

## **The Coming Tribulation: a History of the Apocalypse**

### **Part 2: The Time of the Tribulation and the Signs of its Coming**

#### **Subpart B: The Heavenly Prelude to the Tribulation**

Revelation 4:1 - 7:17

(also available on-line at [ichthys.com](http://ichthys.com))

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**Introduction:** Having received in chapters two and three a complete panorama of the events of the entire Church Age from the divine point of view, we are now given in chapters four through seven a vivid glimpse of the heavenly reality at the end of the era of Laodicea on the threshold of

the commencement of the Tribulation. Just as the discourse of the seven churches explained to us how God interprets the two thousand years of Church Age history, so in a similar way this unveiling of events at the true center of the universe, the very throne room of God Almighty, presents vividly to our view the divine initiation of the final phase of human history prior to the assumption of visible rulership of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ. And in this blessed heavenly prelude to the Tribulation, a revelation of the true focal point of the *kosmos* where the Father and the Son sit enthroned, we have brought home to us in a compelling way the unseen reality of who it is that truly controls time, history, and everything which unfolds before our eyes. For without the events described in chapters four through seven, there would be, there could be no commencement of the Tribulation, the time of “birth pangs” wherewith this world must labor before the brilliant and glorious Kingdom of the Son of God is brought forth into the historical light of day.

## **I. The Heavenly Prelude: Revelation 4:1-11**

### Revelation 4:1:

After this I looked and, behold, a door was standing open in heaven. And the voice which I had heard before (sounding to me like a trumpet) was saying, “Come up here, and I will show you what must happen after these things!”

**After this:** With these first two words, John tells us that the vision of the divine initiation of the Tribulation follows directly after the vision of Christ and His message to the seven churches. It is more than interesting to note that Christ’s message about the seven eras of the Church Age is given on earth, because it has been played out on earth, but that the vision of the heavenly scene on the threshold of the Tribulation (i.e., the content of chapters 4-7) takes place in heaven, because it is played out in heaven. The trends of the Church Age have been in large part a function of the collective decisions of earthly believers over the past two millennia, but the unleashing of the final epoch in Satan’s control of the earth will be initiated in heaven by God’s will and according to His time table.

**A Voice like a Trumpet:** To compare Christ’s voice here to the sound of a trumpet, as was also done in Revelation 1:10, is not insignificant (i.e., this is not the only comparison possible as we see for example in Rev.1:15 where His voice is also compared to “the sound of many waters”). Just as literal trumpets are used as a sign of warning, sounding the alarm to make preparations for battle (Num.10:9; Josh.6:4-9; Jer.4:19; 1Cor.14:8; cf. Rev.8:2-13; 9:1; 9:13-14; 10:7; 11:15), so this simile apprises us of the need to take to heart the warning inherent in the description of the Tribulation which will follow. In chapter one, the proclamation of the trends of the seven eras of the Church (and the characteristic dangers to each, whether internal or external) was likewise given in Christ’s voice to sound an alarm. That previous warning, however, was issued from the earth, for it is on the earth and from the earth that the battle of the Church Age has been and is

being waged with heavenly support (Matt.16:18-19; cf. Matt.11:12; 2Cor.10:4; Eph.6:10-18). The voice here in this context which promises to tell John of the coming tribulational events also belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ (as the one to whom this Revelation belongs: Rev.1:1), but here it originates from heaven (cf. “come up here!”). This is because the events of the Tribulation, the birth pangs which precede the birth of the Kingdom, must be unleashed from heaven (see below on “the breaking of the seals” and removal of the Spirit’s restraining ministry), aggressively directed from heaven (cf. the two witnesses, the expulsion of the devil from heaven, the seven trumpet judgments, the seven last plagues, etc.), and brought to a final, victorious conclusion from heaven with the glorious return of our Lord to assume His rightful rulership of the world (Rev.19:11-21; cf. Ps.110:1). The description of our Lord Jesus Christ’s voice here as again being similar to that of a trumpet has the same essential meaning as it did in Revelation 1:10, namely, to emphasize the fact that this message is one of warning, sounding the alarm to all who will listen to prepare themselves for the intense trial of tribulation which lies ahead.

**The Door:** In the visions of God, John sees heaven opened (cf. Ezek.1:1; Matt.3:16; Acts 7:56; 10:11; 2Cor.12:1-5; Rev.19:11), and is spiritually ushered into the “third heaven”, the unseen throne room of God.<sup>1</sup> This door opens into the third heaven through the barrier of the heavenly sea (on which see below). Now it is an exceptional thing to think of sinful mankind being able to penetrate beyond the veil of heaven, and such a thing is only possible in any sense or at any time because of the work and the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ who by His death broke down for us this barrier between God and sinful mankind (Eph.2:14-18; 4:7-10; Col.2:13-15; Heb.9:24). Jesus is the only true door into heaven (Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; 14:6; cf. Ps.118:19-27), for He is the One whose blood has opened an entrance for us into the very presence of God Himself (Matt.27:51; Heb.10:19-20). Only through Him, and in Him, and by following Him where He has gone (Heb.6:19-20; cf. Heb.2:10 [Greek]; 12:2), can we too enter into the holy of holies for fellowship eternal with the Father, the Son, and the Spirit forevermore (Lk.23:43; Rev.3:21).

**After these things:** The only possible antecedent for this phrase is the content of chapters two and three immediately preceding, that is, Christ’s messages to the seven churches. Therefore this phrase must refer to the events which will take place after the close of the final message to Laodicea at the end of its 144 year history. “After these things” thus directs our attention to the events of the Tribulation which will occur at the conclusion of the final Church era of Laodicea not many years hence from our present point in time. Conversely, this simple phrase also validates the interpretation of the seven churches as historical eras, for they are what precede the tribulational events whose unfolding John will witness once the seventh seal is opened.<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, section II.3, “The Three Heavens”.

<sup>2</sup> It will also be recalled that Philadelphia, the penultimate Church era preceding Laodicea, is “kept from the great hour of testing” in chronological terms by the interposition of Laodicea, the current Church era which will spill into the Tribulation.

two-fold division of events between the Church Age and the Tribulation is also exactly what we find in Christ's initial description of what was to be revealed to John in this prophecy: "both the things that are [in the process of] happening (i.e., the entire Church Age), and the things that are going to happen after them (i.e., the Tribulation and events following it)" (Rev.1:19).<sup>3</sup>

As pointed out above, it was necessary for John to see the trends of the Church Age from the earth, but inasmuch as the Tribulation is the beginning of the Revelation of Jesus Christ "from heaven" (cf. 2Thes.1:7), heaven is the proper place from which to view this sequence of events which will begin and be brought to a close from the very throne room of God. Hence the command which directs John to enter the third heaven to receive this prophecy of tribulational events.

#### Revelation 4:2-11:

(2) Immediately I came to be in the Spirit, and, behold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it]. (3) And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius. (4) And there was a rainbow around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald. And encircling the throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden crowns. (5) And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder. And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God. (6) And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal. And in the midst of the throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back. (7) And the first living-creature was similar to a lion. And the second living-creature was similar to a young bull. And the third living-creature had a face similar to a man's. And the fourth living-creature was similar to an eagle in flight. (8) And [as to] the four living-creatures, each one of them had six wings apiece, laden with eyes roundabout and within. And they have no rest day or night, saying, "Holy, Holy, Holy [is the] Lord, the Almighty God! The One who was, and who is, and who is coming!" (9) And whenever the living creatures give glory, and honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders will fall down before the One who sits on the throne, and will worship the One who lives forever and ever, and will throw their crowns before the throne, saying, (11) "[O] our Lord and our God! You are worthy to assume [this] glory, and honor, and power, because you have created all things, and because of Your will they exist and were created."

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<sup>3</sup> To understand the phrase in Revelation 1:19 "the things that are [now] happening" any other way than as an overview of the entire Church Age would necessarily require us also to perversely assume that the entire Church Age has for some reason been left out of our Lord's synopsis of future events (with the exception of the contemporary situation of seven local churches, a small part of the Church even at that time).

**In the Spirit:** This is the same exact phraseology in the Greek as we saw in our treatment of Revelation 1:10. “I came to be in the Spirit” is John’s way of describing prophetic “ecstasy” (literally, a “standing outside of oneself”), that is, that divinely induced prophetic state also seen in the cases of other inspired writers of scripture (Num.12:6; Ezek.1:1; 1:3; 2:1; 8:3; 40:2; Dan.10:1-7; Micah 1:1; Zech.1:8; 4:1; Acts 10:10; 11:5; 22:17; 2Cor.12:1-4; 2Pet.1:20-21; Rev.4:2; 17:3; 21:10; cf. Is.6:1ff.; Jer.1:4-19; Hos.1:1-2; Amos 8:1; 9:1). Now John has been in this same prophetic state since hearing Jesus’ voice telling him to “write” (Rev.1:10-11). The repetition of this phrase here does not imply any change or alteration of John’s state. Rather, these words are given by way of explanation to describe the manner of John’s rapid change of venue from earth to heaven in “the visions of God”, that is, it is accomplished in a wholly spiritual way by means of the Holy Spirit (cf. Ezek.8:3; 40:2; 2Cor.12:1-4).

**The Heavenly Temple:** Although not specifically mentioned here as such, it is clear from elsewhere in the book of Revelation (and from elsewhere in scripture) that John has here been brought into the heavenly temple of God (Rev.7:15; 11:19 [twice]; 14:15; 14:17; 15:5; 15:6; 15:8 [twice]; 16:1; 16:17; cf. 2Sam.22:7-10; Is.6:1-4; et al.). Here and throughout the book of Revelation we see the true purpose of the real temple of God (represented symbolically on earth by the Jewish temple and tabernacle: see especially Heb.9:1-28). That purpose is, namely, to function as the residence of God Himself, as His temporary “battle headquarters”, so to speak, from which He will continue to survey and direct earthly events until returning to the new earth in total victory at the end of human history (Rev.20-22). The portion of the “temple” wherein John now finds himself is the throne room of what might also be described as God’s heavenly “palace”. For while the Greek word used here (*naos*, ναός) does mean “temple”, the Hebrew word which it translates (in both the Septuagint and the New Testament) means both “temple” and “palace” (*heychal*, lkyh). The fact that this heavenly residence is indeed both the temple and palace of our God is certainly clear from the description of the throne, the regal appearance of the Father, and the attendance upon Him by and operation of His royal, heavenly court. In any event, the distinction in this case between a temple and a palace is one which would have been largely lost upon most ancient cultures who made almost universal use of the “god as king” and “temple as god’s palace” motif (cf. the single word for both concepts in Hebrew). Moreover, **our** God is indeed Ruler of the universe, so that any place He might choose to reside, permanently or temporarily, would in fact become the “palace of palaces” as the abode of the Great Almighty King (Ps.5:2; 9:7; 10:16; 24:9-10; 29:10; 47:7; 84:3; 145:1; Is.6:5; 43:15; Jer.10:10; Ezek.43:7; Dan.4:34-35; Amos 9:6; Mal.1:14; 1Tim.1:17; Rev.15:3).

The Lord is in His holy temple [or palace: *heychal*, lkyh]. The Lord, His **throne** is in the heavens.

Psalms 11:4a

Although John sees the things mentioned in these verses in the form of a vision, the throne and all the paraphernalia of God’s throne room in the third heaven are true heavenly realities, and are here described as they existed then and as they most certainly exist now. This is true even though God is spirit, and does not require this or any other localized residence in the material universe,

whether on the visible earth or in the invisible third heaven (1Kng.8:27; Acts 17:24-25). For the sake of His creatures, however, both human and angelic, this discernible “headquarters” has been established, so that both angels and men may witness our Lord’s overall divine control of the universe (cf. 1Kng.22:19-21; Job 1-2), and, in particular for our purposes here, His reassertion of direct and visible control over the earth in the Person of His Son. For it is precisely for the purpose of reestablishing direct and visible divine rule over the earth that God is seen here about to unleash the Tribulation, the time of “birth-pangs” that must precede Christ’s return. It is precisely for the purpose of viewing the preliminaries of the re-establishment of God’s Kingdom *on earth* in the Person of His Son that John has been brought to heaven:

The Lord said to My Lord, “Sit down at my right hand, until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

Psalm 110:1

But as for Me, I have anointed My King upon Zion, My holy mountain.

Psalm 2:6

Rejoice exceedingly, Zion, My daughter. Raise a shout, Jerusalem, My daughter.

Behold! Your King will come to you.

Zechariah 9:9a

While pagan cultures may see god-in-heaven and man-on-earth as the natural state of affairs, it is important here to re-emphasize that, from a biblical point of view, God’s “tenting” in the heavens is a temporary state of affairs, just as the separation of Man from God is temporary, with both conditions being the result of creature rebellion (Satan’s revolt for the former, Adam’s fall for the latter). And while in pagan cultures the divinity is often something to be kept in a pacified state so that man may “go about his business”, in the true biblical view of things, it is Man who is the trouble, and who has only been rescued from trouble by the intervention of God through the gift of gifts, our Lord Jesus Christ. This personal, spiritual deliverance is at present on the cusp of blossoming into global, material deliverance, as our God is about to render decisive judgment upon the earth and upon all His unrighteous foes in the course of the coming Tribulation, and is about to re-establish His direct, sovereign rule over the earth in the Person of the Messiah. At the conclusion of this victory, once *all* enemies have been placed under the Messiah’s victorious feet (1Cor.15:25), the Father also will once again “tent among men”, when perfection, righteousness and complete harmony have finally been restored to the “new heavens and the new earth” (2Pet.3:10; Rev.21:1), with all evil and evil-doers having been removed from both heaven and earth forevermore (Rev.21:2-23; 22:1-4).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> For a synopsis of this process in the future, see part 5 of [The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”](#), section IV, “Things to Come: Judgment, Restoration and Replacement Phases II and III”.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is [now] with men. And He will tent with them, and they will be His people, and He Himself will be their God.”

Revelation 21:3

The heavenly furnishings described here by the apostle John are the true types “according to whose pattern” the structure and furniture of the earthly tabernacle were constructed (Heb.8:5; cf. Ps.80:1; 99:1; Col.2:17; Heb.10:1). As the earthly tabernacle was constructed at God’s command for the purpose of communicating to His people important information about the true heavenly temple (Heb.8:5), the symbolic meanings of the Jewish tabernacle and its furniture must be considered here in order to prepare us for the descriptions of their heavenly counterparts, both those mentioned here and those mentioned later in the book of Revelation.

### **The Earthly Tabernacle and Temple as a Type of the Heavenly Temple:**

#### **1. The Court (see Exodus, chapters 25-40):**

a. The (Inner) Court: This is also known as the “court of the priests” in Herod’s temple. Surrounded by a barrier in the case of both the tabernacle and the later temple, this enclosure represents the sanctified community of believers on earth who have entered through the gate (i.e., Jesus Christ: on our Lord as “The Door”, see above), accepting His sacrifice which confronts them at the point of entry in the form of the brazen altar (a type of the cross). The enclosure or “barrier” of the court which separates unsaved mankind from those who have been sanctified by God represents the “enmity” of God toward sin which is only removed in Jesus Christ (Eph.2:11-22), who is the only gate or door into the place of fellowship with God while still on earth. As types which speak of our *earthly* experience (acceptance of Christ and entrance into the court of fellowship with God on earth, or rejection of Christ and exclusion from this same court), the court along with its physical enclosure are not represented in the *heavenly* temple.

b. The Brazen Altar: There is also no corresponding item of furniture for the brazen altar in the heavenly temple. That is because this altar represents the cross (1Cor.5:7; Heb.9:11-14; 1Pet.1:19), the place of Christ’s sacrifice on our behalf, which sacrifice was accomplished *on earth*. The brazen altar is to be distinguished from the “altar of incense” which is the true counterpart of the altar mentioned later in Revelation chapter four (see below).

c. The Laver: This is also known as the “sea” in the court of Solomon’s temple (1Kng.7:23-26; 2Kng.16:17; 2Chron.4:2-5; Jer.27:19). The laver-sea is the only piece of furniture from the earthly court which has an ostensible counterpart in the heavenly temple. Inasmuch as the court represents the earth, the relationship to the laver-sea of the somewhat similar “glassy sea” which appears in God’s heavenly temple needs to be explained here in brief.

In Revelation 4:6, the “sea of glass similar to crystal” is actually the watery upper layer of the heavens, the “waters above” that form the circular “vault” of the heavens that stands between the

twin heavens of sky and space and the third heaven, the place of the temple of God (Gen.1:6-7; Is.40:22). Therefore in the heavenly sea we are looking at the “top layer” of the heavens, so to speak. The fact that the earthly laver-sea which represents this heavenly sea is both concave (in terms of the brass container) and flat (in terms of the upper surface of the water contained) is also significant, for each of these two parts represents important aspects of the true heavenly picture, with the bronze standing for the firmament of the heavens and the water for the heavenly sea above it (cf. Is.40:22 quoted below). From the vantage point of the third heaven, the place of God’s heavenly temple (above the sky-universe), the flat surface of the heavenly sea is what is immediately visible. From our perspective here on earth, however, the heavens have a concave or “vaulted” appearance (as anyone looking up at the sky can attest), and it is this earthly perspective which is represented in the similarly concave shape of the tabernacle’s water-filled half-sphere made of bronze:

He [is the One] who sits [enthroned] above the *circle* of the earth (i.e., the “circular ceiling-vault” of the heavens as viewed from the earthly perspective), and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers [in His sight]. He [is the One] who stretches out the heavens like a *curtain* (cf. Ps.104:2), and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in (i.e., the “flat” appearance of the combined heavenly sea and firmament of the heavens looking down from the third heaven).

Isaiah 40:22

Taken as a single composite of two things exhibiting a different appearance from either side, it is therefore not surprising that the heavens and the heavenly sea should receive this dual representation in the organization of the tabernacle-temple, that is, the tabernacle’s curtain representing the view from the third heaven (as seen in the above quote), and the laver-sea representing the view from earth. Importantly, moreover, this twin representation also serves to emphasize two distinct aspects of mankind’s relationship to God. For on the one hand, the actual “waters above” in concert with the “firmament of the heavens” clearly serve to *separate* geographically God’s “dwelling” in the third heaven from Man’s abode here on earth. The outer curtain of the tabernacle beyond which only the priests can go and the inner veil beyond which only the high priest (as a type of Christ in ascension) could go effectively convey this principle of separation of Holy God from sinful man. On the other hand, the heavens also *reflect* the glory of God (a fact obvious to anyone who has ever contemplated the awesome nature of the universe), and all mankind is aware of God from their testimony (Rom.1:18-20; cf. Job 36:24-25; 38:1-38; Ps.8:1-4; 19:1-6; 97:6; Acts 17:24-31). The laver-sea, made of bronze and filled with water, had the reflective qualities of a mirror (and, in fact, was originally *made* of mirrors: Ex.38:8). Anyone gazing into the laver-sea could not help but to catch the reflection *both* of himself *and* of the sky above. Thus, with its unique reflective qualities, the laver-sea effectively conveyed the symbolism of sinful mankind contemplating itself against the backdrop of the awesome heavens of God which stand between Him and us. Bronze, incidentally, symbolizes judgment (cf. the brazen altar), and thus emphasizes the dire nature of this reflective comparison. So whether looking down into the laver-sea and catching the sky’s reflection, or up into the actual heavens above (which are represented in turn by the curtain of separation), man is forced to appreciate his flawed character and God’s perfect character and is thus put into the proper frame of mind to



receive His gracious help, eternal life in the Person of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. When we do thus properly “reflect” on these things, the correct response is to turn to Him in faith for salvation and forgiveness (represented by washing with the water of purification in the laver-sea: cf. Eph.5:26).<sup>5</sup> This symbolism of reflection seen in the laver-sea is a well-attested quality of the heavens, which are ever “pouring forth” God’s witness of Himself to the world (and are thus a surrogate for His Word, the best “reflector” of Him which we possess; cf. Ps.8:1-4; 97:6; Rom.1:18-20):

(1) The *heavens recount* the glory of God, and the *firmament tells* of the work of His hands. (2) One day after another pours forth [His] words, and one night after another declares [His] knowledge. (3) There is no tongue or culture that cannot understand their voice (i.e., of the heavens/firmament). (4) Their design has gone out into (i.e., “is visible throughout”) the entire earth, and their words to the end of the world. He has set a tent for the sun within them (i.e., hidden it in the heavens/firmament’s night sky), (5) and from this it goes forth like a [resplendent] bridegroom from his [wedding] canopy. [The sun] exults to run its course like an athlete [does]. (6) Its starting line is at one end of the heavens, and its circuit [takes it] to the ends [of the sky]. And nothing is hidden from its view.

Psalms 19:1-6

Can you spread out the sky into a *firmament* like He does, like a solid *mirror* which has been cast [of metal]?

Job 37:18

(22) Be doers of the Word and not merely hearers, deceiving yourselves. (23) Because if anyone is a hearer of the Word and not a doer, such a one is like a man who recognizes his natural face in a *mirror* – (24) for in this case, though he recognized himself, he straightway went about his business, soon forgetting what he looked like. (25) But he who sets his gaze upon the perfect law of freedom (i.e., scripture – the perfect mirror of the heart) and sticks with it, and is not a [mere] forgetful hearer [of the Word], but a doer of deeds [inspired by the Word], that man will be blessed in his “doing”.

James 1:22-25

For at the present time our perception [of heavenly things] is like [viewing] a *dim reflection in a mirror*. But then [when we meet the Lord] we will see [Him] face to face. Now I have only partial knowledge, but then my knowledge [of Him] will be complete, just as He has always known me.

1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:12

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<sup>5</sup> This principle, true of salvation, also holds good for the cleansing of our sin through confession, and the laver was indeed used for symbolic cleansing (compare Ex.30:19-21 with Jn.13:1-20, where in both cases only the hands and feet are washed; cf. 1Jn.1:9).

d. The tabernacle and the first curtain: We have already explained how that the curtain of the tabernacle represents the sky and the universe beyond it, thus effectively demonstrating the impossible distance between man and God from the standpoint of human effort (on the inner veil, see below). For who can “ascend to heaven to bring Christ down” (Rom.10:5-10; cf. Deut.30:12-14)? Clearly, there could be no way into the heavenly tabernacle (whose earthly access was impossible for all except those representing God) except through God’s gracious dispensation. For, as the Levitical rites made clear, the only way behind the veil representing the heavens (and thus the only way to pierce the veil of eternity by analogy), was through the blood of a perfect victim slaughtered on behalf of the sinful worshiper (a crystal clear symbol of the sacrificial death of our Savior on our behalf). The tabernacle was itself composed of four layers:

1) An outer layer of dark, leathery “sea-cow skins”, symbolizing the firmament of the sky, glistening, shimmering, with a blue-black watery appearance, and impenetrable to the eye.

2) A layer of ram skins dyed red, symbolizing the only Mediator between man and God, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Lamb without spot or blemish, shedding His blood in order to remove this barrier of separation and reconcile us to God, without which sacrifice it was impossible to penetrate . . . . .

3) the “tent” of goat-hair, representing the vast space separating us from the holiness and holy residence of the Father in the third heaven, a chasm only penetrable through the blood of the Lamb (cf. Heb.1:3; 6:19-20; 9:11-14; 9:24-25; 10:20).

4) An innermost layer of linen, blue (reflecting the heavenly origin of the only One who can give us access), purple (reflecting the royalty of the only One who can give us access), and scarlet (reflecting the sacrifice of the only One who can give us access). This layer was also embroidered with cherubim, symbolizing the holy abode of God, the third heaven lying above the firmament of sky and space (unreachable apart from Christ).<sup>6</sup>

When He had accomplished the cleansing of [our] sins, He took His seat (i.e., beyond the veil) at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

Hebrews 1:3b

Since we have, therefore, a Great High Priest who has passed through the heavens (i.e., as through the veil), [even] Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast to our profession [of faith in Him].

Hebrews 4:14

(19) And this hope [truly] is what “anchors” our lives, a secure and solid [anchor of hope] which penetrates [behind] the veil (i.e., the heavens) into the inner place (i.e., the heavenly holy of holies) (20) where our vanguard, Jesus, has entered on our behalf, having become a high priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.

Hebrews 6:19-20

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<sup>6</sup> Symbolism of the colors is according to M.F. Unger, Commentary on the Old Testament (Chicago 1981) v.1, p.135.

(1) The sum of what we have said is this: we have a High Priest of such [amazing] quality that He has [actually] taken His seat at the right hand of the throne of Majesty in heaven, (2) a Minister of the holy things and of the true tabernacle which the Lord has pitched, not man. (3) For every priest is appointed to present offerings and sacrifices. Wherefore it was necessary for Him also to have something to offer. (4) Now if He were [ministering] on earth, He would not have been a priest, inasmuch as there are already those who present offerings according to the law [of Moses]. (5) These minister in [what is a] copy and a shadow of the [actual] heavenly [tabernacle], just as command was given to Moses as he was about to complete the tabernacle. For He says, “See to it that you make everything according to the pattern shown to you on the mountain (i.e., Sinai).”  
Hebrews 8:1-5

(11) But Christ has already arrived [in heaven] as [the true High] Priest of the good things to come, [having passed] through the [veil of the] greater and more perfect tabernacle, that is, the one which is not of this creation (i.e., through the heavens and into the third heaven). (12) Nor was it through the blood of goats and bullocks, but through His own blood (i.e., His death) that He entered once and for all into the [heavenly] holy of holies, having wrought eternal redemption.  
Hebrews 9:11-12

## 2. The Holy Place (see Exodus, chapters 25-40):

In the tabernacle and later temple there are two spaces, commonly referred to as the holy place and the holy of holies respectively. The holy place, the outer space and the larger of the two rooms, contained the table of the bread of presence, the altar of incense, and the golden candlestick, and was representative of the fellowship between God and sanctified believers in paradise. From before the creation of man, to Eden, to paradise below the earth, to the present third heaven, to eternal New Jerusalem, although the location of “paradise” has been variable, the most fundamental aspect of it has always been the same: it is the place where God’s creatures enjoy untrammelled fellowship with Him.<sup>7</sup> At present, ever since our Lord’s crucifixion, resurrection and ascension, His passage “through the heavens” into the heavenly Holy of Holies, “paradise” has meant the third heaven, the heavenly temple and dwelling-place of God the Father. Christ’s ascension into heaven “split the veil” of the heavens, rending through His blood the barrier of separation between man and God, opening the way of “access” to the Father for all who believe and follow His Son (cf. Eph.2:18; 3:12), for He is the only entrance, He is the only way into heaven (Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; 14:6; cf. Rev.3:7-8; 19:11), and He is in a very literal way our “leader” into the heavenly holy of holies (our *archegos*: Acts 3:15; 5:31; Heb.2:10; 12:2). That is why at Jesus’ death, the moment when He had completed His victorious life and sacrifice perfectly in every way, the Father caused the temple’s physical veil to be split open, graphically demonstrating for any and all who would not refuse to see it the reality of His

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<sup>7</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.

provision of salvation symbolically portrayed in the very temple which speaks entirely of Jesus' work: with the cross an accomplished fact, man can now enter into the very presence of God – but only on the basis of our Lord's sacrificial death (compare Matt.27:51 with Heb.10:19-20). For Christ's work removed the veil-barrier of enmity and estrangement (erected by man through the sin of our first parents) making possible our reconciliation to the Father, so that we may now stand in His presence through the blood of Christ (Rom.5:1-21; 2Cor.5:17-21; Eph.2:14-18; Col.1:19-22; cf. 1Pet.3:18).

In anticipation of our Lord's sacrifice (which was acceptable to the Father in every way), the Father had mercifully delayed judgment upon sin until the time when He gave His own Son to be a means of propitiating all sin for those who put their faith in Him (Rom.3:25-26; 2Cor.5:19; cf. Acts 14:16; 17:30). This salvation – forgiveness of sin and provision of eternal life – extends not only to all who have trusted in Jesus since the cross, but also to all those who sought forgiveness and eternal life from God before the cross, trusting in His promises and in His promised One to come so clearly portrayed in the tabernacle and all its rites, so clearly foreshadowed and prophesied throughout the Bible (e.g., Ps.22; Is.52-53; Lk.24:25-27). Because the way to the Father was not opened until Jesus' sacrifice and ascension to Him, the righteous who died before these events, "the conjunction of the ages" (Heb.9:26; cf. Mk.1:15; Rom.5:6; Gal.4:4; Eph.1:10; 1Tim.2:6), were taken after death to an interim "paradise" below the earth, a place of blessing to be sure, but still separated from the presence of the Father by the veil of the heavens, to await the fulfillment of the Messiah's mission. This is the "hell" to which our Lord descended after His death on the cross before His resurrection – not a place of torments (although part of Hades was and still is reserved for that function), but rather, in the case of all those who died in the Lord from Abel until Jesus' resurrection, a place of rest and repose in which to await the opening of the way into the heavenly inner sanctum through the blood of Christ. It is to this interim paradise that Jesus refers when on the cross He tells the believing thief "today you will be with Me in paradise" (Lk.23:43; cf. Lk.16:19-31).<sup>8</sup>

Since our Lord's resurrection from the dead, ascension to the third heaven, and session at the right hand of the Father, there is now nothing to hinder departed believers from entering into the presence of the Father along the "newly opened and living way" that Jesus has made for us into His presence (cf. Jn.14:2-3; 17:24; Heb.1:3; 4:14; 6:19-20; 8:1-5; 9:11-12):

(19) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence in this entrance of ours into the [heavenly] holy of holies by the blood of Jesus, (20) an entryway through the [heavenly] veil [of separation] which is new<sup>9</sup> and alive and which He has consecrated for us, that is [through the sacrifice] of His flesh (cf. Heb.10:10; 10:18), (21) and since we have [this] great high priest over the household of God, let us approach [the throne of grace (cf.

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<sup>8</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", II.5.b, "The Illustration of the Tabernacle".

<sup>9</sup> Literally, "newly slain".

Heb.4:16) to pray] with a truthful heart in complete faith, (22) our hearts sprinkled [clean] of [any] bad conscience and our bodies washed with pure water [of the Word (cf. Eph.5:26)].  
Hebrews 10:19-22

This tangible reality of believers liberated from the necessity of occupying a temporary abode (i.e., the underground paradise of *sheol*) and free to anticipate their destined home with God in heaven after death was promised by our Lord (Jn.14:1-6; cf. Jn.12:26; 17:24), and is clearly visible in the biblical descriptions of believers now actually in the presence of the Father and the Lamb (2Cor.5:8; 12:1-6; Phil.1:23; Heb.12:22-23; cf. Rev.6:9; 7:9-17). Moreover, it is also clear from a number of passages that our Lord, when He made His actual and highly symbolic journey through the heavens and into the Father's presence, led "captivity captive" (Eph.4:8; cf. Ps.68:18), freeing from the subterranean paradise known as "Abraham's bosom" all the faithful who had previously died (Ps.146:7b; Is.14:17b; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Lk.23:43; cf. Lk.16:19-31), and taking them in His train up to the third heaven (Jn.14:2-3; cf. Ps.68:24-27; Jn.17:24; Col.2:15; 1Pet.3:18-22; Rev.1:18). Since the veil of the heavenly temple of God (i.e., "the third heaven", the "antitype" or true location represented by the Holy of Holies in the earthly tabernacle) has now been split open by Christ's victory, there is no further distinction in heaven between the Holy Place (representing the previous subterranean compartment of *sheol*, "Abraham's bosom") and the Holy of Holies, with saved, departed humanity now resident in the presence of the Lamb and of the Father. For it is into this genuine "Holy of Holies" in heaven above that Christ entered in company with all those who had previously died in the Lord and had previously been awaiting this momentous event in the paradise below:

For Christ did not enter into a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one. Rather, ***He entered into heaven itself***, so as to present Himself before God [the Father] on our behalf.  
Hebrews 9:24

Since then there is now no distinction in the heavenly temple of God between the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place (the separating veil been removed by Christ), we should not be surprised to see in the description of the heavenly temple in Revelation (describing as it does matters after the fact of the ascension) the placement of objects within this true Holy of Holies which, in the earthly tabernacle-temple, were reserved for the Holy Place. So while we shall cover here under the sub-heading of "the Holy Place" the altar of incense, lamp, and table of the bread of presence, the reader is asked to keep in mind that in the forthcoming description in Revelation these articles are seen to appear within the heavenly temple proper (i.e., the genuine Holy of Holies).

In the holy place of the earthly tabernacle, three items are present: 1) the golden table, 2) the golden lampstand, and 3) the golden altar of incense. All three of these furnishings represent Jesus Christ, with the gold standing for His deity (as rare, precious, glorious), the acacia wood (of the table and altar) beneath symbolizing His humanity (as fragile yet perfect), and with each item symbolizing a particular aspect of His sacrificial incarnation:

a. The Golden Table: The *golden table* holding the bread of the presence (i.e., God present with us in the Person of Christ; cf. “Immanuel”: Is.7:14; Matt.1:23), represented the life-giving nature of the **Person** of Christ for all who partake of Him, “the Bread of life” (Jn.6:32-58; 1Cor.11:23-26).<sup>10</sup>

b. The Golden Lampstand: The *golden lampstand*, fed by the empowering oil, which symbolizes the Holy Spirit (Is.11:2; Rev.1:4; and cf. Lk.4:18), represented the life-giving nature of the **message** of Christ for all who receive it and accept Him, “the Light of the world” (Jn.8:12; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 9:5; 12:46; Eph.5:8-15; 1Jn.1:5-7; 2:8-10).<sup>11</sup>

c. The Golden Altar of Incense: The *golden altar of incense*, emitting a sweet savor rising up into the holy of holies, represented the life-giving nature of the **work** of Christ, acceptable to the Father in every way and rising up in resurrection and ascension into His presence (Eph.5:2; cf. Gen.8:21; Heb.1:3), pointing the way to heaven in Him who is the “Way” for all who follow Him (Jn.14:2-3; 14:6; cf. Ps.118:19-27; Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; 17:24).

