

No One Knows

Breaking the Code: Signs and Symbols

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Digging Deeper (Questions are on the last page)

No One Knows — Breaking the Code: Signs and Symbols

Written by: Robert Ismon Brown (bbrown@chicagofirstnaz.org)

Background Notes

Key Scripture Texts: Revelation 4-18

Introduction

In our previous study, we heard the risen Jesus speak to the seven churches of Asia Minor, as John faithfully recorded his words in the Letter Scroll. These letters circulated as a group, allowing the several congregations the ability to read each other's mail — for good reason! The setting was on earth as John saw Jesus walking among the seven individual lampstands which represented the seven churches. The condition of the churches and their preparedness for the future was uppermost in the mind of Jesus.

When we begin reading chapter 4, the scene changes dramatically, and John is transported *in a vision* to the very throne room of God Himself. In the visions which follow, a few scroll unfolds — the Worship Scroll. In later chapters the War Scroll will reveal its contents. Our study this week concentrates on these two phases of revelation. The amount of material is immense, and our decision to tackle chapters 4-18 in a single study is admittedly ambitious. In point of fact, the content of this study consists of several lectures which originally I gave during a seminar series several years ago. Rather than make arbitrary decisions about what to include and omit, I have decided to adapt all of those lectures in these *Background Notes*.

Our emphasis, as evidenced throughout the study, will be on the continuing use of symbols and signs to encode God's view of the future. Learning to decode them is a major part of reading and understanding *Rev*. Events in John's day prompted the various symbolic forms, and, as we shall explain, our ability to make sense of the language John uses depends on our understanding of the Old Testament and historical developments on John's own horizon. Tempting thought it might be leave the symbols in their literal form and then try to apply to today's news headlines, that method is a mistake and leads to unbridled speculation and caters to curiosity without remaining faithful to the symbols themselves.

To orient us to these symbols, we can benefit from re-reading 1:1 where the word "signify" (Greek: *sēmainō*, to make known through signs or symbols) appears as the means Jesus used to communicate "what shortly must happen" to John. This word choice demonstrates that the writing is not simple narrative or plain prose, but filled with symbols and signs instead. It is apocalyptic language, not to be taken literally, yet taken truthfully. Symbols and signs function like rich containers of ideas, both concealing and revealing at the same time. To those familiar with the Old Testament or with other contemporary apocalyptic writers, these literary containers made good sense. We, on the other hand, must work a bit harder to tease the meaning from each of them. That will be a major part of our task in what follows.

The structure of Revelation 4-18 includes a series of visions, first of heaven itself, then of earth from heaven's point of view. John writes from a privileged perspective: he sees earth from heaven's peak. This material offers a God's-eye view of human history, starting with John's own time and its trials, and then consummating with the New Heaven and New Earth — which we will examine next week. As a man in exile, John is granted the vantage-point of those who are "around the throne," though he himself is actually still on earth. What happens in heaven, John learns, will affect what happens on earth. *Rev* expands, therefore, the meaning of the *Our Father*: "Your will be done on earth as in heaven," and does so in a majestic and magnificent display of vision, symbol and sign. We will begin with the heavenly court (4-5) and then proceed to earth's realities (6-18) which unfold prior to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

A Word About Books

The topic of interpreting "signs and symbols" in apocalyptic literature is even more fundamental than a commentary on *Rev*. We normally refer to the theory of interpreting biblical texts as *hermeneutics* and the actual practice of interpreting specific texts as *exegetis*. A number of useful books have been written on this subject. I'd like to recommend the following as especially helpful:

Boone, Dan. *Answers for Chicken Little*. Beacon Hill, 2007. Easy to read, challenging book from one of our finest Nazarene pastors who has a heart for keeping our eyes on the essentials of *Rev* while avoiding the wild-eyed extremes. Available with DVD for group studies.

Dunning, H. Ray, editor. *The Second Coming: A Wesleyan Approach to the Doctrine of Last Things*. Beacon Hill, 1995. "Breaks the silence" within our Wesleyan tradition and offers the viewpoints of ten fine scholars. A constructive challenge to popular perspectives on eschatology.

Hanegraaf, Hank. *The Apocalypse Code*. Thomas Nelson, 2007. Probably the most readable and detailed treatment. High marks from Lee Stobel (Apologist), Paul Maier (Western Michigan University), and Gary Burge (Wheaton College). Directly addresses the serious mistakes of Rapture theology and dispensationalism. Written for laypersons and academics alike.

Metzger, Bruce. *Breaking the Code*. Abingdon Press, 1993. Good solid handling of *Rev* and its symbols from a scholar with a long-standing reputation.

The Worship Scroll: Vision of Heaven: (4:1-5:14)

These two chapters introduce the second major division of *Rev*: **The Worship Scroll (4:1-11:18)**.

Overview

When John received the dictation of the letter to the last of the seven churches (Laodicea), he heard Jesus say to that church, "Look, I am standing outside your church--really *my church*--, knocking for admittance." This is a painful picture: the living Christ excluded from his own church, seeking entrance once again. It is also a loving picture, for it reveals the persistent Jesus who will not leave his people alone in their unfaithfulness. Laodicea had a closed door. Philadelphia had an open door. If anyone simply opens the door, gives opportunity for the living Jesus to come in once more, that Jesus will respond in table fellowship. To such a faithful soul, Jesus promises a seat on his throne in his Father's kingdom. With that image freshly fixed in John's mind (and the reader's), a dramatic scene change takes place in the book.

In 4:1 John witnesses a very different kind of "door". Unlike the door in Laodicea which was closed by a self-sufficient community who left Jesus on the outside, this other door is the entrance of heaven. And it is "standing open". Hearers of this part of the vision ought to be sitting on the edge of their seats. The language used here would be familiar to the audience. Genesis describes a similar scene when Jacob, the grandson of Abraham, was on the run from his enraged brother Esau whom he had defrauded of his birthright. With a rock as his pillow, Jacob dreams of a ladder which reached to heaven itself with angels walking up and down the rungs. God appeared at the top and spoke with him, confirming his covenant with Jacob and his descendents. When he woke up, these were his words:

Genesis 28:16-17 Then Jacob woke up and said, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I wasn't even aware of it." 17 He was afraid and said, "What an awesome place this is! It is none other than the house of God-- the gateway to heaven!"

He names the place "Bethel", which means "house of God".

In the Revelation text before us, John witnesses "the gateway to heaven" and ascends to see a vision which launches the second scroll, "the Worship Scroll" which continues the drama through 11:18. An overview of this scroll will give us perspective on each part. Once in heaven, John sees God's throne room and hears a liturgy of music, choreography, and lection. Images of awesome beauty reveal the nature of God, reigning in his kingdom, at the center of a world that is wondrous beyond description. But the majesty is interrupted by the

problem of the sealed scroll. Should the reader know anything about such a scroll from a reading of the Old Testament? The answer is a definitive "Yes!". The prophet Daniel, in the concluding verses of his book (12:4), is told by his angelic guide to "seal up the book" because its fulfillment waits for the "end of times". In contrast, the book of *Rev* ends with clear instructions, "Do not seal the book" because the end has arrived (22:10). The troubling question raised by chapter 5 is how do we open the scroll? It was God who ordered the book sealed (Daniel 12) and no ordinary human being could take it upon himself to break the seals, any more than a Roman messenger had the authority to break seals on an official communiqué from the Emperor. The reader is not disappointed. A being steps forward who is worthy to open the scroll and reveal its message. In highly symbolic ways the vision depicts Jesus as the worthy one. This is the chief theme which runs through these two opening chapters of the Worship Scroll.

The Parallels to Daniel 7 in Rev 4-5

Students of *Rev* have noted that this throne-room scene gets much of its symbolism and even its flow from the great Daniel 7 vision. The following parallels are worth noting:

1. Introduction to the vision (4:1, Daniel 7:2, 6-7, 9)
2. The Throne set in heaven (4:2a, 4:4a, Daniel 7:9a)
3. God sitting on the throne (4:2b, Daniel 7:9b)
4. God's appearance (4:3a, Daniel 7:9c)
5. Fire before the throne (4:5, Daniel 7:9d-10a)
6. Heavenly beings around the throne (4:4b, 6b-10; 5:8,11,14, Daniel 7:10b)
7. Books before the throne (5:1-5, Daniel 7:10c)
8. Books opened (5:2-5,9, Daniel 7:10c)
9. Divine Messianic figure approaching throne to receive authority over his kingdom (5:5b-7, 9a, 12-13, Daniel 7:13-14a)
10. Scope of this kingdom: world-wide (5:9b, Daniel 7:14a)
11. Prophet's emotional distress (5:4, Daniel 7:15)
12. Prophet receives counsel from a heavenly being (5:5a, Daniel 7:16)
13. God's people given authority to reign over a kingdom (5:10, Daniel 7:18, 22, 27a)
14. God's eternal reign: the conclusion (5:13-14, Daniel 7:27b)

Why are these parallels significant? Briefly, Daniel's vision in its entirety showed him how world history would unfold in the future. Different empires would arise, one after the other (Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome) each symbolized by a mighty animal (lion, bear, leopard and an indescribable fierce beast). The advent of these kingdoms would lead to great turmoil in the life of God's people. At one point outright war would be declared against the "holy people" by a powerful ruler. But God gives the vision to Daniel to assure him that one day the "son of man" will arrive and defeat the enemies of God's people and establish an eternal kingdom. Daniel will not see this occur in his time and so he is told to seal his book "until the end". Now we can discern some key points:

1. John is seeing God enthroned in heaven where beauty, order, justice and worship exist in perfect ways.
2. God's character is praised with familiar strains of "Holy, Holy, Holy", derived from another Old Testament vision, that of Isaiah 6, a text also set in the context of a crisis in the life of God's people.
3. God is praised as the one who "was, is, is coming", *Rev*'s way of saying he spans all of time of history and is not limited by past, present or future.
4. God is seen as creator of all things and because he is creator he also has the authority to direct the manner in which finally reach their conclusion or purpose.
5. Both John and Daniel lived within the context of present or future crisis. Whenever God's people were in crisis or faced crisis, God revealed himself in powerful ways, unmistakable ways. Consider:
 - a. Jacob, the father of the 12 tribes of Israel, had his "ladder vision" while a fugitive from his brother Esau (see text above)
 - b. Moses, receiving the law on Mount Sinai, just before Israel made the golden calf and were judged by God (Exodus 19; 24:9-18). Exodus 24 contains a description of God's appearance similar to that of

Rev 4, and also includes references to the "elders of Israel" being present much like the 24 elders of Rev 4-5.

- c. Ezekiel, with the exiles in Babylon on the eve of Jerusalem's destruction by the Babylonians (586 B.C.E.), sees a vision of God with symbols similar to the text before us (Ezekiel 1-2).
- d. Zechariah, returned from exile, faces hostile forces in his efforts to rebuild the Temple.
- e. Now John, facing dire news from Jerusalem to the east where Rome and the Jews are preparing for war. And to the west where Nero blames the Christians for the burning of Rome. Then, in the very region where John's churches are located, Emperor worship, betrayal from the non-Messianic Jewish leadership, and pressures from the trade guilds all threaten the young churches either with death or the temptation to abandon their faith.
- f. It is against these backgrounds that Rev 4-5 makes perfect sense. John and the early Christians need to see that God is on the throne and that his long-sealed purposes will be fulfilled in spite of what happens on earth.
- g. By taking John, in the Spirit, to heaven, God is giving to John *the perspective of heaven for the woes on earth*. This is precisely what Jesus meant when he asked his disciples to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Rev 4-5 helps us answer the question, "What does God's will look like *in heaven*?" And also encourages us to believe that God is going to make that will felt in his dealings with human beings *on earth*.

