zech 14:9 The LORD will be king over all the earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

After the seventh trumpet is blown, a prophetic announcement is made that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Messiah. The kingdoms of the world will be destroyed together with their armies and Messiah's sovereignty will be established. The

details of the destruction are given in chapter 18, where Babylon and all the cities associated with it are destroyed along with those who destroy the earth; the armies who have gathered at Armageddon.

The 24 elders worship the Lord in anticipation; the Messiah is about to show his great power and *begin his reign* on earth. His great power will be displayed in the final conflict against the forces of evil on the Day of the Lord. The Lord God Almighty often refers to God, but here it is the Son of Man, the Messiah, who will be king. The Messianic reign will begin. God always reigns on his heavenly throne, so in Rev 1:4 God was described as him who is, and who was, and who is to come, but here he is the One who is and who was; he has come at last.

Ps 2 is Messianic and is frequently quoted in the New Testament. The Lord says he has installed his King on Zion his holy hill. He will make the nations his inheritance, the ends of the earth his possession. There are three things mentioned in our reading, that the Messiah will do, although they are not in chronological order: He will judge the dead, as anticipated in 6:10 and carried out in 20:11-15 after the millennium. He will reward the saints, which will happen at the beginning of the millennium, after the resurrection of the righteous. Thirdly, he will destroy the destroyers of the earth, the godless destructive armies (19:19,21).

God lives in a different realm to us; so, references to his temple and the ark of the covenant are symbolic, not literal. They are what John saw in his vision. The temple symbolizes the fellowship God has with his people; the ark symbolizes his covenant. He will fulfill all his promises. The thunder, lightning, earthquake, and hailstorm are on earth, as described in Rev 16:17-21 when the seventh bowl is poured out.

The birth and ascension of the Messiah (12:1-6)

A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

Gen 37:9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

Ps 2:9 You will break them with a rod of iron; you will dash them to pieces like pottery.

The cosmic drama which involves God's plan for the world is a spiritual battle in the heavenly realm between God and Satan. Satan gained power over humanity, because of the sin of Adam and Eve. Understanding this drama helps us understand the spiritual significance of persecution. In the past, Satan set out to destroy the baby Messiah; in the future, he will seek to abort Messiah's reign on earth by destroying God's people, both Christians and Israel. There'll be many martyrs, but not a hair of their heads will perish.

In this vision, John sees a woman who gives birth to a child who will rule the nations with an iron scepter. An enormous red dragon plans to devour the child, but he fails. The ten horns and seven crowns

symbolize his power and authority. The woman flees to the desert to be protected by God for 1,260 days. The child is Jesus, the Messiah. It is he who will rule the nations rigorously with an iron scepter (Ps 2:9, Rev 19:15). The mother is not Mary, but Israel, depicted symbolically, as in Joseph's dream (Gen 37:9-11). The red dragon is Satan (identified in verse 9), who through the edict of Herod, tried to kill the baby Jesus. Jesus was taken up to God at the ascension. The 1,260 days relate to the last three and a half years of this age when Israel will be oppressed by the Antichrist and his worldwide empire.

Verse 4 speaks of the devil sweeping one-third of the stars from heaven to earth. They are not literal stars, and most commentators believe they are fallen angels. Jesus said that an eternal fire had been prepared for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41). These 'angels' are what we would call evil spirits or demons. Jude 6 speaks of them as angels who didn't keep their own position but abandoned their assigned place. See also Isa 14:12-14 and Lk 10:18.

God will protect Israel in an uninhabited place for 1260 days. This will happen after Satan is thrown down to earth, which is described in the following section. It is the same 42-month period that the Gentiles trample on the holy city; the time when the Antichrist oppresses God's people (13:5).

Satan and his demons driven out of heaven

(12:7-12)

Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down - that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

Dan 12:1 At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people – everyone whose name is found written in the book – will be delivered.

There is war in heaven! Victory over Satan in the heavenly realm will precede the victory of Israel over her enemies on earth. The archangel Michael, who is the protector of Israel (Dan 12:1), is at war against Satan, who is out to destroy Israel. The nation of Israel is loved by God because of the patriarchs, for God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Rom 11:28-29). Satan is defeated and loses his place in heaven. This evil angel, who leads the whole world astray, is hurled down to earth together with his demons. This expulsion of Satan from heaven

happens three and a half years before the end. His time on earth is short, and it will result in the final deliverance of God's people, a great manifestation of God's power, and the establishment of his kingdom on earth, under the authority of the Messiah.

Two-thirds of Jews will lose their lives (Zech 13:8-9) and an unknown percentage of Christians, but in those final days, faith will be more important than life. Victory over Satan will be accomplished primarily because of the cross and the blood that Christ shed on their behalf, but also because of the faithful testimony that Christians will bear in the face of persecution and martyrdom.

Jesus said that there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world and never to be equalled again. He said if those days hadn't been reduced, *no one would survive*, but for the sake of the elect those days will be reduced (Mt 24:21-22). Knowing he only has a short time, Satan, in his fury, will bring much destruction to the earth and the sea because of warfare that he instigates (Rev 16:13-14).

Satan persecutes Israel and the Church

(12:13-17)

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

Ex 19:4 You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

When Satan is banished to the earth, his first inclination is to destroy Israel. The river of water that he spews in their direction is a wave of persecution, comparable to that of the Nazis. Some people interpret the woman as being the Church, but it wasn't the Church who gave birth to Jesus. The eagle's wings give us a clue that she is Israel (Ex 19:4). The Lord brought Israel from Egypt into the Sinai desert 'on eagles' wings', and at the end, he is going to look after them again, during those 1260 days tribulation, the time of Jacob's trouble. It will be an awful time, especially for Israel, but Israel will be saved out of it (Jer 30:7). There is a place in the wilderness that God has prepared for Israel during the three and a half years of Satan's rage and Antichrist's oppression. Just where that might be, nobody knows.