Of these three, the altar and lampstand are specifically mentioned as present in the heavenly temple of God (Rev.4:5; 6:9). Neither is the table truly absent, however, for the “Bread of Life” Himself is seen to come before the Father in chapter four (in a related symbol, that of the Lamb of God which also speaks of our fellowship with Him through partaking of His body and blood: Jn.5:25-58; 1Cor.5:7), and, given the representation of the Church collective as “the Body of Christ” and the fact that the table contained the perfect number of twelve loaves, we may also see in the believers who appear “below the altar” a symbolic complement to the “Bread of Life” Himself in His Church, His Body and His Bride (cf. Rev.6:9).<sup>12</sup> Like a new garden of Eden then, the third heaven, God’s inner sanctum or heavenly temple, is the place where all of us blessed to die in the Lord are now privileged to enter. There, in the tabernacle-paradise of God, we shall begin our “face-to-face” fellowship with Him and with our Lord Jesus Christ which we shall from that point on enjoy forever more. These three articles also speak of God’s eternal provision

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<sup>10</sup> The twelve loaves show that He is sufficient for all: one loaf for each of the tribes of Israel, with Israel itself representing the entire future Body of Christ (see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.b.i, “The Uniqueness of Israel”).

<sup>11</sup> As the Word is immaterial and divine in every way, so the lampstand, representing the light of the gospel in the Person of Christ, contains no earthly element (i.e., all gold, no acacia wood). Likely for this same reason, the lampstand lacks the golden “crown” (*zer*) which the altar and table possess, since this “crown” is indicative of the reign of the Messiah “in the flesh”.

<sup>12</sup> Significantly, the table in the tabernacle was also placed “below” the altar, that is, farther away from the veil, just as from John’s perspective these believers are closer to him than to the altar, the import of “below” in Revelation 6:9 (cf. Ex.40:22-28).

for us in this paradise to come: 1) the table of bread speaks of physical sustenance and life, eternal life; 2) the lampstand of light speaks of spiritual illumination and truth, divine truth; 3) the altar of incense with its sweet aroma speaks of physical and spiritual joy, everlasting joy. For since Jesus has split the veil of the heavenly Holy of Holies, our “Holy Place” after departing this earth is now in the very presence of God Himself.

3. The Holy of Holies (see Exodus, chapters 25-40): The holy of holies in the tabernacle-temple represented the heavenly temple of God, inaccessible to any human being, even to saved humanity after death, until the veil which separated it from the holy place should be removed by the Messiah, Jesus Christ (cf. Matt.27:51; Mk.15:38). This earthly holy of holies, the place entered only by the high priest on the Day of Atonement (Heb.9:7; cf. Lev.16:1-34), was, in its shape, a perfect cube (cf. Ex.26:16; 36:21). This was also true in Solomon’s temple (1Kng.6:20), and will be true in the millennial temple as well (Ezek.41:4).<sup>13</sup> Significantly, the New Jerusalem will also be a perfect cube (Rev.21:16), an understandable feature given that it will be, in effect, the last “temple”. For in this final paradise, God will return to earth to “tent” with saved mankind forevermore, pitching His “tabernacle”, the New Jerusalem, on the new earth (Rev.21:3-4; cf. Rev.21:1). There will be “no temple” visible in the New Jerusalem because “the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev.21:22). For the entire New Jerusalem will function at that blessed future time as the final and ultimate Holy of Holies, a perfect cubicle space (representing the perfection of the Trinity in height, width, and breadth: cf. Eph.3:18), wherein all of saved humanity will be accommodated and dwell in the presence of God for all eternity (Rev.21:3-4).

a. The Mercy Seat: The golden “mercy seat” or atonement cover, as it is also called, represents God’s throne (see immediately below for the heavenly throne). Made completely of gold (befitting His deity), the mercy seat was flanked by two golden cherubs (just as the heavenly throne is attended by the actual cherubim). It was between these two golden cherubs that the Lord told Moses “there I will meet with you” (Ex.25:22), so that the image given by the mercy

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<sup>13</sup> The same is also most likely true of the second temple of Zerubbabel (cf. Ezra 6:3), later “rebuilt” by Herod. Of this temple, before its reconstruction, we have only the description in Cyrus’ letter (in the citation above), of which the critical phrase is “let the foundations (i.e., of the first temple) be repaired” (so NASB, Koeler-Baumgartner’s Lexicon, C.F. Keil’s Commentary, omn. in loc.). This would have preserved the original dimensions of width and breadth (and one must assume that the same height was preserved as well, producing the same cube shape). The specific width and height given later in the letter in neither case determine the internal dimensions (just as Solomon’s temple was “thirty cubits high” overall, but the holy of holies only twenty cubits high, a fact that can only be interpreted to mean that the preservation of the cubical shape of the tabernacle’s holy of holies was deliberate: compare 1Kng.6:2 with 1Kng.6:20). If Josephus is to be believed, Herod’s modifications resulted in a “raising of the roof” of the inner sanctum to thirty cubits, thus defacing the cube (and how typical of unbelieving “worship” of God to replace truth and true symbol with a meaningless, even a defiling sort of ornamentation).

seat of God's heavenly throne is beyond symbolic: within the tabernacle and temple, this is the place where the glory of God, the resident or *Shechinah* glory, actually did dwell. Here, between the golden cherubim above the mercy seat, the *Shechinah* glory, a Christophany of the Son representing the Father's sovereign session in the heavenly Holy of Holies, actually did shine forth as the Light of the world (Heb.1:3a: "He [Jesus] is the shining forth of [the Father's] *glory*, the precise image of His essence"; cf. Jn.8:12; Rev.21:23-24).<sup>14</sup> It was also upon this mercy seat or atonement cover that the high priest sprinkled the blood of sacrifice only once a year on the Day of Atonement (Heb.9:7; cf. Lev.16:34), manifestly symbolizing the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins "once and for all" (Rom.6:10; Heb.7:27; 9:12; 9:26; 9:28; 10:10; 1Pet.3:18), as the Father looks down with complete acceptance on His Son's "shed blood" (Heb.1:3b; 9:12; 10:12).<sup>15</sup>

b. The Ark: The "ark of the covenant" is the premier symbol within the tabernacle of our Lord Jesus Christ. For while the entire tabernacle along with its rituals and sacrifices speak of our Lord and His saving work (with the altar of incense, the table of the bread of presence, and the golden lampstand specifically representing clear types of Him as we have just seen above), in the ark we have a picture of Christ in resurrection, ascended to the Father, and seated intimately with Him (the sacrifice of the cross being an accomplished fact). This union can be clearly seen in the close and intimate association of the ark and the mercy seat, the latter representing the Father's throne, the former representing the Son in contiguous union with that throne (literally and figuratively: cf. Ps. 2:6-12; 110:1-6; and cf. Jer.3:16-17 where the throne of the Lord replaces the ark in the millennial kingdom). Moreover, the ark and its mercy seat always appear together and are often described collectively as "the ark" (e.g., 1Sam.3:3-7:2). Thus, in a very real sense, the ark and mercy seat are "one" just as Jesus and the Father whom they symbolize are "One" (Jn.10:30). Finally, the particular picture given by the ark and mercy seat is that of the unity of the resurrected Christ with the Father, with the Messiah, human and divine (i.e., the ark

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<sup>14</sup> In this imagery, moreover, the relationship of Moses to Christ on earth parallels that of Jesus and the Father in heaven: cf. Ex.25:22: "there ... I [Jesus representing the Father] will meet with you [Moses a type of Christ; cf. Deut.18:18; Heb.3:1-6]; there are many points of typological symbolism between Moses and Christ in scripture.

<sup>15</sup> Jesus, of course, offered up His life, not literally His blood, and in the book of Hebrews great care is taken to avoid giving this misleading impression (cf. Heb.8:3: "something to offer"). For "the blood of Christ" is a symbol of Jesus' sacrifice just as "the Lamb of God" is a title symbolic of His sacrifice. The analogy is of sacrificial animals as types of Jesus, and animal blood as types of His death on the cross. We are not to take Jesus' "blood" in this figure as literal anymore than we are to consider Him a literal "lamb" (i.e., animals *represent* Christ; animal blood *represents* Christ's spiritual death for us; cf. Jn.1:29; 1Cor.11:23-26). The aim of avoiding such heresy is one reason why John takes such great pains to show that Jesus did not bleed to death, but "gave up His spirit" while the blood was yet in His body (Jn.19:33-35; cf. Matt.27:50; Mk.15:37; Lk.23:46; Jn.19:30; 1Jn.5:6-8). See also Peter's Epistles #9: "Salvation through Faith, and the Blood of Christ".



is made of acacia wood covered with gold, so that now His divinity is in full view in contrast to the First Advent), now seated in victory at the Father's right hand (Ps.110:1; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20-22; Phil.2:9; Heb.1:3; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22).

As we are told in Hebrews 9:1-5, the ark originally contained 1) a jar of manna (Ex.16:33-34); 2) Aaron's rod that budded (Num.17:10); 3) the tables of the Law (Deut.31:24-26; 1Kng.8:21). Each of these items speaks of God's provision and man's rejection of that provision (both originally with Adam, and subsequently, as illustrated by the behavior of Israel as typical of mankind in general). God provided perfect bodily sustenance for man (the trees of Eden for Adam, manna for the Israelites), but man rejected this gracious provision (Adam by eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the Israelites by "grumbling" [the jar of manna]: Gen.3:6; Ex.16:11-12; cf. Ps.78:17-22). God provided perfect temporal protection for man (the security of the garden for Adam, the leadership of Aaron and Moses for the Israelites), but man rejected this gracious provision (Adam by failing to heed God's warning, the Israelites by challenging Moses and Aaron's right to lead [the rod that budded]: Gen.2:17; Num.16:41). God provided perfect spiritual provision for man (the tree of life for Adam, the Law for the Israelites), but man rejected this gracious provision (Adam by violating God's verbal warning, the Israelites by violating God's written law [the stone tablets]: Gen.3:11; Ex.32). The inclusion of a symbol of each of these three essential categories of human rejection of divine provision (physical, temporal [for freedom of choice], and spiritual) directly *within* the ark is a highly significant representation of Jesus "bearing our sin in His body" (1Pet.2:24; cf. Matt.26:26; Rom.7:4; 1Cor.11:24; Heb.10:10).

For this reason it is not surprising that the ark is also described as the "*ark of the covenant*", for it is the death of Jesus Christ which fulfills God's earlier covenant of anticipation (for no such covenant/testament is valid apart from a death: Heb.9:15-18), while inaugurating a New Covenant of forgiveness through the sprinkling of the precious blood of the Lamb, our Savior (Matt.26:28; 1Cor.11:25; cf. Is.42:6). Christ bore the curse of the first covenant (Gal.3:13), that He might abolish the barrier of sin and reconcile us to God through His body, sacrificed on our behalf (Col.1:22). And this symbolism is reflected by the contents of the ark, with the blood spilled upon the mercy seat which covers it, graphically and effectively representing His sacrifice for sin. In spite of man's rejection and rebellion, God would provide salvation (and subsequently has), a fitting testimony to His inimitable and unsearchable grace which this, the ark of the Testimony, so effectively teaches (cf. Ex.25:16; 40:20-21). Through His sacrifice, moreover, Jesus has renewed all of these provisions in spite of man's initial rejection of them. For He is the Bread of Life (cf. the manna) in whom we shall never hunger again (Jn.6:25-58; Rev.2:17); and He is the Branch (cf. the budding staff) whose perfect Kingdom shall never end wherein we shall dwell for all eternity (Is.4:2-6; Rev.3:21); and He is the Fulfiller of the Law and the Word of God (cf. the tablets of the Law inscribed with the words of God) with whom we shall enjoy sweet fellowship forevermore (Rom.10:4; Rev.3:12). Jesus sacrificed Himself for these and for all the sins of all mankind, that all mankind might be blessed with this eternal life through faith in Him – the most blessed of all promises, and clearly taught by the symbolism of the ark.

This symbolism of the ark helps to explain why there is no counterpart for it per se immediately visible in the heavenly temple: the mercy seat's counterpart is present in the Father's throne, with the glorious presence of the Father Himself corresponding to the *Shechinah* glory of the tabernacle. But the ark represented the Son, and the Son too is already present, seated at the Father's right hand "in the center of the throne" (the very place we expect to find the ark, contiguous with the "mercy seat", that is, the throne: Rev.5:6). Therefore, just as the *Shechinah* glory finds its true antitype only in the Father Himself, so the ark, the most important symbol of the Son, finds its true antitype only in the Son Himself (so that the symbol is not missed: cf. Jer.3:16-17). When our Lord does make His first appearance in the heavenly temple in chapter five, it is appropriate that it be as the victorious "Lamb as having been slain", for it is through His sacrifice that He has won the right to "open the book", and bring on the final events which will lead to the establishment of His kingdom (cf. Rev.5:9-10).<sup>16</sup>

Having concluded our treatment of the earthly tabernacle and its furniture, we may now return to our exegesis of Revelation chapter four, keeping in mind the discussion above as we move on to consider John's description of the heavenly temple.

See Figure #1 at rear: "The Earthly Tabernacle and the Heavenly Temple"

### **The Throne:**

[B]ehold, a throne had been placed in the [third] heaven, and [some] One was sitting [upon it].  
Revelation 4:2b

Inasmuch as God is the King of the universe, it is not surprising that a throne as a symbol of His divine kingship is often mentioned or implied in scripture (1Kng.22:19; Ps.2:4; 9:7; 29:10; 47:8; 113:5; 123:1; Is.6:1; 66:1; Matt.23:22). Moreover, the throne is particularly prevalent in the book of Revelation as a symbol emphasizing the Father's ultimate authority (Rev.5:1; 5:7; 5:13; 6:16; 7:10; 7:15; 19:4; 21:5). As we have just seen, God's heavenly throne is represented in the Jewish tabernacle and temple by the "mercy-seat" above the ark of the covenant with its attendant golden cherubim, the place where God "meets" with His servants, the place of the resident *Shechinah* glory of God (Ex.25:10-22; Lev.16:2; Num.7:89; Heb.9:1-5). The earthly "golden throne" which was placed above the ark of the covenant represented this real throne of

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<sup>16</sup> The ark itself will appear in the heavenly temple later at Revelation 11:19, but as a symbol of the true temple and worship of God and the impending judgment upon the anti-God religion which the beast has centered in the earthly temple (the rightful place of the ark; see in loc.).

God attended by real cherubs whereon He manifests His Presence as John beholds it here (cf. 1Sam.4:4; Ps.80:1; 99:1; Dan.7:9-10; Rev.4:6-9).<sup>17</sup>

Several important characteristics of the Father's heavenly throne (most of which come to light in the course of Revelation, but which are not necessarily obvious to the reader at the throne's first mention in this context) need to be pointed out here:

1. The Throne is awesome and impressive beyond anything in the human frame of reference:

God's throne is high and lofty (Is.6:1), with the appearance of a sapphire (Ezek.1:26; 10:1; cf. Ex.24:10), attended by a royal lifeguard of fiery cherubim (Ezek.1:4-28; cf. Is.6:1-4; Ezek.8:2), issuing forth the fire of judgment (Dan.7:9-10), releasing blasts of thunder and lightning (Rev.4:5), and voices (Rev.4:5; 16:1; 16:17). The throne of God is, therefore, an awesome and formidable thing (Is.63:15), appropriate for the Great Almighty God enthroned thereon.

2. The Throne has the form of a chariot: The earthly "mercy-seat" of gold, covering the ark of the covenant (of which the golden cherubs form a part), is described in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 28:18 as a "chariot", and this is consistent with descriptions of the heavenly throne throughout scripture.

For example, in Daniel 7:9, the fiery throne has "wheels", and the descriptions of the throne in the book of Ezekiel can be interpreted in no other way (see especially Ezek.1:4-28; 10:9-22; cf. Ps.132:7), for as described by Ezekiel this throne is clearly a mobile instrument of battle wherewith God makes visitation of the earth, especially for the purpose of rendering divine judgment (cf. Hab.3:3-15).

3. The Throne is now occupied also by the Lord Jesus Christ: Ancient chariots of war typically carried two combatants (cf. 1Kng.22:34), and while it is not immediately apparent, it becomes clear in chapter five that our Lord Jesus Christ is indeed sharing this throne, where He has been seated with the Father in victory since His ascension, awaiting the time when all of God's enemies will be laid low (Rev.3:21: "The one who wins the victory, I will grant him to sit with Me on My throne just as I also have won the victory and have taken My seat with My Father on His throne"; cf. Ps.110:1; Rom.8:34; Eph.1:20-22; Phil.2:9; Heb.1:3; 12:2; 1Pet.3:22). The close

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<sup>17</sup> See "The Illustration of the Tabernacle" in section II.5.b of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall". More detailed discussions of the cherubim may also be found in The Satanic Rebellion series, parts 1 (section III.i), 4 (section III.3.b.1), and 5 (section II.4).

proximity of Father and Son after Christ's session will become evident shortly when the Lamb appears "standing in the center of the throne" (Rev.5:6)<sup>18</sup>

4. The Throne is attended by cherubs who are an intimate part of it: The cherubim, the highest ranking angelic creatures, are God's "honor guard, life guard, body guard" (see the detailed discussions in the series The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation).<sup>19</sup> As such, it is understandable that they are closely associated with His heavenly throne, so close, in fact, that a bit later they are described as essentially one with that throne. For just as the Lamb is "in the middle of the throne" (Rev.5:6), so the four cherubs are identically described as "in the middle of the throne" (Rev.4:6). It is true that in the verse just cited, the "four living creatures" (i.e., the cherubim: see the references listed in the previous note) are also described as being "around the throne" as well as "in the middle of" it, a combination of characterizations which nicely describes their position as guardians proportionally positioned around the throne (from which positions they also provide this "chariot throne" with locomotion, their wings being closely interlocked with its wheels: Ezek.1:4-26; 10:6-17; cf. Is.6:1-6; Rev.4:6; 4:8; 4:9; 5:6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 6:1; 6:6; 7:11; 14:3; 15:7; 19:4; and see references to previous studies in the previous note):

The Lord reigns. Let the nations tremble. He is enthroned above the cherubim. Let the earth shake.

Psalm 99:1 (cf. Ps.80:1; Is.37:16)

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<sup>18</sup> It is possible that this close relationship of the Messiah to the Father in physically sharing His throne was also represented in the construction of Solomon's exceptional kingly throne. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 9:17-19, we are told that a golden "footstool" or *chebhash* was attached to this throne (along with the steps), but the meaning of the word is not clear, and it is within the realm of possibility that the *chebhash* represents a secondary seat within the throne itself rather than a footstool. This possibility is strengthened when we consider that 1) *chebhash* is not the normal word for "footstool" in Hebrew; 2) the word *chebhash* is otherwise unattested in Hebrew, occurring only in this verse (so that this context can be our only clear guide to its meaning), and 3) at least one manuscript and edition read *chebhes* instead of *chebhash*. The alternative reading might mean that the throne included a secondary seat called a "lamb" (the word indicated by the spelling change). This name would no doubt come from the shape of the seat (consider the fact that the back of the throne is an *'egel*, or "calf", from the rounded shape of a calf's head: 1Kng.10:19). Considering that *the* "Lamb" is soon to appear in the midst of the heavenly throne (Rev.5:6), this reading of 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 9:17-19 at least deserves consideration.

<sup>19</sup> See especially part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section III.i "Satan's Original Status: Cherub"; part 4, "Satan's World-System, Past, Present and Future", section III.3.b.1 "Titles of Rank: Cherubs"; and part 5, "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section II.4 "The Four Ages of Human History (represented by the cherubim)".

In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried unto my God; He heard my voice out of His temple, and my cry came before Him, even into His ears. Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations also of the hills moved and were shaken, because He was wroth. There went up smoke out of His nostrils, and fire out of His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. **He bowed the heavens and came down**, and darkness was under His feet. And He **rode upon a cherub**, and did fly; yea, He did fly upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him was **dark waters** and thick clouds of the skies. At the brightness that was before Him His thick clouds passed, hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice: hailstones and coals of fire. Yea, He sent out His arrows and scattered them; and He shot out lightnings, and discomfited them.

Psalm 18:6-14 KJV

Although this is indeed a highly poetic passage, it should be clear, given our discussion immediately above, that much of the “imagery” here is clearly more than just that. God is spirit, and His being, if it could be defined in material terms, would exceed the bounds of the universe to an infinite degree. But God does display Himself in visible form (as in our immediate context of Revelation chapter four), and when He does so, the nature of the theophany is entirely consistent with the picture painted by David in this Psalm. The cherubs are real and they do perform the function of locomotion for God’s battle chariot (Ezek.1:4-28; 10:9-22). They do have wings (Is.6:1-6; Rev.4:8), and are sometimes described in terms of the wind or closely associated with it (Ps.104:4; Heb.1:14; cf. Zech.5:9; Rev.7:1).

5. The Throne is set atop the heavens: What is true of the cherubim in Psalm 18 quoted above is also true of the heavens. That is, just because something is poetically expressed does not make it theologically inexact (cf. Ps.68:4; 77:16-18; 104:1-4; Hab.3:3-15). David’s words give us a description of God’s manipulation of the universe which is much closer to being literal than metaphorical, for they clearly describe His visitation of the earth by “compressing” the heavens (“He bowed the heavens and came down”) so that only the separating waters of the heavenly sea continue to shield Him from view (“His pavilion round about Him was dark waters and thick clouds of the skies”). The same can also be seen from two theophanic visitations of the earth by God of which we have a good deal of detail from scripture (i.e., His appearances to the Jewish elders at Sinai, and to Ezekiel at the river Kebar: Ex.24:10; Ezek.1:22-28; 10:1). The “waters above” the heavens are described in the Exodus passage as a “pavement” under God’s feet, and in Ezekiel as a “firmament” above the heads of the cherubim. Now the “waters above” are technically separate from the firmament of the heavens which separates them from the earthly sea (Gen.1:6-7), but these two descriptions are entirely appropriate for what amounts to the “top layer” of the firmament of sky and space. In each of these descriptions, therefore, these normally far distant upper waters are now visible, after the separating barrier of the twin heavens has been greatly compressed or “bowed”. It should be noted that on each of these occasions God remains technically **separated from** the earth and the world by the barrier of waters, rather than completely “penetrating” the heavens and actually **coming into** the world and onto earth – an eventuality which would require instantaneous and utter destruction of that sinful, corrupt world (cf. 2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.6:14; 20:11; 21:1). Only by becoming human as well as divine could God

come into the world to save us without first destroying us, that is, only in the Person of Jesus Christ, the God-man and only Mediator between God and Man (Jn.1:1-18; 1Tim.2:5).<sup>20</sup> Thus in all three of these instances referenced above, we have the same essential picture of God's chariot throne pressing down on the heavens from a location atop the waters above them (i.e., from the third heaven), leading us to conclude that all three instances are straightforward descriptions of the heavenly reality of God's throne "resting" upon the combination of firmament and heavenly sea above it.

Secondly, as evidenced by its name, the third heaven itself is located above the "two heavens" of atmosphere and universe we often collectively call "the heavens".<sup>21</sup> Inasmuch as the throne of God (occupied as that throne is by the Father Himself) is the central feature of the heavenly temple (with which the third heaven is itself essentially synonymous), it is not surprising that we see here in Revelation this same picture of God's throne sitting astride the (two) heavens which, together with the heavenly sea that forms its upper layer, separate the third heaven from the earth below. God's throne is in fact so closely connected to this firmament upon which it rests that it can itself legitimately be described as essentially a part of "God's throne":

Thus says the Lord, "***The heavens are my throne***, and the earth My footstool. Where is the house you would build for Me? Or where is the place of My rest?"  
Isaiah 66:1

(34) But I say to you, do not swear at all, not by heaven, ***because it is the throne of God***,  
(35) and not by the earth, because it is the footstool of His feet, and not by Jerusalem, because it is the city of the Great King.  
Matthew 5:34-35

Finally, the close connection between God's chariot-throne and the heavens and sky can also be seen in its description in Ezekiel (1:26; 10:1) as "like a sapphire stone". This is the very quality ascribed to the "pavement" of sky in Exodus 24:10, and in the translucent blue of the sapphire we have a perfect picture both of the brilliance of the heavens along with its sea of heavenly waters (with which the throne is so closely associated).

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<sup>20</sup> This "problem" of the incompatibility of a Holy God with a corrupted earth was apparently anticipated by the devil and used as propaganda to convince his fellows of God's inability to react to his rebellion short of destroying all creation. But while Satan anticipated the "problem", he was completely surprised by God's blessed and unparalleled solution in the Person of Jesus Christ. See "Satan's Coup d'état", section III.3.1 of Part 1 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

<sup>21</sup> "Two-heavens" is the literal meaning of the Hebrew dual form of the common word translated "heaven" in most versions of the Old Testament. See "The Three Heavens", section II.3 of Part 1 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall".

With this scriptural connection between the sky-heavens and the throne of God in mind, the persistent imagery one finds in scripture linking God's visitations of earth with meteorological phenomena of the sort described in our quotation of Psalm 18 above makes all the more sense. Inasmuch as God's chariot-throne in a very real sense "rides the sky" and the waters above it, it should come as no surprise that thunder, lightning, storms, clouds, hail and the like are common representations of the great power of the Almighty in His superintendence of the earth (e.g., Ex.19:16-18; Lev.16:2; Deut.33:26; Ps.50:3; 68:4; 68:33; 104:1-4; Is.19:1; Nah.1:3). For it is from the third heaven and through this "veil" of sky and water that God manifests Himself (Acts 9:3; 26:13; Rom.1:18; Heb.12:26; 2Pet.1:18), keeping His visible form concealed from the eyes of mankind so that their choice for or against Him in the Person of His Son may remain a genuine one, not unduly influenced by the overwhelming and awesome nature of His presence (Ex.33:20; Jn.1:18; 6:46; 1Tim.6:16; 1Jn.4:12).

6. The Throne pours forth the fire of divine judgment: The celestial representations of divine power mentioned above are especially prominent in the book of Revelation, and this is not accidental. For, most commonly in scripture, the presence of thunder, lightning, black storm clouds, whirlwinds and the like are indications of divine *judgment* (as is the case in Psalm 18 above), and Revelation is primarily concerned with the Tribulation, the time of the greatest and most severe divine judgment leveled upon the earth and its inhabitants in the history of mankind's habitation of earth (cf. Dan.12:1; Matt.24:21; Mk.13:19; Rev.16:18; and see part 1 of this series). Inasmuch as fire is the premier symbol of divine judgment (compare the fire and brimstone rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah, the fires of hell, the lake of fire, the fire of the altar where the sacrifice was burned representing Christ's death for us on the cross), it should not seem at all odd that the very *source* of the divine fire of judgment is the Father's heavenly throne (Dan.7:9-10; cf. Ps.97:2-3; Matt.3:11). Indeed, the liquid fire which proceeds from the chariot-throne of God is the very origin of the "lake of fire", the divine instrument of final judgment upon all who have chosen to rebel against Him (compare Dan.7:11 with Matt.25:41 and Rev.20:11-15). This is apparently not an original and necessary characteristic of the Father's chariot-throne, for there are indications in scripture that His intensity of light and fiery brilliance have only become problems for His creatures on account of their own sin and rebellion (cf. the "stones of fire" in Ezek.28:16 turning into "fire coming out of you [Satan]" in Ezek.28:18 as a result of his rebellion). God is a "consuming fire" (Deut.4:24; Is.33:14; Heb.12:29), and dwells in light which is "unapproachable" now (1Tim.6:16; cf. Ps.104:2; 1Jn.1:5-7), but once this present world is consumed by fire (2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:1), and this mortality we bear has taken on immortality (1Cor.15:53-54), then we shall revel in the brilliant presence of God the Father and the Lamb who will be our light forever (Rev.22:5; cf. Jn.1:4-9; 3:19-21; 1Jn.1:5-7; Rev.1:15-16).

7. The Throne is only temporarily located in the third heaven: The present location of God's throne is also a result of creature rebellion. We know from Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 that God's

throne, God’s dwelling, was originally on the earth.<sup>22</sup> Creature rebellion, specifically, Satan’s revolt, created the rift between God and His creation, necessitating either an immediate incineration of that creation or a separation (out of mercy) between God’s Presence and the world until such time as He should effect reconciliation on His own terms, namely, *re*-creation on the basis of His Son’s sacrifice (cf. 2Cor.5:17-19; Col.1:20; Rev.21:5). When all God’s enemies have been put under His feet, death and the corrupt world will be eradicated as well (1Cor.15:24-26), and at that future time, at history’s end, the New Jerusalem will come to earth – the new earth, which will be the dwelling of God for all eternity to come, and God will be all and in all (1Cor.15:27-28; Rev.21-22). This explains the very precise language used here in Revelation 4:2, “a throne *had been placed* in the [third] heaven”. Were this the normal, natural, and eternal location of the throne, we should have expected the simple verb “to be” here. But the third heaven is God’s battle headquarters from which He is in the process of subduing the devil’s rebellion (the victory now secure through the successful mission of the One sent to earth for us), and His throne is a battle chariot, only temporarily removed from earth. Just as the earthly ark was carried by four Levites and accompanied the armies of Israel into battle against their enemies, so the heavenly throne is “carried” by four cherubs, and represents the militant posture of God towards the rebellious creature-rule over the earth in the person of Satan and his angels. The heavenly throne is destined to return at the end of time when sin and death have been completely eradicated from the universe, and every enemy subdued, judged, and disposed of. At that blessed time, we shall see the fire of judgment turn to blessed illumination (compare Rev.20:14-15 with Rev.21:23-25; 22:5), and the waters of judgment to blessed invigoration (compare Rev.21:1 with Rev.22:1-2), for no longer will there be any separation of God from His creatures, nor any further need of it (Rev.21:5; 21:27; 22:15). No longer will there be any need for God’s penetration of the separating heavens through unique “Advents”, whether of the Son (1<sup>st</sup> Advent: Jn.3:13; 3:31; 6:33; 6:38; 6:42; 6:50; 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent: 1Thes.1:10; 4:16; 2Thes.1:7; 1Pet.1:11; Rev.19:11-21), the Spirit (Jn.14:15-17; 15:26-27; 16:13-14; Acts 2), or the Father (Rev.21:2-3; cf. 1Cor.15:24), for on that day God will truly be “with us” (cf. “Immanuel”: Is.7:14) in all three Persons, in every way (1Cor.15:28), and for all time to come – and so shall we ever be with Him (1Thes.4:17)!

The throne of God is therefore not located in some remote corner of the universe, nor is heaven so far away that there is little concern for what is happening on the earth. Far from it. The third heaven is, in theological terms, directly on the other side of the separating barrier of the veil of the heavens (sky, atmosphere, and waters above) which Jesus has already pierced (Heb.4:14; 7:26; 9:11-12; cf. Eph.4:7-10; Col.2:15). Now more than ever, the final and complete dissolution of that barrier (already breached by our Lord) is an imminent and impending reality, a fact brought home by the presence here in Revelation 4:2 of the first thing that meets John’s eye after entering behind the veil, namely, the throne of God.

See Figure #2 at rear: “The Throne”

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<sup>22</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, “Satan's Rebellion and Fall”, section II.6, “The Seven Edens”.



## The Appearance of the Father:

And the One sitting [on the throne was] similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius.

Revelation 4:3

Without doubt, the reason why the throne, covered immediately above, lacks in this context the detailed description which John might have given it is because, as impressive as that throne is, it pales in comparison to the appearance of the One seated upon it. God the Father does not have a physical human body (as Christ does have since His virgin birth), but it is clear from the initial description of the Occupant of throne as the “One *sitting*” that the appearance of the Father here is in the nature of a “theophany”, that is, a divine manifestation of His Person in the likeness of human form for the sake of fellowship with His creatures.<sup>23</sup> God’s willingness to make Himself visible to and approachable by His creatures in this way is part and parcel of His great love for us (manifest most clearly in the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ, given to suffer and serve as a true human being during His 1<sup>st</sup> Advent, and destined to be revealed in exquisite glory during His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent).

In this passage, John describes what to him at this moment is the most salient feature of the enthroned Father, namely, that He is “similar in appearance to a gemstone of jasper or sardius”. To better understand what is meant by this phrase, we need first to consider several other passages of scripture which likewise speak of the Father’s appearance while seated in theophany on His glorious throne.

1. In Exodus 24:10-17, we are told that “the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire” (cf. Ex.19:18), an impression of His glorious Presence reflected by other scriptures as well, such as the burning bush in Exodus 3:1-15, and the pillar of cloud and fire in Exodus 13:21-22. Compare the description of Christ’s eyes in Revelation 1:14: “His eyes were like a fiery flame”.

2. In Isaiah 6:1-5, His apparel is described as awesome and impressive, for “the train of His robe filled the temple”. Compare the description of Christ’s impressive attire in Revelation 1:13: “dressed in a long robe with a golden belt tied around His waist”.