The Scene in Heaven

1. Much of what we see in these chapters looks like an ancient monarch's palace. Some scholars suggest that the vision is an intentional critique of the Roman Emperor's throne-room: the heavenly scene is the *reality* while the Emperor's palace is a mere *parody*. Caesar may imagine he rules the world, but the truth of the matter is quite different: God does, and he does so from heaven.
2. Yet there is more here. This is no ordinary throne-room. God is in his holy temple, in his most holy place, surrounded by the emblems of his glory, majesty, power, and justice. Precious stones enhance the light with colors of white and red, which speak of his holiness and his judgment. The curved rainbow, reminding us of Noah's covenant with God after the flood, frames his throne proclaiming the faithfulness of his word to his people.
3. The four living creatures symbolize creation and surround his throne in much the same way the cherubim overshadowed the ark of the covenant in the most holy place of Israel's earthly temple.
4. The 24 elders (12 tribes+12 apostles) represent his people, the fruit of his redemption, and sit on thrones dressed as priests, crowned as kings. This is how John saw them in chapter 1: "kings and priests" destined to reign on the earth, now reigning in heaven already around the throne of God. In the earthly temple, the priests were divided into 24 orders in order to serve God throughout the year. Here, in God's heavenly temple they lead the worship of the one who sits on the throne. In laying their crowns before the throne, they acknowledge the true source of their authority. Unlike the Caesar who accepts the titles of divinity, these kings, knowing they are redeemed by God, acknowledge only him as the true Lord.
5. Consider the other imagery:
 - a. The flaming lamps are the heavenly counterpart to the lampstands John saw earlier in his vision. The church is the light of the world, but it is also part of the heavenly temple. Just as the earthly temple had the menorah burning in the holy place, so these lamps burn in the heavenly temple.
 - b. The sea of glass corresponds to the basin of brass in the courtyard of the earthly temple.
 - c. The flashing of lightning and the roar of thunder are like the roaring flames which burned constantly on the altar of burnt offering.
 - d. What John sees in heaven is the true pattern for what Jewish people saw their earthly temple. One New Testament writer made the direct comparison this way:
"They [the Jewish priests] serve in a place of worship that is only a copy, a shadow of the real one in heaven. For when Moses was getting ready to build the Tabernacle, God gave him this warning, 'Be sure that you make everything according to the design I have shown you here on the mountain.'" (Heb. 8:5)
"...the earthly tent and everything in it...were copies of things in heaven...but the real things [are] in heaven..." (Hebrews 9:23)

"...the earthly place of worship...was merely a copy of the real Temple in heaven..." (Hebrews 9:24)

Why is John given this vision of heaven as Temple? Is it not because the earthly temple is about to be destroyed and the Christian community needs to see itself as constituting the New Temple whose real sanctuary is in heaven itself? Do not the earthly lampstands (the churches) need to see that their heavenly counterparts are burning brightly before God's throne, while on earth they endeavor to be lights to the world?

- e. Even if the earthly temple disappears, the true worship of God continues in heaven. But this "heaven" is not some distant place, isolated from earth, separated by time from the here-and-now. John's vision in chapter 4 began with "the door standing open in heaven". Our earthly experiences are not cut off from their heavenly origins, but God has opened the door and issued the joyful invitation, "Come up here! See how things really are! See the course of your lives in light of what I am doing. Learn the ways of true worship: worship on earth as you see worship happening in heaven. See yourselves as kings and priests, not beggars and humiliated."
6. The Great Heavenly Music: Five joyful hymns are sung throughout chapters 4 and 5, which ought to tell us something about the priorities of heavenly worship. In chapter four we hear:
 - a. The Trisagion ("Holy, Holy, Holy") proclaims the utter uniqueness of God and his rulership over all time and history.
 - b. The "You Are Worthy" invites all creation to acknowledge the character of God. And there are three more hymns to follow in chapter 5.

The Problem of the Sealed Scroll and the Triumph of the Lion who is the Lamb

1. Into this scene of joyful worship, which introduces the Worship Scroll, appears a problematic object. All seems like peace and light in chapter 4: things are as they should be "around the throne". Yet, interrupting this serenity, is the "scroll" in the right hand of the one sitting on the throne. Several things are said about it:
 - a. It had writing on the inside and the outside. Anyone familiar with the Old Testament would immediately recall a similar scroll offered to the prophet Ezekiel (2:9):

"Then I looked and saw a hand reaching out to me, and it held a scroll. He unrolled it, and I saw that both sides were covered with funeral songs, other words of sorrow and pronouncements of doom"

And another one from Isaiah 29:11-12 which they would recognize:
"All these future events are a sealed book to them. When you give it to those who can read, they will say, 'We can't read it because it is sealed'"

Also, Zechariah wrote of seeing a scroll (5:1ff):
"I looked up again and saw a scroll flying through the air...This scroll contains the curse that is going over the entire land. One side says that those who steal will be banished from the land; the other side says that those who swear falsely will be banished from the land."
 - b. Like the scroll sealed up in Daniel 12, the scrolls described here contain judicial decrees: judgment decrees. Now we encounter the scroll in John's vision: sealed and having writing on all sides. At last, the heavenly messenger cries out: "Who can break the seals and open the scroll?" What he asks is no small thing.
 - c. The readers of John's *Rev* no doubt also wait with eager expectation for the purposes of God in human history to reach their climax. Like the ancient Daniel, they wonder aloud, "when will this happen?" A little later in the book (chapter 6) we will hear an even more somber cry, "How long?" The answer seems imminent. The problem looms large: "No one is worthy". John imitates his prophetic predecessor, Daniel, and expresses deep emotion, weeping over the failure to find someone to open the scroll. How firmly entrenched in the human mind is the pessimism about things finally turning out well! Would not John say to himself, "I know someone. The first and the last, the one who died and is now alive. He can open the book!" Or had the events of first century church-life and the distant thunder from Rome and Jerusalem dampened even the apostle's enthusiasm. It seems that John needs this vision as much as do his churches!
2. But the mood shifts as one of the 24 elders (who reign as kings and priests), one of the redeemed, addresses John with these words: "The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the heir to David's throne, has conquered. He is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals" (5:5). Notice the past tense: "has conquered". Has John

missed some important world-event, despondent in his exile here in Patmos? "Conquest" was a familiar word to anyone living in the Roman Empire. The Caesars were good at it. They built an Empire by doing it and they hoped to maintain the "Peace of Rome" (*Pax Romana*) through constant military presence throughout their empire. Who can match that? It would take "a lion of a king" to defeat the Caesar. But from Judah, that beleaguered land to the east, facing four Roman legions? None of the Herods measure up. Where can the Jewish people find that sort of political and military might? Or the Christians?

3. What follows is common in "vision language". The writer changes his metaphors, but not just for literary effect. "I saw Lamb that had been killed but was now standing...". John no doubt recalled the important words of John the Baptizer who pointed out "the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world". John now understands the connection: "the Lion Who is the Lamb" is the only one able to unseal the scroll and open it. Lambs are for sacrifice in the Jewish worship system. Here stands the dying, rising, Passover Lamb who by his death and resurrection has the power to do what he must now do. Notice how the Lamb appears:
 - a. He stands between the throne and the living beings; among the 24 elders. This corresponds to the vision in chapter one where the "son of man" walks among the seven lampstands.
 - b. He has seven horns and seven eyes. This is imagery taken from Zechariah 3 and 4. The horn symbolizes power, while eyes symbolize knowledge. In the context of Zechariah, the images communicate God's movement throughout the world where he sees what is happening and is able to do something about it. Here, the Lamb knows what is happening to the people of God in the world and he is able to do something about it. The Lamb carries out his surveillance through the "seven-fold Holy Spirit", already introduced in Isaiah 11. Remember it was the Spirit who brought John into his visionary state. And it was the Spirit who was "speaking to the churches". We also recall that Jesus addressed each church with the words "I know...", language which gives concrete meaning to the idea of the "seven eyes".
4. The Lamb approaches the throne. This language parallels the Daniel 7 account of the Messiah coming to the "Ancient of Days". By taking the scroll from his Father's right hand, Jesus now exercises his Father's rule. Judgment has now been given to the Son who will, in the rest of *Rev*, exercise it on behalf of the kingdom and people of God. Those who witness the simple act of "taking the scroll" now burst forth in worship once more.
 - a. First, they kneel before the Lamb, treating him with the same deference as they treated the one on the throne. The Lamb is not a creation of God, he is God--God's Son--to whom all authority has been given "in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:19,20). The elder-priests-kings worship the Lamb.
 - b. Second, they bear bowls of incense which symbolize the prayers of God's people. Once more the lively imagery of the heavenly temple appears in the text. In the earthly temple there was an altar of incense which stood in the holy place, on the other side of the curtain separating it from the most holy place and the ark. When the Jewish priests served in this part of the temple, they offered incense as a constant prayer on behalf of Israel. The connection here is not hard to make. On earth, God's people cry out to him in the midst of their struggles. In heaven, the heavenly priests-kings-elders represent those praises before the Lamb and now look to him for the righteous judgments only he has power to dispense.
 - c. Third, they sing "A New Song". New Songs are for New Things, specifically, in celebration of the coming of the "New Creation". There is an Old Testament parallel here. After the crossing of the Red Sea, and the triumph over the armies of Pharaoh, Moses and Miriam lead Israel in a new song celebrating the victory. Here, Christ the Passover Lamb has been sacrificed and he now stands alive within the New Creation of his resurrected life. What greater motivation for New Worship than such an unprecedented event in history? The worship which follows is the celebration of a New Passover Lamb, the ransom not only for ethnic Jews but also for the whole world (every tribe, language, people and nation, 5:9). This newly constituted people of God has already been declared kings and priests. But more importantly, because the Lamb is about to open the seals and unroll the scroll, "they will reign on the earth" (5:10).
5. The scope of "Lamb Worship" now extends to the whole of creation, as countless angels join in the worship of the Lamb. The Lamb is not an angel for he is worshiped by angels (5:11). The impression left by this

concentrated act of cosmic praise is that the Lamb is being accorded the same homage as God himself. He is the authorized expression of God; he is the Son of God. His royal privileges include God's privileges: "power, riches, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and blessing" (5:12).

- a. The same attributions of worship are given to the Lamb as to the one sitting on the throne (5:13).
- b. This Lamb who alone is worthy to unseal the age-long sealed scroll has all the prerogatives of God to execute the righteous judgments of the one who sits on the throne.
- c. Jesus, the Lamb, has already told the church in Laodicea, "I will invite everyone who is victorious to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his throne" (3:21). Therefore, the victory of the Lamb is also the victory of the people of the Lamb.
- d. No wonder the heavenly worshipers say "Amen!" and the elder "fell down and worshipped God and the Lamb" (5:14).