The *earth* that will help the woman may refer to the inhabitants of the world. *The earth* in Revelation often refers to its inhabitants. Jesus said we are the salt of the *earth*, meaning that we are to have a good

influence on society (the inhabitants of the world). Revelation 14:3 speaks of the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the *earth*, again meaning that they had been redeemed from among the inhabitants of the world. It could mean something like the United Nations deciding in favor of Israel, as they did on May 14th, 1948, when Israel became a modern nation (Isa 66:7-8). Or the United States may come to the rescue of neighboring Jordan.

When Satan fails in his effort to exterminate Israel, he turns on the other offspring of Judaism, the Church, those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony that Jesus bore. In other words, Bible-believing Christians who are committed to Jesus. We read about how he makes war on the saints in chapter 13.

The rise of the final world empire (13:1-4)

The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was filled with wonder and followed the beast. People worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against it?"

Dan 7:7 After that, in my vision at night I looked, and there before me was a fourth beast – terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts and it had ten horns.

Dan 7:23-24a He gave me this explanation: 'The fourth beast is a fourth kingdom that will appear on earth. It will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it. The ten horns are ten kings who will come from this kingdom.'

The dragon, Satan, is seen standing by the sea because he is about to empower an international world government that will include all coastlands and islands of the sea. In 11:7 and 17:8 the beast comes out of the Abyss, which was believed to be in the deepest sea. The beast mentioned in verses 1-4 is not a man; it is a worldwide empire as described in Dan 7. This beast from the sea is an international coalition of countries and political globalization. Satanically empowered, it will

be overtly anti-Christian and anti-Jewish. It has seven heads and ten horns just like the dragon who empowers it. The whole world will be deceived by its ideology. This empire will be oppressive, violent, blasphemous, and dictatorial. The crowns are on the horns rather than the heads, they are symbolic of power. The crowned horns are leaders. 'Ten' may simply express the comprehensiveness of this global coalition. The seven heads are interpreted in Rev 17:9-10 as seven hills, but it adds that they are also seven kings. Rome was known to have been built on seven hills, suggesting that the final world empire is a revived Roman empire, which included parts of North Africa and the Middle East.

One of the heads of the beast had a fatal wound which was healed. a way of saying that the empire ceased to exist for some time and then was resurrected (Rev 17:8). The statue that Daniel saw in chapter 2 had legs of iron (Rome, the fourth empire which stretched from Britain to Iraq), and ten toes that were part iron and part clay. The legs and toes all represent the same world empire, the ten toes symbolizing the unstable confederation of the nations of the world in the end times.

The final world empire will involve political, economic, and cultural globalization of which the UN will surely have a key role. The whole world will be full of wonder which becomes worship. They will embrace it, submit to its laws, and they will worship Satan. Just as the Father gave Jesus authority over the whole world, so Satan will give his power, throne, and authority to the leader of this final empire. According to Daniel, this world government will be very frightening; powerful, violent, destructive, and despotic, even before the rise of the Antichrist (Dan 7:8, Rev 13:5).

Antichrist opposes God and the saints (13:5-8)

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. It was given power to make wage war against God's holy people and to conquer them. And it was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast - all whose names have not been written in the Lamb's book of life, the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.

Dan 7:8 While I was thinking about the horns, there before me was another horn, a little one, which came up among them; and three of the first horns were uprooted before it. This horn had eyes like the eyes of a human being and a mouth that spoke boastfully.

Dan 7:21 As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them.

Dan 7:24b-25 After them another king will arise, different from the earlier ones; he will subdue three kings. He will speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half time.

Dan 11:36 The king will do as he pleases. He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods. He will be successful until the time of wrath is completed, for what has been determined must take place.

The beast in these verses no longer refers to the empire, but to its infamous leader, the Antichrist. He is regularly called the beast in Revelation but is commonly known as the Antichrist. He is the 'mouth' given to the beast, to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for 42 months. He is described in 2 Thess 2:4 as a man of lawlessness who opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped. He even sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Dan 7:8 describes him as a little horn (an insignificant leader) who rises to power by defeating three other leaders. He will lead this empire that will rule the world during the final years before the Messiah's return. He will vehemently oppose all worship – except for himself. He has eyes (intelligence) and a mouth (arrogance). He will embody satanic evil and have great military and political power.

In both Dan 7:21 and Rev 13:7 we are told that the Antichrist will wage war against the saints and defeat them. This will be the most intense and extensive persecution that the Church has ever undergone. If God had not informed us about what was to come, it would have been a very confusing time for Christians. But God has warned us and told us to be patient and faithful, even unto death. The Antichrist will be a world dictator, more powerful than Hitler. He will have authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. Everyone will be forced to worship him and to submit to his satanically inspired authority. Only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life will have the courage to disobey him, at the cost of their lives.

The phrase 'from the creation of the world' relates to the Book of Life, as it does in 17:8, rather than the Lamb that was slain. Jesus' death was decreed by God from eternity, but it happened in time when Jesus was crucified.

The saints will require endurance (13:9-10)

Whoever has ears, let them hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity they will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword they will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of God's people.