3. In Ezekiel 1:27 (cf. Ezek.1:4; 8:2), His body is said to resemble “glowing metal” [NASB, NIV], where the obscure Hebrew word in this phrase, *chashmal* (lmwx), refers either to gold (so W.J. Schroeder), brass (so C.F. Keil), or amber (so KJV), or electrum, an alloy of gold and silver (so Septuagint). Common to all four possibilities is the sparkling quality of the material which recalls the orangish color of fire and gives the Father’s appearance a tangible, substantive aspect. Compare the description of Christ’s feet in Revelation 1:15: “like white-hot bronze when super-heated in a furnace”.

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<sup>23</sup> See “Definition of Theophany and Christophany”, section II.C.3.a, in part 1 of Bible Basics: “Theology: the Study of God”.

4. In Ezekiel 10:4, His glory is called “radiant” or “brilliant” (cf. Ezek.43:2), so intense that it occasions a cloud which fills the temple (cf. Rev.15:8, where the source of the smoke is also the glory of God; cf. also Is.6:4). God, who *is* light (1Jn.1:5), and who dwells in light so “unapproachable” that it is impossible for a man to see Him and live (1Tim.6:16 and Ex.33:20) has clearly *made it* possible here for John to do in the third heaven what is not within the realm of human capacity or survivability to do on earth, namely to view the very glorious image of God without being consumed by His brilliance. Compare the description of Christ in Revelation 1:16: “His face shone like the sun in its glory”.

5. In Daniel 7:9-10, the Father’s clothing is described as “white as snow” and His hair “white as wool”. Compare the description of Christ in Revelation 1:14: “His head and his hair were as white as wool or as snow”.

6. In Ezekiel 43:2, His voice is “like the sound of many waters” (cf. Ps.29:3-9; 46:6; Ezek.1:24). Compare the description of Christ in Revelation 1:15: “His voice was like the sound of many waters”.

The resemblance pointed out here in almost all particulars between the appearance of the Father and that of our glorified Lord Jesus Christ as He appeared to John in Revelation chapter one is hardly accidental. For the Son is the very “*shining forth* of [the Father’s] glory”, and “the *precise image* of [the Father’s] essence” (Heb.1:3a; cf. Jn.1:14; 2Cor.4:4; Phil.2:6; Col.1:15). Jesus Himself tells us that whoever has seen Him has indeed seen the Father (Jn.14:9; cf. Jn.1:18; 12:45). After all, as the Father’s unique representative (1Tim.2:5-6; Heb.8:6; 9:15; 12:24), the One anointed to reconcile the world to Him and Him to the world (2Cor.5:17-20; Col.1:19-20; Heb.10:7), the One sent into the world to be the true Light of the world (Jn.1:4-9), it is really Jesus who has been seen on this earth in all theophany that has occurred on the earth.<sup>24</sup>

The description of the Father in Revelation 4:3 as being like a “jasper or sardius” gemstone refers to the appearance of His “body” and is reminiscent of the description of Christ’s feet as like “white-hot bronze” (as well as to the “glowing metal” description in Ezekiel 1:27). The jasper referred to here is a dark colored stone (black to red to purple), while the sardius is also characterized by fiery earth-tones (orange to red). Moreover, the latter’s Hebrew equivalent is

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<sup>24</sup> Therefore most of the appearances noted above are really of our Lord Jesus Christ acting in the Father’s stead (compare Is.6:1-6 with Jn.12:41). Given that Christ is acting *for* the Father and *as* the Father (i.e., His close representative, so close that distinction is difficult to make without scriptural guidance), the descriptions provided by these passages may be taken as also applicable to the Father’s theophanies (a point indicated as well by the close similarity in appearance between the two noted above; see “Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament”, section II.C.3, in part 1 of Bible Basics: “Theology: the Study of God”).

the *`odem* (,dva), whose similarity to the name “Adam” is not coincidental (,da).<sup>25</sup> For the name “Adam” means “ruddy” and refers to the earth-tone color of the first man whose body was taken directly from the earth. In choosing to represent Himself in the form of a man whose “body” exhibits a similar hue (albeit with a brilliant glory never before borne by man save our resurrected Lord), the Father here signals all who read the words of this prophecy of His clear intention and purpose to reestablish divine rule and residence *with man on the earth*, a reality certainly future in the New Jerusalem (Rev.21-22).

### **The Rainbow:**

And there was a rainbow around the throne similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald.

Revelation 4:4a

The rainbow we see in the sky is a reflection or projection of the visible appearance of the glory of God (compare Ezek.1:26-28 with Gen.9:9-17 and see below). Here in Revelation 4:3, however, John sees the real thing, that is, the actual glory of God which surrounds the Father and His throne in all its iridescent brilliance. Typically, this brilliance of the glory of God is so overwhelming that it cannot even be directly viewed by mere human beings, let alone properly described (so that in earthly manifestations it is usually described merely as a “brightness”). But, as discussed above, John is here enabled to see these heavenly sights which would normally be impossible for any mortal man to view. His description of the rainbow is similar to that given by Ezekiel (as seen here in C.F. Keil’s translation with emphasis and explanations added):

(26) Over the expanse (i.e., the firmament or “compressed” barrier of the heavens: see above) above their heads (i.e., of the four cherubs) was to be seen, like a sapphire stone, the figure of a throne: and over the figure of the throne was a figure resembling a Man above it. And I saw like the appearance of glowing brass (or electrum or amber: see above), like the appearance of fire within the same (i.e., within the figure of the Man) round about; (27) from the appearance of His loins upwards, and from the appearance of His loins downwards, I saw as of the appearance of fire, and a shining light was round about it. (28) ***Like the appearance of the (rain)bow***, which is in the clouds in the day of rain, was the appearance of the ***shining light*** round about. ***This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah.***

Ezekiel 1:26-28a [C.F. Keil]

This passage makes it patently clear that the rainbow and the glory of the Lord are synonymous. Therefore, in Revelation 4:3, the “rainbow around the throne” can only be understood as the

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<sup>25</sup> This correspondence of Hebrew gemstones with Greek equivalents which we have noted in the past is maintained by John also in his description of the gates of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21:18-21. Compare Exodus 28:17-20; 39:10-13; Ezekiel 28:13, and see the series, The Satanic Rebellion, part 4, section III.3.b.2, and part 5, section II.8.b.i.7.

manifestation of that glory for all who have capacity to see it, and we may well imagine that its brilliance, brightness, and iridescence exceed by orders of magnitude the reflection of that glory in the earthly rainbow whose appearance we are occasionally blessed to see.

In terms of its color, John describes the rainbow as “similar in appearance to [something] made of emerald”. We should not, however, imagine that the color of the rainbow is totally or even predominantly green (the usual color associated with this particular gemstone). But the emerald was the most valuable gemstone in wide circulation in the ancient world (the diamond and ruby being rare and relatively unknown). This consideration, coupled with the sparkling, flashing quality of the emerald no doubt prompted John’s description of the rainbow-aura of God’s glory as being “emerald-*like*”. It should also be noted that using a gemstone as the primary point of comparison for the rainbow suggests to us that it is a much more tangible and tactile phenomenon than the reflection we sometimes see. Finally, in addition to its status as most precious jewel, and in addition to its sparkling character, one other factor may have influenced John’s choice of the adjective “emerald-*like*” once it seemed appropriate to represent the rainbow’s palpable, sparkling, and impressive appearance by reference to a gemstone, namely, the fact that the name of its Hebrew counterpart (*bareqeth*, תִּרְב) means “flashing” or “glittering”, and would thus be most evocative of this rainbow’s brilliant, refulgent nature.

The fact of this rainbow’s overwhelming brilliance should be kept in mind, for it is, as we have just seen, the effulgent shining forth of the glory of the Lord, and without any earthly shielding of the glory at that. This is an important point of which to take note, for whenever God has “revealed” His glory on earth, it has always been in shielded form (for otherwise no flesh could survive the experience of viewing it). When Moses sought to see the glory of the Lord, the Lord responded “You are not able to see My face, because no man can see Me and live” (Ex.33:19-20). When God *does* reveal His glory to Moses immediately thereafter, He also makes it clear that this is a “partial revelation” rather than the “direct view” John is here receiving (Ex.33:21-23). Even in cases of the partial revelation on earth of the glory of the Lord, moreover, its intensity and fiery nature is overwhelming (Ex.40:34-38; Lev.9:23-24; 2Chron.7:1-3; Is.6:5; Ezek.1:28; Matt.17:5-6; Lk.2:9). As we have explained above, the world is at present separated from the full glory of God by the barrier of the heavens, and at history’s end when His glory comes back to earth at last, that barrier and the corrupted world beneath it (which cannot stand the light) will meet with fiery destruction and be replaced with a blessed new heavens and new earth “where righteousness dwells” (Is.65:17; 66:22; 2Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:1; 21:5; cf. Is.34:4; Rev.6:14; a blessed new world of which we believers are already positionally a part: cf. 2Cor.5:17).

The rainbow is thus an important symbol of God’s peace, prosperity, and restoration following the impending judgment of the Tribulation, and foreshadowing His final return to earth when God’s glory will no longer be seen only “in the heavens” but also on the earth (cf. Rev.21:23 “the glory of God gives it light”; Rev.22:5 “the Lord will give them light”). The rainbow is well-known by all readers of scripture as God’s sign, God’s promise of mercy upon the earth given after the great flood (Gen.9:9-17). Thus, the appearance of His glory in rainbow form here

anticipates the blessed divine calm after the coming storm of the Tribulation. By allowing John to see His glory in this “blessed aftermath” form of the rainbow, God is assuring him and us that in spite of the devastating nature of the coming Tribulation, earth will not be completely destroyed, but will instead be delivered from the hands of the wicked and restored to the most blessed peace and prosperity it has ever known in the coming Kingdom of His Son.<sup>26</sup> And when those thousand years have run their course, the day will come when all that is corrupt and wicked in this world will be burnt away by this same glory of God when He returns to the new earth to live with us forever (Rev.21:1-8). On that day, the fiery judgment of the glory of God will never again be visible or necessary, and His glory will instead be seen only as the most exquisite and intense light, more brilliant, more blessed, more beautiful than any rainbow human eyes have yet beheld.

### **The Elders:**

And encircling the throne were twenty-four [other] thrones. And on the[se] thrones twenty-four elders were sitting, dressed in white clothing. And on their heads were golden crowns.

Revelation 4:4b

The twenty-four elders are high-ranking angels, not human beings as is sometimes assumed. At this point in John’s narrative, the Tribulation has not yet begun, the resurrection of believers has not yet taken place, and the judgment seat of Christ (with its concomitant rewards to individual believers) is still future – all events which would need to precede any enthroning of human elders in heaven. Furthermore, we know that until Christ’s ascension there were no human beings in heaven at all (that is, until He “led captivity captive”, bringing the pre-cross believers from the subterranean paradise through the heavens and into God’s heavenly temple in the third heaven: see the discussion above under “the Holy Place”). We also know that there are many believers still on the earth at present (with untold myriads yet to come in the Millennium), and it would be most strange if these were not to have “elder representation” too (assuming these elders to be human). In short, an already completed, adjudged, rewarded, and resurrected human college of elders at this juncture is not possible as none of these conditions have yet been fulfilled for the human family of God. Therefore, these elders must be taken to be angels (a conclusion strengthened by the fact that their appearance and behavior is in every way similar to and consistent with the other angelic creatures John describes in Revelation).

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<sup>26</sup> In the same way, the strong angel with the rainbow in Revelation 10:1 who is a type of Christ likewise symbolizes God’s re-conquest and restoration of the earth in the Person of the returning Messiah.

Indeed, as we have seen before, these elders are extremely high ranking angelic creatures, second in rank only to the cherubim.<sup>27</sup> This is reflected by the fact that they are located the closest to God after the cherubs, seated on thrones around the throne of God (Rev.4:4). Along with these thrones, their crowns also speak to their exalted status (cf. Is.24:22-23; Rev.4:4; 4:10; 5:5-6; 5:8; 5:11; 5:14; 7:11; 7:13; 11:16; 14:3; 19:4), and we have suggested before that the “thrones” mentioned in Colossians 1:16 are a comparable rank of fallen angel invented by the devil in imitation of the elders. These elders, as the highest ranking angels not directly associated with the throne of God as the Lord’s “bodyguard” (i.e., the cherubs), are apparently the chief officials of the six angelic clans who remained loyal to God during Satan’s rebellion (with each clan supplying a college of four elders). The presence, appearance, and worship of these twenty-four elders are thus a reminder to all who consider this heavenly scene of the great value of being and remaining loyal to the Lord, and of the exceptional benefits promised to those who excel in the struggle in which we are now engaged.<sup>28</sup>

### **Lightning, Sounds and Thunder:**

And from the throne [of God] come forth flashes of lightning, voices and peals of thunder.

Revelation 4:5a

These are all portents of impending judgment (cf. Is.29:6), as can be seen from 1) the fact that the same three elements occur in combination after the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which is the last warning before the beginning of the Great Tribulation, the Tribulation’s final phase (Rev.11:19; cf. Gen.19:24; Ex.9:23-34; 19:16-19; 20:18; 1Sam.7:10; Job 37:1-5; 40:9; Ps.18:7-15; 29:3-9; 77:17-18), and 2) the fact that lightning, sounds and thunder also reappear together following the seventh bowl judgment, the final tribulational judgment preceding the battle of Armageddon (Rev.16:18). That here these signs of incipient judgment proceed from the throne of God is not unprecedented (cf. Is.6:4; Ezek.1:4; 1:14; 1:24-25; Rev.8:5; 11:19; 16:18), neither should it be completely unexpected. For while God’s presence and glory are indeed blessed for all who have been “made perfect” (Heb.12:23), His brilliant holiness and righteousness spell impending doom for all who persist in opposing Him. For His enemies, the throne of glory is indeed a chariot of war, ready to unleash upon a corrupt and rebellious world the just judgment necessary to cleanse the heavens and the earth once and for all and restore everlasting peace in the new world without end. We may take comfort and encouragement from the awesome and terrifying nature of these warning signs. For when God gives warning, whether to individuals or to the world at large, He does so in an unmistakable way that makes crystal clear the consequences of failing to heed His warnings (cf. Heb.12:18-21) – nothing could be more gracious on His part.

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<sup>27</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion, part 4, “Satan’s World-System, Past, Present and Future”, section III.3.b.2, “Elders”.

<sup>28</sup> See Peter’s Epistles: Lesson #18: “Eternal Rewards”.

## The Seven Lamps of Fire:

And there [stood] burning before the throne seven lamps of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.

Revelation 4:5b

All three members of the Trinity are present in the heavenly temple. The Father (whose appearance we have discussed above), the Son (present with the Father on His throne: Rev.5:6), and the Spirit, represented by these “seven lamps of fire”. That these seven lamps “which are the seven spirits of God” represent the Holy Spirit is clear from Revelation 1:4-5, where these same “seven spirits” are mentioned by John in between the Father and the Son:

(4b) Grace to you and peace from the One who is and was and is coming (i.e., the Father), and from the seven spirits (i.e., the Holy Spirit) which are before His throne, (5) and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

Revelation 1:4b-5a

The Greek word for these “lamps”, *lampas* (λαμπας: the origin of our English word “lamp”), is not to be confused with the “lamp-stands” of chapters one and two (*lychnia*: λυχνια: Rev.1:12-13; 1:20; 2:1; 2:5; 11:4). A “lamp”, such as we have here in Revelation 4:5, is the actual *source* of the light. In the ancient world, these were generally small, oblong, ceramic trays, with a narrow throat that held a wick which drew and burned olive oil from the basin of the lamp. A “lampstand”, on the other hand, was a platform which *served to support* the lamp. As vessels of the Holy Spirit (1Cor.6:19-20; cf. Rom.6:13-19; 12:2; 1Pet.2:5), we believers, whether individually or, as in the case of the seven churches, collectively, are “lampstands”, that is, *instruments* of God who are used by Him to facilitate the shining forth of His Word and His witness in this dark world (Matt.5:15-16; Eph.5:8; Phil.2:15; 1Thes.5:5). The *source* of light, however, the “lamp” which provides the light we hold aloft, display and reflect, is God the Holy Spirit (2Cor.3:17-18; cf. Gal.5:16-25).

The manifestation of the Spirit in the symbol of “lamps” thus not only expresses His role in God’s plan of enlightenment, of empowerment, and of witness to the world (cf. Jn.16:5-15), but also maintains His posture of being ever “felt but not seen” as the invisible yet powerful “energizer” of that plan. Like the wind (and the word for wind and Spirit are of course the same in Greek: *pneuma*: πνευμα), He is not visible to the eye of man, but is yet ubiquitous and powerful (Jn.3:8; cf. Gen.6:3; Zech.4:6; Jn.14:16-17; 1Cor.12:3; Gal.5:16-26).<sup>29</sup> The fact that the Spirit is represented by *seven* lamps emphasizes the perfect and complete nature of the empowerment, enlightenment, and witness He provides (Is.11:1-3; Zech.3:8-9; 4:2; 4:6; 4:10; Rev.3:1; 5:6; cf. Is.42:1; Matt.3:16-17; Jn.3:34; 16:12-15).

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<sup>29</sup> See “the Holy Spirit (the 3<sup>rd</sup> Person of the Trinity)”, section II.B.3.b.3 in part 1 of Bible Basics: “Theology: the Study of God”.

These lamps, moreover, are said to be “lamps of fire”, and further, to be “burning before the throne”. The Spirit is often represented in terms of fire and heat (Acts 2:3; 18:25; Rom.12:11; 1Thes.5:19; Jas.4:5 [Greek]; cf. 1Sam.11:6; Ps.69:9; Jn.2:17), a reference to His warming, quickening, and inspiring of God’s people, that they should be not lukewarm like the Laodiceans (Rev.3:15-16), but zealous for our Lord (Matt.22:37-40; Tit.2:14 [not NIV]; 2Pet.3:12; cf. 1Cor.9:24; 1Tim.4:10 [not NIV]; 6:12), that they should not “quench” the Spirit’s fiery influence, (1Thes.5:19), but take fire themselves in the cause of Jesus Christ (Rom.12:2; 2Tim.1:6-7; cf. 1Tim.4:14). This reminder of the Spirit’s illuminating, purifying, warming, empowering, and inspiring ministry should be comforting for the generation at the edge of the Tribulation, reminding us of God’s perfect and continuing guidance, protection, provision and comfort for all believers through the indwelling of His Spirit, no matter how dark the days to come:

(15) For as many as are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery [leading you] back to fear, but you have received a Spirit of adoption, by whom we cry, “Abba, my Father!” (16) The Spirit Himself [thus] testifies to our spirit that we are God’s children. (17) And if we are God’s children, then we are also His heirs, even fellow heirs of Christ – that is, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we might also be glorified together with Him.

Romans 8:15-17

### **The Sea:**

And in front of the throne [was something] like a sea of glass similar to crystal.

Revelation 4:6a

In front of the throne John sees something “like a sea of glass similar to crystal”. This “sea” (Greek *thalassa*: θαλασσα), is the original (or antitype) of which the laver-sea of the tabernacle-temple was merely a representative type. It is in many respects like a true earthly sea (both are represented by the same word in Greek), but John uses the word “like” here (Greek: *hos*, ὡς) to show that there is a significant difference. This sea is “glass-like” and “similar to crystal” in its appearance, the same essential description we noted above upon encountering this identical phenomenon in the books of Exodus and Ezekiel:

And they (i.e., the elders of Israel) saw the God of Israel. And under His feet was something like a brick-work pavement of [blue] sapphire, translucent as the heavens themselves.

Exodus 24:10

And there was something resembling a firmament shimmering like ice awesomely stretched out over the heads of the living creatures.

Ezekiel 1:22

The nouns ice, glass, and crystal, and the adjectival descriptions sapphire blue, shimmering, and translucent might indeed all be used of an impressive body of water in a solid state, an



interpretation borne out by the names “pavement” and “firmament” in the passages above. Moreover, the appearance of the laver-sea provides a similar impression, for although it was filled with water in a liquid state, the reflective surface of the solid bronze basin would have given that water a shimmering, translucent and even blueish appearance (when it caught the sky’s reflection: cf. Job 37:18). As indicated in our earlier treatment of the earthly laver-sea, this solid or “frozen” heavenly sea which John is viewing here is in fact nothing less than the “waters above” from the Genesis account of the earth’s restoration.<sup>30</sup>

(6) And God said, “Let there be a *firmament* in the middle of the waters, and let it separate between waters and *the* waters.” (7) And God made the firmament to separate between the waters which were below the firmament and the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. (8) And God called the firmament “heavens”.  
Genesis 1:6-8a

These “waters above” are, in effect, the final, solid layer resting on the “top” of the firmament (or heavens), and in concert with the heavens perform the function of separating Holy God from the corrupted world, a fact which helps to explain why they can be described in similar terms to the barrier of the heavens (i.e., “pavement” and “firmament” in Exodus and Ezekiel respectively).<sup>31</sup> One also occasionally finds in scripture, mostly in poetic contexts, instances where the atmosphere of planet earth and its moisture are described as if they comprised the two heavens and the “waters above” along with the moisture contained in the atmosphere (i.e., where these two sets are conflated for poetic effect in phenomenological “language of appearance” along the lines of describing the sun as “setting” when really it is the earth which is rotating: cf. Ps.104:13). However, the existence of this heavenly sea in Revelation 4:6 far above the earthly atmosphere shows clearly that Genesis 1:6-8 is not a “poetic” or “confused” account (which somehow fails to perceive or acknowledge the existence of a universe beyond earth’s atmosphere), but that, on the contrary, the “firmament of the heavens” described there is indeed meant to be understood as *both* of the two heavens (sky and space together), just as God names it to be with the dual form “heavens” (Gen.1:7),<sup>32</sup> and just as one would assume it to be as the place of the sun, moon, and stars (Gen.1:14-19). Once we accept the Genesis account of the

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<sup>30</sup> For more details, see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 2, “The Genesis Gap”.

<sup>31</sup> It should be remembered, however, that while in spatial terms the distance between the earth and these “waters above” on the other side of the universe is immense (and perhaps even unknowable), in theological terms the “distance” between us and the third heaven behind this final barrier is infinitely small, if invisible. For God is omnipresent, although only visible with the eyes of faith through the clear witness He provides. See figure #2 above.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of this truly dual form (*pace* most secular scholarship), see “The Three Heavens”, section II.3 of Part 1 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation, “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, especially footnote #12.

reconstruction of the heavens at face value, that is, as a “firmament” comprising everything between earth and the third heaven and truly dividing two massive sets of waters on each side, then not only is the existence of this heavenly sea in Revelation 4:6 clarified, but other passages of scripture fall into place as well, passages which likewise describe the “waters above” not as atmospheric moisture, but as a separate division of the original waters now far above the known universe (e.g., Ps.104:3; cf. Isaiah 40:22):

In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, all the fountains of the great deep were broken open, and all the sluice gates of the heavens were opened up (i.e., releasing the waters above).  
Genesis 7:11

Praise Him, you heavens of the heavens, and you, O waters above the heavens.  
Psalm 148:4

(5) But something escapes their notice in asserting this (i.e., that God's judgment will never come), namely, that there were heavens long ago too, and an earth, which was [re-]established out from under water (i.e., the “waters below” collected into seas) and through [the midst of] water (i.e., the “waters above” separated from the “waters below”) by the Word of God – (6) [and that it was] through these two [sets of waters] that the world of that time (i.e., in Noah’s day) was [again] deluged by water [from above and below] and destroyed.  
2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:5-6

In the first passage above, the earth is flooded by an abundance of waters which come from below the earth *and* from *above* the heavens (which is the origin of both blessing and judgment: cf. Ps.78:23; Is.24:18; Mal.3:10). Both sets of waters here are given equal emphasis in regard to the volume of water which completely deluged the earth, and this combination of two sets of waters (neither of which is visible to the human eye) gives the lie to skeptical evaluations of the great flood which calculate the generation of such a huge volume of water as impossible (for the waters topped the highest of earth’s mountains by more than twenty feet, something not possible if the volume of water in the present seas was alone the source of the great flood: Gen.7:20).

In the second passage above, the phrase “heavens of the heavens”, often also translated “highest heavens” is a reference to the third heaven located above the twin-heavens of sky and space (cf. verses 1-3 of the same Psalm and Ps.115:15-16). The second half of Psalm 148:4 treats the layer of water between this third heaven and the (other) two heavens, making it abundantly clear that these “waters above” cannot be mere atmospheric moisture, but must instead be the second set of waters divided by the Genesis 1:6-7 firmament, far above the atmosphere at the very “top” of the universe.

In the third passage above, the heavens of Genesis 1:6-7 have this same separating function. Peter’s juxtaposition of the heavens, the earth, and the two sets of waters shows clearly that it is the “heavens which existed long ago” which are the first means of re-establishing the earth (i.e.,

by dividing the two sets of waters). For the earth has come “out of water” (i.e., it appears above the waters as they fall down into their collecting place, the earthly sea), and “through [the midst of] water” (i.e., the heavens as a firmament have split the waters below from those above for earth’s benefit, making possible the collection into seas of the waters below).<sup>33</sup>

Again, although these “waters above” and the twin heavens upon which they rest are really two separate things, they are nevertheless both far “above” the earth, and are therefore occasionally described as being of a piece (precisely as in the description of this layer of water as “firmament” as we have seen in Ezekiel 1:22-28 and 10:1). In fact, the Hebrew word for heavens (*shamayim*, *,ymw*), though the precise etymology is disputed, very probably means “place of the waters” (i.e., it is a phrase meaning “there [are the] waters” = *sham-mayim*, *,ym=w*), which meaning would represent an allusion both to the (atmospheric) waters within the first heaven and to the boundary “waters above” them in the second (though these “waters above” are technically distinct from the heavens as we have seen).<sup>34</sup> Finally, the conflation of these “waters above” with the firmament of the heavens is also clearly represented in the construction of the laver-sea as we have seen above. For in this earthly representation of the heavenly sea, it is the water which represents the heavenly sea proper, while the brazen container technically represents the containing, restraining firmament of the heavens:

Will you hammer out with Him a firmament for the clouds, [which is] hard as a mirror  
which has been forged [of bronze]?  
Job 37:18

These “waters above” also serve an important separative purpose. Just as the firmament was re-constructed by God to separate and restrain the two sets of waters (Gen.1:6-7), so the “waters above” serve to separate the third heaven, the holy temple of God, from the corrupted world beneath. This separating function is clearly visible as well in the case of the “waters below” which stand in the progression of heaven-earth-“waters below” (cf. Ex.20:4) between the earth and the subterranean chambers of Hades beneath it (Job 26:5-6). That is why, for example, Hades is also occasionally referred to as the “abyss”,<sup>35</sup> in exactly the same conflation of technically distinct regions as we saw in the use of “firmament” for “waters above the firmament” in Ezekiel chapters one and ten – because Hades is far beneath these “waters below” and can only be accessed through them, it can be described in biblical terminology as part of the

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<sup>33</sup> See 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 3:20 for a similar use of the preposition *dia*, where it also means “going in-between” (rather than “by means of”).

<sup>34</sup> Mentioned as a possibility in both the Bauer-Leander grammar and the Koehler-Baumgartner lexicon. See references in Jenni and Westermann’s Theologisches Handwoerterbuch zum Alten Testament v.2 (Munich 1979) s.v. *,ymw*.

<sup>35</sup> “Abyss” is properly a name for the sea: see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 2, “The Genesis Gap”, section II.3.b, “The Sea as a Sign of Divine Judgment”.

same conglomerate (in the same way that since both the heavens and the “waters above” must be penetrated in order to reach the third heaven, these two technically distinct regions can for many purposes be considered as if they were of a piece, just as the laver-sea and its waters are considered a unit). This separating function of the “waters below” also explains why in Revelation 20:13 it is “the sea” which is said to “give up her dead” – *not* because there are any departed spirits in the sea, but rather because the sea is the separating layer which “locks in”, so to speak, the unsaved dead beneath, in Hades (Job 26:5-6; 38:16-17).<sup>36</sup> The “waters above” likewise perform an analogous separating function, forming an important wall of division between the holy precinct of the third heaven above them and the *kosmos* of the devil, Satan’s corrupt world, which lies below them. Viewed schematically, therefore, the two sets of waters may be represented in the following way:

See Figure #3 at rear: “The Waters”

Thus both sets of waters are, in theological terms, “separating seas”, dividing “death and Hades” from the (corrupt) world of the living in the case of the “waters below”, and the (corrupt) world of the living from the holy abode of God in the case of the “waters above”. Without this separating, shielding function of the heavens (of which this frozen sea of Revelation 4:6 is the upper “crust”), the currently corrupt heavens and earth would “flee away” in the presence of the awesome glory of the Holy Lord God Almighty (Rev.20:11; cf. Ps.97:5; 102:25-27; Is.13:13; 24:19-20; 34:4; 51:6; Hag.2:6-7; Matt.5:18; 24:35; Lk.21:33; 1Cor.7:31; Heb.12:25-29; 2Pet.3:10-13; 1Jn.2:17; Rev.6:14; 21:1). It is important to note, however, that despite the present separation of holiness above from corruption below (a separation without which the continued existence of our world would not be possible), God has in no way isolated Himself from the world. On the contrary, He has always maintained a powerful and comprehensive witness to this world, through the very nature of His creation, through the ministry of human and angelic agents, and finally and most significantly through the sending and the sacrificing of His own beloved Son (compare Heb.1:1 with Jn.3:16). And the day *will* come when this barrier of water no longer separates us from God, when God Himself has purged with fire the world we know (2Pet.3:10-12; cf. Is.26:21), when instead of a corrupted *kosmos* there will be new heavens and a new earth “where righteousness dwells” (2Pet.3:13; cf. Is.65:17; 66:22), when God Himself will dwell among us on that new earth (Rev.21:3; cf. Is.25:6-9; Ezek.37:27; Zech.2:10), and when the brilliant glory of His being will no longer be incompatible with the world’s continued existence, but will be instead the light whereby we walk (Rev.21:23-24; 22:5). On that blessed and glorious day, from thenceforth and forever there shall be “no more sea” (Rev.21:1). On that blessed and glorious day, the only thing resembling the waters below shall be waters of life which flow down from before the Lord (Rev.22:1-2; cf. Is.55:1; Ezek.47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech.14:8; Rev.22:17), and the only thing resembling the frozen waters above shall be the crystal of which the New Jerusalem is built (Rev.21:18-21). Instead of serving as a temporary liquid barrier between Hades and the world of the living (through which the unsaved dead must inevitably pass), the

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<sup>36</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 2, “The Genesis Gap”, section II.3, “The Sea”.

waters of life will flow freely for everlasting blessing and fellowship with Him. And instead of being a frozen barrier separating us from His holiness (as the waters above now do), the brilliantly crystalline walls and streets of the New Jerusalem will provide a permanent, abiding, solid home of unprecedented blessing forevermore.

Finally, as the last barrier between the abode of God and the world below, all access between these two must come through this heavenly sea. Such “passage ways” through the heavens and the waters above them into the presence of God are variously described in scripture:

1. As “sluices” in the heavens (cf. Gen.7:11; 8:2; 2Kng.7:19; Is.24:18; Mal.3:10):

(1) Then Elisha said, “Hear the Word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord, ‘At this time tomorrow, a seah of flour for a shekel, and two seahs of barley for a shekel in the gate of Samaria’”. (2) And the officer upon whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God and said, “Behold, if the Lord were to ***make sluices in the heavens***, could this thing come to pass?” And [Elisha] answered him, “Behold, you are going to see [it] with your eyes, but you will not eat of it”.

2<sup>nd</sup> Kings 7:1-2

2. As “doors” in the heavens (cf. Ps.78:23-25):

After this I looked and, behold, a ***door was standing open in heaven***. And the voice which I had heard before (sounding to me like a trumpet) was saying, “Come up here (i.e., *through* the door), and I will show you what must happen after these things!”

Revelation 4:1

3. As an “opening” in the heavens (cf. Ezek.1:1; Matt.3:16; Jn.1:51; Acts 10:11; Rev.19:11):

(55) But [Stephen], being full of the Holy Spirit and looking intently into heaven saw God’s glory and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (56) And he said, “Behold, I see ***the heavens opened up***, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!”

Acts 7:55-56

4. As traversed by a “ladder”, “ramp”, or “stairway” through the heavens (cf. Amos 9:6 [Hebrew]):

And [Jacob] dreamed, and, behold, there was a ***ramp (or ladder) standing on the earth, and its top reached the heavens***. And, behold, ***the angels of God were ascending and descending on it***.

Genesis 28:12

All of these passages refer to the same thing, namely, the accessibility of the third heaven only through tightly controlled means which preserve the separation between holy God above and the

corrupt world below. This accessibility involves divinely provided temporary apertures which penetrate the heavens and the barrier of upper waters in order to allow God's messengers, the angels, to accomplish His will on earth and then return into His presence. As creatures who, in addition to being spiritual, are also of this corrupt earth, human beings would never have been able to enjoy the same access through the protective barrier of the heavens and the "waters above", had it not been for the victory of our Lord Jesus Christ who is "the way" (Jn.14:6; cf. Matt.7:13-14; Lk.13:24-25; Jn.10:7-9; and cf. Ps.118:19-27), who has gained this access for us (Eph.2:18; 3:12), and who has given us the hope of passing through this same barrier as those who belong to Him (Heb.6:19-20; 9:24-25; 10:20; cf. Matt.27:51):

And He said to him, "Truly, truly I say to you, you will [all] see heaven standing open, and the angels of God ascending and descending unto the Son of Man".