Foreshadowings

1. As we look back over the content of the first five chapters of *Rev*, one large idea appears: God is about to bring about the fulfillment of his kingdom plan for the people of God.
2. That plan, to a significant degree, has **already** been unfolded. That's an important idea when coupled with the equally important idea that some things have **not yet** been unrolled. Holding the *already* and the *not yet* in carefully balance is helpful in interpreting the words of *Rev*. In the two chapters just studied:
 - a. *Already* Jesus, God's Lamb was killed and by his blood ransomed the people of God from every tribe, language, people and nation.
 - b. *Already* He has caused them to become God's Kingdom and his priests. Indeed, that's exactly how they appear in the throne-room scenes of *Rev* 4-5.
 - c. *Not Yet* do God's people reign on the earth, though Jerusalem and its temple still stand as the earthly symbols of that kingdom. In fact, a new kingdom arrangement is forming in the world, represented by the seven churches. *Already* their lampstands in the holy place shine their light into the world.
 - d. The message of *Rev* up to this point seems to be leading up to a further fulfillment when the people of God, with the authority of the Lamb, will experience kingdom life "on earth as it is in heaven".
3. The reader is now prepared for the next great drama about to unfold which flows from these joyous scenes of worship in chapters 4-5. Seals must be removed from the scroll so that the kingdom of God can enter into a new and victorious phase. What are those seals? What stands between the people of God, ransomed by the Lamb, and their rightful role as earthly kings and priests? Whatever these obstacles are, they must exist in the history of John's time. Moreover, if we are to read *Rev* in a normal sense, words like "soon take place" seem to imply the removal of these obstacles will also occur in John's time.
4. As we have already observed, the history of John's time has been crisis filled. Momentous events have already happened:
 - a. Jesus, God's Son, was born of a virgin in Bethlehem, in fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.
 - b. For 3+ years, Jesus conducted a ministry of words and deeds that could only be seen as inspired by God.
 - c. Jewish leaders, in concert with the Roman procurator, arranged for Jesus' trial and crucifixion which occurred at the time of Passover, *circa* 30 C.E.
 - d. On the third day, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared in a transformed physical body to his followers.
 - e. For forty days, he made periodic appearances, teaching and instructing his apostles, giving them orders to assemble in Jerusalem at the Feast of Pentecost ("First Fruits", "Feast of Weeks") when God will "clothe" them "with power from above", a reference to the Holy Spirit.
 - f. The apostles, after Pentecost, continued the work of Jesus throughout Israel and eventually, "to the ends of the earth", in obedience to Jesus' "great commission".
 - g. Throughout the early years, the Jesus community was largely Jewish, made up of people who saw Jesus as the Messiah and themselves as the renewed people of God sent into the world to announce the arrival of his kingdom. But among the temple and synagogue leadership was substantial opposition to the message. Judaism needed national strength to defeat its Gentile occupiers and the so-called "Nazarenes" brought a message of reconciliation which actually invited Gentiles to share in kingdom blessings. This led to persecution, some of it deadly.

- h. The apostles carried around the memory of Jesus' words about what they could expect: "If they persecute me, they will persecute you", he said, and then proceeded to lay out an outline of what they would face within "this generation", a time period which could stretch out some 40 years. During this time, Jesus said, they would bring the good news throughout the towns of Israel--and then the kingdom of God would come in its power (read Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).
- i. Scarcely thirty years after his return to heaven (to the place John saw in his vision), the Roman heel fell on the church. Nero burned Rome and pinned the crime on the Christians. In the provinces, cults to the Emperor began to spring up. Earlier, Caligula had attempted to place a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple, but failed. Elsewhere he cut off the heads of Roman idols and put his own in their place. Tradesmen among the Christians were expected by their guilds to do homage to the gods and participate in pagan feasts as part of their membership requirements.
- j. Put simply, the early church was being flanked on every side. Where was the fulfillment of the promised kingdom? Is there no relief on the horizon? Not in Jerusalem, where adamant and strong-willed nationalists among the Jews (mixture of Zealots and right-wing Pharisees) conspire against Roman occupation. By 66 C.E. that effort would result in a crisis that would affect the Christians living in Israel. They would need to follow Jesus' instructions to flee the cities under siege and not participate in the resistance movement breaking out against Rome. Three and one-half years later, the temple lies in ruins, an event predicted by Jesus.
- k. These were dramatic days indeed. Days in need of fresh "revelation" and a word from "the throne of God". John was not disappointed. Chapter 4-5 set the stage for the unfolding of events that would literally sweep the world. The Lamb would break the seals and unleash in the world his righteous judgments against Rome and Jerusalem alike. He would vindicate his people who followed the Lamb, protecting them from genocide.
- l. In the chapters which follow, that earth-shattering story will be told with language worthy of its "apocalyptic" name. When the dust finally settles, God's people will be reigning on the earth and the kingdom of God will grow by leaps and bounds until the Emperor of Rome will be forced to acknowledge "Jesus is Lord".

The Worship Scroll: Seven Seals and the People of God Sealed: (6:1-8:1)

Introduction

1. In the first section of the Worship Scroll, we were introduced to the problem of the sealed scroll and to its solution. The Lion who is the Lamb Slain takes the scroll from the right hand of the one on the throne. Once this happens, all heaven and earth breaks forth in simultaneous praise. At last the "closed book" will be opened.
 - a. We noted that Daniel 12 (in addition to other OT texts) provide background for the scroll.
 - b. In Daniel's case, the scroll was sealed and would not be opened until the "end of days".
 - c. By the time *Rev* is completed (see 22:10), the new theme is "don't seal the book". The fulfillment of that promise begins in *Rev* 6, the first chapter we look at in this study.
2. Chapter 5 made it clear why it is now safe to "open scroll": the Lamb has died and risen in order to liberate the people of God and transform them into a "kingdom and priests" destined to reign on the earth.
 - a. In other words, the renewed people of God now stands ready to assume their new role in the world because the Lamb has set them free.
 - b. What now remains is that the seals be removed and any remaining hindrances taken out of the way for the kingdom of God to assume its new role on the earth.
3. What follows is a multi-part drama: the seven seals are opened and the new people of God are sealed.
 - a. Notice the irony: there is an unsealing, followed by a sealing.
 - b. The unsealing brings judgment, while the sealing brings blessing.
 - c. Four Horsemen bring conquest, civil war, famine and death: Seals 1-4
 - d. Martyrs appear beneath the bloody altar of sacrifice and ask the question, "How Long?": Seal 5
 - e. Those affected by the judgments go into hiding and ask the question, "Who can stand?": Seal 6
 - f. Those two questions evoke the vision of chapter 7 where the sealing of God's people is proclaimed.

- 1) God's people from faithful Israel are anointed with his seal
- 2) God's people from every nation are washed in the blood of the lamb
- g. The seventh seal is broken, marked by a short period of worshipful silence.
4. Our study needs to look at the meaning of the seals and the significance of the sealing.

Background

1. Some Old Testament texts serve as background to *Rev* 6.
 - a. Ezekiel 4-7; 14
 - 1) Judgment of Jerusalem through siege, war, famine and death
 - 2) Reference to being showered with arrows (from the "bow")
 - 3) A remnant who are scattered will return to God in and through their suffering.
 - 4) The end finally comes with the destruction of Jerusalem and the exile to Babylon
 - b. Zechariah 1:17-20; 6:1-8
 - 1) Four horses with distinctive colors (red, black, white, gray)
 - 2) Horses connected with heavenly agents who go out to do God's work in the world
 - 3) Shows God's intervention to help his people after the return from exile from Babylon
 - c. These sets of texts offer contrasts
 - 1) On the one hand, they indicate judgment on the unfaithful people of God
 - 2) On the other hand, they show God at work in restoring the people of God
 - 3) These two themes also appear in Revelation 6-7
 - d. Deuteronomy 32:15, 23-26
 - 1) Written just before Moses dies, after Israel's 40-years of life in the wilderness.
 - 2) Through an extended poem, Moses tells the story of Israel, including its rebellion and God's judgment.
 - 3) Language includes arrows, famine, sword and death
 - 4) Reflections on the suffering of Israel at the hands of its enemies and God's need to bring justice to "avenge the blood of his servants..." (32:43), a direct quotation in *Rev* 6:10
 - e. Leviticus 26:14-45
 - 1) This text is part of a larger "covenant blessing and cursing" text. It falls at the end of Leviticus, a book which instructs Israel in the proper form of worship.
 - 2) What happens when Israel does "not listen to me or obey my commands", asks the Lord (26:14)? The answer is terse: "I will punish you" (26:16)
 - 3) The language God uses to describe this punishment includes: sudden terrors, wasting diseases, burning fevers, conquest by their enemies, drought, etc.
 - 4) In 26:21, God says, "I will inflict seven more disasters for your sins...punish you seven times" and then proceeds to mention: wild animals to kill them, enemies against them, plague, armies, conquest, famine, death, eating one's family members, exile, wind, etc.
 - 5) With the repentant, God will renew his covenant.
2. New Testament Parallels: The "Little Apocalypse" of Jesus.
 - a. Matthew 24, Mark 13 and Luke 21 all record Jesus' so-called "Olivet Discourse", a sweeping prediction by Jesus, given on the Mount of Olives, to the apostles.
 - b. What prompted this discourse? The admiration of the Temple buildings by the disciples and Jesus' plain prophecy that the Temple would be destroyed
 - 1) This event would happen in their lifetime ("this generation")
 - 2) He would "come" in judgment in their lifetime
 - c. Comparing the flow of events: *Rev* 6 and the Olivet discourse chronicle parallel events
 - d. The words of Jesus point to the events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. by the Romans, a period of some forty years which would be punctuated by:
 - 1) Appearance of false Messiahs
 - 2) Declaration of war by one kingdom against another
 - 3) Famines and earthquakes

- 4) Persecution of the followers of Jesus by Jewish authorities and by others
 - 5) Preaching of the Gospel
 - 6) Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies and desecrated in ways predicted by the prophets, Daniel in particular.
 - 7) Followers of Jesus will not participate in the fight against the invaders, but are ordered by Jesus to leave the land of Israel.
 - 8) These final events will be accompanied by signs in the heavens.
 - 9) God will gather his remnant people, the redeemed.
 - 10) These events will happen quickly, so God's people must be prepared at all times.
- e. Even a casual reading of *Rev 6-7* reveals the close connection between this discourse and the flow of events revealed to John when the seals are opened.
 - f. Jesus elsewhere predicted that God would judge the nation of Israel for rejecting the new way of peace and deliverance he offered to it.
 - 1) In Matthew 23, seven times Jesus declares "Woe" (Hebrew word indicating God's judgment) on the leadership of Israel. He then proceeds to say:
 You build tombs for the prophets and decorate the graves of the righteous. 30 And you say, 'If we had lived in the days of our forefathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.'
 31 So you testify against yourselves that you are the descendants of those who murdered the prophets. 32 **Fill up, then, the measure of the sin of your forefathers!** 33 "You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? 34 Therefore I am sending you prophets and wise men and teachers. Some of them you will kill and crucify; others you will flog in your synagogues and pursue from town to town. 35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berekiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 I tell you the truth, **all this will come upon this generation.** 37 "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, **but you were not willing.** 38 Look, **your house is left to you desolate.** 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'"
 - 2) In Luke 23:26, Jesus is led to his death and along the way encounters the weeping of sympathetic women. To them he says:
 "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me; weep for yourselves and for your children. 29 For the time will come when you will say, 'Blessed are the barren women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!' 30 Then "they will say to the mountains, "Fall on us!" and to the hills, "Cover us!" 31 For if men do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"
 In this passage, Jesus uses the same language found in *Rev 6* when the sixth seal is opened. And he sets up a timeline leading to the fulfillment of these events when he speaks of wood, first green, and then dry. Once dry, wood burns, and that is the dark future Jesus predicts for his beloved city.
 - 3) Matthew 10:23 adds additional support to the notion that Jesus fully expected to "come" during the generation in which people were then living: When you are persecuted in one place, flee to another. I tell you the truth, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel before the Son of Man comes. His "coming" is, of course, in judgment as the texts above show.
3. Josephus, the Jewish Historian
 - a. Non-Christian, Jewish historian (37-101 C.E.)
 - b. Eyewitness to the events leading up to, during and after the Roman war with Israel (67-70 C.E.), serving as a general for a Jewish army that was defeated at Jotapata
 - c. Befriended by the commanding general of the Roman occupation, Vespasian, who later became Emperor. Josephus attempted to end the conflict by brokering peace, but was rebuffed by the Jewish leadership.
 - d. Wrote two significant works: *Wars of the Jews* and *Antiquities of the Jews*. In these he clearly shows his first-hand knowledge of the events of this period.
 - e. Josephus argued that what happened to Jerusalem was a judgment for the sins of the nation, especially its leaders. He gives graphic accounts of the civil war that occurred inside the Temple courts, even as the Romans laid siege to the city.