Jer 15:2 And if they ask you, "Where shall we go?" tell them, this is what the LORD says: "Those destined for death, to death; those for the sword, to the sword; those for starvation, to starvation; those for captivity, to captivity."

This call for patience endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints is repeated in Rev 14:12-13. It is one of the most important themes in the book. The elect are those who obey God. They are not ignorant of his eternal plan to save believers through their faith in Christ. When facing imprisonment or martyrdom in the final days, they will find the courage and strength to be loyal to their Lord. After all, to turn from the Lord and submit to the Antichrist would in reality be to worship Satan.

If we are there, the Lord will expect us to be faithful and brave. That time will be extremely difficult, and only the elect will have the courage to disobey the Antichrist and be victorious. On that day our faith will enable us to overcome. How could we submit to the instructions of the Antichrist or the false prophet, who are both inspired by Satan? How could we bow down and worship him, or allow the number of his name to be stamped on our bodies? On dying, our spirits will go to be with the Lord (2 Cor 5:8), and a short time later our bodies will be resurrected, and we will rule the world with the Messiah. In the last years of the Great Tribulation, there will be no reason for Christians to remain in the condemned world; death will be preferable. Suffering for Christ's sake and believing in him are both gifts or privileges that God has given us (Phil 1:29). As Christians, we can expect both an abundance of suffering for his sake and also an abundance of comfort (2 Cor 1:5). We share in his sufferings so that we can share in his glory (Rom 8:17). Paul said he wanted to know Christ and his resurrection power better, by sharing in his sufferings even to the point of death (Phil 3:10). We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God (Acts 14:22).

The false prophet (13:11-18)

Then I saw a second beast, coming out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb, but it spoke like a dragon. It exercised all the authority of the first beast on its behalf and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people. Because of the signs it was given power to perform on behalf of the first beast, it deceived the inhabitants of the earth. It ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.

Mt 24:24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect.

2 Thess 2:9, 10a The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie, and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing.

John sees another beast coming out of the earth. Empires arise from the sea, but men arise from the earth. This beast is not an empire, but a man, a bestial man. He will appear gentle like a lamb, but he will speak like a dragon. He is a deceiver who will perform miracles with satanic power. He is closely associated with the Antichrist, who is also called the beast (13:14), and he will instruct everyone to worship him and be branded with his mark, a sign of allegiance. He will order people to set up an image of Antichrist which he will animate, so that it can speak. This is the abomination that causes desolation standing in the holy place (Mt 24:15). Paul said the lawless one will set himself up in God's temple and proclaim himself to be God (2 Thess 2:4). Anyone who refuses to worship the image will be executed, and he will force everyone, whether rich or poor, to receive a mark on the right hand or forehead. Without the mark, nobody will be able to buy or sell anything.

The mark is 666. Nobody can identify the name it represents yet. It is the name of the beast, that is, the Antichrist's name. 666 is the sum of his name. Deriving numbers from names is a practice called gematria. As Revelation is written in Greek, we need to think in terms of Greek spelling. For example, Jesus in Greek is Ιησούς. Ι = 10, η = 8, σ = 200, ο = 70, ú = 400, ζ = 200. The number of Jesus' name is 888.

This second beast is otherwise called the false prophet (Rev 16:13, 19:20, 20:10) because he is a religious figure. He will perform miracles and oppose all religions except his own. He will exalt the Antichrist over everything that is called God or is worshiped, and he will execute those who disobey his orders.

The word 'antichrist' does not occur in the book of Revelation. He is mentioned in John's letters (1 Jn 2:18, 22, 4:3, 2 Jn 7), where he is depicted as a religious deceiver or an adversary of the Messiah. Paul calls him the lawless one. In Revelation, he is referred to as the beast over 30 times. Satan, the Antichrist, and the false prophet are a triumvirate, the evil equivalent of the Holy Trinity.

The Messiah and the saints standing on Mount Zion (14:1-5)

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

Ps 2:6 I have installed my King on Zion, my holy mountain.

Joel 2:32 And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved; for on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there will be deliverance, as the LORD has said, even among the survivors whom the LORD calls.

Jer 2:3 Israel was holy to the LORD, the first fruits of his harvest.

Zeph 3:13 The remnant of Israel will do no wrong; they will speak no lies, nor will deceit be found in their mouths.

Mount Zion was also called the City of David, and it became synonymous with Jerusalem. Here we have the victorious Messiah standing with the saints, those who had been sealed with the seal of the living God (7:2). This scene contrasts the state of the saints with the unbelievers in chapter 13 who received the mark of the beast. The Messiah has not arrived on earth yet; this vision takes place in the

throne room of heaven with the living creatures and the elders. The Mount Zion John sees is the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12:22), the holy city which will come down out of heaven, so that the Lamb might rule over the world together with the victorious Church. There is loud joyful music playing as the saints sing a new song. These are the overcomers who have successfully passed through the Great Tribulation. The words of the new song they sing may be the same as those sung by the living creatures and the elders in Rev 5:9-10 or the words they sing in Rev 15:3-4.

The saints are described as virgins. This word picture distinguishes them as being morally pure and faithful. They didn't worship the Antichrist or receive his mark on their bodies. They follow Jesus, the great Shepherd of the sheep, wherever he goes. They are honest and blameless. They are now perfected, and their sins are forgiven. Their way of life is in marked contrast to that of the evildoers described in Rev 22:15.

They have been redeemed and they are offered to God and Jesus as a choice offering. Rev 14:14-16 describes the harvest of the righteous (the first fruits), while verses 17-20 describe the harvest of the wicked. The righteous are an acceptable offering, redeemed from the inhabitants of the earth, and purchased from among men (all mankind) with the blood of Christ (1 Pet 1:18-19).