John 1:51

To return to the scene in the third heaven, the sea of upper waters is thus not only a separating barrier between God's heavenly temple and the world below, but also an access point. This latter function helps to explain the appearance "*on* the sea" of the tribulational believers as they endure the fiery Great Persecution (Rev.15:2). In this respect, then, the heavenly sea of "waters above" seems also to act in the capacity of an "observation port" of sorts for the heavenly throngs witnessing the events unfolding on the earth below. Scripture provides few details of such heavenly observation of the earth, but it is clear that angelic kind is very aware of what is happening here below (Job 1-2; 1Kng.22:19-22; Lk.15:10; 1Cor.4:9; 11:10; 1Pet.1:12), and there are also indications that departed believers, now in residence in the third heaven, may also be able to view earthly events in this way (Jn.8:56; Heb.12:1; Rev.6:10). If so, this sea seems to be the "viewing lens" for such observation, although it is important to note that God is so overwhelmingly glorious and wonderful in Person that such earthly events will no doubt only be of interest from the heavenly perspective to the extent that they reflect His glory and the progress of His plan.

### **The Four Living Creatures:**

And in the midst of throne, encircling the throne, were four living-creatures, laden with eyes in front and in back

Revelation 4:6b

These four "living creatures" are the cherubs (or cherubim, to use the Hebrew plural). The cherubs are the highest ranking angelic order and we have had occasion to discuss them in detail

several times in the past.<sup>37</sup> The Hebrew word “cherub” (*cherubh*, *bvrk*) is cognate with an Akkadian root apparently meaning to praise or worship, and this is certainly descriptive of one of the main duties of the cherubim, who attend the throne of God, continually praising Him (Is.6:1-7; Rev.4:8; 5:8; 5:14; 7:11-12; 19:4).<sup>38</sup> These angels are also called “seraphs” in Isaiah chapter six, a reference to their fiery appearance (cf. Ezek.1:5; 1:13; 8:2; cf. Deut.4:24; Ps.104:4; Ezek.28:14).<sup>39</sup> As in the case of Satan, the original cherub replaced by these four, the cherubim or “living creatures” attend, transport, and guard the throne of God, a duty which explains the plethora of eyes which fill their bodies and wings (i.e., as symbols and means of constant vigilance: Rev.4:6; 4:8; Ezek.1:18; 10:12). Before the devil’s rebellion, there was only one cherub (Satan), who represented the relationship between God and angelic creation, standing as a type of the anti-type “angel of the Lord”, namely, Jesus Christ in His pre-incarnate manifestations.<sup>40</sup> Following the devil’s rebellion and Satan’s removal from this privileged position, the symbolism of the cherub changes, with the devil’s four replacements now representing the God-man Jesus Christ in His role as God’s Mediator between God and *Man* in the four ages of human history (see Part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion, section II.4, “The Four Ages of Human History”):

- The bullock face (Gentile age) is a picture of Christ the suffering Servant. The bullock not only bears burdens (as Christ bore our sins: cf. Is.53:4), but is also the most esteemed sacrificial animal, whose blood was shed under the Old Testament economy as a symbolic representation of Christ’s promised work on our behalf (Lev.1:5ff.).
- The lion face (Jewish age) is a picture of Christ as the promised Messiah. The lion is the symbol of the tribe of Judah (Rev.5:5; cf. Gen.49:9-12), and has a messianic connotation throughout the Old Testament (cf. Num.23:24; 24:9). The generation of Israel to whom

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<sup>37</sup> See especially The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: part 5, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.4, “The Four Ages of Human History”, where the supposed differences of representation between the cherubs of Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation are reconciled and explained. In the same series, see also part 1, “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, section III.i, “Cherub”, part 4 of “Satan’s World System”, section III.3.b.1, “Cherubs”, and in Bible Basics, part 2A: “Angelology”, section II.9.3.1, “Cherubs”.

<sup>38</sup> See R.L. Harris’ article *sub voce* in the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago 1980), as well the Gesenius, KB, and BDB lexicon entries.

<sup>39</sup> From the Hebrew root *seraph* [rs, “to burn”. See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, section III.i, “Cherub”.

<sup>40</sup> i.e., a Christophany, or pre-incarnation manifestation of Jesus Christ. See Bible Basics: Part 1, “Theology: the Study of God”, section II.C.3, “Appearances of Christ in the Old Testament”.

He came was ready to embrace the lion (the Messiah as avenging warrior), but stumbled over the bullock (the Messiah as self-sacrificing servant).

- The human face (Church age) is a picture of Christ as the incarnate, visible Savior of the world. He is *the* Son of Man (Matt.9:6; Jn.9:35), the archetypal human being who is truly human in every way apart from sin (Heb.2:14 with 4:15), the last Adam (1Cor.15:45). The Church, composed of all believing Jews and gentiles, is His body here on earth, not yet glorified as indeed He was not glorified until after His work on the cross was completed (Jn.17:1-5).
- The eagle face (Millennial age) is a picture of Christ exalted in resurrection and victorious in battle. Glorified by the Father for His victory at the cross ( Eph.1:19b-23), following His resurrection and ascension He is now seated at the right hand of God the Father until the day of His return (Ps.110). At that time (the Second Advent), He will fulfill all the messianic prophecies recorded in the scriptures and will rule the world in glory for a thousand years (Eph.3:10-12; Col.1:20). With its connotations of forbidding majesty and awe (Deut.28:49; Jer.48:40; 49:22; Ezek.17:3; 17:7; Dan.7:4; Hos.8:1; Hab.1:8), the eagle is an appropriate symbol for Christ's majestic and awe-inspiring double victory, first at the cross (with its accompanying resurrection, ascension and session at the Father's right hand), and ultimately at the Second Advent (Matt.24:28; Lk.17:37; compare the picture of the glorified Christ at Rev.1:12-16).

Of all human features, the face is at once one of the most memorable and expressive, making it a most effective means for the type of symbolic representation discussed above. Although their bodies resemble human form (Ezek.1:5), the four faces of the cherubim are unique, and stand symbolically for the various aspects of our Lord's earthly ministry just described. In this way, the faces of the cherubim reflect the glory of the Son of God instead of their own glory, just as, ideally, the world should see the face of Christ in us, His servants, when we walk as He commanded us to do (2Cor.3:18; cf. Matt.16:24; Jn.13:15; 1Cor.11:1; 2Cor.2:15; Gal.4:19; Eph.5:1; 1Thes.1:6; 1Pet.2:21).

The order of the cherubs given in Revelation 4:7 (Lion-Bullock-Man-Eagle) has the following significance:

- The symbol of the historical Age of Israel is placed first.
- The symbol of the coming Kingdom of Israel is placed last.
- These two symbols enclose the two symbols of the predominantly gentile ages, of which ...
- The symbol of the Age of the Gentiles is placed first.
- The symbol of the Church Age (where gentiles are grafted into Israel) is placed next to it.
- Thus Israel and Kingdom Israel enclose the gentiles and the mystery gentiles (Eph.3:6).



The symbolism thus rendered of Israel enclosing the gentiles and the gentiles fulfilling Israel is at once powerful and appropriate, for Christ, whose Person and work these four ages and their corresponding cherub-faces represent, is the One who fills and completes everything in every way (Eph.1:23; cf. Eph.1:9-10).<sup>41</sup>

**Holy, Holy, Holy:** This refrain is the same as we find in Isaiah 6:3 (with the Greek “holy” *hagios* [αγιος] being the exact equivalent of the Hebrew “holy” *qadosh* [wvdq]). The structure of the strophe is also similar in both cases:

Holy, Holy, Holy  
[is the] Lord of hosts!  
The whole world is full of His glory!  
Isaiah 6:3b

Holy, Holy, Holy  
[is the] Lord, the Almighty God!  
The One who was, and who is, and who is coming!  
Revelation 4:8b

The phrase “Almighty God” is essentially a Greek equivalent for the Hebrew “Lord of hosts” (and is frequently found as such in the Septuagint). Therefore, only the third line of the strophe is significantly different. In that third line, in the quote from Revelation, not only is the eternity of God emphasized, but also His imminent advent, a reality that is only fully revealed in this final book of scripture. For in the two final chapters of Revelation, it is made clear that, after Christ’s millennial reign, the Father too will return to the earth, and God will be “all in all” forevermore (1Cor.15:28; Rev.21:2-8; 22:1-5). The complete victory of God and His complete restoration of all things for the better is thus now being proclaimed continually in His presence by the cherubim.<sup>42</sup>

Although the Greek of verse eight states that the four cherubs are “saying” these words, that does not exclude the possibility that they are doing so in musical form. For both at Revelation 5:9 and 15:3, the same formula is used in conjunction with singing, and the fact that these words are in the form of a poem or song makes it a likely possibility that we are to take “holy, holy, holy” as a hymn of praise to God (compare with Rev.5:8; 5:14; 7:11-12; 19:4). The original cherub, Satan, for example, was endowed with a magnificent musical apparatus (the “tabrets and pipes” of

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<sup>41</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 5, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.4, “The Four Ages of Human History”.

<sup>42</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 5, “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section IV.3.c, “Replacement III: The Advent of the Father”.

Ezek.28:13).<sup>43</sup> In any case, we can be sure that the proclamation of “holy, holy, holy” is most impressive indeed, for at the similar rendition of this refrain by the cherubs in Isaiah, the doorposts and threshold of the temple were shaken while the temple itself filled with smoke (Is.6:4).

John further describes this (probably) musical worship on behalf of the cherubim as giving “glory, honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever”. In this phrase we have perhaps the perfect definition of what it means to worship God aright, namely, to acknowledge His glory, to bestow upon Him all due honor, and to give thanks to Him for who He is and what He has done. It is also both interesting and important to note that, while this refrain may be delivered in musical form, there has been no attempt by John even to characterize the melody, much less reproduce it. This fact should remind us in no uncertain terms that what is really important are the true words of God. The Word of truth is the most powerful and important thing we possess, and must not even be compared to musical accompaniment, no matter how stimulating or sublime (as with the Psalms; cf. Ps.138:2b [Hebrew]; Heb.4:12). With their fiery bodies, triple set of wings, and marvelously expressive and symbolic faces, the four cherubs undoubtedly make an impressive sight as they sing forth these words before the throne of the Living God – but it is their words that we have been given to consider:

Holy, Holy, Holy  
[is the] Lord, the Almighty God!  
The One who was, and who is, and who is coming!  
Revelation 4:8b

### **The Twenty-Four Elders and their Worship:**

(9) And whenever the living creatures give glory, and honor, and thanks to the One who sits on the throne, the One who lives forever and ever, (10) the twenty-four elders will fall down before the One who sits on the throne, and will worship the One who lives forever and ever, and will throw their crowns before the throne . . .  
Revelation 4:9-10

As we saw above, these elders are high ranking leaders of the angelic clans, their crowns and thrones being indicative of their rank and merit.<sup>44</sup> The worship of these twenty-four elders is

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<sup>43</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 1, “Satan’s Rebellion and Fall”, section III.g, “Satan’s Original Status: Tabrets and pipes”

<sup>44</sup> In addition to the section “Elders” above, see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation Part 4, “Satan’s World-System, Past, Present and Future”, section III.3.b.2 “Titles of Rank: Elders”.

entirely in keeping with this new and revised worship of the cherubim (i.e., the change of the third stanza of the strophe to reflect the imminent return of the Father now that, from the prophetic perspective John is given to see here, the Tribulation and the end times which it inaugurates are about to begin). Often overlooked in the exegesis of Revelation 4:10 is the fact that the “falling down before Him”, the “worshiping”, and the “casting of their crowns” are rendered in the Greek by *future* tenses.<sup>45</sup> John’s use of the future here is truly significant, designed to make clear that what we are viewing is not a part of the continual behavior of praise coming from the cherubim, but part of the anticipation of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, as the twenty-four elders engage in a special form of worship to celebrate the incipient commencement of the final phase of God’s plan. Therefore we should assume that these verses are describing the very first such session of the angelic elders at a “pre-Tribulation congress” of the elect just prior to this direct and visible intervention by God into human history. This is also clear from the content of the worship the elders express, words which emphasize this reassertion of direct divine control over the earth (through initiating the Tribulation), and the right of the Lord Almighty as the Creator of all to bring on the final phase of history at this point (commencing with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of Jesus Christ).<sup>46</sup>

[O] our Lord and our God!

You are worthy *to assume* (lit. “to take”) this glory, and honor, and power,  
because you have created all things,  
and because of Your will they exist and were created.

Revelation 4:11

**Synopsis:** Without question, chapter four paints for us an awe-inspiring and impressive picture of the heavenly scene. The sapphire throne, the glassy sea, and the burning lamps, the fiery cherubim and high ranking elders, and in the middle of it all the glorious Person of the Father with the rainbow of His glory around Him – sights defying human capacity, and overwhelming for any mortal man apart from being in a divinely provided ecstatic state (such as John is in)! We should take a moment to visualize these glorious things, and to remember that they are real, more real than the tangible world we inhabit. For this picture gives us a blessed foretaste of the wonders to come for all who have put their trust in Him and in His Son.

## II. The Lamb and The Scroll: Revelation 5:1-14

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<sup>45</sup> If not meant to be literally future from this point (i.e., only to begin happening at the inception of the Tribulation), this would be a completely unparalleled usage of the future tense in Greek (including in the New Testament). Attempts to explain these futures as influenced by the Hebrew imperfect (so Moulton, Grammar of the Greek New Testament [Edinburgh 1963] v.3, p.86, et al.), not only fail to persuade, but also fail to solve the problem: the Hebrew imperfect in a completely parallel construction would also be *prima facie* future.

<sup>46</sup> That is, at the end of the Church Age: see Part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion Series, “Judgment, Restoration, and Replacement”, section II.4, “The Four Ages of Human History”.

### Revelation 5:1-14:

(1) Then I saw in the right hand of the One sitting on the throne a scroll, with writing on its front and on its back, sealed with seven seals. (2) And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to undo its seals?” (3) And no one in heaven, nor on the earth was able to open the scroll or to look inside of it. (4) And I began to cry much, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or to look inside of it. (5) And one of the elders was saying to me, “Don’t cry! Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, He has won the victory [so as to be worthy] to open the scroll and to undo its seals.” (6) And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, a Lamb standing [there, looking] as if He had been slain, with seven horns and seven eyes (which are the seven spirits of God sent out into the entire earth). (7) And He came and took [the scroll] from the right hand of the One sitting on the throne. (8) And when He took the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell [down] before the Lamb, each with a lyre and golden bowls of incense, which [incense] is as prayers of the saints (i.e., Christ's sacrifice which validates our prayers is represented by the incense; see part 3). (9) And they sang a new song, saying, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, (10) and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!” (11) And I looked and heard, as it were, the voice of many angels around the throne and [around] the [living] creatures and [around] the [twenty-four] elders, and their number was myriads upon myriads and thousands upon thousands, (12) [and they were] saying in a loud voice, “The Lamb who has been slain is worthy to take the power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing (13) and every created thing in heaven and on the earth and in the sea and everything in them.” Then I heard them saying, “To the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever!” (14) And the four living creatures were saying, “Amen!”. And the [twenty-four] elders fell [down] and worshiped.

In chapter four, John gave us a detailed description of the glorious scene in God’s heavenly temple. Chapter five begins the heavenly prelude to the Tribulation, the initiation of the process – through tribulation – of the reestablishment of direct divine rule over the earth in the Person of the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ. It is important to remember that this book of Revelation is *about* Jesus Christ (i.e., it authorizes, describes, and effects “the revelation” *of Him* to the world), and so it is fitting that He be introduced last in this description of the heavenly scene for the purpose of emphasizing all that is about to take place, that is, the events which must precede His return.

The description above of the Messiah’s inauguration of the Tribulation (through His opening of the “book” or scroll) as a prelude to His assumption of power over all the earth is very closely

parallel to the similar description in Daniel chapter seven (which follows Daniel's vision of the four beasts, the last of which represents the kingdom of antichrist):

(9) I kept looking until thrones were set down and the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) took His seat. His attire was white as snow, as was the hair of His head, [white] like the purest wool. His throne was aflame with fire, and its wheels were a blazing fire. (10) A river of fire was flowing, and it poured forth from before Him. Thousands upon thousands were ministering to Him, and myriads upon myriads were standing before Him. The court was seated and the books were opened. (11) Meanwhile, I kept looking on account of the sound of the arrogant words which the horn [antichrist; cf. verse 8] was speaking. I kept looking until he was killed and his body destroyed and given over to the burning fire. (12) As for the remaining beasts, their dominions were taken away, but an extension of life was given to them for an appointed time and season. (13) I kept looking during my vision of that night, and behold – with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming up, and He approached the Ancient of Days (i.e., the Father) and they brought Him before Him. (14) And to Him was given dominion and honor and a kingdom, so that all nations and peoples and tongues should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which will not pass away, and His kingdom one which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 7:9-14

In this passage, wherein Daniel is focusing upon the end of the tribulational period, we nevertheless find a number of important similarities to Revelation chapter five (where the scene described is just prior to its commencement).

1. The appearance of the Father is similarly described. In both passages He is seated “in state” in His capacity as Ruler and Judge of all. This serves to emphasize the character of the proceedings in both passages as in the nature of a judicial and/or regal pronouncement. God's control and disposition of history are clearly in view.
2. The angelic court is comparably described, with their uncountable numbers expressed in near identical language. Multiple “thrones” are mentioned in both passages, and the fact that they are “set up” on this particular occasion in the Daniel passage indicates that, as we have suggested above, rather than being a continual situation the session of the angelic elders is a special preliminary to the Tribulation and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent which follows it.
3. The proceedings themselves are also comparable. In both cases a written record figures prominently, and in both cases these books or scrolls contain the decrees of God which form the basis for the attendant judgment (compare the analogous situation preceding the great flood: Ps.29:10). Parallel too is the fact that the judgments which precede the Messiah's assumption of power serve the purpose of vindicating God's persecuted people (compare Dan.7:22 with Rev.15:1-2).

4. The picture and presentation of the Son is similar (though Daniel's vision includes by conflation the ascension which has already historically taken place by the time of John's vision, and the judgment of Satan with its concomitant filling up of the lake of fire).

5. Finally, the results of the proceedings are identical, with dominion over the earth given to the Messiah.

A major part of the significance of the similarities between these two passages (to be sure, not the only resemblances to be found between the books of Daniel and Revelation) is the point that in both books the process of divine regal-judicial judgment upon the earth and upon the forces of evil which control it is an essential preliminary step and a necessary prerequisite to the Messiah's return and to the establishment of His universal rule. Simply put, both Revelation and Daniel tell us plainly that the Tribulation is part and parcel of the "revelation of Jesus Christ", the "birth pangs" of judgment which must precede the wondrous birth of His glorious kingdom:

(4) And Jesus answered and said to them, "See to it that no one deceives you. (5) For many will come in My name, saying, 'I am the Christ (i.e., the Messiah)', and they will deceive many. (6) And you are going to hear about wars and reports of wars. See to it that you are not shaken [by these reports]. This must happen, but it is not yet the end [of the Tribulation]. (7) For a nation will rise up against a nation, even a kingdom against a kingdom (i.e., the northern confederacy against the southern alliance). And there will be earthquakes and famines from place to place. (8) But all these things are the beginning of *birth pangs*.

Matthew 24:4-8

**The Scroll:** As codex style books had not yet been invented at the time Revelation was written,<sup>47</sup> the word "book" here (Greek: *biblion*, βιβλίον; from which the word "Bible" comes) is actually a scroll or roll. This particular scroll, representing the book of Revelation, has writing on both its inside and its outside, an indication of the intensity of events during the Tribulation (cf. Ezek.2:9-10). In this regard, we may also be correct in seeing some symbolism here of the division of the Tribulation into two discrete parts, with the second or "back" part by far the more onerous of the two (for the rear or *verso* of any papyrus roll was always the more difficult to write upon because its fibers ran at right angles to the flow of the scribe's hand – so that the "rough" side indicates the corresponding "roughness" of the second half of the Tribulation, that is, the Great Tribulation). Very significant here are the seven seals which prevent the book or roll from being read. In earthly documents, such waxen seals were stamped with the signet ring of the document's author, thereby both verifying its authenticity and at the same time preventing any unauthorized tampering. If such a document were a will or other legal bequest, no action

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<sup>47</sup> It is quite possible that the bound codex book with which we are now so familiar was invented (or at least brought to prominence) by Christians in order to provide a complete copy of the scriptures in one piece. See the article by Peter Katz, "The Early Christians' use of Codices instead of rolls", *JTS* 44 (1945) 63-65.

could be taken until such seals were broken in a proper and authoritative way. Such clearly is the symbolism here, and it is through the victory provided by His death that the Lamb, our Savior, has won the right to open these seals at the appropriate time (cf. Dan.12:4; 12:9), thus bringing on the execution of the contents of this decree, namely, the establishment of His Kingdom through the intermediary event of the Tribulation, the process by which all His enemies are made “the footstool of His feet” (Ps.110:1).

As to the seven seals, which must be opened before this decree is put into effect, these have a dual symbolism, representing on an individual basis the events which are released by their removal, and on a collective basis the force which now restrains them, namely, God the Holy Spirit. The former (i.e., the “effects” of the opening of each seal) are covered in section IV, while the latter, the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit, will be considered first (in section III).

**John's Reaction:** John cries because he realizes the significance of the sealed book: there can be no eternal salvation and no temporal deliverance if this book cannot be opened. But he is told not to cry because the Lord Jesus has paid the price necessary to open the book, His spiritual death on behalf of the whole world – that is the basis for our forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Him.

**The Victorious Lamb:** We can hardly imagine the ecstasy John must have experienced in the presence of these heavenly wonders, glorious sights so intense as to be beyond human endurance and continence (compare Dan.8:27 and 10:7-11 with Rev.19:10 and 22:8-9). And as the final glory, a sight which John and all believers long for as the central focus of their hope, we now behold the Lamb of God, our victorious, risen Lord Jesus standing at the Father’s right hand!

Our Lord is here described as “The Lion of the Tribe of Judah”, “The Root of David” and “The Lamb who has been slain”. Important titles, filled with symbolism about who He is and what He has done for us. The first two titles emphasize His undisputed royalty and His exceptional lineage (compare Gen.49:9-10 and Is.11:1 respectively), foreshadowing thereby, in His imminent return to earth and assumption of the Kingdom to come, the fulfillment of all God’s promises to His people Israel. However, it is the title and description “Lamb” which receives by far the most emphasis here, both from the repetition of the title (repeated four times in this chapter) and from the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ is here described as appearing *as a Lamb*, and one “having been slain” at that, symbolism that leaves us in absolutely no doubt that it is through His sacrificial death on our behalf that He has won the right to rule the world.

For Jesus is “the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world” (Jn.1:29; cf. Jn.1:36; 1Pet.1:19; Is.53:7). He is the One whom all the Old Testament sacrifices prefigure, so that “Lamb” is a perfect description of Him and of His saving work, the life He gave up for us and for the whole world. Indeed, all Old Testament animal sacrifice speaks of our Lord’s death on the cross. The lamb without spot or blemish represents His perfect Person (He was willing to come into the world to fulfill the Father’s plan), while the blood shed in sacrifice represents His perfect work (He was willing to die on the cross, the Just for the unjust, that we might have eternal life).

So it is important to remember as we study this book about the “revealing” of Jesus to the world, His glorious return and coronation as the Ruler of the world (and the cataclysmic events which precede it), that this right to rule was won at the greatest cost: Jesus had to come into this world as a true human being, run a perfect course under the most intense opposition anyone has ever faced, then suffer and die in our place in order to win back the world from the evil one and to win us out of the devil’s deadly grasp (Col.1:13; Heb.2:14-15; 1Jn.3:8). Christ’s session at the Father’s right hand (following His resurrection and ascension) shows beyond any doubt the completeness of His victory (Col.2:13-15; cf. Eph.4:7-10), the Father’s approval of that victory (Col.1:19; cf. Is.42:1; 49:6; Matt.3:17; 17:5), and the imminence of our Lord’s return to take His rightful place as Ruler of the world as a result of that victory (Ps.110:1; Matt.28:18; Jn.17:2; Rom.16:20; 1Thes.4:16-17; Heb.1:3-4; 2:8-9):

(11) And while every [other] priest has received a temporary appointment for service and for repeatedly offering the same sacrifices which are never able to take away sins, (12) this [One] offered one sacrifice for sins for all time to come, then took His seat at the right hand of God, (13) waiting from thenceforth until [the time when] His enemies should be made a footstool for His feet.

Hebrews 10:11-13

Therefore, though Jesus appears here as a Lamb “having been slain” (symbolizing His sacrifice), the fact that He is yet alive is testimony to the reality of His resurrection, and is at the same time a powerful affirmation of His victory over sin and death (1Cor.15:54-57; cf. Is.25:7-9; Hos.13:14; Matt.12:20; Rev.1:18). Moreover, the seven horns and seven eyes represented on the Lamb are potent symbols of His coming reign, with the horns signifying the completeness of the power that is now His for rulership (cf. Deut.33:17; Ps.18:2; 112:9; Zech.1:18), and with the seven eyes signifying the completeness of His empowerment by the Holy Spirit for rulership (cf. Is.11:1-3; 42:1-4; Zech.4:1-10; Jn.3:34). Therefore this is not only the Lamb of sacrifice John sees, but also the victorious Lamb, having already destroyed the power of Satan’s world rule (based on universal sin and death: Heb.2:14-15; cf. Lk.10:18; Acts 26:18; Rom.16:20), and about to permanently wrest control of that world rule from the evil one:

These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, because He is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and called, and elect – and faithful are those with Him.  
Revelation 17:14

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven saying, “The world Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ has [now] come, and He will rule forever and ever. Amen.”

Revelation 11:15

This symbolic use of the visible image of a Lamb (in contrast to the true appearance of Christ as seen in Rev.1:12-16) is a well-precedented teaching device used in prophetic biblical passages (e.g., Dan.4:9-18; 7:2-14; 8:1-12; Zech.1:18-21; 5:5-11), and one which is paralleled in the book of Revelation as well (e.g., the woman representing Israel: Rev.12:1-6; the beast representing



antichrist: Rev.13:1-8; the whore representing Babylon: Rev.17:1-8). The picture of the Lamb representing Christ thus all the more effectively reminds us of the Son's sacrifice, of its acceptability to the Father, and of the fact that it is through this sacrifice, His saving work on the cross, that He has shown Himself worthy to take the scroll and assume rulership of the world.

It is also significant that the Lamb is said to be "standing" in the middle of the throne. Our Lord's posture here is an indication of the imminency of the Tribulation's commencement. That Christ has now risen to His feet, although the Father had said to "sit at My right hand" until the time when this final period of judgment in preparation for His Kingdom should begin, is a definite sign that this process of subduing the evil one and all his minions is about to commence:

The Lord said to My Lord, "Sit down at my right hand, *until* I [start to] make your enemies a footstool for your feet."<sup>48</sup>

Psalm 110:1

(19) So repent and turn back [to God] for the blotting out of your sins, so that times of revival may come from the Lord, (20) and so that He may send to you the One acknowledged as the Christ [Messiah], [namely] Jesus, (21) who must remain in heaven (lit., "whom heaven must receive") *until* the times of the restoration of all things of which God has spoken through the mouths of His holy prophets from of old.

Acts 3:19-21

Our Lord's victory at the cross established His authority beyond question, a supreme authority which was confirmed in His session at the Father's right hand (Matt.28:18; Jn.14:2-3; Eph.1:20-23; Phil.2:9-11; Col.1:13-20; 2:15; Heb.2:14-15 Rev.1:18). Christ has been seated (Acts 2:32-36; 5:30-31; Rom.8:34; Heb.1:3; 12:2), prisoners have been freed (Ps.146:7; Is.14:17; 42:7; 49:9; 61:1; Matt.12:29; 1Pet.3:22), and gifts have been given (Ps.68:18; Jn.16:7; Eph.4:8). It only remains now for the victorious Lamb to take the scroll and open its seals, thus inaugurating the final period of the devil's earthly rule, a period to be brought to a dramatic end at the return of our glorious King (Rev.17:14), the blessed event so eagerly anticipated by all Christians (Matt.6:10; 1Cor.1:7-8; 16:22; 1Thes.1:10; Tit.2:13; Jas.5:8).

Along with rising to His feet, Christ's taking of the scroll from the Father's right hand (the side where our Lord is now seated) is also a future event which John is privileged to see and we are blessed to read. This event too will happen just prior to the beginning of the Tribulation (and is

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<sup>48</sup> The Hebrew imperfect tense in combination with the preposition '*adh* (di), allows in this instance for the commencement of the process rather than requiring its prior completion (i.e., "Sit down *until* the rendering of Your enemies a footstool for your feet"). The Messiah is not being told to wait passively in heaven until everything is resolved, but to wait upon the appointed time when things will begin to be resolved. Thus Christ's direct participation in the Tribulation (most prominently in His personal destruction of the armies of antichrist at Armageddon) is not in any way in conflict with this passage.

still future at the moment of writing). Once the Lamb has risen and taken the scroll, nothing is left but to open this divine decree of the scroll of Revelation, the event which will set the tribulational events in train.

**The New Song:** “New” songs are special songs of praise and worship composed for unique occasions (Ps.33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Is.42:10), and, as in the case of the hymn of the 144,000 Jewish witnesses martyred by the beast (Rev.14:3), this song marks a special occasion. As the heavenly audience looks on in anticipation, the four cherubs and the twenty-four elders, the highest ranking angelic creatures, begin to sing a special, inaugural hymn to commemorate the beginning of the Messiah’s Kingdom come:

1) The Chorus of Angelic Rulers: The first stanza is performed by the cherubs and the twenty-four elders alone. Stanza number one emphasizes the Lamb’s worthiness to begin the final phase of history (by opening the scroll) based on His sacrificial death which redeemed the Church (as a replacement for fallen angelic kind).<sup>49</sup>

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and have purchased with your blood for our God [men] from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and have made them into a kingdom and priests to our God, and they will rule upon the earth!”

2) The Chorus of the Holy Angels: The second stanza is sung by the other elect angels (exclusive of the cherubim and the elders). Stanza number two emphasizes the results of the Lamb’s worthiness and the effect of His opening of the scroll (thus launching the end times), namely, His assumption of authority over the entire world along with all the honors pertaining thereto.<sup>50</sup>

“The Lamb who has been slain is worthy to take the power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing and every created thing in heaven and on the earth and in the sea and everything in them.”

3) The Doxology: The final portion of this “new song” (also performed by the angelic choir) is specifically in the form of a doxology, a singing of praise to the Father and the Son.

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<sup>49</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 3, “The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man”, section I.2, “Man created to replace Satan and his angels”.

<sup>50</sup> The reading of the best Greek text has been given here. Most translation erroneously place the creation in the role of choir (based upon the reading of less authoritative manuscripts), whereas the entire creation is in actuality represented here as the substantive element over which our Lord is about to take control.

“To the One who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb [be] the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power for ever and ever!”

This hymn is followed by a final pronouncement of the truth and blessedness of these facts as the four living creatures add their “Amen!” (a Hebrew word meaning “truly”, or “in truth”). Then the elders fall down and worship the Father and the Son, a fitting conclusion to this heavenly psalm of praise which proclaims the worthiness of the Lamb to initiate the final stage of history, beginning with the fiery Tribulation, followed by His cleansing with fire of the threshing floor of Armageddon, and the final burning up of all His enemies at the end of history at the conclusion of His millennial reign – righteous judgments all, and all based upon His victory at the cross, His own baptism of fire suffered for you and me:

(49) “I came to cast a fire upon the earth, and how I wish that it were already kindled!

(50) But I have a baptism to undergo [first], and how I am pressed until it be completed!”

Luke 12:49-50

### **III. The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit**

Before we begin our exposition of the seven seals, we need first to consider the Spirit’s ministry of restraint, for it is that ministry which is of primary significance in the symbolism of the seven seals overall. As mentioned above, waxen seals, stamped with the signet ring of the originating party, were a means of preventing unauthorized opening of important, sealed documents (such as wills, deeds, or official communications). By the same token, the legitimate opening of such a document necessarily entailed putting the will, declaration or decree into effect. Given that the scroll we are considering here is *the* revelation of Jesus Christ (a process which reaches its dramatic conclusion in our Lord’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, but which is preceded by all the events of the Tribulation), the seals on this scroll are clearly meant to symbolize restraint on the commencement of the last times until God’s good time. For once the seals are opened, the end times do indeed commence almost immediately thereafter (as described in Revelation chapters six through eight).

In these seven seals, therefore, we are to see a prohibiting force which prevents the onset of the darkest period in human history before its appointed time. Only God is capable of such restraint, and it is clear both from this context and from other passages of scripture that it is indeed God the Holy Spirit whose restraining ministry is being represented by these seven seals. Seven objects of clear divine connection are characteristically symbolic of the Holy Spirit, for example, the seven spirits (Is.11:1-2; Rev.1:4; 3:1), the seven lampstands (Zech.4:2; Rev.4:5), and the seven eyes (Rev.5:6; Zech.3:9; 4:10). In all these cases, the ministry is perfect, powerful and largely invisible – felt, but not seen as is characteristic of the Spirit (Jn.3:8; cf. 1Kng.19:11-12).<sup>51</sup> As the seven spirits suggest perfect divine empowerment in the Spirit, the seven lampstands

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<sup>51</sup> See “Roles of the Trinity in the Plan of God”, section II.B.3, in part 1 of Bible Basics: “Theology: the Study of God”.

perfect divine illumination by the Spirit, and the seven eyes perfect divine oversight with the Spirit, so the seven seals are meant to convey a perfect ministry, in this case, the perfect divine restraint through the Spirit which prevents the premature launching of the end times before the appointed time (as well as the restraint of the conditions and actions pertaining thereto). This ministry of the Spirit involves both the restraint of the human heart and of the devil's plans, and, in consequence, forestalls the divine judgment destined to fall upon the excesses proceeding from each of these prime sources of evil.