- f. He gave eyewitness reports of signs that appeared over Jerusalem in 70 C.E. as the city was being destroyed. This account was also given by the Roman historian, Tacitus, in his *Histories* 5:13.
 - g. Josephus' descriptions parallel events symbolized by the four horsemen of *Rev* 6 and situation of those mentioned at the breaking of the sixth seal.
4. These are representative background materials and do not exhaust every possible text. In summary, this is what they reveal:
 - a. God had already spoken through the prophets about the potential for judgment to fall on national Israel at some point in its future. The language used in those texts bear close resemblance to the passage before us.
 - b. Jesus made clear that unless national Israel repented it faced a desolating war and eventual loss of temple and territory.
 - c. Josephus provides ample confirmation, from a Jewish source, that what happened in 70 C.E. was, in fact, God's judgment for the sins of his people.
 5. Revelation, consistent with its overall message, makes clear to the reader that the devastating events about to take place in history are under the direction of the One Who Sits on the Throne and of the Lamb. Far from accidents of history, they are given meaning because they fulfill the purposes of God revealed to his servants the prophets. Now John the Seer joins that prophetic line and witnesses the opening of the long-sealed book.

Note: In understanding chapters 6-7, the reader will be aided by reading the textbook (*Four Views on the Book of Revelation*), Gentry, pages 52-56; Pate, 146-161, which are rich with historical references and quotations, too lengthy to be quoted here).

The First Six Seals (6:1-17)

1. The Rylands Professor of Biblical Criticism and Exegesis at the University of Manchester, Dr. F.F. Bruce (d.1990), wrote *New Testament History* and in the course of his explanations declared: "the first six seals span the forty years up to A.D.70". Several things make this view plausible:
 - a. Jesus' account in the Olivet Discourse, discussed above.
 - b. Josephus description of events during that period.
 - c. The likely role of Nero in both conducting a systematic persecution of Christians and initiating the Roman war against Israel. Nero ruled 54-68 C.E.
 - d. The general civil strife, chaos and uncertainty throughout the Empire after Nero's death. Between 68 and 69 C.E. four Emperors ruled Rome in rapid succession until Vespasian (69-79 C.E.), the general who began the war against Israel, became Emperor.
2. It is not difficult constructing a picture of this period as a time when the world seem to be coming to an end for Jews, Christians and Romans.
3. What *Rev* provides the reader is the certain knowledge that when the four horsemen gallop across the stage of world history, they do so under the authority of the One Who Sits on the Throne and the Lamb. For the first readers, this is helpful knowledge.
4. Before any of the four horsemen make their appearance, they are summoned by the symbols of God's creative power, the four living creatures, with the words "Come Out!". Can there be any more powerful words of "revelation"? It is as if the creatures had said, "Show yourself!" The heavenly throne room is the true origin of the authority possessed by these riders. The opening chapters of *Rev* have already indicated that God is on the throne and has given all authority to the Lamb. And it is the Lamb who unseals the book and authorizes the events now being revealed.
5. **The First Seal: Conquest and Revolt (6:1-2)**
 - a. The horse is white, he carries a bow, and a victor's crown-wreath (the temporary kind, given at the games) is placed on his head.
 - b. The bow-and-arrow (Greek: *toxon*) was carried by the dread Parthian warriors and was the weapon of choice for distance strategies. It was also used by other soldiers of the Near East where it seems to have originated. The Romans were less likely to employ the hand-held variety, but did have a "dart launcher"

for stationary use. Josephus indicates that when the Jewish war began, the first decisive defeats of the Roman General Cestius took place at Bethoron Pass in late November, 66, and during this engagement, arrows were used, resulting in nearly 6,000 Roman deaths.

- c. What seems to be in view, then, is the first stages of the war, instigated by the Jewish revolt with the promise of victory, symbolized by the *stephanos* crown, the **temporary** wreath given to the initiators of the conquest Elsewhere in Scripture, this kind of wreath is said to "fade away" with time. Whatever intention was imagined by the bearer of this wreath it would soon fail.

6. The Second Seal: War, Civil War (6:3-4)

- a. The defeat of the Roman Cestius by the Jews led to a widespread outbreak of carnage, in the words of Josephus, "without a moment's delay".
- b. The newly established government in Jerusalem appointed regional commanders in Judea, Idumea, Perea, Galilee, and, of course, in Jerusalem.
- c. *Rev* puts it accurately: "to take peace from the earth". The unbroken *Pax Romana*, the promised security of the Empire had been broken and for the next several years, from East to West, the Roman eagle would encounter one calamity after another, including its own civil war in Rome.
- d. The Jews, also, in spite of their new found courage against Roman soldiers, would be faced with internal discord and renewed attacks from the Greeks and Romans.
- e. Vespasian commands the Fifth and Tenth Legions, based in Syria, while his son Titus would assume command of the Fifteenth in Egypt which he would march overland to Israel. Vespasian's first objective is Galilee (67 C.E.) where he defeats Josephus who then becomes the diplomat seeking an end to the war. One by one the cities of Israel fall to Rome with heavy loss of life.
- f. Next, he attacks Judea (68-69 C.E.). Before he is able to finish the operation, Nero dies in Rome (either by his own hand or assassination, 69 C.E.). This ensuing suspension of military operations gives time for the Jewish Christians to leave, following Jesus' instructions to flee Jerusalem when they see the armies surrounding the city.
- g. Now its Rome's turn to experience civil war, as three emperors (Galba, Otho, Vitellius) take power successively and then are killed. Finally, Vespasian (69-79 C.E.) is firmly in charge and commits the finishing of the Jewish war to his able son Titus.
- h. Before Titus resumes his operations, the battle for Kingship in Jerusalem begins. "Who will be king?" is the question of the day. Several factions vie for power, while at the same time, they are suppose to be preparing for the Siege of Jerusalem by the Romans:

Ananus son of Ananus	Former high priest; moderate leader of Jerusalem during the rebellion
Eleazar son of Simon	Leader of the Zealots, former Temple treasurer [same as Eleazar son of Ananias]
John of Gischala	Josephus' enemy in Galilee, who fled to Jerusalem and took control of the Zealots
Simon son of Gioras	Popular leader from the countryside who gained control of much of Jerusalem
The Idumaeans	Skilled soldiers from Idumaea, south of Judaea, who were strongly anti-Roman but found themselves manipulated by the factions

- i. Ultimately, three factions engage in bitter warfare until Titus arrives in early 70 C.E. to begin the fatal siege. When Passover comes, there is an attempt to celebrate it within the Temple. But the opportunity is seized by the radicals to eliminate the priests, leaving Simon of Gioras and John of Gischala to battle for power, and still to face the Roman siege.
- j. The resulting carnage earns John's figure of the "great sword"" "great" because of the extent of its effect.

7. The Third Seal: Famine (6:5-6)

- a. The sort of famine images described here fit the circumstances of a siege. Jerusalem is shut up against the Roman assault, complete with its earthworks and catapults. No one leaves or enters without Roman permission. The food supply drops dramatically and human beings are left to the ravages of starvation.
- b. Josephus paints some of the most graphic pictures of that famine. He recounts how children took food from the father's mouths, and how parents did the same to their offspring. In one especially painful account, a woman kills her child and roasts it for food (*Wars*, Book VI,3:4)

- c. Old Testament parallels abound, especially in Ezekiel during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.E. (Ezekiel 5, 6, 7, 12, 14). The prophet Jeremiah, also a witness to that siege, writes about it in chapter 14.
- d. These texts from the Old Testament prophets are plainly in mind when John gives his account of the events on his horizon, leaving us to believe that *Rev* intends to draw a direct comparison between the first fall of Jerusalem and this one, some 657 years later.

8. The Fourth Seal: Death and the Grave (6:7-8)

- a. *Rev* borrows language from the Ezekiel and Jeremiah texts above when it says, "They were given authority over one fourth of the earth (the land), to kill with the sword and feminine and disease and with wild animals". Consider some examples:
 Ezekiel 5: 16 When I shoot at you with my deadly and destructive arrows of famine, I will shoot to destroy you. I will bring more and more famine upon you and cut off your supply of food. 17 I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will leave you childless. Plague and bloodshed will sweep through you, and I will bring the sword against you. I the LORD have spoken."
 Ezekiel 6: 11 "This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Strike your hands together and stamp your feet and cry out "Alas!" because of all the wicked and detestable practices of the house of Israel, for they will fall by the sword, famine and plague.
 Ezekiel 7:14-15 14 Though they blow the trumpet and get everything ready, no one will go into battle, for my wrath is upon the whole crowd. 15 "Outside is the sword, inside are plague and famine; those in the country will die by the sword, and those in the city will be devoured by famine and plague.
 Ezekiel 14:21 "For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments-- **sword and famine and wild beasts and plague-- to kill its men and their animals!**
- b. *Rev* wants the reader to understand, as did Jesus in his Olivet Discourse, that the events of the four horsemen point to the fall of Jerusalem. Their arrival is by his instruction and are his judgment on the failed leadership of both city and Temple, as had been true in the days of Ezekiel and Jeremiah. The language is the same and the ideas are the same.

9. The Fifth Seal: The Martyrs (6:9-11)

- a. But not all who die are under God's judgment. Many die as the innocent victims of a war they did not choose. Even Josephus chronicles the story of "Jesus, son of Ananus" who some four years before the war (62 C.E.) began to prophecy about the fall of Jerusalem, using the familiar "woe" language we find in the Old Testament and in the words of Christ. The Jewish rulers brought him, as they had brought Christ, to the Roman procurator for flogging. He was eventually killed in the war by an errant stone (*Wars*, VI,5:3). Historians set the total death count at over one million during a seven year period which began in 66 and ended in 73 C.E. (*Wars*, footnote to VI,9:3 in Whiston's translation).
- b. But there was also Nero's persecution of the Christians in the West and John himself witnesses the effects of that persecution by way of threat to himself, the churches in Asia Minor and the coming persecutions he cites in the Letters. By pinning his burning of Rome on them, Nero fills up the cup of divine judgment against himself, resulting in his own death. But it will also contribute to the chaos within the Empire during the year of the three emperors, when civil war and bloodshed breaks out in Rome and will not end until Vespasian becomes Emperor. Rome and the Jewish leadership both bear guilt for the death of Jesus, the death of the martyrs, and the excesses against the Jews during the siege and burning of Jerusalem. Innocents die in each case and it is their voices we hear beneath the altar.
- c. But what altar? The reference to blood suggests the altar of burnt offering which stood in the court of the Temple, where fire burned constantly and blood flowed freely, consuming the animal sacrifices. But during the siege it became the altar where the Passover lamb was offered by some 2.7 million pilgrims who had arrived before the siege began. Josephus tallies the number of sacrifices at 256,500 (*Wars*, VI,8:4). One can only imagine the amount of blood beneath the altar! In a sort time, human blood would commingle with it. Against this background, John's vision takes on new meaning. The martyrs are the new sacrifice of the new people of God in the New Temple of God (not this one). That's why they are "beneath the altar". This altar is not in Jerusalem alone, but extends throughout the Empire where the witnesses to Jesus pay the supreme price for their faith. Once more, we see the imagery of Temple being applied outside the Jerusalem Temple. Like the lampstands, the altar stands in the New

Sanctuary God is raising up in the world. Tertullian later wrote, "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church".

- d. Only God can avenge the martyrs and that is why they cry to him. The martyred dead know that their fellow brothers, still living, will not take up the sword, because this was not Jesus' way. Instead, they seek justice from the one who was living, but died, and is alive forever more. Their white robes are God's gift of eternal resurrection life, even as they await others who will join them in their glorified state. This is their true vindication.