The Gospel preached to all nations (14:6-8)

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth - to every nation, tribe, language, and people. He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water." A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

Isa 21:9 Babylon has fallen, has fallen! All the images of its gods lie shattered on the ground.

Chapter 13 informed us about the satanically inspired final world empire and the false prophet who will enforce his message on everyone: to worship the Antichrist and submit to his government.

Chapter 14 started with an interlude about the Messiah and the saints, who didn't defile themselves with the pagan world system, and who are now in heaven.

This is now followed by three angels who warn about impending judgment, before a symbolic description of the harvest of the earth, of both the righteous and then the wicked. It is difficult to envisage three angels preaching the gospel in mid-air to unbelievers on earth, so we need to interpret these angels as messengers who symbolize the church with her message of eternal salvation through faith in Christ, acceptance of which is the only way to escape the impending judgment of the world. John saw the angels flying in mid-air, for all to see, proclaiming the gospel to every nation, tribe, language, and people. This is in fulfilment of the Lord's promise in Mt 24:14 that the gospel would be preached in the whole world, by the church, as a witness to all nations, and then the end would come.

The only way of escape is to fear God and give him glory, to recognize that he is the Creator of all things and that one day he will judge everyone according to what they have done. Belief in the good news about Jesus Christ is not explicitly mentioned, but it is implicit in the word 'gospel' which means 'good news'.

The messages of the three ‘messengers’ are related. The first gives the invitation to all to believe in the gospel, the second announces the fall of the rebellious world system with its luxuries and moral decadence, while the third warns that everyone who worships the Antichrist will share in his judgment and suffer eternal punishment in hell. As many Christians are martyred, the whole world will look on, and the church will preach its message.

The second angel announces the fall of Babylon. Historically Babylon was the arch-enemy of Israel, the powerful empire that conquered Jerusalem in 587 BC, destroyed Solomon’s temple, and took the Jewish people and their king into exile. The name is used here symbolically of the last world empire associated with the Antichrist. The angel, by quoting Isaiah’s prophecy that Babylon has fallen, is announcing that God is about to overthrow the rebellious civilization who are willing accomplices with the Antichrist and the false prophet, who have intoxicated the world with their corruption and idolatry.

Beware of worshiping Antichrist (14:9-13)

A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and its image and receives its mark on their forehead or on their hand, they, too, will drink the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. They will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment will rise forever and ever. There will be no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image, or for anyone who receives the mark of its name." This calls for patient endurance on the part of the people of God who obey his commands and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

Jer 25:15 This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, said to me: "Take from my hand this cup filled with the wine of my wrath and make all the nations to whom I send you drink it."

The third angel warns people that if they worship the beast (Antichrist) or his image, or if they receive his mark on their bodies, they too will experience God's wrath. Those who worship the beast are also worshipping Satan. That is the choice everyone will be forced to make: throw in your lot with Christ or with Satan. Refusing to worship Antichrist won't be easy. The whole world will follow him, and those who refuse will be out on a limb. No one will be able to buy or sell anything without the mark of the beast on their hand or forehead. The image of the Antichrist will be able to speak, and it will order the executions of those who don't worship it. The saints will endure and be faithful.

The alternative is to be tormented in hell in the presence of the Messiah and his angels after the last judgment (20:15).. This divine punishment is eternal (20:10). The language may be symbolic, but the torment is

real. Jesus speaks about the dangers of hell more than anyone else (Mt 18:8); it is not a doctrine that can be watered down.

The saints are here given a clear warning. They are aptly described as people who obey God's commands and believe and trust in Jesus. If they undergo martyrdom, they will be blessed. It is not a shame or even a disaster. They will be relieved of their sufferings, and they will be rewarded, as Jesus promised the overcomers in each of the churches in chapters 2-3. They will be rewarded for their devotion and service for Christ over the years. Salvation is a gift, but believers will be rewarded for what they have done. Paul's advice is that we should always give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord because our labor in the Lord is not in vain (1 Cor 15:58).

‘Only one life ‘twill soon be past,
only what’s done for Christ will last.’

Salvation for the righteous and destruction for the wicked (14:14-20)

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one 'like a son of man' with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested. Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

Dan 7:13 In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven.

Joel 3:12-13 Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat, for there I will sit to judge all the nations on every side. Swing the sickle for the harvest is ripe. Come trample the grapes, for the winepress is full and the vats overflow – so great is their wickedness.

The destiny of those on earth is now depicted as two harvests that occur when the Messiah returns. The first one is a grain harvest, which is carried out by the Messiah. The second is a grape harvest, carried out by two angels, one with a sharp sickle and another who has authority over fire (hell). Jesus receives instructions from God via an angel who comes from the temple in heaven. Then he harvests the grain, which symbolizes the saints of all nations. The Son of Man passage in Dan 7 is about the Messiah and the saints receiving the kingdom and reigning forever. Alluding to that, Jesus said that the nations would see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. He would send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they would gather his elect from all over the world (Mt 24:30b-31). Their destination is not mentioned, but Dan 7:18 tells us that the saints of the Most High would receive the kingdom and would possess it forever.