1. Previous Restraining Ministries: Scripture offers some important precedents of the Spirit's work in preventing evil from crossing all bounds (thereby destroying freedom, the opportunity to choose for God). Two instances in particular are specifically described in the Bible, and we may infer from these that the Spirit's ministry in restraining evil is a wide-ranging and virtually comprehensive one, even when not specifically described in scripture (as implied in such passages as Gen.11:6; Deut.32:8; Job 12:23; Ps.74:17; Jer.18:7-10; Acts 17:26-28):

(1) Before all else, God created the heavens and the earth. (2) But the earth came to be ruined and despoiled – darkness lay upon the face of the abyss while God's Spirit brooded [or "hovered"] over the surface of its waters.  
Genesis 1:1-2

And God said, "My Spirit will not strive with Man forever in their sinful manner of life – for this [is the way of] flesh. Therefore his days shall be 120 years."  
Genesis 6:3

In the first instance above, we see the Spirit (following the devil's rebellion) preventing any further satanic activity on the devastated earth – before the appointed time (i.e., before earth's recreation and the creation of Adam and Eve).<sup>52</sup> In the second quotation above, we see described the protective ministry of the Spirit restraining and preventing Satan and his half-angel, half-human cohorts from annihilating true humanity – until that threat is removed (i.e., until the coming of the great flood which destroyed this demon seed from off of the face of the earth).<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the two cases above, both involving high-profile deterrence of direct satanic interference in earthly affairs, we also know that the Spirit is active in the restraint of human behavior. In this respect, the Spirit's ministry of "binding" may be seen as an opposite side of the coin to His ministry of "loosing", providing power to all that is good in the latter case, while depriving of power all that is evil in the former (cf. Matt.16:19; 18:18; Jn.20:22-23; Acts 5:3;

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<sup>52</sup> See part 2 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "The Genesis Gap", section II.4: "The Restraining Ministry of the Holy Spirit".

<sup>53</sup> See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1: "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

5:9). And were it not for this general and all-encompassing ministry to accentuate good and inhibit evil, it is clear that at the very least we would be inhabiting a far more savage world than is now the case (if indeed it should even be possible for mankind to survive without the Spirit's "leveling of the playing field").

2. The Mystery of Lawlessness: On the individual level too, the Spirit has always been active in the restraint of sin and evil – not to the point of removing the individual's right to choose, but, on the contrary, in working to preserve that right. This is true not only from the point of view of protecting believers from others, but also from themselves. Examples of the former include Saul and his men being prevented from harming David (1Sam.19:20-24), and Paul and his companions' protection by preventing their entering of Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). The Spirit's "sealing" of all believers in this present age demonstrates in particular the protective direction His ministry often takes (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; cf. Ezek.9:1-11; Jn.6:27; 1Pet. 1:1-2):

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God with whom you were *sealed* for a day of redemption.  
Ephesians 4:30

As the above verse shows, the Holy Spirit's protective ministry is a counterpart of His ministry of empowerment. As believers in Jesus Christ, we are all blessed to have the Holy Spirit in us, and even as this "seal" marks us out as God's own property, a blessed sign of the protection we have in Christ, at the same time the Spirit works in us to intensify, empower and support our Christian walk and all our service to the Body of Christ. Even as we can take comfort in the fact that we are marked out as God's possessions (a warning to all the minions of evil against unauthorized interference), so we should also take special care ever to respond to the Spirit's guidance, and not to resist Him. In this respect, the Holy Spirit's influence not only helps us to do what is right, but also to resist what is wrong (a clear example of His restraining ministry; cf. Matt.12:31; Acts 5:1-11; 1Thes.5:19; Jas.4:5):

Thus the flesh (i.e., the sinful nature of Man) sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit sets its desire against the flesh. For these two are antithetical to each other, and so the result is that it is not your own will that you are carrying out.  
Galatians 5:17

These general principles we have studied before (and the reader is directed to the references contained in the two previous footnotes). However, two specific features of the Holy Spirit's overall ministry of restraint which especially concern us here are His hindrance of unbounded "lawlessness", and His thwarting of the arrival of antichrist. Both of these particular aspects of His restraining ministry are directed towards inhibiting Satan's control of the world, with the first placing limits on the devil's disruption of human life before the time of the Tribulation, and the second preventing Satan from bringing his chosen instrument of world domination onto the world stage before that future time. With the removal of the restraints provided by the Spirit which the world now enjoys, both of these horrible events will ensue, namely, the intensification

of “lawlessness” and the arrival of “the lawless one”. The opening of the seven seals which hold the Lamb’s book of revelation closed signifies the removal of this restraining ministry, allowing the devil and his forces (both human and demonic) to begin the prophesied series of tribulational events. Without this removal of restraint and until this removal of restraint, Satan is powerless to begin his final earthly offensive (characterized by unparalleled “lawlessness”) or to institute his ultimate earthly kingdom (ruled by the man of “lawlessness”). This coming trend of increased sinful and evil behavior (beyond the bounds of anything earth has yet experienced) and the rise to power of the most sinful and evil ruler in world history are intimately interconnected events, as can be seen from the apostle Paul’s conjoining of the two:

(6) Even now you know what it is that restrains [antichrist’s arrival] so that he will be revealed [only] in his own time. (7) For the mystery of lawlessness (*anomia*) is already at work – it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. (8) And then the lawless one (*anomos*) will be revealed . . .  
2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:6-8a

With his use above of cognate vocabulary (*anomia – anomos*), Paul makes it clear here that the coming lawlessness which we are already experiencing now in principle (but which will break loose unrestrained when the seven seals are opened) is both a prerequisite preparation and a necessary condition for the coming of the lawless antichrist. Satan’s progressive inroads into human society at all levels and in all places are a lawlessness which is “already at work”, but cannot be brought to the fever pitch necessary to bring about antichrist’s world domination until the Spirit’s restraint is allowed to wane as the Tribulation begins (that is, not until the seven seals are opened). John gives a similar description of current satanic trends culminating in the Tribulation when he discusses the “spirit of antichrist” – and it is the very fact that many “antichrists” are active in the present age which tells us that we are on the threshold of the Tribulation:

Children, it is [now] the final hour, and just as you have heard that antichrist is coming, even now many “antichrists” have arisen – that is how we know it is the last hour.  
1<sup>st</sup> John 2:18

Simply put, the exponential expansion of the present “mystery of lawlessness” is a prophesied, unprecedented expansion of sin and evil world-wide which will occur during the Tribulation as a direct removal of the barriers put up by the Spirit and the devil’s consequent exploitation of this opportunity. This is the essential meaning of the opening of the seven seals, symbols of divine restraint which prevent these trends from coming to full fruition before the time (1Tim.4:1-3; 2Pet.3:3-7; 1Jn.2:18; Jude 1:17-18).

(1) So be aware of this, that in the last days there will be difficult times. (2) For [in those times] there will be men (i.e., false teachers; cf. chap.2) concerned only for themselves, devoted to money, egotistic, arrogant, blasphemous, not concerned for their parents, ungrateful, irreverent, (3) implacable, slanderers, uninhibited, savage, despising the good, (4) betrayers, impetuous, megalomaniacal, devotees of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

(5) possessing an [outward] appearance of godliness, but [in reality] having rejected its [true] power. From such men turn away.

2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:1-5

And we should not suppose that this list is meant to be complete – its purpose is only to give us the flavor of the path human behavior will take during the Tribulation. For in the absence of both invisible and visible restraints (i.e., the Spirit’s restraining ministry on the one hand, and the force of nationalism and law on the other), the darkest side of human nature will be revealed as never before. Certainly we can see all of these characteristics today in individual cases and at particular times (cf. Rom.1:18-32), but in the Tribulation these will represent the consistent norm of behavior for the vast majority of the world’s population, not only making the world an even more terrible place to live than it is now, but also furnishing an extremely fertile ground for the devil’s operations, a horrible state of affairs that will affect even believers, as our Lord has warned us:

And because of the proliferation of *lawlessness* [during the Tribulation], the love of many will grow cold.

Matthew 24:12

We should take note of the progression here for it is most informative: the special “lawlessness” now operative (i.e., Satan’s intensified efforts to expand his world system) will increase out of all previous proportion with the opening of the seven seals (i.e., the removal of the Spirit’s restraint) which begins the Tribulation. This will be followed at the Messiah’s return by a restriction of lawlessness more complete than at any prior time in human history (Rev.20:1-3). Through this progression, God is showing the world that:

- 1) some restraint of creature depravity is necessary for the world to function at all.
- 2) when such divine restraint on the lawless inclinations of the human heart is removed, mankind (with the devil’s help) runs headlong towards its own destruction.
- 3) the unparalleled blessings of the age to come require as a prerequisite an even more intensive restraint of natural human “lawlessness” (and satanic interference) than has ever yet been the case.

Seen in this light, the removal of divine restraint upon evil during the Tribulation is a deliberate demonstration of the inability of man to accomplish anything apart from God – except his own destruction. In the course of this fateful period the devil’s wickedness and true intentions will be laid completely bare (cf. Rom.7:13), so that God the Father will gain for Himself surpassing glory in subduing the creature in preparation for the glorious reign of His Son (Ps.110:1; Heb.10:13; cf. Ex.14:4; Is.63:12-14).

3. The Restraint of the Man of Lawlessness: As a [fallen] angelic creature, the devil’s ability to interfere and intervene in earthly events, though substantial, labors under certain limitations. For Satan is “the prince of the power of *the air*” (Eph.2:2), a phrase which pithily suggests the

restrictions on an angelic creature's influence when operating in the human realm.<sup>54</sup> Without question, the devil has made great strides in the development of a world system for manipulating and indirectly controlling the human race (see Part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, "Satan's World System"). In order to make this control complete and direct, however, Satan's attempt at world domination during the Tribulation requires a human face, a human agent, namely, "the man of lawlessness", otherwise known as antichrist. Paul's discussion of these events in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians chapter two makes a clear connection between antichrist's "revelation" to the world and the removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in the opening of the seven seals which we are studying in this context:

(3) Do not let anyone deceive you in any way. For [the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent cannot come] unless the Apostasy [the great falling away of the faithful in the first half of the Tribulation] has already occurred, and the man of lawlessness [antichrist] **has been revealed**, that "son of destruction" (cf. Jn.17:12 of Judas), (4) the one who will oppose and exalt himself against every so-called god and object of worship to such a degree that he will take his seat in the temple of God and represent himself as being God. (5) Don't you remember that I was telling you these things while I was still with you? (6) Even now you know what it is (i.e., the Spirit) that restrains [antichrist] so that **he will be revealed** [only] in his own time. (7) For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work – it is only the Restrainer [who keeps things in check, and will] until He moves out of the way. (8) And then the lawless one **will be revealed**, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the Spirit of His mouth, and will annihilate with the appearance of His coming.

2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:3-8

The "revelation" of antichrist described above is to be understood as a loose antithesis to the revelation of our Lord (the true Christ of whom *anti*-Christ is a deliberate counterfeit). That is to say, antichrist's rise to power and his "unveiling" to and acceptance by the unbelieving world as a god (though to true believers in Jesus Christ he will be unveiled and revealed as what he really is) will only be allowed to occur once the Tribulation has begun, and only after the deliberate and purposeful removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in these seven seals.

#### **IV. The Seven Seals: Revelation 6:1-17**

In the first place, it should be recalled that these seven seals taken together represent the Holy Spirit's restraining ministry vis-à-vis the future Tribulation and its characteristic trends, and, secondly, that these seals have heretofore kept closed the "book" which is the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ to the world at His Second Advent, the time when He ushers in His glorious millennial kingdom. That return and reign can only come *after* the prophesied period of satanic excess and divine judgment upon it known as the Tribulation, and the Tribulation in turn cannot

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<sup>54</sup> See The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 4 "Satan's World System", section II.5 "The Limits of Satan's Control over the World"; and Part 1, "Satan's Rebellion and Fall", section II.4, "The Operational Sphere of Angels".



occur until God, and specifically the Lamb, opens the seals (that is, commands the removal of the seven-fold Holy Spirit restraint) which prevent the onset of the Tribulation before its time. This twin perspective is important when considering the opening up of the separate seals in chapter six, because this process has so frequently been misunderstood and misconstrued.

The first thing to note about the opening up of the seals and their concomitant descriptions is that, in stark contrast to the later trumpets and bowls (with which they are often wrongly grouped and compared), these seal-descriptions *do not* portray events in process (as opposed to the trumpet and bowl judgments which are “real time” occurrences), nor are they representative of specific divine judgment per se (except in so far as the entire Tribulation can be so characterized).<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, the opening of each of the six seals of chapter six are all accompanied by *previews* of broad trends to come once the Tribulation begins, and it is the opening of the seventh seal, the last impediment to the launching of the apocalypse, which finally begins the action in earnest. The six seals of chapter six give a chronological overview of the major trends of horrendous distress and disruption that will characterize the seven years (resulting from antichrist’s satanic activities and the ultimate divine response to them), with seal-trends one through four coming fully into play in the first half of the Tribulation, and seals five and six reserved for the second half or “Great Tribulation”. Thus through careful attention to and understanding of the six seals, the reader of Revelation is given a framework for *all* the events to come even before the opening of the seventh seal and consequent initiation of the Tribulation per se.

The so-called “four horsemen” of seals one through four are symbols representing specific tribulational trends (as is the case with seals five and six as well), and are *not* actual entities in their own right. This is an especially important point to grasp given the recurrent mistranslation of these verses which one finds in most English versions: as will be seen from the translations given below, the four living creatures do *not* address their respective “horsemen” with the command “come!”, but in reality are addressing John with the dual commands “come *and see!*” (commands followed in each of the four cases by the appearance of one the sequential symbolic horsemen for John to view, consider and record).

In scripture, especially in prophecy, it is far from uncommon to use such symbols, that is, graphic representations of otherwise amorphous entities or events, in order to make the lesson at hand more easily understandable (the beasts of Daniel chapter seven representing coming world kingdoms, and the woman of Zechariah chapter five representing wickedness are notable examples of this phenomenon). Revelation, moreover, is itself filled with exactly this sort of metaphor or “teaching example” (the woman Israel in chapter twelve, for instance).

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<sup>55</sup> As we shall see in due course, both the trumpets and the bowls represent cycles of actual divine judgments, with the trumpets representing an inaugural sequence (akin to the ten plagues against Egypt), and the bowls representing God’s final prelude of warning prior to the Second Advent.

So while direct parallels are often drawn between the “four horsemen” and the horsemen and charioteers in the book of Zechariah (in chapters one and six respectively), there is an important distinction to be drawn between the two: the riders in Zechariah in both cases are actual angels, messengers and agents of God sent forth on specific missions by Him, while the “four horsemen” here in Revelation chapter six are not real individuals but symbols intended to embody certain trends of the Tribulation which will result from direct satanic rule through the person of antichrist. A similar situation is encountered when we consider the often adduced parallel between these “four horsemen” and the “four deadly judgments” of Ezekiel 14:21. For the four divine judgments of Ezekiel originate with God and are directed at evil, while these trends of the “four horsemen” are blanket curses upon the earth that result from unrestricted satanic operation.

It is true that horsemen cover ground rapidly and extensively like the angelic riders of Zechariah so that the theme of rapid and complete proliferation is common both to them and to the “four horsemen”, and it is also true that the disruptions created by antichrist’s diabolical rise to power unleash trends that are very similar to the direct divine judgments described in Ezekiel chapter fourteen. While these passages may seem similar, nevertheless it is a case of *symbols* of satanic trends versus *actual* divine agents when contrasting the Zechariah passage to Revelation in the first instance, and of deliberate divine judgment (in Ezekiel) versus ancillary satanic causation (the curses associated with antichrist's rule in Revelation) in the second.

What all this means is that the “four horsemen” are unique, both as symbols and in the effects they prophetically proclaim. Indeed, they *must* be unique, because the Tribulation will be a unique period of satanic rule, different in nature and in degree from any other period of human history (as our Lord has told us, and as we have emphasized from the beginning of this series).<sup>56</sup>

For those days will see a **tribulation** the like of which has never occurred from the beginning of God’s creation of the world until now, and never will occur again.  
Mark 13:19

The “four horsemen”, the consecutive trends which accompany antichrist’s rise to power and administration of his satanic kingdom, represent patterns of activity destined to occur during the first half of the seven-year Tribulation. On the other hand, the fifth and sixth seals represent the most important events of the Tribulation’s second half or “the Great Tribulation”, namely, the Great Persecution (seal five), and the divine response to it (most notably the seven “bowl judgments” and the final judgments of Armageddon which accompany the Second Advent). This distinction between first half trends (seals 1-4) and second half events (seals 5-6) helps to explain why there are only “four horsemen”, that is, because the horsemen are symbols which represent the pervasive evils of satanic rule heretofore largely restrained (a development which forms the focus of the Tribulation’s *first half*), and would therefore be inappropriate and potentially confusing as symbols of *specific events* during the Tribulation’s *second half*. The seventh seal (Revelation chapter eight) has an altogether different symbolism, because, as the final seal, its

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<sup>56</sup> See Part 1: “Introduction”, section I.2.a, “Tribulation”.

opening represents the actual beginning of the tribulational trends and events which the first six seals preview. Each seal is treated individually below, but a synopsis will be helpful at this point:

The Tribulation's First Half (four major trends):

1. **White horse:** Antichrist's Conquests: the trend of warfare and aggression
2. **Red horse:** Civil Discord: the trend of lawlessness and political destabilization
3. **Black horse:** Economic Constraint: the trend of economic dislocation and famine
4. **Pale-green horse:** Accelerated Mortality: the trend of plague and rampant death

The Great Tribulation (two major events):

5. **Martyrs:** the Great Persecution (of believers by antichrist and his religion)
6. **Judgments:** the Second Advent (with its preliminary and concomitant judgments)

## 1. The White Horse: Antichrist's Conquests

Revelation 6:1-2:

- (1) And I saw when the Lamb opened one[, that is the first,] of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying with a voice like thunder, "Come and see!"
- (2) And I looked, and behold, [there was] a white horse, and the one sitting on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and did conquer.

The white horse symbolizes the trend of military aggression by antichrist and his forces. As the Roman color of victory, therefore, white is most appropriate for representing the successful conquests of antichrist, the coming ruler of revived Rome.<sup>57</sup> This is the first major tribulational trend, wherein antichrist's initial territorial expansion is accomplished both by overt military means and also through deceit, subterfuge, and guerilla tactics (the symbolism behind the bow, on which see below; cf. Dan.11:21-45). This trend (and indeed the arrival and unveiling of antichrist) could not happen without the opening of this seal of Spirit restraint (cf. 2Thes.2:1-8).

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<sup>57</sup> Antichrist's kingdom is the same as Daniel's fourth beast, revived Rome (compare Dan.2:40-43 with Dan.9:26), a topic taken up in part 3B of this series. On the symbolism of white as the Roman color of victory (especially the white horse), see H.B. Swete's note in The Apocalypse of Saint John (Cambridge 1908) 93: "cf. Verg. *Aen.* iii.537 'quattuor hic, primum omen, equos in gramine vidi | tondentes campum late *candore nivali*'; on which Servius remarks, 'hoc ad *victoriae* omen pertinet'" (emphasis added).

It is important to understand that the rider on the white horse is *not* Christ, but *anti*-Christ. As his name implies, antichrist is a “pseudo-Christ” in many respects, a diabolically deliberate counterfeit who will deceive many. That the representation of him and the trend he represents at the beginning of the Tribulation should bear some resemblance to our conquering Lord is therefore quite understandable (cf. Rev.19:11-16). Antichrist wears a crown, but his is an athletic wreath (Greek *stephanos*: στεφανος), inferior in both quantity and quality to the multiple royal diadems worn by the Messiah (Greek *diadema*: διαδημα in Revelation 19:12). Antichrist comes forth at the very beginning of the Tribulation to conquer a kingdom which will not endure (the first seal), whereas the Messiah returns at its end to win a victory and a Kingdom which will know no end (at the Second Advent).

And antichrist is given “a bow”, a weapon whose biblical and historical connotations are often ignoble. That is to say, the bow is much more of a guerilla-type weapon in the ancient world, a weapon of stealth rather than one of bold confrontation (contrast the impressive, sharp broadsword proceeding directly from the Messiah’s mouth: Rev.19:15), and this distinction would not have been lost on John’s contemporaries. The employment of horse-archers by the Scythians and the Parthians of that day, while effective, was outside the paradigm of Greco-Roman “fair play”, and would most definitely have had a negative connotation for the original readers of Revelation. This aspect of antichrist’s weaponry is consistent with Daniel’s account of antichrist’s insidious and devious rise to power, accomplished as much through terrorism, coup d’état and intimidation as through overt military conquest (cf. Dan.11:21ff.). And in Ezekiel’s description of the tribulational invasion of Israel prior to Armageddon, antichrist, under the generic gentile name “Gog”, is also described as carrying the bow:

(1) And you, son of man, prophesy against Gog, and say, “Thus says the Lord God, ‘Behold, I am against you, Gog (i.e., antichrist), chief prince of Meshech and Tubal. And (2) I will fetch you back, and conduct you, and bring you up from the far reaches of the north. For I will make you come to the mountains of Israel. (3) Then I will strike *your bow* from your left hand, and make *your arrows* fall from your right hand””.  
Ezekiel 39:1-3

Finally, none of the positive elements we find in the descriptions of our Lord – His fiery eyes, impressive white robe, majestic names, etc. (cf. Rev.1:12-16; 19:11-16) – are to be found in this first description of the conquering antichrist. Just as this symbol gives an outward appearance of majesty at first (but upon closer inspection proves hollow), so it is with antichrist, who will demand and receive worship from an awe-struck world, but will in turn only lead his followers to their complete destruction (cf. 2Thes.2:1-12).

## 2. The Red Horse: Civil Discord

Revelation 6:3-4:

(3) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come and see!” (4) And I looked, and behold, another horse, a red [one], came out, and it was given to him who was sitting upon it to take away peace (i.e., create civil discord), and [to bring it about] that they (i.e., people) might slay one another. So a large sword was given to him.

The red horse symbolizes the trend of civil discord, civil strife, social upheaval, the breakdown of law and order, the evaporation of civility, an increase in crime, political persecutions, revolutions and the like. This second tribulational trend is both a direct and an indirect result of the devil’s activities spearheaded through his antichrist. For Satan will be actively involved in the subversion of law and order and of civil peace (as indeed he always has been), in order to corrupt and undermine these sources of inherent resistance to antichrist and his bid for world power and control. The removal of Holy Spirit restraint symbolized in the opening of this second seal coupled with the unprecedented intensity of satanic activity in the Tribulation will serve to accelerate these effects beyond anything now imaginable in so short a time.<sup>58</sup> At the same time, moreover, the universal breakdown in social harmony and social institutions will tend to have a cascade effect, with each societal devolution tending to reinforce and further accelerate social degeneration worldwide. The Spirit’s restraint on such things at the present time, to be removed with the opening of this second seal, is well-known (cf. Gal.5:17-26).

As the color of blood, red is a natural choice to symbolize the horseman who represents violent internal strife (i.e., the unquestionably “bloody” slaughter and the sword whereby it is accomplished in verse four).<sup>59</sup> For as the history of the world amply attests, foreign conquest is often less bloody than the violence which accompanies internal revolution. It must be emphasized here, moreover, that the red horse is *not* “war” in the sense of conflict between two separate nations (which is covered in full by the first seal), but represents instead the gory violence of internecine conflict. As it was in the case of the trend toward military conquest represented by the first seal, revolution and civil strife have also always been with us. However it is the unparalleled *intensity* of the trend which is being communicated here, an intensity which, once again, proceeds from the removal of divine restraint, and the intensified efforts of the devil. The resultant hardening of the world’s population as “wickedness increases and love grows cold” (Matt.24:12-13) will provide one of the Tribulation’s most disturbing and horrible trends as human behavior, never particularly uplifting when seen from the scriptural point of view, is prophesied to take a dramatic turn for the worse (1Tim.4:1-3; 2Tim.3:1-9), a factor which will be both a result and a contributory effect of this trend toward social breakdown. Indeed, a

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<sup>58</sup> The devil will “pull out all the stops” during this final seven years of his semi-rule. See part one of this series, section III, “General Character of the Tribulation”.

<sup>59</sup> cf. 2Kng.3:22, “red *like blood*”, where in the Septuagint version the same Greek word for “red” is used as in our context: *pyrros* (πυρρος). We can also see here from the fact that red is the color of the dragon, Satan, in Revelation 12:3 a clear reference to evil (in this context the evil manifest in murder and bloodshed).

significant part of antichrist's conquests will be accomplished through just such rebellions (cf. Dan.11:21-24), and, on the other hand, a significant portion of his power will flow from his "reorganization" of society and the establishment of a new social system whose only true purpose will be to deepen his hold on his kingdom and make his followers all the more dependent upon and beholden to him (cf. Dan.11:36-39). Finally, the fact that the second horseman will "take peace from the earth" indicates that the period immediately preceding the Tribulation may be one of relative tranquility, a state of affairs which would only make the extraordinary bitterness of the Tribulation itself that much more difficult to bear (cf. Dan.11:21; 11:24).

### **3. The Black Horse: Economic Constraint**

Revelation 6:5-6:

(5) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, "Come and see!" And I looked, and behold, [there was] a black horse, and the one who was sitting upon it had scales in his hand. (6) And I heard something like a voice in the middle of the four living creatures saying, "A quart of flour for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and don't [even] trouble [yourself over] the oil and the wine".

The black horse symbolizes the trend of extreme economic controls, scarcity and constraint. As in the case of the second horseman, so also here a goodly portion of the hardship described will result from the series of aggressive wars and internal dislocations represented by the first two seals. This active interference in all aspects of economic activity will be one of the key means which will be employed by antichrist to tighten his grip on power (through strict controls on all spheres of commerce) and also to earmark the lion's share of production for the exclusive use of his followers (as a means of reward). The notorious extension of this strategy in the Tribulation's second half to religious persecution is well-known (Rev.13:16-18).

As the color associated with starvation, black is most fitting to symbolize the trend of scarcity represented by the third horseman (Job 30:30; Lam.4:8-9; 5:10; cf. Is.50:3). By any estimate, the prices quoted here are extreme. The ratio of the value of barley to wheat is consistent with what we know of ancient pricing, but the prices themselves indicate that the average employed person of that time will need all of his/her income for subsistence. A denarius represents the standard day's pay for a working man (cf. Matt.20:2), but a quart/liter/*choenix* of milled flour (roughly the equivalent in nutritive value to three times its weight in unprocessed barley) will barely suffice for an individual, let alone a family. Therefore we are to see in these prophetic words control of *wages* and control of prices, limiting radically (and artificially) the consumption of all who are not on antichrist's "team". The phrase "and see thou hurt not the oil and wine" (KJV – most versions similar) is often misunderstood. The command is directed to the prospective buyer (not to the horseman), and suggests that, for the average person who is not part of antichrist's privileged few, anything beyond the most basic and essential staples will be out priced out of

reach (cf. Prov.21:17), so much so that there will not even any need to be on the lookout for a “good price”, because they will never be in range (as long as antichrist’s kingdom endures).

It must also be said here that the black horse is *not* mere dearth, but control by design of production, prices, distribution, capital, etc. Although famine has always been with us on this planet, and its intensification is indeed a sign and a characteristic of the Tribulation (Matt.24:7), the trend depicted here is, once again, a “man-made” one, an outrageous and untenable economic situation brought on by antichrist’s policies. For just as communist and fascist regimes “redistribute wealth” upon ascension to power (i.e., engage in theft on an almost unimaginable scale), so it will be in the case of antichrist, and we fully expect his activities to surpass even the horrendous historical examples of the past hundred years (cf. Dan.11:24; 11:39).

Therefore the “scales” in the hand of the third horseman are a *weapon* of economic control and torment equivalent to the first horseman’s bow (for accomplishing devious conquests) and the second horseman’s sword (for fomenting internal insurrection). This deliberate and artificial system of rationing and price controls will no doubt seem appealing to many at first, but it will soon promote horrendous scarcity for all but the rich and privileged followers of antichrist (cf. Lev.26:26; 2Kng.7:1; Ezek.4:16).

#### **4. The Pale-green Horse: Accelerated Mortality**

Revelation 6:7-8a:

(7) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come and see!” (8) And I looked, and behold, [there was] a pale-green horse, and the one who was sitting upon it was named “Death”, and Hades followed with him.

The pale-green horse symbolizes the trend of a monumental increase in the incidence of death. The reference to “Hades”, the place of the (unbelieving) dead, following closely and immediately after Death, is a vivid symbol of the intensification and rapidity of tribulational mortality (i.e., with no space or lag at all between the coming of “Death” and internment in “Hades”). This expansion and acceleration of the rate of mortality will result from a variety of factors, specifically, the war, revolution, and famine of the preceding three horseman-trends. As the color of decay and putrefaction, pale-green is a natural choice to represent death and its corruption.

It must be emphasized here that the pale-green horse does *not* merely represent the increasing number of deaths resulting from the wars, insurrections, and economic scarcities represented by the first three horsemen, but an expansion of mortality in its own right resulting from the cheapness with which antichrist will treat the lives of his subjects (cf. Prov.14:28). For a large element in elevating this trend of mortality to levels so far not yet seen in the history of the world since the great flood will again be deliberate policy choices on the part of antichrist. In addition

to the deaths and degradation of health brought on by the trends of the first three horsemen, the rider on the pale-green horse represents death in his own right. For we may expect antichrist, in his zeal for world conquest (given the nearly unlimited means required for such a course of action) to redirect resources from all of life's essential areas, namely, medicine, law and order (beyond mere martial control), and environmental protection. The resultant expansion in plague and disease, crime, and environmental hazards (coupled, of course, with the contributions of the first three horsemen) will greatly increase both the risk and the incidence of mortality for all but the very few.

In a sick way, this expanded mortality rate, hitting hardest the young, the old, and the infirm, will also accomplish antichrist's bidding by eliminating consumption by "non-productive" members of society. We can be relatively sure, therefore, that the ultimate effect of this massive redirection of resources from health, safety, and environmental sectors will not be unanticipated by antichrist (or unwanted). Just as the bow, sword, and scales represent "weapons" whereby antichrist furthers his self-serving trends, so also in the same way "Hades" mentioned here must be seen as a tool for accomplishing his satanic objectives, in this case, the freeing up of resources by death for his megalomaniacal purposes.<sup>60</sup>

#### **[4b.] Summary of the Four Horsemen**

##### Revelation 6:8b:

And authority over the fourth [part] of the earth (i.e., antichrist's kingdom) was given to them (i.e., to the four "horsemen" collectively) to kill with sword (war and revolution, the first two horsemen), and famine (the third horseman), and death (the fourth horseman), even at the hands of *the* beasts of the earth (i.e., antichrist and his false prophet as agents of the four trends).

The reader is enjoined to attend with special care to the fact that this second half of verse eight (above) *does not* apply to the fourth horseman individually (as is usually supposed), but is instead a summary statement, applying to all four of the horsemen collectively. Not only have the sword (the violence of war and revolution) and famine (resulting from economic dislocation) already been assigned to the first three horsemen, but there is also the problem that death (i.e., increased mortality resulting from pestilence and other consequences of antichrist's policies) and Hades (the place of the unsaved dead prior to the last judgment) can in no biblical sense wield the sword. In the case of Hades, its accompaniment of death (i.e., the accelerated rate of death) is merely to symbolize the horrendous increase of mortality – it actually "follows after" death closely. But the idea of Hades as an agent, even in symbolic terms, is a mistaken borrowing from classical mythology, and has no part in the interpretation of scripture. On the other hand, the

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<sup>60</sup> This is not yet religious persecution – believers at this time are housed in heaven after death, not Hades (as they were before the ascension of our Lord: see above under our discussion of "The Holy Place").



interpretation evident in the expanded translation of this half verse given above shows the clear relationship between this summary statement and the respective roles of the four horsemen, adding important additional information in the process.

The “sword” refers collectively to both the first and second horsemen, combining them in this summation because, strictly in terms of the *means* through which death comes, the violence represented by the sword is an apt symbol for each of these first two. The switch in vocabulary (from *machaira* [two-edged sword] in verse four to *rhomphaia* [broad-sword] here in the second half of verse eight) signals that the “sword” here, a weapon of violence technically different from either of the weapons given to the first two horsemen, combines symbolically *both* types of overt violence represented by the first two seals, namely, war and revolution. As a weapon shunned by the Roman legions (who used the *machaira*), the Thracian *rhomphaia*-sword of verse eight combines both the first seal’s notion of a foreign weapon, and the second seal’s notion of a sword-like instrument of violence (similar but not identical to the *machaira*-sword precisely because it is meant to be understood as including the first horseman's bow in its symbolism as well).