10. The Sixth Seal: Cosmic Signs and the Hiding (6:12-17)

- a. This text may pose a problem for the view we are developing. How can we possibly imagine such cosmic disturbances happening in 70 C.E.? Once more, the contemporary literature of Josephus and Roman historians shed light on these phenomena. So does the Old Testament:
 - b. Isaiah 13:10 The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light.
Joel 2:10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 11 The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?
Joel 3:14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. 15 The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine.
These prophets write with respect to events on their own horizons, using language that is well-understood by the readers. It is true, this is end of the world language, but not as we might imagine. Someone's world is ending, whether Israel's or Rome's. The images used for the sixth seal come from a cache of symbols, ready at hand, from the Old Testament prophets. Jesus used them. Even Peter used them of the events witnessed at Pentecost (see Acts 2) when wind and fire appeared as signs of the Holy Spirit.
- c. Josephus, on the eve of Jerusalem's fall, uses similar language of unusual signs taking place.
 - 1) He writes of a great number of false prophets who claimed that God would end the siege and deliver his people (compare Jesus' Olivet predictions).
 - 2) In one passage he recounts, "A star resembling a sword, which stood over the city, and a comet, that continued a whole year" (*Wars*, VI,5:3)
 - 3) During the Passover, prior to the fall of Jerusalem, "so great a light shone round the altar and the holy house, that it appeared to be bright day-time; which light lasted for half an hour" (5:3).
 - 4) The eastern gate opened of its own accord, though bolted shut.
 - 5) "Before sun-setting, chariots and troops of soldiers in their armor were seen running among the clouds, and surrounding of cities."
 - 6) At Pentecost, he writes, "they felt a shaking, and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a sound as of a great multitude, saying, 'Let us remove hence'."
- d. Tacitus, a Roman historian (and a pagan), documents that "Prodigies had occurred...In the sky appeared a vision of armies in conflict, of glittering armor. A sudden lightening flash from the clouds lit up the Temple. The doors of the holy place abruptly opened, a superhuman voice was heard to declare that the gods were leaving it, and in the same instant came the rushing tumult of their departure" (*The Histories*, V:13).
- e. When the Romans breached the walls and went through the city, they found some Jews hiding in caverns beneath the city.
- f. These historical citations help us understand the fear and terror felt by those who underwent the siege and its conclusion. When the Temple fell, the world of Second Temple Judaism came to an end. Many, including Josephus, believed what happened was the judgment of God. "For the great day of their wrath has come, and who will be able to survive?", are the words of the sixth seal.
- g. That is the ominous question: "Who will be able to stand?" It is the purpose of chapter 7 to answer it.

The Remnant Who Will Survive (7:1-16)

1. Is chapter seven an interlude to the flow of the sixth seal? Some scholars want to isolate its message from the opening of the seven seals. But the language and context of the whole passage (6:1-8:1) argue against

this artificial separation. The embattled residents of Jerusalem have just cried out, "Who can stand?" Earlier, the martyrs cried who "How Long?" These are large and important questions in the text, deserving comprehensive treatment. *Rev* does not disappoint. If anything, this chapter ties together many themes to answer the pressing question, "Who then remains as the People of God?" Once Jerusalem is fallen, the old age and its powerful Jewish symbols (Temple, land, priesthood) have been taken from the earth. What or who can be left?

2. The Old Testament prophets always received a word of hope whenever they received a word of judgment. The way that "hope" was expressed took the form of "remnant theology". While God might destroy in judgment, not all would be destroyed.
 - a. Remnant language is as old as Joseph and his brothers in Egypt, where he addressed them this way: Genesis 45:7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a **remnant on earth** and to save your lives by a great deliverance.
 - b. When Hezekiah, king of Judah, fears the fall of Jerusalem to the Assyrians, he still holds forth hope: 2 Kings 19:4 It may be that the LORD your God will hear all the words of the field commander, whom his master, the king of Assyria, has sent to ridicule the living God, and that he will rebuke him for the words the LORD your God has heard. Therefore pray for the **remnant that still survives**." This theme continues in 19:30-31 where it becomes a real promise from God.
 - c. One additional passage from Isaiah will illustrate the pervasive "remnant" theme from the Old Testament:
Isaiah 10: 20 In that day the remnant of Israel, the survivors of the house of Jacob, will no longer rely on him who struck them down but will truly rely on the LORD, the Holy One of Israel. 21 A remnant will return, a remnant of Jacob will return to the Mighty God. 22 Though your people, O Israel, be like the sand by the sea, only a remnant will return. Destruction has been decreed, overwhelming and righteous.
 - d. Paul adds his own words to this in Romans 11:5-6:
So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace. 6 And if by grace, then it is no longer by works; if it were, grace would no longer be grace. He goes on to add that though Israel has "stumbled", it has not fallen without recovery, but God has taken opportunity to expand his people through including Gentiles among them. He then declares, "All Israel will be saved" (11:26), referring to both Jew and Gentile as part of the people of God.
3. Now we come to Revelation 7 where two distinct groups of people are described:
 - a. **The Jewish People who are the remnant of ethnic Israel, listed by tribe, enumerated in a census list format, and "sealed" by God as his own. This seal is not protection from death (remember the martyrs of the fifth seal), but marks them out as his own people. (Revelation 7:1-8)**
 - 1) This same image is found in the Old Testament prophecy of Ezekiel (chapter 9).
 - 2) Paul refers to God's seal of ownership on us, namely, the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:22) "guaranteeing what is to come". See also Ephesians 1:13.
 - 3) Jesus was Jewish and the first followers of Jesus were Jewish. And they became the apostles, evangelists, missionaries, and leaders of the early Christian community. Paul saw his role as Jewish apostle to the Gentiles, in fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.
 - 4) *Rev* is making clear that God has called out from ethnic Israel his remnant, numbered them and sealed them.
 - 5) John tells us he "heard" the number sealed: 144,000. Jewish numerology would interpret that number as 12 x 12 x 1000. Whether this number is literal or symbolic has little bearing on the text. The Angels holding the four winds (sources of coming judgment) are restrained from judging Israel until God has sealed their remnant --consistent with the Old Testament prophets, Jesus' own words, and the teaching of the New Testament about the formation of the Church.
 - 6) God "knows those who are his" and marks them as his "servants".
 - 7) The future of God's covenant people of the Old Testament is secured by this sealing from God. It was secured in the first century, before Jerusalem fell (30-70 C.E.). And it is secure today.
 - b. **The Gentiles, from every nation, tribe, people and language, enhance the 144,000: this group is "too great to count" (7:9-16).**

- 1) From the very beginning of God's covenant with Abraham, it was his intention, all along, to include the Gentiles among his people. Those who were "not a people" have become part of his redeemed community. Peter states it well:
1 Peter 2: 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
- 2) When God sealed his remnant Israel and commissioned them as the New Israel, he created a powerful advance guard to bring the message to Gentiles. We could accurately state that the 144,000 became the first Hebrew Christian missionaries to the Gentiles. What John "saw", when he looked at his the vision, was the first-fruits of the Jewish-Christian mission to the world, the result of the first great missionary work of the Christian Church.
- 3) "A light to the nations", that's how the Old Testament described the coming of the Messiah. Paul took up that theme as the greatest Jewish Christian witness in the first century.
- 4) And that Jewish-Gentile mission continues until this day.
- 5) What are we told about the "vast crowd" of Gentiles?
 - (a) They stand before the throne and the Lamb (Note: they are not kept segregated, as in the old Temple "court of the Gentiles").
 - (b) They are clothed in white (victors, priests, redeemed)
 - (c) They hold palm branches (they enter into the worship of the people of God)
 - (d) Their very presence before the throne leads all of heaven to break out in worship (This is still the Worship Scroll!)
 - (e) They experience their own "great tribulation" (Apparently not only Jerusalem will face suffering, but also the newly redeemed Gentiles who comprise many of John's Seven Churches)
 - (f) The blood of Jesus, the Lamb, has made them clean (No longer considered those filthy *goyim*)
 - (g) They are now part of the New Temple of God
 - (h) God lives in their midst and spreads his tabernacle over them.
 - (i) God provides for them as their Shepherd (They are the "other sheep" Jesus described to his disciples in John 10 who belong to the one fold and one Shepherd).

The Seventh Seal: Silence in Heaven (8:1)

1. The results of opening the sixth seal have been surprising. When it appeared that the world was coming to an end, suddenly God announces "Stop!" And then proceeds to seal his remnant people and reveal to John that the people of God, in spite of these judgments on Israel, still has a bright future. God will not destroy all of ethnic Israel, but will seal the remnant. Then, in a surprising new twist to the story, God makes clear that his people now include Gentiles as well. What looked like a calamity of dreadful proportions has been turned to a great triumph for the People of God.
2. The fall of Jerusalem is not the end. But it marks a new beginning.
3. Perhaps this is why the seventh seal announces "silence". Somehow the vision of chapter 7 is the answer to the great questions raised by seals one through six. Rather than announce seal seven before the vision of chapter 7, *Rev* opts to let us see the vision, understand its meaning, and then make it clear that the seventh seal is now open.
4. Heaven's holy hush follows.
 - a. This is reminiscent of a familiar text: "The Lord is in his Holy Temple. Let all the world be silent before him" (Habakkuk 2:20)
 - b. We are also reminded of this text: Deuteronomy 27:9 "Then Moses and the priests, who are Levites, said to all Israel, 'Be silent, O Israel, and listen! You have now become the people of the LORD your God.'"
 - c. In numerous texts, silence represents coming judgment. It has the meaning of "awe" as God's people stand on the threshold of the wrath of God (Zechariah 2:13; Psalm 31:17; Isaiah 47:5; Ezekiel 27:32, among others). The Jewish commentaries also make this connection, as do the Dead Sea Scrolls.
 - d. The Jewish people were taught that there was silence at the moment of Creation, and that there will be such silence before final judgment. They also associated this with the Exodus when God both judged Egypt and redeemed Israel at the same time. The mystery of both is awe-inspiring, leaving heaven speechless.

- e. During the events leading up to 70 C.E., when the Romans under Vespasian were about to strike the city, Nero dies and Rome is in chaos. This prompts Vespasian to break off the attack, remove troops and withdraw for a time while he returns to Rome to become its Emperor. History reveals that this pause in military action enabled Jews and Christians alike to leave the city and seek safety elsewhere. It's hard not to see the connection. Though judgment was coming on Jerusalem, God's hand of protection so ordered the events of history, that the brief interruption allowed escape for many of his people. This is consistent with the vision of chapter 7.
- f. But there may be more here. Silence was part of the daily liturgy in the Temple and parallels the sequence of action in Revelation:
 - 1) Trimming of the lamps (1-3)
 - 2) Slaying of the sacrificial lamb (5)
 - 3) Pouring the blood of the lamb at the base of the altar (6)
 - 4) Offering incense during a period of silence and prayer (8)
 - 5) Burnt offering and drink offering, when the trumpets were blown (16)
 - 6) Singing of Psalms (19)
- g. Half-an-Hour: Marks the brevity and "crisis" nature of the moment. This suggests more is coming and the reader should expect it "shortly".