In contrast, the angel who has charge of the fire instructs the angel with the sharp sickle to gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because they are ripe. The angel swings his sickle, gathers its grapes, and throws them into the winepress of God's wrath. This harvest does not refer to judgment day but to the slaughter of the wicked at the battle of Armageddon at Jesus' return. In chapter 19, which portrays Jesus as returning on a white horse, he strikes down the nations and treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty (19:15). The bloodshed occurs outside Jerusalem, where according to Zech 14:2 the nations are gathered to fight. John sees the blood flowing for 300 km, the length of Israel, to the height of a horse's bridle. This is what John sees in his vision; it is not literal, but the slaughter of the rebellious armies will be enormous. John the Baptist spoke about the Messiah separating the wheat from the chaff in Mt 3:13.

God's wrath and praise from the overcomers (15:1-4)

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues - last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed."

Lev 26:21 If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve.

Ps 86:9 All the nations you have made will come and worship before you Lord; they will bring glory to your name.

Isa 66:23 From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me, says the

Chapters 15-18 describe the punishment meted out by God on the Antichrist, the evil empire called 'Babylon', and on rebellious unrepentant mankind who follow the Antichrist. It is depicted in a symbolic way as seven bowls of wrath poured out on the earth. These angels and their plagues are called a signs because they are a portent or foreboding of calamitous events that will happen in the last days. A plague in the Greek language is a blow or a stroke; figuratively, a blow of fate, or a calamity. These calamities are the final expression of God's anger and retribution to satisfy his justice. They fall specifically on Antichrist's kingdom and his followers, who have thrown in their

lot with him. Chapter 16 will reveal the extent of these judgments, including the death of every living thing in the sea, intense heat from the sun scorching people, darkness over Antichrist's kingdom, and the battle of Armageddon.

Before the calamities arrive, John sees the overcomers, those who were victorious over the Antichrist, standing in heaven beside the sea of glass, a calm glassy sea mixed with fire, before the throne of God. They have harps to praise God. They are happy. They sing the song of Moses (Ex 15), which celebrates victory over an evil empire, which is also the song of the Lamb, who is responsible for their salvation. The title Lord God Almighty applies to both Father and Son. Both are universally worshiped. God said everyone will bow before him and everyone will swear by him (Isa 45:23), and Paul said that at the name of Jesus everyone will bow, and everyone will confess that he is Lord (Phil 2:10-11) It is during the time of the Messianic kingdom that follows, that survivors of all the nations will come and worship the Father and his anointed Son.

Angels are given seven bowls of God's wrath (15:5-8)

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

Ex 32:15 Moses turned and went down the mountain with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands.

Ex 40:34-35 Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.

What is about to happen on earth is first determined by God in heaven. God is pictured in his temple, which is also called the Tabernacle of the Testimony, or the Tent of Meeting that was constructed by the Israelites in the wilderness after the Exodus from Egypt. A temple is a place to meet God and the tabernacle was a tent that was portable and the place where Moses met with God. The stone tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments were placed in the Ark of the Covenant (a wooden box) in the Tabernacle. The word Testimony means a divine charge or code of law and refers to the Ten Commandments, God's moral law. God's wrath results from his unalterable opposition to sin; the breaking of his commandments. Because of their stubbornness and unrepentant hearts, the bulk of mankind who have rejected these commands will experience the day of God's wrath when his righteous judgment is revealed (Rom 2:5).

The angels are dressed in white, symbolizing righteous retribution, with gold sashes, symbolizing their priestly function. The shallow bowls they were given were made of gold and were used for libations. In this symbolic way of expressing things, the bowls are filled with the wrath of the eternal God. The temple will be filled with smoke or clouds, representing the power and glory of God. He is the all-powerful, absolute ruler. Nobody can enter his presence to intercede for the world. God has been patient, but now it is time for him to act. The coming judgments are inevitable; nothing can stop them.

The first four bowls are poured out on the earth, the sea, the rivers, and the sun (16:1-9)

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died. The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments." The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

Ps 79:6-7 Pour out your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge you, on the kingdoms that do not call on your name, for they have devoured Jacob and devastated his homeland.

Ps 78:44 He turned their river into blood, they could not drink from their streams.

These catastrophes that come upon the earth correspond to those of the seals and the trumpets. They result from warfare, and here the effect on creation is stressed. More severe than the plagues sent upon Egypt in the book of Exodus, these four bowls affect the whole world. They are poured out on different parts of creation: the land, the sea, the rivers, and the sun. They are directed toward those who have the mark of the beast and who worship his image, which is just about everyone. After the pouring out of the first bowl, they suffer from foul, painful ulcers, which can be compared to the festering boils inflicted on the Egyptians (Ex 9:8-12). One wonders whether there are any saints left on earth at this time. Jesus asked whether he would find faith on the earth when he came (Lk 18:8).

The second catastrophe hits the oceans, presumably, all the oceans, as none is specified. They turn to thick blood and every living thing in the ocean dies. This could be an algal problem rather than literal blood, but the result is devastating, every living thing in the sea dies.

The third catastrophe hits the freshwater rivers and streams, turning them into blood. It is seen as a just punishment, because the wicked inhabitants of the world have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and God has given them blood to drink. God is not unpredictable or capricious; these acts are an expression of his eternal justice and righteousness.

The fourth catastrophe causes the sun to become hotter and scorches people, who in turn curse God who is seen as inflicting this punishment on them. No one repents or glorifies God. The martyrs under the altar in the heavenly temple confirm that God's judgments are right and well-deserved.

Antichrist's kingdom collapses as the kings gather for Armageddon (16:10-16)

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done. The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three impure spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are demonic spirits that perform signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. "Look, I come like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake and remains clothed, so as not to go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

Isa 11:15 The LORD will dry up the gulf of the Egyptian sea; with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand over the Euphrates River. He will break it up into seven streams so that anyone can cross over in sandals.