The word “famine” here also expresses the *means* by which the third horseman’s trend brings about death, and “death” itself as used here in verse eight is a synonym for “plague” or “pestilence”, a precedented biblical use (disease being the number one *means* through which the fourth horseman will accomplish his task).<sup>61</sup> Finally, the phrase, “even at the hands of the beasts of the earth” requires some comment because it is so often supposed that this is a reference to death by wild animals. Now while it would not be wrong to expect problems in this regard on account of depopulation resulting from the four trends of the first four seals (cf. Deut.7:22), death from wild animals will almost certainly be a minuscule consideration as compared to the deaths caused by war, social degeneration, economic catastrophe, and pestilence. Even more to the point, nowhere in the actual treatment of the trends of antichrist’s policy (i.e., within the individual treatment of the four horsemen) are “wild beasts” even hinted at. Passages such as Ezekiel 14:21 are often adduced as parallels here, but to place agricultural, sparsely populated, ancient Israel side by side with urbanized, highly populated modern Europe (the kingdom of antichrist where these trends first apply: see immediately below), is very much an “apples and oranges” comparison. It must also be remembered, moreover, that the four horsemen of the first four seals symbolize trends which result from *antichrist’s* satanic activities and are not divine judgments per se (as they most definitely are in Ezek.14:21), further rendering this false comparison moot. For it is the devil and his antichrist who are now under restraint, but who will be allowed to unleash their destructive policies once the day comes when the scroll and its seals are to be opened (cf. 2Thes.2:3-12).

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<sup>61</sup> Compare the Septuagint’s habitual translation of the Hebrew *dheber* (“plague”: rbd) with the Greek *thanatos* (“death”: θανάτος, as in here in Revelation 6:8): e.g., Lev.26:25; 1Chron.21:12; Jer.21:6-7; Ezek.5:12 (*et passim* in Ezek.).

If the word “beast” (Greek *therion*: θηριον) in verse eight above were to refer to literal wild animals, it would be the only instance in several dozen occurrences in Revelation where that would be true. For in all of the many other uses of “beast” in the book, we have only unmistakable references either to antichrist or to his false prophet (see Rev.13:1 and 13:11 *in loc.* in CT 5). Additionally, the Greek preposition *hypo* (υπο: translated above “at the hands of”) is normally and properly used only of human agents, not of instruments, of people, not of things or animals. That is to say, “at the hands of” is another indication, grammatical this time, that we have here individuals characterized as “beasts” rather than actual wild animals. Indeed, as we have seen above, antichrist and his administration (including the false prophet as the most prominent human supporter of his coalition: Rev.13:11-18) are the ones responsible for these four deadly trends, so that we would be remiss to take “at the hands of *the* beasts” any other way.<sup>62</sup> These beasts are “of the earth”,<sup>63</sup> and given that Satan too will be thrown to earth during the Tribulation (Rev.12:7-9), and is described throughout the book as “a dragon” (a horrible beast if ever there was one; cf. Rev.12:3), we can see in the phrase “at the hands of the beasts of the earth” the infernal false-trinity who will be responsible both for these first four tribulational trends, and for all of the ensuing horror which is the Tribulation. For it is antichrist, the beast, who is unleashed by the removal of the divine restraint represented by these four seals (2Thes.2:3-12), directed by the beastly dragon, Satan (Rev.13:1; cf. 2Thes.2:9), and supported by the beast-like false prophet (Rev.13:11), so that as we have said from the beginning of this discussion, the seals-removed (whence the four horsemen come forth) show the trends of the beast’s administration of his kingdom which will briefly come to dominate the world (cf. Rev.13:12; 17:8).

The phrase in our context “a fourth part of the earth” is likewise also often misconstrued. For this is not a reference to a fourth part of the world’s population, but refers instead, just as it says, to a “fourth part *of the earth*” (exactly as in the trumpet judgments where the areas affected are also very precisely spelled out: e.g., Rev.8:7 “a third of the earth”; Rev.8:8 “a third of the sea”; Rev.8:9 “a third of the ships”; Rev.9:15 “a third of mankind”). The qualifying phrase here, “of the earth”, tells us that the initial sphere of these four trends launched by antichrist’s activities will be confined to a quarter of the world in terms of geographical limits. That is to say, the

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<sup>62</sup> As we have a plural, the definite article here can hardly be generic, thus providing a further grammatical obstacle for taking these as wild beasts in general rather than as particular and well-known “beasts”, namely the “beasts” who can only be antichrist and his false prophet. Moreover, in the Ezekiel chapter 14 parallel, the beasts come last; in Revelation 6, beasts are not mentioned until this point – except for *the* beast, antichrist, the focus of the very first seal.

<sup>63</sup> The phraseology “of the earth” (where a simple genitive is used) is different from that in Revelation 13:11 (where we find the preposition *ek*, “from”, describing the false prophet’s origin). Both antichrist and his false prophet are “of the earth” (i.e., earthly, indicating these trends are not of divine orchestration), whereas the false prophet originates “from the earth” as opposed to the origin of antichrist “from the sea” in Rev.12:17-13:1 (to be discussed in part 4 of this series).

initial trends toward wars of conquest, social unrest, economic meltdown, and accelerated mortality will be concentrated in antichrist's own kingdom (which comprises a fourth of the world in biblical terms). In common scriptural designation, the earth is indeed divided into four quadrants, north, south, east, and west, (often represented by the four winds which in turn stand for these four directions: Jer.49:36; Ezek.37:9; Dan.7:2; Matt.24:31). We may compare the four angels standing at the "four corners of the world" in Revelation 7:1, the devil's deception at the end of time of all the nations "in the four corners of the earth" in Revelation 20:8, God's regathering of Israel in Isaiah 11:12 "from the four corners of the earth", and the four chariots of divine visitation of Zechariah 6:7 who go forth "throughout the [entire] earth" (i.e., one to a quadrant, north, south, east and west). Moreover, in biblical geography, Israel is at the world's center, so that these four quadrants are to be identified relative to her own central location. As the home of God's chosen people, "whence is the Christ according to the flesh", and as the geographical focus of world events from the divine point of view, it should not be at all surprising to believers that Israel should be so described (Rom.9:5):

Thus says the Lord God, "This is Jerusalem. I have placed her in the center of the nations, and round about her [I have placed] the earths (i.e., areas of *the* earth).  
Ezekiel 5:5

The particular "fourth part" of the earth here in the context of the four seal-trends of antichrist's kingdom is certainly therefore that very kingdom. Further, Daniel chapter eleven identifies antichrist as "king of the north" in the process of describing his wars with the "king of the south" wherein a large part of the Tribulation's first half will be consumed (cf. Dan.11:40-45). We also know from elsewhere in Daniel and from Revelation that this "northern kingdom" is roughly equivalent to the Roman Empire of John's day, a "revival" of sorts of that ancient kingdom (see respectively Dan.9:26 and Rev.17:9-11; cf. also Dan.2:40-44; 7:7-25; Rev.13:1-4; 17:1-15). Add to this picture the fact the "kings [and therefore kingdoms] of the east" will be relatively uninvolved in the main events of the Tribulation until they are summoned for Armageddon (Rev.16:12-14), and the further fact that the "Babylon" of Revelation chapters seventeen and eighteen is both somehow a part of the beast's kingdom, yet distinct from it (and must therefore represent the one so far unnamed quarter of the earth, namely, the west: compare Is.14:3-20 with Rev.17:16-18), and we arrive at the following general division of the world at the time of the Tribulation:

North: Europe [antichrist's initial ally and conquest]  
South: Africa and the Middle East  
East: Asia and the Pacific  
West: Western Hemisphere [Babylon, antichrist's homeland]

All this is an admittedly brief composite sketch of a number of important passages and extensive teachings, the explication and exegesis of which are found in parts 3 through 5 of this series. However, it is hoped that this overview will be useful in helping to understand the initial applicability of the first four seals, namely, that they will be first and foremost evident within the realm of antichrist's victorious conquests. The beast's initial area of conquest is Europe, the

Mediterranean, and the Near East, the seat of Rome's power, against which antichrist will proceed through alliance, subterfuge, intimidation, and open hostilities from his original base of power, symbolic Babylon (of which he is king: Is.14:4; alternatively Tyre: Ezek.28:1-19; cf. Is.23:1-17; Ezek.27:1-36). While these facts clearly imply that Babylon, the west, will be spared the worst of these four deadly trends in the early part of the Tribulation, it should be kept in mind that Babylon, an object of jealousy and loathing to the rest of antichrist's subjects, will be virtually destroyed near the Tribulation's end (Rev.17:16 - 19:3).

We also need to mention here the relationship between the four horsemen and the four cherubs (i.e., the "living creatures"). The text of Revelation chapter six (i.e., the "first"<sup>64</sup>, second, third, and fourth pairs in verses one, three, five and seven respectively) makes it clear that the horsemen are introduced by the cherubim in the same order in which these angelic creatures appear in Revelation chapter four, giving us the following series of couplings:

1. Lion-face: White Horse
2. Bullock-face: Red Horse
3. Human-face: Black Horse
4. Eagle-face: Pale-green Horse

Inasmuch as the faces of the cherubs represent aspects of the God-man Jesus Christ in His role as God's Mediator between God and man, while the horsemen represent trends of the kingdom of the false-Christ, Satan's surrogate Messiah, the juxtaposition of the two is significant. For we have in this collocation a clear and telling contrast between the wonderful aspects of Messiah and His coming Kingdom on the one hand, and the horrible trends of antichrist's satanic kingdom on the other:

1. The lion-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the white horse contrasts the righteous conquering Lion of Judah with the evil conquering beast, antichrist.

2. The bullock-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the red horse contrasts the suffering Servant sacrificing Himself for the world with the self-aggrandizing antichrist willing to sacrifice the world for himself on the altar of strife and warfare.

3. The human-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the black horse contrasts the Bread of Life giving Himself to provide the world eternal sustenance with the greedy antichrist, taking away mankind's material sustenance.

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<sup>64</sup> It is true that the "first" is literally to be rendered "one of the living creatures", but the occurrence of the cardinal number "one" to lead a sequence of following ordinals is not unprecedented in biblical usage: cf. the Genesis days of recreation where "**one** day" in Gen.1:5 is followed by "the second day", "the third day", etc., and is therefore usually translated "the first day" [so KJV, NIV, though NASB does have "one day"].

4. The eagle-faced cherub's introduction of the rider on the pale-green horse contrasts the resurrection and eternal life provided by Christ with the death and corruption provided by antichrist.

All four of the trends represented by the four horsemen are far from unique in the history of the earth. It is rather the intensity, rapidity and extensiveness of these four deadly trends which are unique. And just as the number four symbolizes completeness of coverage in terms of the earth, so the fact that the horsemen are four in number symbolizes the comprehensive nature of the distress and tribulation destined for those within the sphere of antichrist's rule. These four deadly trends show us distinctly what it will be like to live in a world under the devil's thumb (for all of these trends are direct results of antichrist's deliberate policies), and should serve to reinforce our appreciation of the fact that everything in this world not directly related to God is, at its core, nothing but vanity. As believers, we know that permanence, security, safety and stability in this world are really not much more than illusions. How much more will this truth not be obvious for those who first bear the brunt of the aggressive, seditious, avaricious, and malignant policies of Satan's chosen man! For though he will promise peace, harmony, prosperity and justice, antichrist will deliver the opposite for all but his most dedicated followers. For all who have chosen instead to follow the Son of God, this preview of the coming regime which the four horsemen represent makes for a sobering warning of the spiritual preparations we would be well-advised to make before that day arrives.

## **5. The Slain: The Great Persecution (9-11)**

Revelation 6:9-11:

(9) And when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the fifth seal, I saw below<sup>65</sup> the altar the living persons who had been slain because of the Word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained. (10) And they cried out with a loud voice, saying "How long, O Master, holy and true, will you [wait and] not render judgment and vindication for our blood upon those who dwell on the earth?" (11) And a white robe was given to each one of them that they might rest yet a little while longer until their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion should also fulfill [their course].

As did the first four seals, the fifth seal also represents the removal of divine restraint, specifically the removal of divine limitation on the deliberate slaughter of believers for their faith

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<sup>65</sup> They are not "under" the altar, but "below" it in the sense that they are standing lower than the altar which is before the elevated throne. The mention of the altar, a type of Christ as we have seen above, emphasizes the blessed fellowship with Him that all who have died for Him will ever enjoy. Soon to join these martyrs of the past in this same place of honor "before the throne" [= "below the altar"] will be the tribulational martyrs (Rev.7:9).

(i.e., “martyrdom”).<sup>66</sup> As in the case of the first four seals, it is not the fact of the trend in view (for the conquest, social strife, famine, and plague they represent have always been present), but the extent to which this persecution will go (as a result of the lifting of the Holy Spirit’s mollifying ministry described here). There have been martyrs for God in the devil’s world since Abel, and as we saw in the previous installment of this series in our study of the seven churches, the era of Smyrna was noted for the persecutions which believers had to endure. There were martyrs throughout the Reformation, and martyrdom still occurs in our day in countries where Christianity is violently opposed (even if this fact is not generally acknowledged in the west). But in the Tribulation, specifically, in its second half, the “Great Tribulation”, the martyrdom of believers for their faith in and faithfulness to Jesus Christ will exceed all previous persecutions by many orders of magnitude. The fifth seal thus represents the “Great Persecution” which will be an inaugurating feature of the Tribulation’s second half. Following the massive falling away from the faith in the Tribulation’s first half (the “Great Apostasy”), and beginning with the martyrdom of the 144,000 Jewish evangelists (see section V below), this will be a world-wide persecution of believers on a scale never yet witnessed in human history (cf. Is. 24:16; Jer.9:4; 12:5-6; 31:2; 45:1-4; Dan.7:21; 7:25; 8:10; 11:33-35; 12:1; 12:7; Mic.7:1-7; Zeph.2:3; Matt.13:21; 24:9; 24:21; Mk.13:19; Lk.21:12-19; Jn.15:20; 16:1-3; 1Pet.4:12-19; Rev.7:9-17; 12:17; 13:7-18; 14:1-20; 15:2-4). Discussion of the details of this persecution must await its proper place (part 4 of this series, “The Great Tribulation”), but we should note here that the opening of this fifth restraining seal represents the first trend confined exclusively to the Tribulation’s second half (confirming that the seals reflect a chronological sequence).

The martyrs of the past, of the present, and of the Great Persecution to come all have in common the fact that they are killed because of their fidelity to the truth. It is precisely because they are true believers in Jesus Christ and genuine witnesses to Him, the Word of God, that they have, do and will earn the world’s hostility and, as a consequence, have their lives taken away by henchmen of the evil one. Every believer should be clear about the fact that genuine dedication and faithful commitment to Jesus Christ carries with it the potential for such a death (no matter how improbable that may seem under present circumstances). For it is not the lukewarm or pseudo-believers who run the risk of martyrdom, not the compromised or the compromising who incur the world’s enmity and the devil’s attention, but only those who have truly placed Jesus Christ first in their lives regardless of consequence who will ever even potentially face this danger. For all those who do meet this fate, however, we may rest assured that they have not done so apart from the benevolent will of God, and that such an end, far from being shameful, is in fact the most glorious possible transition from this world to the next which a believer in Jesus Christ may be privileged to have, for martyrdom is truly “sharing the sufferings” of our Lord, demonstrating thereby through such faith and faithfulness the power of God and of His Word (cf. Matt.5:10-12; Mk.10:38-39; Jn.21:19; Acts 5:41; 7:54-60; 22:20; 2Cor.1:5-7; Phil.1:20-30; Col.1:24; 1Pet.4:13-14; Rev.2:10; 2:13; 14:13; 17:6).

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<sup>66</sup> On this most extreme example of suffering for Christ, see Peter’s Epistles #25: “Personal Tribulation”.

(35b) Some [of these great believers of the past] were tortured, refusing release, that they might obtain a better resurrection (i.e., worth more to them than their lives; cf. Ps.63:3). (36) Others endured ridicule and beatings, and even chains and imprisonment. (37) They were stoned, sawed in half, killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goat hides. They were deprived, persecuted, abused. (38) The world was not worthy of them. They wandered the deserts and the mountains, making their homes in caves and fissures in the earth. (39) And through their faith, all of them became witnesses [to the world] (lit., “were martyred”) . . .  
Hebrews 11:35b-39a

The specific description of the martyrs here in Revelation chapter six whom John is given to see deserves special comment, for they are described as “the living persons [“souls”] of the men [people] who were slain”. What is significant about this description is the use of the word “living person” (Greek *psyche*, ψυχη), often (confusingly) rendered “souls” (cf. the similar usage of Rev.18:13 & 20:4).<sup>67</sup> In true biblical usage, however, this “*psyche*-soul” is the whole “person”, body and spirit, with stress upon the inner self, and, by definition, all such “persons” are *alive*. The message, therefore, is clear: the devil and his minions may remove us from this world, if it so pleases God for His own glory, but they can never really take away our lives.

(31) “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what God spoke to you when He said, (32) ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’? (32) He is not a God of the dead, **but of the living.**”  
Matthew 22:31-32

“And do not fear those who can kill the body, but are not able to take (lit. “kill”) your [true] life. But fear rather the One who is able to destroy both life and body in hell.”  
Matthew 10:28

Despite the earthly appearance of things, all these “living individuals” whom John sees here are indeed alive and well, eagerly awaiting the coming day of God’s vengeance upon the world that slew them. Nor have they been “left naked”, for the “white robe” each of them has received is a symbol of the interim body each of us receives to house our spirit and preserve our life until the day of resurrection we so eagerly anticipate (2Cor.5:1-3).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> The immaterial part of the human being is, properly speaking, the [human] spirit. In *combination* with the body, this immaterial part of mankind enjoys an inner life – the thoughts and intents of the **heart**, which word is a virtual biblical synonym for “soul”. For a detailed explanation of the biblical usage of “soul”, “heart”, and “spirit”, see The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: Part 3, “The Purpose, Creation and Fall of Man”, section II.3, “The Human Spirit”, and section II.4, “The Dichotomy of Man”.

<sup>68</sup> For discussion of the resurrection body and the believer’s interim state after death, see also Peter’s Epistles #20: “The Resurrection”.

The opening of the fifth seal represents the end of the previous restraint on martyrdom, relatively speaking. For the believers in view here “below the altar” in verses nine through eleven are not those who die at the hand of antichrist and his followers (who are described as “ their brothers who were destined to be killed in the same fashion”). Rather, these believers are all those who have been martyred up until that future time. They are still awaiting the Lord’s righteous recompense to be leveled upon the earth and its inhabitants, and waiting also for their resurrection, which, as in the case of future rewards, must await the fulfillment of our entire echelon of resurrection (1Cor.15:23; cf. Heb.11:39-40). The intensity and magnitude of the persecution to come is evident from a comparison of these martyrs (who are not described as and do not appear to be numerous, although they represent all those who have so died for the Lord from Abel until the Tribulation’s mid-point) and those who are going to be “coming out of the Great Tribulation”, who are said to be “a great multitude which no one could count” (Rev.7:9).

## **6. The Earthquake: Divine Judgment and the Second Advent**

### Revelation 6:12-17:

(12) And I saw when He (i.e., the Lamb) opened the sixth seal, a great earthquake occurred, and the sun became black like hairy sackcloth, and the moon became entirely like blood [in appearance], (13) and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree casting its fruit when shaken by a strong wind, (14) and the heaven retreated like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and hill was moved from its place. (15) And all the kings of the earth and the prominent men and the generals and the wealthy and the powerful and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and the rocks of the mountains. (16) And [thus] they say to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the One who sits upon the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, (17) because the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand [before them]?”

Although there are seven seals, the sixth seal is the last to represent tribulational trends per se. That is because the opening of the seventh seal in chapter eight is synonymous with the actual commencement of the Tribulation. Just as this sealed scroll in the Lamb’s hand cannot be unrolled and read until every last one of its seals has been opened, so the Tribulation and glories to follow (which this scroll represents) cannot begin until the restraining ministry of the Spirit has been completely “taken out of the way” (cf. 2Thes.2:6-8).

The sixth seal represents the Second Advent of our Lord Jesus Christ, along with all the events which accompany that glorious day (the battle of Armageddon in particular). Clearly then, this sixth seal compresses many events and details into a very brief though powerful sketch (and we can see in the reduction from four seals to two to cover the more eventful Great Tribulation a representation of the unprecedented intensity and rapidity of these dramatic events to come, a phenomenon to which we have been calling attention since the beginning of this study: see especially part 1 on Rev.1:1).



The Lord is angry with the nations; His wrath is upon all their armies. He will totally destroy them, He will give them over to slaughter. Their slain will be thrown out, their dead bodies will send up a stench; the mountains will be soaked with their blood. All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree.

Isaiah 34:2-4 NIV

Characteristic features of the Second Advent which occur here and are also well-known from Old Testament prophecy include the great earthquake (Is.29:6; Ezek.38:19; Hab.3:6; cf. Zech.14:3-5; Rev.6:12), the supernatural darkness (Is.13:10; 60:2; Ezek.32:7; Joel 2:31; 3:15; Zech.14:6-7), and the dissolving of the heavens and the falling of the stars (Is.13:10; 34:4; Matt.24:29), all of which bring terror to the inhabitants of the earth in the face of the impending wrath of God (Is.2:10; 2:19-21; 34:2-3; Hos.10:8; Mal.3:2; Lk.21:25-26; 23:30). On the subject of “falling stars”, it should be pointed out that the Bible does not express itself in terms of modern scientific terminology. That is to say, a “star” in our contemporary usage means something very technical, quite different in size from these meteor showers which precede our Lord’s return (Matt.24:29; Mk.13:25). In addition to the massive world-wide earthquake that will rock every mountain and hill, and to the period of supernatural darkness just prior to His advent, these intensive meteor showers will melt the courage of all who oppose Him (and occasion the reaction described in verse seventeen above).

(9) Behold, the day of the Lord is coming, a mighty day of anger and intense wrath, to make the earth desolate and remove her sinners from upon her. (10) For the stars of heaven and the constellations will not flash forth their light. The sun will grow dark on its course and the moon will not pour out its light. (11) Then will I punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity. I will bring an end to the arrogance of the proud and bring down the haughtiness of the ruthless. (12) I will make men more rare than gold, and mankind than the choice bullion of Ophir. (13) Therefore I will shake the heavens, and the earth will quake from its place, on account of the anger of the Lord and on the day of His fierce wrath.

Isaiah 13:9-13

The “rolling up” of the heavens described here (cf. Ps.102:25-27; Is.51:6; Matt.24:35; Heb.1:11-12; 12:27; 2Pet.3:10-11; Rev.21:1), is, additionally, both representative of the eviction from heaven of Satan and his followers (cf. the angels elsewhere described as stars, often falling/fallen ones: Judg.5:20; Job 25:5; 38:7; Is.14:12-13; 40:26 [c. Lk.2:13]; Lk.10:18; Jude 1:13; Rev.1:16; 1:20; 2:1; 3:1; 8:10-11; 9:1; 12:1-4), and is also a preview of the dissolution of the present heavens and earth for the new heavens and earth which will constitute the eternal kingdom of the Father (Is.65:17; 66:22; Matt.13:43; 1Cor.15:24-28; 2Pet.3:13; Rev.21:1-2).

## **V. The Sealing of the 144,000: Revelation 7:1-8**

Revelation 7:1-8:

(1) And after this, I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, so that a wind might not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. (2) And I saw another angel coming up from the rising of the sun with a seal of the Living God. And he shouted in a loud voice to the four angels to whom it had been given to harm the earth and the sea, (3) saying, “Don’t harm the earth or the sea or any tree until we place a seal upon the foreheads of the servants of our God.” (4) And I heard the number of those sealed, 144,000 sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:

- (5) from the tribe of Judah, 12,000 sealed,  
from the tribe of Reuben, 12,000,  
from the tribe of Gad, 12,000,
- (6) from the tribe of Asher, 12,000,  
from the tribe of Naphtali, 12,000,  
from the tribe of Manasseh, 12,000,
- (7) from the tribe of Simeon, 12,000,  
from the tribe of Levi, 12,000,  
from the tribe of Issachar, 12,000,
- (8) from the tribe of Zebulun, 12,000,  
from the tribe of Benjamin, 12,000,  
from the tribe of Joseph, 12,000 sealed.

**The Four Angels of the Four Winds:** The four winds mentioned here are instruments of divine judgment (Jer.49:36-37; cf. 1Kng.19:11; Job 1:19), and the four elect angels who control them are the agents who administer that judgment on God’s behalf:

(1) Then I turned and lifted my eyes and looked, and, behold, four chariots were coming forth from between two mountains, and the mountains were mountains of bronze. (2) And with the first chariot were red horses, and with the second chariot were black horses, (3) and with the third chariot were white horses, and with the fourth chariot were dappled horses, strong ones. (4) And I answered and said to the angel who was speaking with me, “What are these, my lord?” (5) And the angel answered me and said, “These are *the four winds of heaven*, going forth from standing by the Lord of the entire earth. (6) And among them, the black horses are going to the land of the north, and the white ones have gone behind them, and the dappled ones have gone to the land of the south, (7) for they are strong, and they went and made request to go and to go about throughout the earth. And He (i.e., the Lord) said, ‘Go! Go about throughout the earth!’ And they went about throughout the earth. (8) Then He shouted to me and said, ‘Look! Those going to the land of the north have set My Spirit [of wrath] upon the land of the north!’”

Zechariah 6:1-8

Whereas Zechariah was given to see the whole process of their deployment from the presence of the Lord represented by the angels who control them, in Revelation chapter seven we see the four

winds already in position, set to be unleashed upon the earth.<sup>69</sup> In both instances these destructive winds are controlled by angels who, while they are directing them in Zechariah six, are seen to be holding them back in Revelation seven. In Zechariah's description, the process of divine judgment has already been set in motion, with the main recipient of divine wrath being the "north country" (note the translation of verse eight above, often mistranslated in the versions). The four winds in our context, Revelation chapter seven, are not being directed against any particular region or country as a means of destruction (as were the two winds sent to destroy historic Babylon in the Zechariah six passage above), but are instead on the point of being released upon the entire world to administer God's warning judgments (i.e., the "trumpet judgments").

As we saw above, the phrase "the four corners of the earth" (Rev.7:1) is a common biblical way of referring to the earth in its entirety, and here stresses the completeness of the coverage and worldwide effect which the warning judgments of these four angels and their winds will administer (Ezek.37:9; Dan.7:2; 8:8; Matt.24:31). It is important to understand that the "four winds" and their angels do not permanently reside at the earth's "four corners" – they stand before the Lord in eager anticipation of His mandates for judgment as Zechariah six makes clear. But here they have been pre-positioned in anticipation of the opening of the final seal, at which point they will begin without delay the seven-fold series of the "trumpet judgments", God's systematic series of warnings to humanity to repent delivered during the Tribulation's first half. Specifically, the four angels of the four winds are responsible for directing the first four trumpet judgments, all of which originate from the sky (respectively, hail and fire hurled down upon the earth, a blazing mountain thrown down into the sea, the Wormwood star cast upon the world's waters, and the smiting of the light of the sun, moon and stars). As we see them here in Revelation seven, the angels are told to maintain their restraint of the winds until the sealing of the servants of God has been accomplished, suggesting a period of calm before the storm of the Tribulation breaks forth (cf. the "half hour" = a half year of silence and calm in heaven following the opening of the seventh seal: Rev.8:1).

**The 144,000:** This passage tells us little about the 144,000 themselves or their ministry beyond the fact of their selection by tribe and their sealing. However, from the further description in Revelation 14:1-5, and from the parallel and prophetically foreshadowing ministries of the twelve (Matt.10:1-42; Mk.6:7-12; Lk.9:1-6) and of the seventy-two (Lk.10:1-20) sent out by our Lord, it is possible to reconstruct the essential course of their ministry. And while its full description appears in the next installment of this series dealing with the Tribulation's first half (that is, the time frame for the work of 144,000), it will be helpful to put forth here at their first mention the main points about the 144,000 confirmable by scripture (especially in light of the

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<sup>69</sup> It should be noted here, given the context of the first four seals (whose horses are symbolic of tribulational trends) that *these* horses of Zechariah chapter six are real (albeit heavenly). Compare the horse and horses of Christ and His army of resurrected believers in Revelation 19:11-14 (and cf. 2Kng.2:11; 6:17; Ps.68:17; Is.66:15; Hab.3:8; 3:15; Zech.1:8-11).

many heresies and cults which not only misinterpret chapter seven, but also use it to further their own agendas in spite of the actual teachings of the Word of God).

We may note at the outset that, just as the 12 and the 72 described in the gospels were sent out as representatives of our Lord to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the nearness of the Kingdom, spiritually speaking (Matt.10:7; Mk.6:12; Lk.9:2; 9:6; 10:1; 10:9; cf. Lk.9:52), so the 144,000 are likewise representatives of our Lord, sent out to prepare the hearts of His countrymen for the coming of the Kingdom in its tangible reality. Thus, both these First and Second Advent messengers have a similar role and a similar function, for all are Jesus Christ's special representatives. And as His special representatives, it is fitting in the case of the 144,000 not only that they will adhere to the same mandates set down by our Lord for the 12 and the 72, but also that they will approximate His life and His walk (in so far as those born of the flesh can).<sup>70</sup>

### **Characteristics of the 144,000 and their Ministry:**

1. They are Jewish: Our Lord, in His humanity, is clearly Jewish (Lk.3:23-38; Rom.9:5), and these 144,000 are just as clearly described as belonging to the twelve tribes of Israel (12,000 from each tribe named). There is no justification in the Greek text here (or, for that matter, in any English translation this author has seen) that would lend credence to any other view than that the 144,000 are literally of Jewish ancestry. Just as clearly, they are also Christians, that is, Jewish believers and followers of Jesus Christ, "servants of our God" (Rev.7:3).

Many attempts have been made over the millennia to read these verses in some other way, to see this passage as somehow symbolic or the descriptions as somehow not precisely literal, but it is important to emphasize here that all such attempts have no basis, no foundation, no justification in scripture. It is certainly true that the 144,000 are "biblical celebrities", and it is only natural that a Christian reading these verses might wish to be a part of their unique and wonderful ministry (even though it ends in martyrdom, or perhaps even because of this fact). However, just as even great apostles like John and James who might have wished for things which were beyond them (i.e., to sit beside Jesus on His right and on His left: Matt.20:20-23), have had to defer to the will of God in such honors, so in the case of the 144,000 membership in this elite group comes only through God's election, according to God's will, and it behooves every believer to humbly, patiently and zealously accept the role, the ministry, and the place that he/she has been appointed by God in His grace, and not to be tricked into trying to arrogate to him/herself a position that is not in the will of God (cf. Lk.14:7-11). The 144,000 are *of Jewish ancestry*, coming from the tribes described in the translation above. Moreover, what is meant by "Jewish ancestry" is also clear, and must not be subjected to interpretive gymnastics. While it is true that a person of Jewish ancestry today cannot be expected to know his/her tribal affiliation, by and

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<sup>70</sup> In spiritual terms, this, of course, is a mandate given to all believers (cf. 1Cor.11:1; 1Thes.1:6). See Peter's Epistles #17, "Imitating Christ".

large those of Jewish ancestry are aware of their Jewish heritage, just as those of gentile patrimony are aware that they are not Jewish. Given the *importance* in the ministry of the 144,000 that they be conversant with Jewish traditions and culture, it also seems very unlikely that any sizeable part of their number will be made up of persons who may be “Jewish and not know it”. For while this is certainly a theoretical possibility, the main thrust and focus of the work of the 144,000 will be to “the lost sheep of Israel”, a ministry that would be difficult to fulfill without the proper cultural perspective. Everything points to the 144,000 being not only nominally Jewish, but also Jewish by culture, steeped in the traditions of their people the better to witness to them.

Time and space do not permit here an exhaustive refutation of the many “ten lost tribes” scenarios. Suffice it to say that the Bible provides sufficient evidence to conclude that even if all those exiled in the Assyrian deportation perished within a few generations (or became entirely secularized), there could easily still be sufficient stock from each of these ten tribes within that portion of the Jewish nation not conquered for the perpetuation of their blood-lines and the fulfillment of this prophecy *without* requiring recourse to bizarre theories about the present location or composition of the “ten lost tribes” (cf. 1Chron.9:2; 2Chron.10:17; 11:13-17; 15:9; 30:6; and chapter 34 passim). In any case, even if some of the far-fetched theories one hears did turn out to have any merit, it would still be a case of “Jews who knew nothing of Judaism”, eliminating such people from consideration in the ministry discussed here for the reasons explained above. Nor can it be maintained that John’s listing of the 144,000 is a “spiritualization” of chosen gentiles. Nowhere in the Bible are gentiles ever described individually as Jews, especially to the point of assigning them to specific Jewish tribes. So while it is true that, in this world, gentile and Jewish believers alike are all one in Christ spiritually (Gal.3:28; Eph.2:12-18), and while it is true that, in eternity, we of the gentiles who have followed Christ will be made one with Israel in reality (Eph.3:6; cf. Rom.8:16-17; 8:32; 1Cor.12:2; Gal.3:29; Phil.3:3; 2Pet.1:4),<sup>71</sup> nevertheless, while we are in this world, there is a physical distinction, with pride and precedence of place and stature belonging to those of Jewish ancestry (Rom.3:1-2; 9:4-5; 11:11-24; Gal.2:15; Phil.3:4-6).