The Worship Scroll: Trumpets, Temple and Testimony: (8:2-11:18)

Introduction and Background

1. The lengthy section of the Worship Scroll before us extends from 8:2 through 11: 18. It follows the period of "silence in heaven", noted in 8:1. This "pause" between the opening of the Seven Seals and the sounding of the "Seven Trumpets" fits well into the worship pattern found in the daily service of the Temple until its fall in 70 C.E. (see our previous study). It also parallels the suspension of hostilities by Vespasian as he returns to Rome and reassigns his son, Titus, as the commander of the armies in Israel.
2. Before the trumpets are sounded, an angel appears before the heavenly "golden altar" of incense, located before the throne of God, and offers up the incense offering "together with the prayers of the saints".
 - a. These prayers were recorded in 6:9-11 at the opening of the fifth seal and took the form of a petition for God to fulfill his justice on their behalf, in light of their martyrdom. They contained the plaintiff cry, "How Long?"
 - b. This new scene shows that the prayers of God's people are actually offered up daily in the heavenly temple. This is important to those reading John's *Rev*, since very soon the earthly Temple and its earthly service of prayer will be interrupted when the Romans destroy it in 70 C.E..
 - c. Just as God preserves a "remnant people" (see previous study of chapter 7) after national Israel undergoes judgment, so now he preserves and enhances the worship of his people in his heavenly sanctuary. From our study of chapters 4-5 we have seen how worship happens continuously in this "temple above" and is made possible because the Lion who is the Lamb was slain and raised from the dead.
 - d. But the same angel fills his incense censor with fiery coals and "hurls" them to the earth. This symbolic action results in "thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake" on earth. It also is the trigger for the sounding of the Seven Trumpets.
3. Several Old Testament themes are background to the scene setup by these opening verses.
 - a. General Parallels
 - 1) God's judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah which follows the intense prayers of Abraham on behalf of the righteous members of his family. "Will God destroy the righteous with the wicked?" is the patriarch's question to God in (Genesis 18:25a) followed by his even stronger affirmation "Will not the judge of all the earth do the right thing?" (Genesis 18:25b). Then the Lord rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah--from the Lord out of the heavens. Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities--and also the vegetation in the land...dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace. So when God destroyed the cities of the plain, he remembered

Abraham, and he brought Lot out of the catastrophe that overthrew the cities where Lot lived" (Genesis 19:24-26, 28-29).

- 2) The situation of Israel while in Egyptian slavery led them to cry out to God for help (Exodus 2:23) with the result that God heard them, sending Moses and the ten plagues to judge Egypt and set them free. The plagues included bodies of water turning to blood, frogs, gnats, flies, plague on livestock, boils, hail, locusts, darkness and finally, the death of firstborn. The event which climaxes these plagues is the Passover (Pesach) with the lamb slain, its blood placed on the entrances to Hebrew dwellings to protect them from the passing of the "death angel" who spared them, but not the Egyptians. What follows these momentous events is the crossing of the Red Sea, the drowning of Pharaoh's pursuing army, and the beginning of the 40 year wilderness experience.

b. Trumpets (Shofar ram horns)

- 1) The trumpets are really "shofar" horns, made from ram's horns and capable of very loud sounds.
- 2) Such horns were used for a number of things, including 1) calling people to special assemblies, 2) signaling movements during a military campaign (Judges 3:27; 6:34, 3; 2 Samuel 2:28) 3) raising an alarm in the face of danger (1 Samuel 13:3), 4) punctuating acts of worship (Psalm 150:3), 5) announcement for the 12 tribes to break up the camp and move on (see Numbers 10:5), 6) coronation of a new king (1 Kings 1:34, 39, 41; 2 Kings 9:13;), to name the most common. The sounds of the shofar could be long blasts, repeated fast bursts, or short blasts, each having a different meaning.
- 3) Once in the Sinai desert, God's people encamp before Mount Sinai but were not allowed to approach it until God "came down on the third day" (Exodus 19:11), and his coming would be announced "when the ram's horn sounds a long blast" (19:13). The we read the following account, just before God gives the ten commandments to Moses:

Exodus 19:16-19 On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently, 19 and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

- 4) Later, when God gives instructions to Moses about proper forms of worship, he commands the observance of a "sacred assembly" on the first day of the seventh month (Tishri) to be announced by the blowing of the shofar (Leviticus 23:24). This is called the "Feast of Trumpets" and corresponds to Rosh Hashanah, the beginning of the Jewish civil New Year in the fall, marking the end of the grape and olive harvests. It is the first feast after the summer months and climaxes on the tenth day of the month with the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) (Leviticus 23:26-32), a day of national repentance, fasting and atonement. During Yom Kippur of every 49th year the shofar is also sounded (25:9) to announce "liberty throughout the land", including release from debts and servitude, and the arrival of the "year of jubilee". Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles is celebrated between the 15th and 21st days, commemorating that Israel lived in tents on the way from Egypt to Canaan (23:33-44).
- 5) Once in Canaan, Israel faces its first challenge: Jericho, a walled, strategic city, gateway to Israel's conquest of the land. Joshua 5:13-6:27 chronicles the details, including the following: "March around the city once with all the armed men. Do this for six days. Have seven priests carry trumpets of ram's horns in front of the ark. On the seventh day, march around the city seven times, with the priests blowing the trumpets. When you hear them sound a long blast on the trumpets, have all the people give a loud shout; then the wall of the city will collapse and the people will go up, every man straight in" (Joshua 6:3-5). In some clarifying verses, Joshua reminds them to blow the trumpets, but not utter a war-cry until the seventh day (6:10). On that day, Joshua commanded them, "Shout! For the Lord has given you the city!" (6:16).
- 6) The prophets emphasize the role of the shofar as a warning signal to prepare the people of God for battle or to call them to rescue. Some examples illustrate this understanding:
Isaiah 18:3 All you people of the world, you who live on the earth, when a banner is raised on the mountains, you will see it, and when a trumpet sounds, you will hear it.
Isaiah 27:13 And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the LORD on the holy mountain in Jerusalem.

Isaiah 58:1 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.

Jeremiah 4:5 "Announce in Judah and proclaim in Jerusalem and say: 'Sound the trumpet throughout the land!' Cry aloud and say: 'Gather together! Let us flee to the fortified cities!'

Jeremiah 4:19-21 Oh, my anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain. Oh, the agony of my heart! My heart pounds within me, I cannot keep silent. For I have heard the sound of the trumpet; I have heard the battle cry. 20 Disaster follows disaster; the whole land lies in ruins. In an instant my tents are destroyed, my shelter in a moment. 21 How long must I see the battle standard and hear the sound of the trumpet?

Jeremiah 6:1-2 "Flee for safety, people of Benjamin! Flee from Jerusalem! Sound the trumpet in Tekoa! Raise the signal over Beth Hakkerem! For disaster looms out of the north, even terrible destruction. 2 I will destroy the Daughter of Zion, so beautiful and delicate.

Jeremiah 6:17 17 I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.'

Hosea 8:1 "Put the trumpet to your lips! An eagle is over the house of the LORD because the people have broken my covenant and rebelled against my law.

Joel 2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand—

Joel 2:15-17 Blow the trumpet in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. 16 Gather the people, consecrate the assembly; bring together the elders, gather the children, those nursing at the breast. Let the bridegroom leave his room and the bride her chamber. 17 Let the priests, who minister before the LORD, weep between the temple porch and the altar. Let them say, 'Spare your people, O LORD. Do not make your inheritance an object of scorn, a byword among the nations. Why should they say among the peoples, 'Where is their God?'"

4. We have now seen that a rich biblical source lies behind the Seven Trumpets section of the Worship Scroll. One aspect is the sacred Jewish year with its cycle of feasts. As noted above, the blowing of the trumpets signaled the arrival of the fall civil New Year, the Day of Atonement and finally the Feast of Tabernacles.
 - a. All of these feasts falls in the month of Tishri, coincidentally, the seventh month when the last harvests are brought in (grape and olive) and Israel shares in the blessings of God's provision of tent-residences in the wilderness.
 - b. In addition these three feasts follow a period of festival silence during the summer months (compare Revelation 8:1) when only the weekly Sabbath is observed. Before this "summer silence", the 6th day of the third month (Sivan) marked the celebration of the Feast of Weeks, also known as Pentecost, marking the giving of the Law on Sinai and, for Christians, the giving of the Holy Spirit. Prior to this feast was Passover on the 14th day of the 1st month (Nisan), Unleavened Bread (15th), and First-fruits (beginning the barley harvest) on the 21st day.
 - c. In chart form, note the temporal relationships:

Feast Name	Month	Revelation Allusions Thus Far
1. Passover and Unleavened Bread (Pesach and HaMatzah): Nisan 14-15	1	Christ the Passover Lamb (5)
2. Early First Fruits (Sfirat HaOmer): Nisan 21	1	Remnant First-fruits (7)
3. Feast of Weeks-Latter Firstfruits (Shavuot): Sivan 6	3	Scroll Opened (6-8)
4. Feast of Trumpets (Rosh Hashanah): Tishri 1	7	Seven Trumpets (8-11)
5. Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur): Tishri 10	7	Service at the Altar in 8:2
6. Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot): Tishri 15-21	7	TBA
7. Feast of Lights (Hanukkah): Kislev 25	9	Seven Lampstands (1-3)
8. Purim (deliverance at Esther's time): Adar 14	12	TBA

- 1) The chart lists the names and dates of the prominent feasts of the Hebrew year.
- 2) Revelation makes clear allusions to these in various places, sometimes more than once.
- 3) The current section relates to the Tishri feasts, appropriately in the seventh month, yet a New Year month, as God begins to make all things new.
- 4) Key Idea: Just as God's people kept the sacred year in honor His Lordship over their time, so Revelation proclaims that all of history, God's time ("his story"), is under his control and nothing happens without his permission or guidance.

The First Six Trumpets: The Response of God to the Prayers of His People for Vindication **The First Four Trumpets:**

1. God's people are held captive in a world that stands against them, whether Roman or Jewish.

- a. Like Abraham's family in Sodom and Gomorrah and like the children of Israel in Egypt, the people of God are in captivity to human powers in this world.
 - b. God wants to set them free and does so by redeeming them from sin and death through the offering of his Lamb, slain and risen from the dead, the Passover sacrifice which makes possible a new exodus.
 - c. From heaven's point of view, that exodus has already happened, for the twenty-four elders, the 144,000 and the great crowd all stand before the throne and worship him (chapter 7).
 - d. The earthly form of God's people, however, face the real life political bondage imposed by Nero's persecution, the shadow of Emperor worship, and the hostility of Second Temple Judaism to the message about Jesus. But for national Israel, who did not accept Jesus as Messiah, that slavery was even more severe.
 - e. Saint Paul summed up the situation well with his own analysis in Galatians 4:
 22 For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the slave woman and the other by the free woman. 23 His son by the slave woman was born in the ordinary way; but his son by the free woman was born as the result of a promise. 24 These things may be taken figuratively, for the women represent two covenants. One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: This is Hagar. 25 Now Hagar stands for Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children. 26 But the Jerusalem that is above is free, and she is our mother. 27 For it is written: "Be glad, O barren woman, who bears no children; break forth and cry aloud, you who have no labor pains; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband." 28 Now you, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise. 29 At that time the son born in the ordinary way persecuted the son born by the power of the Spirit. It is the same now. 30 But what does the Scripture say? "Get rid of the slave woman and her son, for the slave woman's son will never share in the inheritance with the free woman's son." 31 Therefore, brothers, we are not children of the slave woman, but of the free woman.
 - f. That slavery would intensify for national Israel, but the New Israel, the Messianic People of God would be newly born out of this historical crisis.
2. God was about to summon his Trumpet Judgments against all who imperiled his New People, his New Humanity.
 - a. As the censor of burning coals is cast into the earth, the seven angels sound their trumpets: trumpets which announce liberty to the captives but judgment for the captors.
 - b. Jewish literature believed there were, in fact, seven angels who did the bidding of God under such circumstances. Daniel and the New Testament identified two: Gabriel and Michael. The full list follows here: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Saraquel, Gabriel, Remiel (1 Enoch 20:1-8, part of the Jewish non-canonical literature).
 3. Each of the first four trumpets draw their language from the Exodus plagues. As such, they send a powerful, coded message to the readers: God is bringing down judgment on the captors of his people and is signaling deliverance for the captives. Even as Israel was shielded from the ravages of the Egyptian plagues, so God's people, sealed by him, will not fall under his judgment along with the rest of the world.
 4. The first four trumpets announce "one-third" as the extent of their judgment. This is more than the "one-fourth" seen in the case of the first four seals in chapter 6. The trumpets reveal an intensification of the impact felt by the world now falling under God's direct judgment. But still, the judgment is not entire, but partial, revealing the mercy of God, waiting on the exodus of the remnant people from the doomed city of Jerusalem. Similar language appears in Ezekiel 5:2 and Zechariah 13:8-9, but the ratios are reversed: two-thirds perishes, while one-third remains. The only exception in *Rev* is the grass which is all burned up. Scripture compares humanity, as a whole to grass in its susceptibility to dying: 1 Peter 1:24-25 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you. It may be that the text is communicating the idea that although these judgments are, at first, on Israel alone, they will reach, in time, to all humanity, a fact revealed as the book reaches its conclusion. In the end, this judgment has to do with all humankind, not just national Israel.
 5. These judgments, one through four, affect land, sea, water, and eventually, in the case of Trumpet Four, the heavenly bodies seen from the earth. It is as if the order of creation, described in Genesis 1, is being reversed, in a sort of "de-creation". What is John telling us? That the old creation is passing away and the new creation is dawning (see 2 Corinthians 5:17ff). Even as the shofar was blown on Rosh Hashanah to

welcome in the New Year, so also these trumpets, by decreeing the death of the old world, summon in the new one.