Zeph 3:8 "Therefore wait for me," declares the LORD, "for the day I will stand up to testify. I have decided to assemble the nations, to gather the kingdoms and to pour out my wrath on them – all my fierce anger. The whole world will be consumed, by the fire of my jealous anger."

Satan gave the Antichrist his power and his throne, but now his throne and kingdom, which seemed so invincible, is plunged into darkness. The sun had been darkened after the sounding of the fourth (8:12) and fifth (9:2) trumpets, and in the latter passage, unbelievers suffered the agony of something like scorpion stings. The fourth bowl was poured out on the sun, scorching people with intense heat so that they gnawed their tongues in agony because of their pain and sores. They curse the God of heaven and rebel against their king who set himself up as God. Now after this fifth catastrophe, they continue to curse God and refuse to repent. Daniel said the kingdom would not remain united (Dan 2:43). The Antichrist has lost his grip on power.

The sixth catastrophe is the battle of Armageddon, which is referred to again in 17:14 and 19:19. This is one of the greatest days in the history of our planet; it is the battle of the great day of God Almighty. This battle involves the armies of nations from all over the earth. The Euphrates River was mentioned in 9:13-16, when the sixth trumpet was blown, and 200 million mounted troops were released to kill one-third of mankind with plagues of fire, smoke, and sulfur. Modern warfare will involve nuclear weapons of mass destruction.

In his vision, John saw demons that looked like frogs emanating from Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet. They perform miracles and deceive the world leaders into gathering their armies for the battle of Armageddon on the great day of God Almighty.

Verse 15 is significant because the speaker is Jesus. He has not spoken since 4:1 and he doesn't speak again until 22:7. He gives warning that he will come unexpectedly like a thief. His people have not been raptured yet. They must keep alert and faithful at this critical time.

The world leaders and their armies gather in Israel. But who is fighting who in this battle? Why are nations from the whole world gathering there? Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet have deceived them. He was cast down from heaven, and in great anger, he is trying to prevent the Messiah from taking over leadership of the world.

The prophets Ezekiel, Daniel, Zechariah, and John say a lot about this battle. Antichrist has set up an image in the temple, but the city is still in Jewish hands. The Antichrist has authority over all nations, but his kingdom is unstable and there is rebellion.

Zechariah tells us that the Lord will gather all nations to Jerusalem to fight against it. The city will be captured, the houses ransacked, and the women raped (Zech 14:2). The Antichrist wages war against his enemies (Dan 11:40-45). The southern king (Egyptian coalition) engages him in battle first, then the northern king (Gog) storms out against him with chariots (tanks), cavalry, and a great fleet of ships. The battle then moves into Israel. Then reports from the East and the North alarm him, and he sets out to annihilate many, but he meets his end near the beautiful holy mountain (Zion).

[The Lord descends to the Mount of Olives and fights against those nations (Zech 14:3-5). All the holy angels will be with him (Matt 25:31, Mark 8:38, 2 Thess 1:7). Resurrected saints will also be with him (1 Thess 3:13, Rev 17:14, 19:14).

The Messiah will become king over the whole earth (Zech 14:9). Zechariah also tells us that the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the Lord Almighty (14:16). They will be the subjects during the millennium, while the saints will constitute the royal family who will rule with the Messiah.] later

A severe earthquake causes the cities of the nations to collapse (16:17-21)

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

Ezek 38:20b All the people on the face of the earth will tremble at my presence. The mountains will be overturned, the cliffs will crumble, and every wall will fall to the ground.

Dan 12:1 There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then.

Mt 24:21 For then there will be great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until now – and never to be equaled again.

The pouring out of the seventh bowl signals the final great catastrophe that is inflicted on the world. It has already been described at the opening of the sixth seal where there was a great earthquake, cosmic disturbances, and the disappearance of every mountain and island (Rev 6:12-16). Earthquakes will be felt worldwide. The cities of the nations collapse; their populations are decimated. The angel pours his bowl of God's wrath into the air because it is from the air that this destruction comes. Could not the hailstones of a hundred pounds be bombs or

ballistic missiles? 'It is done', expresses the fact that God's visitation in judgment on the world is now finished.

The great city that splits into three parts is 'the great city that rules over the kings of the earth' (17:18). In other words, the leading city of Antichrist's empire, which is symbolically referred to as Rome and Babylon. Chapter 17 shows these cities of the world to be civilizations that have deliberately rejected the will of God, and chapter 18 describes their destruction. The apostle Peter says that the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare (2 Pet 3:10). And he adds that that day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with God's promise, we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness (2 Pet 3:12-13). Islands fleeing away and mountains not being able to be found indicate their complete disappearance, or at least, that they will no longer be recognizable.

The inhabitants of the world, who are now past repentance, can only curse God. This is the end of God's judgment on the world. The next two chapters describe the great city and its downfall in more detail, and that is followed by a description of the coming of the Messiah.

A great prostitute sits on a scarlet beast (17:1-6)

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits by many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries." Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. The name written on her forehead was a mystery:

BABYLON THE GREAT,
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of God's holy people, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

Gen 11:4, 9a Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." ... it was called Babel.

Jer 51:7 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.

This chapter is about Rome, that city which in the first century had dominion over the kings of the earth. Rome was built on seven hills. She is called Babylon the Great because she symbolizes all centers of empire which are inevitably characterized by opulence, pride, greed, corruption, and the persecution of God's people. The final world empire under the Antichrist will be centered on a great city or all cities, and it will have control over all nations, and the population of the whole world. The city is called a prostitute, because of her inhabitants' desire for vice and self-gratification.