It is not necessary that all or even most of these 144,000 come from the present state of Israel. Indeed, given the present widespread distribution of the Jewish people, and the clear necessity for the audience of the 144,000 to receive the gospel message in their own particular languages as well as from their own unique cultural perspective, that would be an unlikely development. Furthermore, the fact that the angel who announces the sealing of the 144,000 gives his message to the four angels *at the four corners of the earth* is a certain indication that the *whole earth* is meant as an area which must be protected while the 144,000 are sealed (and that they, therefore, are located all over the world). That the 144,000 are all Jewish with no gentiles included should not be taken as in any way derogatory to the role of gentiles in the plan of God (any more than

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<sup>71</sup> See part 5 of [The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation](#): “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.c, “The Symbolism of the Four Gaps and their Twelve-Day Groupings” point #5, “Israel is the ultimate organization”.

the fact that they are single men and virgins should seem to demean the role of women or married persons). Rather, it must be understood that this is a unique ministry with a unique purpose and thus has correspondingly unique requirements, most especially the need to understand the Jewish point-of-view, and to avoid giving offense (Matt.27:18; Acts 13:43-45; 17:5; 22:21-22; Rom.10:2; cf. Lk.15:25-32).<sup>72</sup>

There is a passion, a “zeal” for God deep set in the Jewish heart. Reading and re-reading the Psalms, for example, one cannot help but be deeply moved by the profound and vibrant love for and appreciation of God these songs exude, often exemplifying a degree of passion for Him that seems impossible to completely emulate. It is often hard for gentiles to comprehend this special feeling for the Almighty on the part of His special people, especially in regard to its persistence even when locked in the hardness of unbelief. For this “zeal” is at present by and large resistant to Christ (Rom.10:2; cf. Prov.19:2). One of the astounding and glorious things about this ministry of the 144,000 is that when once Israel is confronted by the undeniable witness of God ministered by these Jewish witnesses, many of their countrymen will indeed turn to Jesus, and do so in a most passionate and zealous way. This radical turn-around, where negative zeal will be at once transformed into positive passion is reminiscent of the experience of the apostle Paul, who, on his way to destroy the Church, was transformed in his heart into one of its most firm pillars by the miraculous intervention of our Lord (Acts 9:1-22; 22:3-21; 26:9-23). The 144,000 will indeed prove their bona fides through the working of miracles (see below), but an even more profound miracle will be the radical and zealous change of heart on the part of so many previously rock-hard hearts as the chosen people of God turn to Christ in large numbers around the world in response to this perfect ministry given at the perfect time.

2. They are male: Our Lord is male, and so are these 144,000 who are chosen to spread the good news of His imminent return to the lost sheep of Israel. Throughout this section and in Revelation chapter fourteen where they are also described, the Greek adjectives and participles which agree with the 144,000 are masculine. The parallel cases of the twelve (who were all males) and the seventy-two (who are likewise exclusively described with masculine modifiers) also indicate that all of the 144,000 will be men. One may also say that it is difficult to see how the description of the 144,000 as never having had relations “with women” can be understood in any other way. The fact that the 144,000 are male should not be taken as in any way derogatory to the role of women in the plan of God (any more than it should seem to demean the role of gentiles or married persons). Rather, it must be understood that this is a unique ministry with a unique purpose and thus has correspondingly unique requirements. This particular characteristic of the 144,000 is understandable in light of Jewish tradition, in particular the restriction of ministry roles to men even before the Mosaic Law. Given that one of the top priorities for

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<sup>72</sup> The clear implication for gentile Christians, many of whom do not fully appreciate the historical importance of Jews in the Church or their primacy in the plan of God, is that care and circumspection should be exercised when giving the gospel to those of Jewish background who have not as yet put their faith in Jesus Christ. We are all responsible to witness to our Lord, but we must always do so with sensitivity (cf. 1Cor.9:19-23).

making this ministry as effective as possible is, as we saw in the previous point, the avoidance of giving offense in the Jewish cultural context, the use of an all male cadre would seem to be a necessity. For this principle we may recall the words of the apostle Paul, who, as far as he was able, made himself “all things to all people”, adapting himself to the backgrounds of his audience whatever their backgrounds may have been, the better to win as many lives as possible for Christ (1Cor.9:19-23).

3. They are virgins: Our Lord remained a virgin throughout His earthly life, and this is also a characteristic of the 144,000 precursors who will begin to turn the hearts of Israel back to Him. For the description of the 144,000 as virgins in Revelation 14:4 is by no means symbolic. In addition to the fact that one finds nothing in the context that would lend itself to such an interpretation, the statement “for they are virgins” is, after all, a further explanation of the statement that these young men “have not fallen into sin with women (i.e., been seduced by them)”. It is important to understand that no blanket indictment of women is meant here. Rather, this is a simple statement to the effect that the entire group of the 144,000 are not only *single, unmarried* men, but also that in their single status they have *never* had illicit sexual relations. As it was with our Lord, so it will be with the 144,000, and the unmarried part of this equation is equally as important as the point that they have kept themselves chaste. For by keeping themselves uninvolved, they have also kept themselves from what would be a major impediment for men about to undertake a ministry of the nature of the one the 144,000 are called to complete. For, as we shall discuss in more detail below, these witnesses will be called upon to live an itinerant life of the greatest sacrifice, enduring privation and persecution, and ending in martyrdom. It could hardly be fair for any spouse or for any family to have their breadwinner removed to partake in such an ordeal. Nor could it fail to compromise the ministry of such a witness to have a wife and family at home somewhere, deprived of his fellowship and support, and quite likely forced to share in a measure of the persecution that comes his way. Clearly, God expects every one of us to do right by those who are dependent upon us (cf. 1Tim.5:8), so that the only way the 144,000 could possibly make the sacrifices called for by their unique ministry is to first make the sacrifice of committing themselves to a life of celibacy and abstinence. In this they follow our Lord, as well as some of His greatest apostles (Paul, and probably John; cf. 1Cor.7:7-8; 9:5-6).

Nor should we take this special sacrifice and commitment of the 144,000 to diminish in any way the role of the married, widowed, or divorced in God’s plan (any more than it should seem to demean the role of gentiles or women). After all, Moses, David and Peter were married, as were, obviously, the mothers of Jesus and John the baptist (to name but a very few outstanding believers). Rather, it must be understood that this is a unique ministry with a unique purpose and thus has correspondingly unique requirements. In addition to the need to be without the responsibility of marriage and free to undertake the heavy responsibilities of this ministry without compromise, the fact of their virginity will also form an important contrast to the growing sexual immorality of the world at that time, a trend which will be increasingly blended into the resurgent idolatry and its immoral rites which will explode in the Tribulation, culminating in the entirely degenerate religion of antichrist wherein he will be the overt object of worship.

4. They are sent to evangelize Israel: Our Lord became a “Minister to the circumcision” (Rom.15:8; cf. Acts 3:26), sent “to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt.15:24; cf. the twelve: Matt.10:6), and the mission of the 144,000 has essentially the same objective, except that theirs is a worldwide ministry preceding Christ’s 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, rather than a localized ministry during Christ’s 1<sup>st</sup> Advent. This does not mean that evangelism among the gentiles and by the gentile members of the Church will not continue, nor that there will not be extraordinary grace provision for disseminating the truth going hand in hand with the extraordinary warning judgments coming from God (cf. the proclamation of the “eternal gospel” worldwide by the angel in Revelation 14:6-7). But it is entirely appropriate that God’s own special people should receive their own specialized ministry (cf. Acts 3:25-26; 13:46; Rom.1:16; 3:1). The command not to go “to the gentiles” applies equally to the 144,000 just as it did to the twelve (Matt.10:5; 10:23), and apparently to the seventy-two (cf. Lk.10:1), just as it was also an operative principle of Christ’s 1<sup>st</sup> Advent ministry (cf. Matt.15:21-28; Mk.7:24-30; Jn.1:11; Acts 3:26; Rom.15:8). This approach is entirely understandable when one considers that all these ministries have in common as their fundamental purpose to prepare Israel for her Messiah. “Repent (i.e., turn to God in truth), for the Kingdom is at hand (i.e., Christ is about to return)” will therefore be the clarion call of the 144,000, just as in the case of the twelve and the seventy-two (Matt.10:7; Mk.6:12; Lk.9:2; 9:6; 10:9; cf. Lk.9:52).

We should not take this to mean that the 144,000 will have no contact whatsoever with gentiles – we may compare our Lord’s gracious ministering to the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt.15:21-28; Mk.7:24-30), the Samaritan woman (Jn.4:1-42), and the Roman centurion (Matt.8:5-13; Lk.7:1-10). But as with our Lord who was sent to Israel and maintained this preeminent focus to His ministry to the end, so shall it be with the 144,000. And there is also an important sense in which this impressive, worldwide ministry, ending as it will in what will constitute the Tribulation’s first massive wave of martyrdom, will be a witness in and of itself to the entire world of the power and the truth of God’s gospel (Matt.10:18). Paul had said that his ministry to the gentiles had the added purpose of “provoking” his countrymen to the effect, he hoped against hope, that they should believe in Christ, if only out of a competitive spirit (Rom.11:13-14; cf. Phil.1:15-18). In a sense, this phenomenon will be reversed in the Tribulation, with the ministry of the 144,000 and the Jewish response to it providing the “provocation” that will at least be grounds for gentile response. In this respect, we see another facet of the re-emergence of Jewish leadership and prominence in the Church not witnessed since apostolic times.<sup>73</sup>

5. They are given the authority to perform miracles: In addition to the suffering they alleviated and the prophecies they fulfilled, Jesus’ miracles were given Him by the Father as a badge of His authority that clearly marked Him out as the true Son of God and the Messiah (Jn.5:36; 10:25; 10:38; 14:11; cf. Matt.11:1-6; Lk.7:18-23). Our Lord’s delegating of the ability to perform similar miracles to the twelve, to the seventy-two, and in the time to come to the 144,000 has a

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<sup>73</sup> A phenomenon we have discussed before: see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.b.i, “The Uniqueness of Israel”.



similarly important purpose. For many can claim to be speaking with the authority of God (and during the Tribulation this claim will be made falsely to a degree never yet witnessed), but who can act with the power of God unless God has empowered that person? Demonstrating the power and authority of God has always been a prime purpose of miracles, and we may compare Moses at the Red Sea and Elijah on Mount Carmel as outstanding examples of Israel responding to clear “signs” given by God through the hands of His anointed ones (cf. Ex.14-15 and 1Kng.18:20-40 respectively; cf. Matt.12:38-42; 1Cor.1:22). In a similar fashion, the miraculous works that will be given to the 144,000 to do will serve to demonstrate to all those whose hearts are not hardened to an exceptional degree that their message is true. This validation of their message – a gracious act on God’s part on behalf of His people, will enhance the effectiveness of their ministry, doubtless leading many who would otherwise not have done so to return to God by the only true path, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the One and only Messiah. Specifically, the miracles they are given to perform are reminiscent of the miracles of our Lord (and of His apostles in the early days of the Church):

- Healing the sick (Matt.10:1; 10:8; Mk.6:7; Lk.9:1-2; Lk.10:9; compare Matt.4:24 *et passim* in the gospels; and Acts 5:15-16; 8:5-7; 28:8-9). The rapid and dramatic nature of this healing will leave no doubt about its divine origin. Further, the removal of disease will be, as always, a poignant symbol of the forgiveness of sin through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Is.53:4-5; Lk.5:17-26).
- Driving out demons (Matt.10:1; 10:8; Mk.6:7; 6:12; Lk.9:1; 10:17; 10:20; compare Lk.8:26-37 *et passim* in the gospels; and Acts 5:16; 8:7; 16:16-18; 19:11-13). There is doubtless more demon possession in our own day than we are aware, and it is certain that in the Tribulation to come, the present restraints upon this form of satanic control will be significantly reduced, making the miracle of true exorcism both obvious and welcome. Further, the removal of demons will be, as always, a poignant symbol of deliverance from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Lk.10:17-18; Col.1:13-14).
- Raising the dead (Matt.10:8; compare Mk.5:37-43; Lk.7:11-17; 7:22; Jn.11:1-44; and Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12). Few miraculous acts will be as dramatic and as difficult to contest as restoring life to the dead. For instance, we know in the case of our Lord that His raising of Lazarus occasioned much interest (Jn.12:9) and much opposition (Jn.11:45-47; 12:10). Further, the raising of the dead will be, as always, a poignant symbol of deliverance from the grave into eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ (cf. Jn.11:23-25; Eph.2:6; 1Jn.3:14).
- Miraculous protection from dangers (Lk.10:19; compare Lk.4:28-30; Jn.7:30; 8:59; 10:39; and Acts 12:1-10; 28:3-6). Not only will they be protected in ways beyond the ken of the human eye (i.e., their sealing; see below), but they will also receive the benefit of visibly miraculous deliverance from overt mortal hazards as a testimony to and further validation of their truthfulness.

As with all such activities, we may assume that as was the case in the past, so with the 144,000, their miracle-working activities will not be overly extensive, but will be designed to win an open-hearted hearing from the lost sheep of Israel in whatever community they are presently operating (i.e., healing, exorcism and the like will be *the means* rather than the end of their ministry).

6. They are subject to a special code of conduct: Jesus' servant life-style, most perspicuous in His deliberate self-limitation in the taking on of true humanity and operating within human constraints throughout His 1<sup>st</sup> Advent (Phil.2:5-10; cf. Is.42; 49; 52-53; Matt.20:28; Lk.22:27; Jn.1:1 with 1:14; 5:18; 10:30; 14:9; 17:5; Rm.8:3; 9:5; 2Cor.8:9; 1Tim.2:5-6; 3:16; Heb.2:9-18; 10:5-10), provides a pattern for the analogously sacrificial lives of the 144,000.<sup>74</sup> In addition to the maintenance of celibacy (see point 3 above; cf. Is.53:8), the special "code of servant conduct" under which the 144,000 will operate will be similar to the one our Lord adopted in many other important respects as well. This life of extreme commitment, total dedication, and complete sacrifice (even to the point of death), will serve to remove, as it did in the case of our Lord, any and all doubt about their loyalty to God, or about God's endorsement of them, or about the veracity of their message (for all objective observers). In this sojourner lifestyle, there will truly be no "conflicts of interest" whatsoever, and no reason for the fair-minded to have the slightest suspicion that the 144,000 would undertake such a difficult ministry for anything even approaching selfish motives. In short, as it was with our Lord, their character and the character of their message will be righteous in every detail and at all times. As John sums up their lives and ministries in Revelation 14:5, "no lie was found in their mouths, for *they are blameless*". In everything they do, the 144,000 will, like our Lord, conduct themselves in a transparent, honorable, above-board, and consistent way, with the result that they will silence all possible legitimate criticism through their flawless behavior (a principle that every believer should note and take to heart: cf. 1Pet.2:15):

- Their help (healing, etc.) and their message will be offered on a grace basis, without charge (Matt.10:8).
- They will be entirely dependent upon God's day by day provision (Matt.10:9-10; Lk.9:3; 10:4).
- Their ministry will be conducted in a serious and purposeful fashion (Lk.10:4).
- They will maintain an itinerant lifestyle (Lk.9:6; Matt.10:11; 10:23).

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<sup>74</sup> The apostle Paul's life of ministry is also strikingly similar in this regard (1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11; et passim in Acts and the Pauline Epistles), a fact that should not surprise given his close "imitation of Christ" (1Cor.11:1).

- They will maintain an overt and above-board dependence upon the charity of those they minister to (Matt.10:11-15; Lk.9:4; 10:5-7), but without any opportunity to amass surplus (i.e., only “room and board”, *trophe* in Matt.10:10).
- They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of seeking and accepting support, searching diligently for a “worthy” house (a policy which will entail many nights spent in the open in travel and prior to finding a “worthy” house: Matt.10:11-15; Lk.9:4; 10:5-7).
- They will maintain an overt and above-board policy of removing themselves from a particular mission field only 1) when the mission is completed (Matt.10:11; Lk.9:4; 10:7); 2) if the town proves unworthy (Lk.9:5; cf. 10:10-12); 3) if forced to leave by persecution (Matt.10:23).
- They will be careful and circumspect in every aspect of their manner of life, thereby not giving offense on their own behalf in any way, but keeping the focus on the gospel message (Matt.10:16-17).
- They will make their complete faith in God obvious to all from the total reliance they will display in His protection in times of trouble (Matt.10:16-20).
- They will conduct their ministries courageously, openly proclaiming the gospel in spite of any and all consequences (Matt.10:26-31).
- They will resolutely demonstrate uncommon perseverance in a variety of threatening circumstances (Matt.10:32-39).
- They will courageously continue their ministries despite threats and opposition, departing only at the point when persecution makes further work impossible (Matt.10:23).

7. They will face stiff opposition: Implied in our Lord’s commands in these passages to be bold, to be brave, to fear not, and to take up His cross, is the fact that this ministry will be accomplished in the face of and in spite of stiff opposition which will take many forms. Clearly, one of the last things that the devil desires is this successful evangelizing of the lost sheep of Israel. Not only will the 144,000 face privations natural to the course of such an itinerant, day-to-day ministry, but there will also be specific persecutions (Matt.10:17-23), followed at the end of their three and one half year term by martyrdom (cf. Rev.14:1-5 compared with Rev.13). Even in the course of their day to day ministering (as we may conclude from a reading of all the pertinent passages: Matt.10; Lk.9; 10; Rev.7; Rev.14) the 144,000 will be spoken against vociferously not only by gentile unbelievers, but also by those of their fellow Jews who have determined in their hearts not to accept their witness and return to God through Jesus Christ (Matt.10:17; 10:21; cf. Is.6:9-10; 53:1; Jn.1:11; 12:37-41). They will be betrayed by their own family members (Matt.10:21; 10:35-37), hated by all men (Matt.10:22), slandered (Matt.10:24-25), imprisoned, tortured and falsely accused (Matt.10:17-20), persecuted (Matt.10:23), knowing

no peace (Matt.10:34), running their course as did our Lord, as did his apostles among ravening “wolves” (Matt.10:16; Lk.10:3), faithful until the appointed end when they will give up their lives in the service of God’s gospel (Matt.10:39; Rev.14:1-5).

8. They will receive miraculous protection during the days of their ministry: As the previous point makes clear, given the tremendous opposition, seen and unseen, which the 144,000 will face, there could be no question of effective ministry without special divine protection to allow these faithful witnesses sufficient opportunity to carry out their assigned tasks. It is true that this special seal of God lends a definite measure of validation to the ministry of the 144,000 (cf. Jn.6:27), but it is clearly the specialized protection of God which we are to see as the essential meaning and effect of the sealing we are studying here in our context of Revelation 7:1–8.<sup>75</sup> As the well-known parallel in Ezekiel makes clear, the supernatural mark or “seal” placed on the foreheads of the 144,000 represents a special divine warning to refrain from any attempts to destroy these unique witnesses before the appointed time (Ezek.9:1-6).<sup>76</sup> Just as in Ezekiel, this mark will not be visible to the human eye, but all angelic creatures, fallen and elect, will clearly see and understand its meaning. The purpose of seals in antiquity was often to provide an unmistakable mark of ownership (as in the case of documents validated with a signet ring), and that is the clear analogy here. By placing His own seal on these witnesses, God guarantees their security on His own authority. All who see the seal understand that these 144,000 remain under God’s own special protection as His own unique property.

The timing of this sealing is significant. As we find ourselves in the middle of this digression between the sixth seal and the seventh seal (the opening of which commences the Tribulation, as we have seen), the angel of verse two who comes “from the rising sun” (i.e., from the east, the direction of the Messiah’s return: Is.41:25; 63:1; Ezek.43:4; Zech.14:4; Mal.4:2; Lk.1:78; 2Pet.1:19; Rev.19:17) commands the four angels who administer the first four trumpet judgments at the Tribulation’s inception not to commence until the sealing of the 144,000 is complete. Clearly, then, the sealing of these unique ministers will take place just *before* the Tribulation’s commencement, a fact which underscores the importance of this ministry in God’s plan on account of the equally critical importance to that plan of the conversion of a large segment of Israel. This conversion, which, as we shall see in due course, will not be universal (cf. Zech.13:8-9), will be accomplished in two phases, with the first phase coming as a response

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<sup>75</sup> cf. the Passover mark (Ex.12:7). Other examples of unseen divine protection of believers include, but are certainly not limited to, the universal sealing of the Holy Spirit for Church-Age believers (2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), Elisha’s chariots of fire (2Kng.6:17), the Angel of the Lord’s protection of Israel (Is.37:36; 63:9), and the “guardian angels” of individual believers (Matt.18:10; cf. Ps.91).

<sup>76</sup> Compare also the “sealing” of the Spirit that all believers now enjoy which guarantees our resurrection as believers in Jesus Christ (see section III.2 above; cf. 2Cor.1:21-22; Eph.1:13-14; 4:30), and also the seven seals on the “scroll” of the book of Revelation which prevent (on God’s authority) its implementation before the proper time (see section IV above).

to the witnessing of the 144,000 (these are those who later flee from antichrist: cf. Rev.12:1-16), and the second phase occurring at the return of our Lord (Joel 2:30-32; Zech.12:10; Rom.11:25-27; Rev.1:7).

With the opening of the first six seals and the imminent commencement of the Tribulation, the restraint (on lawlessness and the activities of the evil one) that had previously obtained generally throughout the world must now be disbursed individually (i.e., the individual stamp of protection on the 144,000 which this seal represents). Given our Lord's promise that the Spirit will be with us always (Jn.14:16; cf. Eph.1:13-14), we understand that this sealing of the 144,000 witnesses will be an additional mark of protection, guaranteeing not only their resurrection (a primary result of the Spirit's sealing: Eph.4:30), but also affording them the requisite opportunity for ministry. This invisible seal on their foreheads which marks them out as special servants of God will thus provide a very sharp contrast to the visible "mark of the beast" on the foreheads and hands of those who have rejected God (Rev.13:16-18; 14:9-11; 15:2; 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). This seal, moreover, is an assurance from God to the 144,000 themselves of His special superintendence of their lives and ministries. Jesus has told them not to be afraid in spite of all the opposition detailed above (Matt.10:26-42), and this special sealing is an encouragement and a reminder that God will indeed protect them just as He said He would.

9. They will be martyred at the conclusion of their ministry: The appearance of the 144,000 with our Lord on the heavenly Mount Zion (i.e., in the heavenly temple: see section I above) directly following the description in chapter thirteen of the beast, his false prophet, and their methods of forcing as much of humanity as possible into a system of satanic idolatry paints a very clear picture. The 144,000 are no longer on earth, but in heaven. In fact, they have been "redeemed from the earth" (Rev.14:3) as the first to be martyred "for God and for the Lamb" (Rev.14:4). As the events of chapter thirteen focus upon the Tribulation's mid-point, that is, the transition between the first half of the seven years and the "Great Tribulation" of the second half, we are forced to conclude that the 144,000 are the first to fall at the hands of the beast for their refusal to worship him as the first martyrs of the Great Persecution.<sup>77</sup> Their lives protected until their ministry of evangelism has been completed (cf. Lk.21:12-19), the 144,000 will have the great honor of offering up those same lives to our Lord in the supreme sacrifice of martyrdom, a witness that will resound through the ages and for which they shall receive great reward. Finally, the statement in Matthew 10:23 that these witnesses (i.e., the 12 and, by prophetic application, the 144,000) "will not finish [evangelizing] the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes" not only confirms that this will be a worldwide ministry ("cities of Israel" meaning for the 144,000 any town with a significant Jewish community) directed at evangelizing the Jewish people, but

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<sup>77</sup> The ministry and sacrifice of the 144,000 is unquestionably at least partially in view in Revelation 17:6 where the woman Babylon is drunk with "the blood of the saints, *even from the blood of the witnesses (i.e., martyrs) of Jesus*" (cf. Lk.21:13).

also makes quite clear that the 144,000 will be busily employed at this task until they are martyred (well before the return of the Messiah as we shall see).<sup>78</sup>

### **The Course of the Ministry of the 144,000:**

1. Some particulars of their ministry: Although scripture does not tell us much about the operational niceties of their ministry, that is, their call, its time, its nature, or the administration and deployment of this large force of evangelists, it is likely that their ministry is intimately connected with that of the two witnesses of Revelation chapter eleven. For just as the twelve, and the 72, and John's disciples did not operate in a vacuum, but were selected, commissioned, and sent out by Jesus and John respectively (cf. Matt.10:7; Mk.6:7; Lk.9:1-2), so it seems certain that the 144,000 must also operate under specific, earthly direction. The most likely, indeed the only candidates for this supervisory role (whether in Revelation or the rest of scripture) are these "two witnesses" (that is, Moses and Elijah, the prophetic counterparts of Jesus and John respectively).

While we shall not be taking up the details of that "two witness ministry" until part three of this study, it needs to be emphasized here by way of essential preview that these two are indeed none other than Moses and Elijah, two unique servants of God, both of whom left this earth in likewise unique fashion (2Kng.2:11-18; Jude 1:9), and both of whom are prophesied to be key figures heralding the return of the Messiah (compare especially their presence at Jesus' transfiguration: Matt.17:3-13; cf. also Mal.4:4-6). Of critical importance in this regard is also the fact that these two witnesses are responsible for "restoring" Israel, that is, for ministering to a revival that will turn the hearts of many in Israel back to God through faith in Jesus Christ (Matt.17:11; Mk.9:12; Acts 3:21), *the very ministry* to which the 144,000 are also dedicated as we have seen (cf. also John the baptist's First Advent ministry which closely parallels Elijah's future ministry: Matt.17:13).

When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the Lord your God and obey his voice.  
Deuteronomy 4:30 ESV

Just as the two witnesses are to conduct a ministry that will gain worldwide attention from its central location in Jerusalem (Zech.4:11-14; Rev.11:1-13), so the ministry of this famous pair will be projected, augmented and paralleled by the ministries of thousands of other pairs serving around the globe (72,000 pairs, to be precise). We may deduce, therefore, that to Moses and Elijah will fall the task of visibly selecting, commissioning, and sending out the 144,000 after God has sealed and drawn these future martyrs of the Lamb to Jerusalem through His Spirit (cf. Matt.23:34; Lk.11:49). And it will be from Jerusalem that they will be sent forth into their separate mission fields. Whatever questions about the composition of the 144,000 there may be

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<sup>78</sup> On the connection of this passage with worldwide evangelism as a sign of the "end", see below, section VII, "Signs of the Coming Tribulation".

in the minds of contemporaries or even among this elite group itself will be removed as their hearts prompted by the Spirit lead them to journey to Jerusalem where they will be subsequently selected and commissioned by two of the greatest prophets of all time, Moses and Elijah.

We may be sure that the 144,000 are destined to come in for close scrutiny from the evil one and his henchmen from the very beginning of this process whereby they will be recruited and sent forth to witness to the world Jewish community. For this reason, they will receive the special protection of sealing even before their official selection at wherever place they happen to be located worldwide prior to the opening of the seventh seal, a process that will require a multiplicity of elect angels (cf. verse three, “until *we* place a seal upon the foreheads of the servants of our God”).

As to their specific distribution and the deployment of their ministry, we can do little more than speculate. One thing we can say is that the 72 sent out are a deliberate foreshadowing of the 144,000 (who will operate in 72,000 pairs). Some have understood a relationship to the symbolic number of the gentile nations (i.e., “seventy” of them are listed in Genesis chapter ten). Subtracting a double complement for the state of Israel (i.e., 2000 “teams”), one could assume that this number of now 70,000 to be a “thousand team per country” symbolic counterpart of the Luke parallel. But it is doubtful that even so we would be left with any clear indication of distribution and deployment. For while it is true that the diaspora is truly worldwide, yet the numbers of Jewish residents in some countries obviously far exceeds the size of the Jewish community in other nations (not to mention the practical impossibility of applying the original Genesis ten list to the current hodgepodge of nations wherein the world is presently organized). Then too there are issues of accessibility, concentration, responsiveness – many things, in fact, that may only be ascertained with divine help. We may assume that larger Jewish communities will receive more sets of “hands” for the work at hand, and that cultural, geographic and linguistic abilities will be taken into account (with individuals likely being sent back to their countries of origin), but this is only surmise. One thing that is clear from scripture, however, is that despite the seemingly large number of teams, these missionaries will have plenty of work to do, for they will not “complete the cities of Israel” before they run out of time (Matt.10:23).

2. The content of their message: The content of the message preached by our Lord Jesus Christ, as well as by John, Moses and Elijah, the 12, the 72, and the 144,000 is all one and the same, namely the gospel of the kingdom, the call to repent and turn back to God through faith in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There is also, it must be said, an urgency to the message so given in all these cases, precisely because of the imminence of events:

a. Jesus (Mk.1:14):

From this time forward, Jesus began to proclaim and say, “Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”

Matthew 4:17

b. John (Acts 13:24):

(1) And in those days, John the baptist came upon the scene, making proclamation in the desert of Judah (2) and saying, “Repent! For the Kingdom of Heaven is near.”  
Matthew 3:1-2

c. Moses and Elijah (Rev.11:3; 11:6; 11:7):

(4) Remember the Law of *Moses*, My servant, which I commanded him on Horeb concerning all Israel, [with both its] statutes and judgments – (5) behold, I am about to send you *Elijah* the prophet before the coming of the Day of Lord, [that] great and awesome [Day], (6) so *that he may restore [to God] the hearts* of the fathers along with [their] children and the hearts of the children along with their fathers, lest I come and smite the land with complete devastation.  
Malachi 4:4-6

d. The 144,000 (based on the parallels of the twelve and the 72 as we have seen above):

“Go and make proclamation, saying, ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is near.’”  
Matthew 10:7

And they went forth and made proclamation that [people] should repent.  
Mark 6:12

And He sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick.  
Luke 9:2

And going forth they made circuit of the villages, giving the good news and healing everywhere.  
Luke 9:6

And after this the Lord also appointed seventy-two others and sent them forth two by two before Him to every city and place where He was going to go.  
Luke 10:1

“And heal the sick in [that town] and say to them, ‘The Kingdom of God has come near to you’”.  
Luke 10:9

“And the dust of your city which has stuck to our feet we are brushing off [as a witness] against you. But know this – that the Kingdom of God is near.”  
Luke 10:11

In Revelation 17:6, where they are called “witness-martyrs of Jesus”, the 144,000 are given special consideration even above the others who will die for our Lord during the Tribulation.



This title both stresses the special relationship which the 144,000 will have with Him (cf. Rev.14:1-6), and the fact that the content of the gospel message of the Kingdom which they preach is nothing else than the Person and work of Jesus Christ, of whom they are both witnesses and martyrs.

3. The results of their ministry: Again, we are not given precise information as to the number of their countrymen that the 144,000 will help to turn back to God in Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, a couple of points should be kept in mind. In the first place, as is often the case in difficult mission fields, in God's Kingdom (where one who repents is rejoiced over more than ninety-nine who do not require repentance) results are not necessarily measured in sheer numbers (and that some of the "cities of Israel" will unquestionably prove more fruitful than others is not something to be laid entirely at the feet of the teams doing the evangelizing). The mere fact of this worldwide witness will be an accomplishment and a prodigious result in and of itself. Secondly, we may safely assume that around the fringes of their ministry, much interest will be generated in the gentile community (especially from the miracles the 144,000 are given to perform), leading to many opportunities for evangelism among non-Jewish observers of these events. Thirdly, it is not only those who repent and are restored to God at this time who should be taken into account when considering the results of this ministry. The work of the 144,000 and the ministry of Moses and Elijah with which it is intimately linked will, no doubt, leave many questions in the minds of those Jews who do not return to God through Jesus Christ at this time (that is, during the Tribulation's first half). However, we know that many more *will* turn back to Him at the very hour of His Second Advent, when they "look upon Him whom they have pierced" in viewing the returning Messiah face-to-face (Rev.1:7). The groundwork for this (massive) conversion of the Jewish people at the very end of the Tribulation is certainly that which is to be laid by Moses and Elijah in company with their 144,000 evangelist agents. For it will be this body of work, this distribution of the gospel message in Jewish terms by Jews to Jews lying dormant in their hearts until that day, that will, in company with the visible presence of Christ, produce the prophesied repentance at His return.

(30) For I will display wonders in the heavens and on the earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. (31) The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the Day of the Lord, that great and terrible [day]. (32) And it will come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.

Joel 2:30-32

And I will pour out on the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem a Spirit of grace and repentance. For they will look upon Me whom they have pierced, and they will grieve for Him like the grieving for an only son, and they will [weep] bitterly for Him like the bitter [weeping] for a firstborn son.

Zechariah 12:10

(29) Immediately following the tribulation of those days, the sun will grow dark and the moon will not give out its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. (30) And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven.

And then all the tribes of the earth will mourn and will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory.

Matthew 24:29-30

(25) Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery (and so think more of yourselves than you should): hardness has come over a part of Israel until the time when the fullness of the gentiles has come in [to the family of God]. (26) And it is in this [following] way that all Israel will be saved just as it is written:

The Deliverer will come from Zion. He will expel ungodliness from Jacob. (27)

And this will be My covenant with them when I take away their sins.

Romans 11:25-27

This having been said, there are nevertheless a sizeable (though unspecified) number who will respond directly to the message of the 144,000 (cf. Zech.10:9: "Though I scatter them among the peoples, yet in distant lands they will remember me." NIV). In Revelation chapter twelve (and elsewhere: Matt.24:15-22; Mk.13:14-23; Lk.21:20-24), we find a large remnant of Jewish believers in Israel who are persecuted by antichrist immediately following the Tribulation's mid-point and are subsequently forced to flee into the desert for refuge. Since this remnant is to all appearances not currently existent, we must conclude that it comes into being as a result of the ministries of the two witnesses and of the 144,000 (both of which will come to an end just prior to this persecution). Following his unsuccessful attempts to eliminate this new remnant of Jewish believers, antichrist will expand his operations against Jewish believers worldwide (and against believers in general: Rev.12:17). Scripture does not say, but it does seem probable, that a portion of this new remnant in Israel may have assembled there from elsewhere in the world in response to the ministering of the 144,000 (just as they themselves were drawn to Jerusalem and the ministry of Moses and Elijah).