6. Commerce is impacted, as merchants are unable to sail their ships. This loss of economy results from the burning of "a huge mountain, burning with fire". Jeremiah 51:25 uses the same language to speak of Babylon, the nation which exiled and held captive the people of God. There God calls the captor "O, destroying mountain". Though God used Rome to judge his people, Rome's day is coming. Already, Rome has burned at the hands of its insane Emperor Nero. But sooner yet will it burn after his death as the forces of the Empire vie for power in the city of Rome. Equally applicable is the burning of Jerusalem, also called the "mountain of the Lord". The details of the fiery end of Jerusalem are recorded by Josephus (see Gentry, pp. 58-59).
 - a. Note: Revelation is truly the "Tale of Two Cities": Jerusalem and Rome. Each, to its own extent, persecuted the true followers of the Lamb. Both, in response to this injustice, will fall under the justice of God. This is the message of the Seven Trumpets.
 - b. And yet, out of this interplay of Jerusalem and Rome rises another city: The New Jerusalem whose future lies secure in the promises of God.
7. The Third Trumpet introduced the symbol of "Wormwood", a bitter herb which can render water poisonous if contaminated by it over a long period of time. The prophet Jeremiah wrote of how God would feed his people with wormwood as a form of judgment (Jeremiah 9:15; 23:15; 8:13-14). Because the leaders of Israel had poisoned her society with idol worship, God would judge them in kind.
 - a. Fresh water, in any case, is essential to life and its absence is the worse kind of famine.
 - b. Whereas *Rev* 6 spoke of famine in the opening of the third seal, here, an even more horrendous famine, that of water, overtakes the wicked.
8. Like the darkness in Egypt, during the plagues, for three days and nights, the Fourth Trumpet brings darkness, in part, as its judgment. Josephus witnessed such darkening during the burning of the city of Jerusalem. John has already cited the huge mountain burning with fire. Such fire belches up dense smoke, darkening the skies for days at a time, or filtering out the light.
 - a. Note: Eclipses occurred in 49 and 52 C.E., while Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79 C.E.
 - b. For future generations, reading *Rev*, such occurrences took on new meaning. Happening as this did close to the events witnessed by John's generation, they acquire significance as sign of God's judgments in the earth.
9. Gentry cites references from Josephus and secular history to document actual occurrences which parallel many of the details contained in the first four Trumpets (pp. 58-60).
10. These first four Trumpets affect the natural order and turn creation on its head. The next Trumpets are of a different order and are announced by an "eagle that was flying in midair".
 - a. "Woe, woe, woe": this is the both the medium and the content of the last three Trumpet judgments.
 - b. The eagle is, of course, the national symbol of Rome, carried on all its military standards.
 - c. But it is also the great Old Testament symbol of God, who carried Israel "on eagles wings" bringing her out of Egypt and "to myself". That text comes from Exodus 19:4 in the setting of Mount Sinai, the great mountain burning with the fire of God as he prepared to give the law to Moses.
 - d. Therefore, the flying eagle can mean deliverance for the true people of God, or it can mean judgment to those who are the enemies of God.

The Fifth Trumpet (9:1-12)

1. The third angel's shofar blast brought a star from the sky which poisoned the fresh waters. But this angel's trumpet sounds brings down a star with a much darker mission. We are no longer looking at natural disasters or the natural consequences of human warfare. What follows defies description with ordinary language, and so the seer employs symbols in his vision which seek to grasp, not the natural, by the supernatural order of things. And this will not be the last time a being fall from heaven in *Rev*, as we shall discover in our next study of *Rev* 12.
2. What is the meaning of this vision of the supernatural, the demonic? As the visions in this last half of the Trumpet judgments unfold, readers see more and more the Sovereignty of God over all things, not just

nature. They also come to see that the conflict they now experience is not due to ordinary nature alone, but to a war which has its origin, neither in Rome nor in Jerusalem, but from that primeval place John calls the "Abyss". Ancient Jewish sources, and some New Testament texts (Jude 6; 2 Peter 2:4) speak of the imprisonment of demonic spirits by God. In this passage, these beings are released from their prison.

- a. Apparently not all demons were imprisoned here, since Jesus encountered them during his public ministry.
- b. Or perhaps, they were released during his earthly ministry so that he could do battle with them and defeat them on behalf of his coming kingdom. On one occasion he cast out a Legion of them, casting them into a herd of pigs, driving them to their death over a precipice and sending the demons into the Abyss.
- c. During the fifth Trumpet, these beings are set loose on earth, not to harm the ecology, but to torment human beings:
 - 1) The sky is darkened by the smoke rising from the place of their imprisonment.
 - 2) They have the function of locusts
 - 3) They have the sting of a scorpion
 - 4) They do not harm the ecology
 - 5) They harm people who do not have the seal of God
 - 6) They do not kill, but torture these unsealed human beings
 - 7) The agony they bring is like the poison of a scorpion's sting
 - 8) The duration of their torment is five months
 - 9) Death eludes those who are stung
 - 10) They look like a cavalry of human kings with women's hair, lion's teeth, armored with iron, winged with speed like chariots.
 - 11) Their king: "the destroyer" (Abaddon, Apollyon)
- d. To describe this army of demonic beings, *Rev* employs language also used to describe Rome's most feared enemy to the east, on the border with Israel, the Parthians. Throughout all of Nero's reign as Emperor, they staged military adventures against the Romans in pursuit of secure borders. The Parthian empire occupied all of modern Iran, Iraq and Armenia, parts of Turkey, Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, and -for brief periods- territories in Pakistan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel and Palestine. The end of this loosely organized empire came in 224 CE, when the last king was defeated by one of their vassals, the Persians of the Sassanid dynasty.

While it would be tempting for the Jews and the Romans of the first century to imagine that their real foe lies to the east, in Parthia, John's *Rev* seems to be saying something quite different: the real enemy is the army of Satan, the forces of demons unleashed in the world.
- e. But for the followers of the Lamb, perhaps the words of Paul are more appropriate:

Ephesians 6:10-18 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. 11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. 13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. 14 Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, 15 and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. 17 Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. 18 And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.
- f. *Rev* reveals to the reader, then, the true nature of this struggle in the world. Followers of Jesus faced the dual challenge of Rome and Jerusalem in their efforts to spread the word of the gospel and live the life of Jesus, following the Lamb wherever he goes. It would be tempting, no doubt, to take up arms like their Jewish brothers against the Romans. Or, in the face of Jewish persecution, take the side of Rome against Jerusalem. Instead, John reminds them that the devil is neither Rome nor Jerusalem, but the dark forces of Satan set loose in the world. Like Jesus among the Gerasenes (Mark 5:1ff), these followers of Jesus are to cast out Satan and replace his unjust rule with the message of the kingdom.

- g. Even Josephus, when he describes the events unfolding within the Temple courts during the rebellion against Rome, spares no criticism of the horrendous actions of the Zealot leaders (see Gentry, 60-63). The sins committed by these would-be rulers of a future independent Israel merit the judgment of God, he writes. Although Josephus never mentions the "demonic" nature of these crimes, John's *Rev* makes clear that the events revealed by the fifth Trumpet have their origin in the Abyss.

The Sixth Trumpet: 9:13-11:13

1. If by now the reader has forgotten the origin of these Trumpet judgments, *Rev* reminds him that they come from the altar that is before God. These judgments are in response to the prayers of chapter 6, mingled with the incense of the angel before the golden altar in chapter 8.
2. While the demon armies described in the previous Trumpet rise from the Abyss, the army now revealed to John is associated with the river Euphrates where Four Angels are bound but kept ready for this point in history. It should be noted that the Romans normally kept four legions on the Syrian border adjacent to the River. And perhaps even more interesting is that the Romans used four legions in the war to put down the Jewish rebellion.
3. Clearly the Trumpets connect with real history: the history experienced by John's readers. Real armies fought flesh and blood battles both in the contest to restore the Pax Romana in Judea, and in the effort to restore civil rule in Rome. The years 69-70 were crucial for Jerusalem and for Rome. More importantly, John's *Rev* tells us God himself was at work, waging a different kind of war against the powers of darkness and evil let loose "for this very hour and month and year" (9:15). But this time, with the sixth Trumpet, the stakes are higher, for real human beings will die real deaths, consumed by "the plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur" that resulted from the massive army arrayed against humankind.
 - a. Is this army the same as the "locust" army described at the sounding of the fifth Trumpet? Has it merely acquired new leadership in the form of the "four angels bound at the Euphrates".
 - b. Why the Euphrates? Along with the Tigris, it was the River of ancient Babylon. So, once more we are led back to the Old Testament, in particular, the writings of the prophet Joel who compared the invading Babylonian armies to a locust plague. Our study would benefit from a simple quotation of that text, taken from Joel 2:

1 Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming. It is close at hand-- 2 a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was of old nor ever will be in ages to come. 3 Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste-- nothing escapes them. 4 They have the appearance of horses; they gallop along like cavalry. 5 With a noise like that of chariots they leap over the mountaintops, like a crackling fire consuming stubble, like a mighty army drawn up for battle. 6 At the sight of them, nations are in anguish; every face turns pale. 7 They charge like warriors; they scale walls like soldiers. They all march in line, not swerving from their course. 8 They do not jostle each other; each marches straight ahead. They plunge through defenses without breaking ranks. 9 They rush upon the city; they run along the wall. They climb into the houses; like thieves they enter through the windows. 10 Before them the earth shakes, the sky trembles, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine. 11 The LORD thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty are those who obey his command. The day of the LORD is great; it is dreadful. Who can endure it?
 - c. The closing words of that text take the reader back to the closing words of the sixth seal (6:17). And notice how Joel begins his prophecy: "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill". Consistent with the context of the Trumpet judgments, Joel uses language compatible with John's and connects these descriptions with the arrival of "The Day of the Lord". Like John's description of the armies of Trumpet 5 and 6, Joel speaks of "The Lord [who] thunders at the head of his army; his forces are beyond number, and mighty to obey his command." When John uses a number which seems to amount to 200 million, he plainly means to say "a number we cannot count". This is God's army, in the end, not Rome's or Jerusalem's, or the dreaded Parthians. Judgment day has arrived and God is in charge. This is D-day for the nations of the world, east and west.
 - d. Yet, Joel does not leave his reader hanging, any more than John's *Rev* paints a picture of only doom and gloom. He goes on to say: Joel 2:12-15 'Even now,' declares the LORD, 'return to me with all your heart, with

fasting and weeping and mourning.' 13 Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity. 14 Who knows? He may turn and have pity and leave behind a blessing-- grain offerings and drink offerings for the LORD your God. 15 **Blow the trumpet** in Zion, declare a holy fast, call a sacred assembly. Here is hope. As we saw in the festival pattern of *Rev*, so here as well. The Feast of Trumpets comes and the Day of Atonement cannot be far behind! It's a time to rend the heart and not the garments. Time to return to the Lord, for he is gracious and relents from sending calamity. Blow the Trumpet! What is this sacred assembly, this holy fast? It is the month of Tishri, Rosh Hashanah has come, Yom Kippur lies up ahead. Here is hope.