Gen 11 records the building of the tower of Babel, which symbolizes the pride of man in wanting to make a name for himself. God confused their language; the building was stopped, and the population dispersed. In recent decades a reversal has taken place. Half the world's population now lives in urban areas. All global population growth between 2017 and 2030 will be absorbed by cities. The largest cities, Delhi and Tokyo, are approaching 40 million each. Global cities are being increasingly linked together through telecommunications, industry, trade, banking, education, and politics. That is why we see the woman riding on the beast. Antichrist will rule the final empire which will include all the great cities of the world.

Since 2008 the tallest building has been the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, standing at 828 meters with 163 floors. There are over 50 buildings higher than 350 meters, half of them in China, and there are many more under construction, including the one-kilometer-high Jeddah tower in Saudi Arabia, which is planned for completion in 2020. We may think that these buildings are marvelous feats of engineering, but God sees them as symbols of man's pride and arrogance. All the cities of the world and their majestic towers will collapse when the angel pours out the seventh bowl of God's wrath.

The prostitute symbolizes these cities, all the capital cities of the world, and especially the capital city of Antichrist's empire. The angel told John to come and he would show him the punishment of the great prostitute who sits on many waters; peoples, multitudes, nations, and languages. Not only Rome, but the fall of Babylon is God's punishment on all the cities of the world.

The inhabitants of the world are intoxicated by city life; 'the wine of her adulteries'. They are attracted by universities, jobs, entertainment,

sporting facilities, casinos, hotels, and restaurants; but especially the opportunity to make money and get rich. Regarded as necessities of modern life, these facilities lead to greed, materialism, the love of the world, and godlessness.

The woman sits on a scarlet beast covered with blasphemous names. The beast is the empire of the Antichrist that arose from the sea in chapter 13. It is covered in blasphemous names because it is the deification of secular authority. When civil authorities don't acknowledge their role as a service to God, they become proud and arrogant and see themselves as the ultimate authority. They see no value in the spiritual and spurred on by an atheistic, evolutionary ideology, they oppose God and the people of God. They are obsessed with the economy and embrace anything that will make money.

City mentality is intoxicated with wealth, symbolized by expensive clothes and jewels. The inhabitants desire freedom from all restraint. They turn their backs on God and his law. The woman is described as drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bear testimony to Jesus. Rome was known for its persecution of Christians who refused to deny their Lord and worship the emperor. The government of the Antichrist will follow that example.

The kingdom of Antichrist (17:7-11)

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and yet will come up out of the Abyss and go to its destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because it once was, now is not, and yet will come. This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

The angel explains the mystery of the woman (17:18) and the beast she rides. The beast which once was (the Roman empire), now is not (it ceased to exist), and which will come up from the underworld (as a revived world empire) will finally go to its destruction. It pretends to be like God, who was, who is, and who is to come, and like the Lamb who was crucified, came back to life, and is alive forevermore. This time the world empire will have ten horns, a confederation of states, or even a global government. The whole world will be astonished and support this globalization because it once was (Rome), there was a time when it didn't exist, and now it is back. One of the beast's heads (Antichrist) had a fatal wound, but the wound was healed (Rev 13:3). The saints will have discernment and won't follow him, or worship him, or take his mark on their bodies.

The seven heads are described as the seven hills on which Rome was built, but they also represent seven kings. These rulers are different from the confederation of national leaders, the ten horns. Some interpret them as Roman emperors, others as emperors of Egypt,

Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome (then present), and the eighth one, the Antichrist, the emperor of a revived Rome.

The angel said that the beast was an eighth king. He belongs to the seven, (but is not one of them), and is going to his destruction. The beast who once was may be a reference to Antiochus Epiphanes 165 B.C., of whom Daniel spoke (11:21-32), and who is a type of the future Antichrist. Antiochus set up a statue of Zeus in God's temple, called the abomination that causes desolation. Jesus warned that one day people would see another abomination that causes desolation standing in the holy place and that they should flee. It will be a time of great distress, unequalled from the beginning of the world until then – and never to be equaled again.

World rulers surrender their power to the Antichrist (17:12-18)

The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings - and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers. Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to hand over to the beast their royal authority, until God's words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

The ten kings, who represent the global leaders (Rev 16:14), will for a short time, maybe seven years, share authority with the Antichrist. They will make war on the Lamb (the Messiah) by opposing and killing Christians, and by invading Jerusalem and God's temple. However, when the Messiah returns, he will conquer them, and with him will be his resurrected saints, his called, chosen, and faithful followers. Jesus told his disciples, that they did not choose him; he chose them and appointed them to go and bear fruit (Jn 15:16).

In 1 Tim 6:15, Paul said that God is the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of Lords. Here in Rev 17:14 it is the Messiah who is King of kings and Lord of lords. The early Church believed in the full deity of Christ.

The Antichrist and the global leaders will hate the prostitute; the alliances between military powers and trading blocks and the economic system will disintegrate. We know from Dan 2:41-42 that this final world kingdom will be a divided kingdom. The toes of iron mixed with clay symbolize instability. The nations will not remain united. After the pouring out of the seventh bowl the great city will

split into three parts, and the cities of the nations will collapse, presumably due to the great earthquake, but nuclear warfare is also a possible cause.