4. Parallels to the ministry of Christ, and also of John, Moses, Elijah, and the Apostles: The ministry of the 144,000 bears many resemblances to the most impressive divine ministries which have preceded them. These parallels are important to take note of, because they emphasize both the importance and the nature of the ministry of the 144,000, both points which we have been stressing since the beginning of this section. For the 144,000 are all ...

- Jewish males: As are Christ, John, Moses, Elijah, and the apostles.
- Unmarried: As are Christ, John, Elijah, and Paul.
- Miraculously protected: As are Christ (Lk.4:28-30; Jn.7:30; 8:59; 10:39), Moses (Num.16-17), Elijah (2Kng.1), and the apostles (Acts 12:1-10; 28:3-6).
- Evangelists to Israel: As are Christ (Matt.15:24; Lk.2:34), John (Matt.3:7-10; Lk.1:67-80), Moses, Elijah, and Peter (Gal.2:7).
- Preachers of restoration to God: As are Christ (Lk.4:14-21), John (Lk.1:17; Jn.1:7), Elijah (Mal.4:4-6), and the apostles (Acts 3:17-21).

- Performers of exceptional miracles: As are Christ (Mk.5:37-43; Lk.7:11-17; Jn.11:1-44), Moses (Ex.4:1-17; Acts 7:36), Elijah (1Kng.17:17-24), and the apostles (Acts 9:36-42; 20:7-12).
- Subject to a demanding “code of conduct”: As are Christ (Matt.4:1-11), John (Matt.3:4; Lk.1:80), Elijah (1Kng.17:1-16), and Paul (1Cor.4:8-13; 2Cor.4:7-12; 6:3-10; 11:16-33; Phil.3:7-11).
- Confronted by fierce opposition: As are Christ (Lk.4:29; Jn.7:1; 8:40), John (Matt.14:1-5), Moses (Acts 7:39), Elijah (1Kng.18:16-17; 19:1-2), and the apostles (Acts 5:17-42).
- Consistent in flawless behavior (Rev.14:4-5): As is Christ (Jn.8:46; Acts 8:32-35; Heb.4:15; 1Pet.1:19).
- Serving a three and one half year ministry: As did Christ, Elijah (Jas.5:17), and John.<sup>79</sup>
- Martyred at the conclusion of their ministry (Rev.14:3): As was John (Matt.14:6-12), and the apostles (cf. Jn.21:18-19), following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.
- The first to be so martyred in the Great Persecution (Rev.14:4): Following in the footsteps of Christ (Matt.10:38; 16:24; 20:23; Mk.8:34; Lk.9:23; 14:27; Jn.21:18-19; cf. Lev.23:9ff.; 1Cor.15:23).

5. The omission of the tribe of Dan: As is well-known, there are twelve tribes of Israel, but one of the tribes, that of Joseph, is generally referred to as two tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh), based upon the adoption by Jacob of his grandsons (Gen.48:1-22) and the double portion he assigned to Jacob thereby at that time (Gen.48:22 in the Hebrew). Any list of twelve that fails to combine Ephraim and Manasseh will therefore of necessity exclude one of the other tribes, and the tribe which fails to make the list of the 144,000 here in our context is that of Dan (with Manasseh and “Joseph”, that is, Ephraim, receiving separate listing).<sup>80</sup> The deficiencies of the tribe of Dan are numerous, and many reasons could be adduced for its failure to make this list, but the overarching reason for Dan’s non-inclusion within the ranks of the 144,000 is the fact that antichrist will be descended from this tribe (Gen.49:16-18; cf. Gen.3:16). This removal of one of the twelve tribes for betrayal and satanic allegiance parallels the removal of Judas from the number of the twelve apostles (replaced by Paul). The details of antichrist’s origin (including his Danite provenance) will be considered in part 3B of this series.

6. Their reward: Because our Lord gave Himself in the most spectacular and gracious way imaginable, God the Father has “exalted Him to the highest place”, giving Him “the Name that is above every Name, that at the Name of Jesus, every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth” (Phil.2:9-10). The principle seen here of the greatest rewards accruing to the greatest sacrifices is also true in the case of the 144,000, who will be the first to receive a unique

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<sup>79</sup> For the chronology of the ministries of Jesus and John, see part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.9.a.3, “The Crucifixion of Christ”.

<sup>80</sup> Ephraim is the younger yet “greater” son, and is therefore identified here by his father’s name (cf. Gen.48:19; Num.13:11 has “tribe of Joseph” explained by “tribe of Manasseh”).

and preeminent martyrdom during the Great Persecution (Rev.14:4), a special, memorial anthem (Rev.14:3), and a unique place beside the King of Kings and Lord of Lords forevermore (Rev.14:4).<sup>81</sup> So important is their ministry that those who support them, even in seemingly trivial ways, will be rewarded as well (Matt.10:13; 10:40-42).

## **VI. The Multitude in Heaven: Revelation 7:9-17**

### Revelation 7:9-17:

(9) After this I looked and, behold, [there was] a huge multitude which no one was able to number from every nation and tribe and people and tongue standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes and with palm branches in their hands. (10) And they were shouting in a loud voice, saying, “Salvation belongs to our God, the One who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!” (11) And all the angels had taken their stand around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures. And they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, (12) saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might belong to our God forever and ever! Amen!” (13) And one of the elders who was speaking with me replied, “These people dressed in white robes – who are they and where have they come from?” (14) And I said to him, “My lord, you know.” And he said to me, “These are the ones who are about to come forth from the Great Tribulation. And they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15) For this reason they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple. And the One who sits upon the throne will pitch His tabernacle over them. (16) They will neither hunger nor thirst again, nor will the sun beat down upon them nor any burning [heat], (17) because the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to fountains of living water (lit., “fountains of waters of life”), and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”.

With the ministry of the 144,000 set in train, there is now no question but that during the Tribulation’s first half the gospel message will be made widely available for all the lost sheep of Israel, no matter where they may be scattered over the face of the earth. This unique presentation of the gospel will contrast sharply with the worldwide “evangelism of evil” by the beast and his false prophet for his false anti-Christian religion in the Tribulation’s second half. A significant part of that campaign to rid the world of truth and replace the true worship of God with overt Satan worship will be the active and aggressive attempt to exterminate believers from off of the face of the earth. This is the “Great Persecution” which was the subject of the fifth seal in Revelation 6:9-11, and as the “heavenly prelude” of chapters 4-7 comes to an end (the subject of this installment, part 2B), we see here the other side of that general persecution which shall claim first the 144,000, then this multitude “which no one was able to number from every nation and

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<sup>81</sup> Compare, for example, the special honors that fall to the lot of the twelve apostles (the “thrones of the twelve” of Lk.22:30; their “twelve gates” of Rev.21:14).

tribe and people and tongue”. All those who have fallen in that great time of martyrdom to come are seen here not as objects of pity, but as victors, holding palm branches that betoken both their own personal victory and also the coming victorious return of the Lamb. It is true that victors in the Roman arena were given *palmae* or palm branches (cf. the “palm of victory” in Martial 29.9). However, the important reference here is to the palms of “Palm Sunday”, that is, the branches that should properly have been used during the “feast of booths”, which festival proclaimed the coming of the Messiah-King and the beginning of the Kingdom (and so on “Palm Sunday” were used out of proper context by those who ushered Jesus into Jerusalem and who were hoping for Him to take up the crown at that time, failing to understand that the cross, symbolized by the Passover whose true time it was, must come first: cf. Ps.118:26-27).<sup>82</sup>

In our discussion of the fifth seal, we have already elaborated upon the interim, pre-resurrection state occupied by these martyrs (and also by all who shall have died in the Lord from Adam and Eve onward until the future day of our resurrection at Christ’s return), both the interim body (represented here by the white robe) and their blessed, fully conscious status quo (obvious from their enthusiastic worship in the verses above). The expansive repetition of the situation of the tribulational martyrs at this particular point in the book, that is, directly before the Tribulation commences in earnest in John’s narrative, is of extreme importance. That is because it is critical for believers to keep firmly in mind their ultimate blessed end despite the horrors to come, to remember the complete control God maintains over the process of history, and to remain focused on the fact that even in the most horrendous death (as the world sees things) there will be for these martyrs the most sublime victory. For the “victims” of antichrist will be following in the footsteps of our Lord, who, though to the eyes of the world He endured the most humiliating end in human history (cf. Ps.22; Is.52-53), yet in God’s deeper and greater reality had truly accomplished the greatest divine victory in world history, the victory of the cross whereby we have all that we have, our eternal life (cf. Phil.2:5-11).

As good as the interim state described here will be – and it will be very good: perfect worship of God in heaven itself, being with Him and He with us, serving the Lamb, our Lord Jesus, face to face, freed from pain, and toil, and tears forevermore, enjoying our victory in a body better than anything now existing in the world – we should also remember that our final state in resurrection, fully rewarded, in the New Jerusalem will be far better still! So whether those of us who are destined to enter that future Tribulation (which grows closer with every passing day) have as our task from God to witness for Him through death, or to demonstrate our faithfulness to Him through continuing to live in the midst of the Great Tribulation, in life or in death let us dedicate ourselves to serving Him as best we can, and to being the best witnesses for Him that we can be, however He has chosen for us to manifest that witness (Phil.1:20-23). Indeed, the only result from which we should shrink is the dreadful prospect of apostasy, a fate which, sadly, will befall large numbers of our fellow believers in the course of that terrible time to come.

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<sup>82</sup> See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: “Judgment, Restoration and Replacement”, section II.8.c.7, “The Jewish Ceremonial Calendar: Tabernacles (Booths)”.

## VII. Signs of the Coming Tribulation

As we contemplate this scene of the martyrs on the cusp of the Tribulation, we cannot help but understand the importance of preparing spiritually for this crisis of all crises before it befalls us, especially when we consider our own proximity to these very events. For we have already made the point previously in this series that, in Theological terms, the Tribulation is imminent.<sup>83</sup> Inasmuch as there remain no major events of unfulfilled prophecy between us and the commencement of the end times, there is certainly no justification for contemporary believers to let down their spiritual guard and assume, as King Hezekiah did, that we have no need to worry since there will be “peace and security” in our day (Is.39:8). For it may well be, dear reader, that you personally will be relieved of experiencing that bitter time – but that is not something upon which you may definitively count.

We can see building throughout the Church Age a growing body of trends which are consonant with the end (i.e., disturbing developments in technology, the international arena, society and the visible church, to cite but a few examples), a steady laying of the ground-work for the next “Tower of Babel”, morally, politically, socially, indeed, in every aspect of the “world system” which the present ruler of this kosmos has established and seeks to expand in eventual world domination through the person of his antichrist.<sup>84</sup> But it must be pointed out that none of these trends, no matter how alarming in the present moment, are able in and of themselves to give contemporary Christians definite guidance as to where we presently find ourselves on the pre-Tribulation continuum. To put it another way, things are indeed bad, spiritually speaking, and getting worse, but this only informs us that we are indeed headed toward the Tribulation, not when that final conflagration will occur. Beyond the obvious conclusion to be drawn from this fact, namely, that believers ought to take advantage of every opportunity for spiritual growth and preparation “while the sun still shines” (Jn.12:35-36; Heb.3:13), especially given the depth of the darkness about to fall, it is also understandable that Christians would wish to know, as far as the Bible affords clear guidance, what definitive signs they may watch for in anticipation of some warning that the Tribulation is on the point of commencing. The short answer to this question is that there are few, if any, clear indications of imminent commencement. Most of the “signs” given by scripture are warnings of imminent events *within* the Tribulation (the Great Tribulation and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent in particular). However, it will be our purpose in this final section to outline what scripture does have to say about the start of the Tribulation.

**Fallacies about the Start of the Tribulation:** We must begin with what is not true because of the large body of misinformation at present abroad on this topic. Below are four common misapprehensions concerning the commencement of the Tribulation:

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<sup>83</sup> See part 1 of this series, section V, under Revelation 1:3, “because the time is near”.

<sup>84</sup> See part 4 of the Satanic Rebellion series, “Satan’s World System”.

1. Fallacy #1: The prior removal of believers from the earth by the so-called “Rapture” removes the urgency of this issue: We have had occasion in the past to show that scripture is unmistakably clear as to the time of the resurrection of the Church, namely, just prior to the return of our Lord at His 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (for such is the unequivocal meaning throughout the New Testament of the “coming” [*parousia*, παρουσία] described in 1Thes.4:16).<sup>85</sup> From one point of view, the precise time of our future resurrection may seem to be of only passing consequence in comparison with weightier issues of the faith. But the problem is that the belief in an “escape” from the Tribulation ahead of time goes a long way toward removing any and all urgency for spiritual preparation for it. “Rapture wishful-thinking” is a spiritually dangerous condition precisely because it is based upon a (potentially disastrous) misinterpretation of the Bible.

2. Fallacy #2: The unknowable nature of the time removes the urgency of this issue: It is true that the Bible does not provide us with an explicit calendar of coming events, and that it is therefore impossible to state with dogmatic authority the precise day on which the Tribulation will begin. However, that does not mean that believers are relieved of the responsibility of considering this matter, of watching and waiting, of gleaning what may be known from scripture, and of doing everything within the capabilities they have been given to prepare spiritually for that coming time. The negative aspects of this second fallacy are thus twofold: 1) the idea that seeking to know is wrong-headed, even possibly blasphemous, undermines proper seeking of guidance from the Bible; 2) the idea that since precise knowledge of the exact time is unavailable that therefore no spiritual preparations are necessary undermines proper efforts to prepare spiritually. This combination of misapprehensions creates a “head-in-the-sand” effect which is inimical to scriptural searching and spiritual preparation – exactly the opposite of what scripture enjoins.

For that we should watch carefully is clear (Matt.24:42-52; 25:1-13):

(54) And [Jesus] was saying to the crowds, “When you see clouds coming up at dusk, you immediately say ‘A storm is coming’, and that is what happens. (55) And when [you notice] the south wind blowing, you say ‘There’ll be a hot spell’, and that is what happens. (56) Hypocrites! You know how to evaluate the appearance of the earth and the sky, but how is it that you don’t know how to evaluate this [critical] time?”  
Luke 12:54-56

And that we should prepare carefully while we can is equally clear (cf. Matt.7:24-27; 25:14-30):

(35) So Jesus said to them, “For a little while yet, the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so the darkness doesn’t overtake you. (36) While you have the Light, believe in the Light, that you may become sons of light.  
John 12:35-36

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<sup>85</sup> For extensive discussion, see Peter’s Epistles #27: “Three Doctrines that Threaten Faith”.

Matthew 24:36 (“No one knows the day or the hour”) is neither a command nor an excuse for believers to make a virtue out of ignorance and willfully ignore the issue. For one thing, Matthew 24:36 is speaking about the *precise* timing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent, not, that is, the timing of the Tribulation’s commencement, but of its termination (cf. Zech.14:7). And even so, the fact is that, just a few verses earlier (Matt.24:22), Jesus had told us that the variation of the precise timing of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent would be a matter of days, not of weeks or months, and certainly not of years.<sup>86</sup> Secondly, this statement about the unknown day and hour comes in the immediate context of the parable of the fig tree (verses 32-33), whose stated lesson is that one can and indeed *should* be on the lookout for that particular future event – one cannot know the precise hour, but the faithful believer can and should form a close approximation of that coming time.

3. Fallacy #3: The fact that the world has not been completely evangelized removes the urgency of this issue: A future completion of world evangelism is not an unfulfilled prerequisite for the commencement of the Tribulation. Leaving aside consideration of the geographically extensive proclamation of the gospel already achieved in past two millennia, Matthew 24:14 (cf. Mk.13:10) is also describing events within the Tribulation (not prior to it), and the universal (further) proclaiming of the gospel is thus something said to precede the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (“then the end will come”), not the beginning of the Tribulation (for one fulfillment, see Rev.14:6-7).

4. Fallacy #4: The fact that the momentous nature of tribulational events requires recognizable antecedents removes the urgency of this issue: The flood speed at which Tribulation events will

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<sup>86</sup> Acts 1:7 is often mistranslated “It is not for you to know”, but should be rendered “It is not for you *to decide* the times and the seasons”. The Greek verb *gignosko* commonly has this meaning of “decide” especially when it is in the aorist as it is here. The context strongly supports this revised translation since our Lord immediately adds “which the Father *has ordained by His authority*”. That is to say, Jesus’ point is that it is the Father who has *decided* these matters; they are *not to be decided* by your wishes. For our Lord’s disciples had just very clearly expressed the wish through their question in the preceding verse six for Him to establish the Kingdom immediately. Therefore our Lord’s reproof in verse seven is not a commendation of complete ignorance about the Father’s timetable, but rather a reminder to them that it is His will in these matters that counts, not theirs; they would have to remain patient, even though from their perspective the time seemed ripe for the commencement of the Messiah’s kingdom. We must also take into consideration the fact that this statement was given to the apostles prior to the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost. The Spirit is the agent of inspiration, chronology included, who, as Jesus had already made clear, would be the One to relate to them “the things to come” (Jn.16:13; cf. 2Pet.1:16-21). Since they will later come to understand the “things to come”, verse seven must also be understood in conjunction with verse eight: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you . . .”, a statement that clearly includes the previously promised further revelation of the Spirit (not excluding information about the end times). This is why, a few short years later, Paul can tell the Thessalonians the exact opposite of Acts 1:7 (that is, as it is generally misconstrued): “concerning the times and the seasons, you have no need that anyone write you, for you know very well . . .” (1Thes.5:1-2).



move (after the restraint of the Spirit is lifted) will be unprecedented in the history of the world (cf. Rev.1:1 and the treatment of that verse in part 1 of this series). For as Daniel says, “the end will come like a flood” (Dan.9:26). What this means in terms of our present discussion is that the entire landscape of the political, social, economic, even technological status quo will undergo such massive changes *after* the Tribulation begins that it is extremely difficult to say with authority that the Tribulation *cannot* commence until some particular set of political, social, economic or technological circumstances are already in place.<sup>87</sup> Therefore it is a definite mistake for believers to assume that before the Tribulation begins, they will be confronted with a set of facts that makes its onset unmistakable and incontrovertible. That is simply not necessarily going to be the case, so that we cannot afford to relax our thinking on the grounds that we are sure to have plenty of advanced warning.

**The Proper Attitude of Anticipation:** Clearly, forgetting about God (cf. 1Sam.12:9), choosing our own ways instead of His ways (Is.66:3), and failing to remain awake and alert at this critical juncture in God’s plan for the ages constitute the wrong approach (Matt.25:1-13). Failure to appreciate the critical moment of God’s visitation when it comes is a classic sign of backsliding and apostasy (Lk.19:44; cf. 1Pet.2:12).

Instead, in terms of our own individual lives and in terms of the plan of God on the larger, world-wide stage, we need to be very aware that His visitation can come at any time, and we need therefore to be as ready as we can be for it, whenever it should come (Matt.24:42-43; 25:13; Mk.13:33-37; Lk.12:37; Acts 20:31; 1Cor.16:13; Eph.6:18; Col.4:2; 1Thes.5:6; 1Pet.5:8; Rev.16:15):

But when the Son of Man returns, will He find faith on the earth?  
Luke 18:8b

(34) "Watch out for yourselves lest your hearts be burdened down in debauchery and drunkenness and earthly cares, and that day fall upon you suddenly like a trap [snapping shut]. (35) For it will come upon all those who dwell upon the face of the earth. (36) So be alert at all times, praying that you might have the strength to endure all these things which are going to happen, and to stand before the Son of Man."  
Luke 21:34-36

(9) Let us not put Christ to the test, as some of them [the Exodus generation] did and were killed by serpents. (10) And let us not complain, as some of them complained, and were killed by the Destroyer. (11) These things happened to them as an example to us, and were written to warn us – we who live at the culmination of the ages. (12) So let him who thinks he stands firm beware lest he fall.

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<sup>87</sup> In fact, all of the specific references to be on watch which occur in the Bible are not pre-tribulational in application, but pre-Great Tribulation and pre-2<sup>nd</sup> Advent (e.g., Lk.12:39-40; 17:26-36; 21:7-36).

(1) But concerning the times and the seasons (i.e., the time-line and the specific events within it), brothers, you have no need for anyone to write you. (2) For you yourselves know full well that the Day of the Lord is coming just like a thief in the night. (3) When [people] are saying “Peace!” and “Safety!”, at that precise time destruction will fall swiftly upon them, just like labor pains on a pregnant woman. (4) But you, brothers, are not in darkness that [this] Day [of the Lord] should catch you out like a thief. (5) For you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness. (6) So let us therefore not sleep like the rest [of unbelieving mankind], but be awake and alert. (7) For those who sleep do so at night. And those who get drunk do so at night. (8) But since we are of the day, let us put on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet of hope (i.e., confidence) of salvation. (9) Because God has not appointed us for wrath, but for [taking] possession of [our] salvation (i.e., for resurrection) through our Lord Jesus Christ, (10) the One who died on our behalf, that, whether we stay awake or sleep (i.e., pass on to heaven), we will be alive together with Him [on that day of resurrection].

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 5:1-10

**Possible Indications that the Tribulation is about to Begin:** As the parable of the fig tree shows plainly enough, we believers are responsible to remain alert to whatever clear and obvious signs God may choose to give to us as warnings of His impending judgments (Matt.24:32-33; Mk.13:28-29; cf. Lk.21:29-31). The question here is whether there are any *specific* signs listed in scripture of the impending commencement of the Tribulation for which believers should be on the lookout. Trends, as we have pointed out above, may give us reason to be on heightened alert. After all, God never brings to the point of birth and then fails to deliver (Is.66:9). But this principle does not supply specifics. Given the rapidity with which tribulational events are prophesied to progress, a prior era of exceedingly prosperous and peaceful times (cf. Gen.41) is just as likely a precursor to the Tribulation as one characterized by growing troubles and difficulties (and something in-between is equally possible as well). Therefore, much of what passes in contemporary Christian media for “being on the alert for the Tribulation” must be rejected out of hand. In all cases where scripture does not definitively point to a particular event as a tribulational prerequisite, the most a Christian can do is to take note, and continue to prepare (something he/she ought to be doing in any case!). We will treat here three of the most prominent possibilities that suggest themselves on this point:

1. The Rise of the Beast: We will have occasion in part 3B of this series to consider in detail the rise of antichrist, the development of his empire, and his campaign of world conquest (so that what occurs here should be understood to be a cursory examination only). Even taking into account the rapidity of tribulational events, it does seem to stand to reason that a personality of the uniquely perverse nature of antichrist coupled with the celebrity status he will enjoy from the very moment of his rise will at least have to be visible to *some* degree on the world stage prior to the actual commencement of the Tribulation (even if his true identity is not completely verifiable from the start). A reading of Isaiah chapter 14, Ezekiel chapter 28, Daniel chapters 8-12, 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians chapter 2, and Revelation chapters 13 and 17 will give a very clear impression of

his personality, methodology, and career. Daniel's statement that he will be a "despicable person – and they will not bestow upon him the honor of the kingdom" is clearly consonant with the many other passages that suggest a rise to power by unconventional means (a circumstance arguing for a very low profile prior to his tribulational rise to power). 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians chapter 2 and Revelation chapter 13, on the other hand, are very clear in ascribing miraculous, demonic powers to antichrist, and, as the seed of Satan (Gen.3:16), we may expect him to be somewhat super-human (along the lines of the Nephilim of Genesis 6).<sup>88</sup> But it is certainly not clear that antichrist's use of his exceptional powers will come to the fore in an obvious way *before* the Tribulation commences. Eventually, we shall have "the number of the beast" to work with, and it is possible that this proof of antichrist will afford believers a litmus test even before the Tribulation begins. However, it is equally possible that his "name" which is consistent with 666 will be one which antichrist will choose *after* his ascension to power (hence not verifiable before the Tribulation). It would seem at first consideration that an internationalist movement that stresses antichrist's political goals of a one-world state ultimately based upon his claim of messianic status would be hard to miss, even in its earliest antecedents. But it should be pointed out that history provides many intriguing parallels which ultimately proved false. After all, a totalitarian regime inimical to the Jews coming to span most of the old Roman Empire closely linked with a state that claimed to be a revived Rome in Italy seems like a perfect match with the antichrist scenario (we are speaking, of course, about Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy). This intriguing parallel proved not to be the genuine article, suggesting that believers should be extremely circumspect when it comes to pronouncing any contemporary figure "the antichrist".

2. The reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem: One feature of the tribulational landscape which would seem to be absolutely essential, but which is not yet historically visible, is the reconstructed temple in Jerusalem.<sup>89</sup> Revelation 11:1 makes reference to the "temple of God", complete with its altar and, in verse two, its inner court,<sup>90</sup> and, as becomes clear from the rest of the chapter, John has in his view the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem whence the two witnesses will conduct their ministry along with the 144,000, events which, as we have just seen, take place during the Tribulation's *first* half. Additionally, in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians 2:4 antichrist is said to take

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<sup>88</sup> See part 5 of The Satanic Rebellion: Background to the Tribulation: "Judgment, Restoration and Replacement", section III.1, "Satan's antediluvian attack on the purity of the human line (the Nephilim)".

<sup>89</sup> There are, of course, elements within the contemporary state of Israel who would like to begin reconstruction immediately (Gershon Solomon's "Temple Faithful" movement being perhaps the best known), but the political obstacles to this are formidable.

<sup>90</sup> The reading of codex Sinaiticus, "inner" (Greek *esothēn*: εσωθεν), is the correct one. For the *naos* or temple includes the innermost or "priest's" court (including the altar) which has here been "given to the gentiles" who are trampling the city – i.e., these gentiles should *not* be in this sacred place. The reading *exothēn* is incorrect, and we do not have here a reference to the Herodian "court of the gentiles".

his seat in “the temple of God”, an event which takes place in the middle of the Tribulation (Dan.11:31; cf. Dan.12:11; Matt.24:15; Mk.13:14; Rev.13). We also know that it is at the Tribulation’s midpoint that antichrist will suspend the temple rites (Dan.9:27). All three of the above cases require a temple in Jerusalem dating from the Tribulation’s early days, and are certainly consistent with a scenario that posits a temple rebuilt in Jerusalem *before* the Tribulation begins.<sup>91</sup> It is also equally possible, however, that the two witnesses, Moses and Elijah, are responsible for this rebuilding. Central to their ministry, as we have suggested above, is the theme of “restoration”, which, while it is unquestionably focused upon repentance and spiritual restoration (cf. Mal.4:4-6), may very well include the resuscitation of the temple rite (cf. Zech.4:14 in the context of chapter four which is one of the rebuilding of the second temple). Finally, given the fact that massive embellishment of the temple structure and precinct as described in Ezekiel 40-44 is assuredly accomplished by the returning Messiah (see the previous footnote), the structure with which we shall have to do during the Tribulation may be anything but elaborate, and a hasty reconstruction is not only possible, but might be necessary in light of current political obstacles to such a move. Therefore we cannot say that the reconstruction of the temple at Jerusalem will be a clear and unmistakable *precursor* to the Tribulation’s arrival any more than we could count on antichrist’s prior ascendancy to warn us before the time.

3. The conclusion of the two millennia: The reader is asked to recall that in part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series, we made an extensive study of the chronological architecture of God’s plan for the ages as it is presented in scripture. Germane to our discussion here are the findings that the Age of the Church began in 33 A.D., will run for two complete millennia, and includes in its count the seven years of the Tribulation (overlapping with the last “week” of the Jewish Age). This combination of circumstances, if correctly appraised, would yield a starting date for the Tribulation of 2026 A.D. (most likely in the fall of that year). If this calculation be correct, then without question it would give believers very precise guidance about that time to come (not to mention motivation for prior preparation). This author is very aware of the controversial nature of this projection, and the reader is encouraged to consider that the date offered has been calculated on the following interpretive assumptions (see part 5 of the Satanic Rebellion series for details):

1. The seven millennial day interpretation is taught in scripture and meant to be understood and applied.
2. The Church Age will last for two millennial days or 2000 years.
3. The Church Age commences following the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ.

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<sup>91</sup> While Zechariah 6:12-13 may seem to imply that the Messiah is the one who will rebuild the temple, it is more likely that *yibneh* in that context means “build up” (cf. Ps.147:2 et al.), and refers to the cleansing, repair, and expansion of the whole temple complex rather than its initial rebuilding (similarly, Zech.6:12; cf. 1Kng.6:1). We may compare Ezekiel 40-44 wherein the millennial temple complex is much more extensive than anything we are given to assume about the tribulational temple. What Herod did in turning the small second temple into a massive structure furnishes a loose parallel.

4. These events took place in 33 A.D.

5. The Tribulation belongs to both the Church and Jewish Ages and is therefore to be subtracted from the 2000 year total when calculating the start of the Tribulation.

6. The half hour of silence in heaven at the breaking of the seventh seal (Rev.8:1) signifies a half year grace period that shifts the start point from spring to fall.

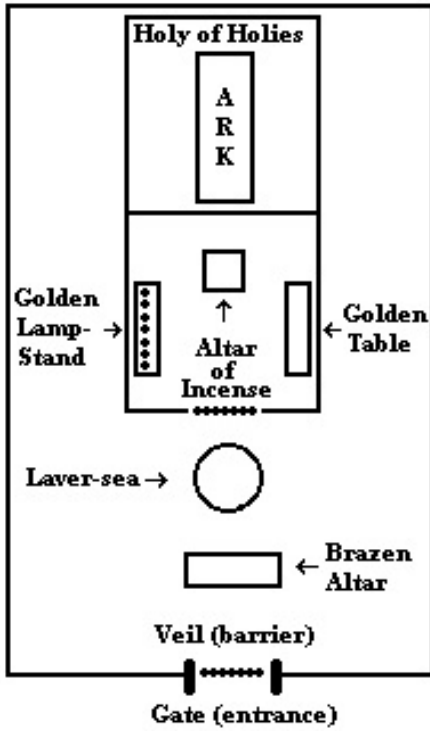
7. Scripture gives no indication of either shortening or lengthening of this time-line, and therefore no such change of schedule is anticipated.

While it is this author's firm conviction that all of the above assumptions are indeed correct and should be accepted, the reader is enjoined again to prepare for the Tribulation as if it might occur at any time (for it is, as we have repeatedly maintained, "imminent" according to scripture). Clearly, variation on any one of the above assumptions would invalidate the projection given. And we would be remiss in failing to point out that it is certainly within the power and authority of the Almighty to make whatever alterations He may wish to this scriptural chronology whenever He should wish to do so, whether of lengthening or of shortening. Nevertheless, what we have been given in the Bible, we have been given for a purpose, and it would be equally remiss not to report what may be learned from scripture on such an important point (cf. Acts 20:20; 20:27). Having said this, we must emphasize yet again that it is certainly the prudent course to make every effort to be prepared spiritually for the Tribulation whenever it should come.

Finally, while we may not recognize antichrist's rise before the fact, we may not be presented with a rebuilt temple prior to the Tribulation, and we may not (perhaps should not) be willing to rely on the chronological projection provided by the "seven millennial day" architecture of history, we should at least have confidence that we *will* have clear indications of the Tribulation's commencement *after the fact*. The miraculous ministries of the two witnesses and the 144,000, the conversion of a large portion of Israel to Jesus Christ, the falling away of a large portion of the church visible into apostasy, antichrist's predicted rise to power, the terrible trumpet judgments – these and all of the details of the coming Tribulation which we have been blessed to receive in the pages of the Bible will at the very least give all believers who turn to scripture for answers very clear and definitive proof of the start of that final seven years before our Lord's return. Let us therefore take care to make ourselves ready for these trials before the fact, lest we find ourselves in the number of those upon whom that day comes unawares (1Thes.5:4).

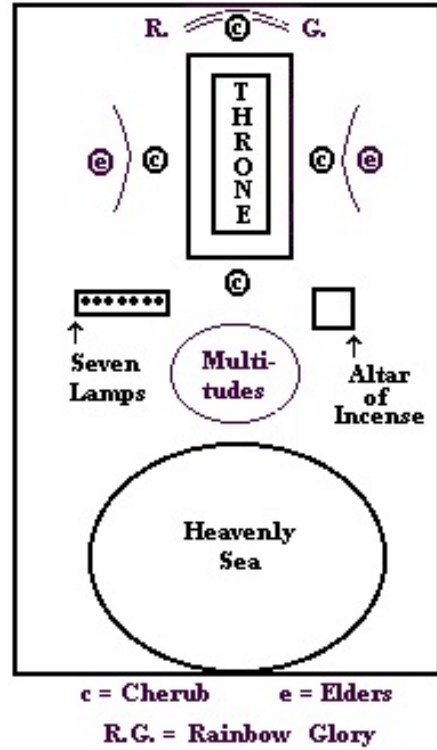
(1) And when He opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. (2) And I saw the seven angels who stood before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. (3) And another angel with a golden censer came and stood by the altar, and much incense was given to him so that he might offer it for the prayers of the saints on the golden altar in front of the throne. (4) And smoke from the incense went up from the hand of the angel before God for the prayers of the saints. (5) Then the angel took the incense holder and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. And there

occurred thunderous voices and flashes of lightning and an earthquake (i.e., these are the signs that accompany the *beginning* of the Tribulation).  
Revelation 8:1-5



**Earthly Tabernacle**

(not to scale)



**Heavenly Temple**