Dan 11:40-45 says that southern and northern confederations will turn against the Antichrist, and storm out against him with chariots and cavalry and a great fleet of ships Antichrist will then set out in a great rage to destroy and annihilate many but will come to his end in Israel. Cities will be destroyed in the process, as described in chapter 18. It is God who caused the world leaders to make this bad decision of giving their power and authority to the satanically inspired beast, to accomplish his will (Rev 17:17).

The fall of Babylon (18:1-5)

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a dwelling for demons and a haunt for every impure spirit, a haunt for every unclean bird, a haunt for every unclean and detestable animal For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries." Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.

Jer 51:37, 45 Babylon will be a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and scorn, a place where no one lives. ... Come out of her. My people! Run for your lives! Run from the fierce anger of the LORD.

A mighty angel announces the fall of Babylon, the symbol of worldly glory, and the high point of satanic influence. The vocabulary of desolation comes from the prophets. All the nations have been intoxicated by the self-gratification of city life, and the worship of money which is idolatry. The politicians and billionaires benefitted from her commerce, through corrupt dealings with the wealth of her banks, trade, and share markets. Babylon stands for the political, commercial, and banking systems of the world, centered in all the big cities of the world.

They will never be rebuilt. Like a scene from *The Matrix*, they will become a haunt for demons and unclean birds. The riches and splendor of the cities will vanish forever, never to be recovered (18:14).

Christians are advised to leave the city and the evil system that it embodies. We are not to be yoked together with unbelievers. Righteousness and wickedness have nothing in common. Light and darkness can't have fellowship. There is no agreement between Christ and Satan, and a believer has nothing in common with an unbeliever. So, we should be separate and not touch unclean things (2 Cor 6:14-15, 17). The last generation of believers is advised to leave the cities of the Antichrist's empire, so that they might escape the calamities which will be poured out on the cities, to punish the inhabitants for their sins, as described in Revelation 16:21 to 18:24.

Judgment on corrupt world commerce (18:6-10)

Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Pour her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit enthroned as queen. I am not a widow; I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: "Woe! Woe, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour your doom has come!"

Ps 137:8 Daughter Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is the one who repays you according to what you have done to us. Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Isa 47:7a, 8b, 9 You said, 'I am forever – the eternal queen!' ... I will never be a widow or suffer the loss of children. Both of these will overtake you in a moment, on a single day: loss of children and widowhood. They will come upon you in full measure, in spite of your many sorceries and all your potent spells.

Jer 50:29 Summon archers against Babylon, all those who draw the bow. Encamp all around her; let no one escape. Repay her for her deeds; do to her as she has done. For she has defied the LORD, the Holy One of Israel.

Babylon is to be paid back double for her sins, for her pride, for her extravagance, and for the murder of prophets and saints and all unjust killings. Her doom will occur in one day, as she is consumed by earthquakes, hail, bombs, missiles, and fire.

In verse 7 Babylon boasts that her soldiers are always victorious; they'll die on the battlefield. Now she will experience death, mourning, famine, and destruction.

When the world leaders who shared in her wealth see her destruction, they will be horrified and terrified and mourn over her doom. Political leaders, merchants, and seamen will all mourn for her.

Isaiah's prophecy against Babylon is primarily concerned with its defeat by Cyrus, king of Persia, in 539 BC, but he also foresaw the fall of the last great empire of Babylon. The global extent of the prophecy in the following verses suggests that it refers to the final great Day of the Lord Almighty. This final battle takes on universal proportions as the nations of the world mass together. It is a time of great destruction on earth and few will survive (Isaiah 13:4-12).

The collapse of the world economy (18:11-24)

The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes anymore - cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and human beings sold as slaves. They will say, "The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your luxury and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered." The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: "Woe! Woe, great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!" Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, "Was there ever a city like this great city?" They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: "Woe! Woe to you, great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour, she has been brought to ruin!" Rejoice over her, you heavens! Rejoice, you people of God! Rejoice, apostles and prophets! For God has judged her with the judgment she imposed on you." Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, pipers and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's important people. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of God's holy people, of all who have been slaughtered on the earth."

Traders and businessmen can only stand far off and feel terror at the sight of the destruction of the world's great cities. All the great cities will be linked together in the great empire symbolically called 'Babylon'. The world's great businessmen will mourn because they can't carry on as they had before. The whole world will be in a state of destruction and ruin. It will be up to the Messiah to rebuild the world, and he may do that without cities. The lament is based on Ezekiel's lament of Tyre in Ezek 27, where the inventory of imports is similar.

With the end of the city, world trade has come to an end; the ports function no more. All those involved in trade and commerce will mourn the loss of the great cities. The industry is finished, the banks and stock markets are gone, the shopping malls are destroyed. Gone are the casinos and nightclubs. A significant item of trade is the bodies and souls of men.

But the saints will rejoice, as they do in the Hallelujah chorus in Handel's Messiah. That great song of praise is in response to the fall of Babylon. The great cities will be destroyed forever (19:3), and there will be no more music there, no tradesmen, no light, no marriage. Babylon is especially condemned for her sorceries and the death of God's people: saints and prophets and all (righteous) people who have been killed on earth.

In chapter 6 when the fifth seal was opened, the martyrs were crying out to God for vengeance. They were then told to wait a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and brothers was complete (6:11). In 8:3-4 the prayers of all the saints are offered up on the altar before God's throne. They are prayers for God's will to be done, prayers for justice and judgment on their persecutors, and prayers for Messiah's kingdom to come. Now in 18:20, they are told to rejoice, because God has judged the evil empire for the way she treated them. The Messiah is about to make his glorious appearance and the saints will be glorified in him and he in them.