- e. But in John's account, "the rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands" (9:20), and the resulting list of sins primarily has to do with idol worship, magic, sexual immorality and thievery. For the sins of idolatry, God brought judgment on Israel in the Old Testament (the context of Joel's prophecy above). Within Israel, the Temple had assumed the status of an idol. Stephen's sermon in Acts 7 says as much. For Rome, the Emperor's role as god was on the rise and would soon become the testing ground for Christians who would refuse to accept his divinity. God's judgment in these six Trumpets fails to turn the hearts of those who stand in need of repentance.
 - 1) Note: Here is a direct parallel with the plagues against Egyptian before the Exodus. God's judgments served to "harden Pharaoh's heart", but did not persuade him until the death of the firstborn in the tenth plague.
 - 2) Reflection: God's judgments in *Rev* seem to mirror the form of covenant "curse" found in the Old Testament. Yet, these acts of punishment do not seem to have the desired effect. Is the Revelator trying to send a message to the reader, that judgment alone is insufficient to move the heart of sinful humankind? That God's "better way", under the new covenant, is to melt the hearts of the most hardened by the power of the gospel? Perhaps the book of *Rev* will answer this question in its remaining chapters.
4. "Angels of death": this might be an apt title for the messengers of the six Trumpets whose mission is recorded in chapters 8-9, just completed.
 - a. For the martyred saints, whose prayers are mingled with incense in 8:2, these judgments are vindication for the cries of 6:10. As for Israel in Egypt, so the day of liberation is at hand for all who are held captive by Rome and Jerusalem. Like Israel before the walls of Jericho, these trumpets announce the victory of the "overcomers", when the walls fall down. The feast of Trumpets and Yom Kippur are near at hand.
 - b. Yet these two chapters are grim, and their conclusion with the sixth blast of the shofar is unsatisfying to the reader who is looking for the happy ending. Might we not want to say, "What will it take to bring the world to repentance and end this day of judgment?"
 - c. The contents of chapters 10 and 11 offer reprieve and to them we now turn. Since 11:15 marks the sounding of the seventh Trumpet, I take this entire section as a unit and find no interludes within it. It belongs to the sixth Trumpet in much the same way chapter 7 belonged to the sixth seal.
5. The descent of the "Mighty Angel" coming down from heaven reveals he is more than a mere angel:
 - a. Robed in a cloud
 - b. Rainbow above his head
 - c. Face like the sun
 - d. Legs like fiery pillars
 - e. He holds a little scroll which is now open in his hand
6. Who can this one be but the Lord Himself, first revealed to John in chapter one, and then seen again in the heavenly throne room surrounded by the glory of God, holding a sealed scroll.
 - a. But now he comes down and plants his feet on land and sea. This is a powerful image, for land and sea have been the scene of much judgment. It is now time for the Son of God to take his place on the earth.
 - b. He comes with great promise, for the rainbow reminds us of the commitment of God to Noah after the flood: never again.

- c. He comes with the roar of a Lion (he is, after all, the Lion who is the Lamb, slain and risen). But his voice, resounding like the thunder, cannot be captured in writing. After all, thunder signals a coming storm, but the storm is quickly coming to an end, and there is no point writing about what is coming when it is now here.
7. The Mighty One come down from heaven swears an oath, in the fashion of the covenant oaths found in the Old Testament.
- a. By him
- 1) who lives for ever and ever
 - 2) Who created the heavens and all that is in them
 - (a) The earth and all that is in it
 - (b) The sea and all that is in it
- b. No more delay when the seventh trumpet, **the last trumpet** sounds
- 1) The mystery of God will be accomplished (reached its intended goal)
 - 2) The mystery revealed to the prophets (Daniel's prophecy spoke of such mysteries, and of course made reference to the "sealing of the book" which is now lying open in the hand of the mighty one from heaven.
- c. There is good reason for speaking about "the last trumpet", as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15: 1 Corinthians 15:51-57 Listen, **I tell you a mystery**: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- 52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trumpet**. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. 53 For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. 54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
- d. Paul's letters are in complete agreement with the words of the Might One, coming down from heaven, and in fact, he speaks often of the "mystery" once hidden, but now revealed in the gospel. These texts illustrate this idea:

Romans 11:25 I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

Romans 16:25-27 Now to him who is able to establish you by my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery hidden for long ages past, 26 but now revealed and made known through the prophetic writings by the command of the eternal God, so that all nations might believe and obey him-- 27 to the only wise God be glory forever through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Ephesians 1:9-10 And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10 to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment-- to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

Ephesians 3:2-11 Surely you have heard about the administration of God's grace that was given to me for you, 3 that is, the mystery made known to me by revelation, as I have already written briefly. 4 In reading this, then, you will be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, 5 which was not made known to men in other generations as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to God's holy apostles and prophets. 6 This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. 7 I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. 8 Although I am less than the least of all God's people, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for ages past was kept hidden in God, who created all things. 10 His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms, 11 according to his eternal purpose which he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Ephesians 5:32 This is a profound mystery-- but I am talking about Christ and the church.

Ephesians 6:19-20 Pray also for me, that whenever I open my mouth, words may be given me so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains. Pray that I may declare it fearlessly, as I should.

Colossians 1:25-29 I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness-- 26 the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints. 27 To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all

wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. 29 To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Colossians 2:1-3 I want you to know how much I am struggling for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not met me personally. 2 My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge

Colossians 4:3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.

1 Timothy 3:16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations (or Gentiles), was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

- e. Paul makes clear that the grand mystery, not fully revealed in the past, was God's secret plan to unite all things together in Christ. Though he had chosen Israel as his prototypic people, he had not thereby, unchosen the rest of his creation. Rather, the coming of the Messiah (Christ) was to accomplish the reconciliation of all things to himself. Paul affirmed it, but John's *Rev* also proclaims the accomplishment of the mystery.
 - 1) That is why the Might One who comes down from heaven stands on land and sea, thereby symbolizing the union of all things: heaven and earth, Jew and Gentile, God and his sinful creation.
 - 2) There is no more to be done. Covenant judgment has fallen, but redeeming grace is being proclaimed in the formation of the new covenant community. Paul preached it. Now *Rev* makes it clear (once again, read *Rev* 7).
8. What work remains for the prophet if the "mystery of God will be accomplished" during the blast of the seventh shofar?
 - a. Take the scroll, for it now lies open in the hand of the one standing on sea and land. There is good reason to take it, for it is no longer sealed and the messenger can proclaim it to the world.
 - b. Yet John is no disinterested messenger, no courtly herald on an official mission. He is completely and entirely involved in his message. He not only carries the message, he must also embody it: "Take it and eat it": this instruction was also given to Ezekiel (2:8-3:3) at a time when Israel was in exile and Jerusalem stood on the verge of destruction by Babylon. Ezekiel's prophetic call involved acting out the prophecy he proclaimed. It became a deep part of his own life.
 - c. John had two physiological reactions to "eating the scroll": sweetness in the mouth, but bitterness in the stomach.
 - 1) Clearly the message was one of judgment for the wicked and salvation for the faithful.
 - 2) Yet, there is great conflict here for the prophet. Can he rejoice in the "death of the wicked" when in fact God does not. Once again, let us listen to the OT prophet: Ezekiel 18:23 Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign LORD. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live? So John witnesses to the very heart of God. It is not enough to gloat over the judgment of God on Jerusalem or take pleasure in the troubles of Rome. If the prophet is truly representing the heart of God, he will experience a "mixed blessing" in his prophetic work. After all, the ones on whom judgment will fall are also ones for whom the Lamb of God has given his life.
 - 3) This tension between *ethos* (doing the right thing) and *pathos* (feeling the right way) was characteristic of the prophetic work. Abraham Heschel has written about this in his two volume work on the *Prophets*.
 - d. To John, the angel entrusts the sacred task of bringing this prophetic word.
 - 1) This word, he is told, has to do with "many peoples, nations, languages and kings."
 - 2) The Greek, translated "about" is *epi* and can also mean "with reference to" or "against" or "to".
 - 3) Prophets, by and large, bring messages which attract hostility. Remember Jesus' own words about Jerusalem as the city "which kills the prophets". Throughout his public career, Jeremiah was pressured by the royal court to tame down his message of coming judgment. His failure to comply led to his imprisonment.
 - 4) John stands in a similar situation. He receives a message from God which pertains to the whole world, Jew and Gentile alike, Hebrew and Roman alike. The message is severe and announces

coming judgment for those who do not turn from their sinful ways and accept the redemption of God.

- 5) No wonder his act of eating yields a double response within his body: 1) He delights in the word of God; 2) he dreads the human reaction.
- e. His first assignment as a re-commissioned prophet follows and his first task is marked by joy and sadness.
9. As chapter 11 opens, John may have felt he stepped back in time with Zechariah the prophet. Unlike the pre-exilic and exilic prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, Zechariah was a prophet of the post-exile and time of reconstruction.
 - a. To Zechariah was committed the task of proclaiming God's word to raise up again the Temple in Jerusalem, once destroyed by the Babylonians. Babylon no longer rules the world, but Persia does and it is friendly to the returning exiles.
 - b. Zechariah, the prophet, has as his two companions, Zerubbabel, the governor (the king-substitute) and Joshua, the priest. Together, they represent the leadership in Israel. Much of what Zechariah writes in his prophecy has to do with restoring to the remnant people their land, their Temple and their leaders.
 - c. But the task is difficult and many things stand in the way.
 - 1) There are opponents to the task within Israel.
 - 2) Sin exists among the people, including the priesthood.
 - 3) The surrounding nations don't want to see a successful nation rise in Israel again.
 - d. Zechariah has a number of visions which point in a different direction:
 - 1) God will bring the nations to Israel's aid and eventually the nations will worship with Israel in a restored Temple.
 - 2) Zerubbabel and Joshua need the endowment of God's spirit, the anointing of his oil so that together they can be the two lampstands, shedding light into the world of darkness around them. "Not my might nor by power but by my Spirit, says the Lord" (4:6).
 - 3) He sees a man with a measuring line who reports that a new city will one day rise in Jerusalem, but the number of people who need to live and worship there will be greater than the size of the city (2:1).
 - 4) God will one day come in his Messiah King and open a fountain of salvation in a restored city of God.
 - 5) God will be king of all the earth.
 - e. When John is handed a measuring rod and told to measure temple, altar and then count the worshippers, he could hardly help recalling Zechariah the prophet and marveling that God's mystery is now being revealed in and through what he is about to do. In what follows, John experiences things both sweet and bitter.
 - 1) The inner sanctuary and its worshippers are measured and counted. This is sweet, for it is a sign that the true people of God are sealed and have become part of the New Temple already established in heaven, but experienced in the worshipping community of Jesus on earth.
 - 2) The outer court is not measured but given up to the Roman armies who trample on it for 42 months (roughly 3 1/2 years, the length of the war until Roman destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple). This is bitter, for it means national Israel has come to an end.
 - 3) Power is given to "my two witnesses" whose ministry lasts 1260 days, clothed in sackcloth. John is told they come in the spirit of Zerubbabel and Joshua by referring to them as olive trees and lampstands, the same language found in Zechariah 4. This is sweet, for it means God's people are indeed "a kingdom and priests" (see chapter 1) and are active and empowered in spite of the reversals experienced by national Israel.
 - 4) Further, they are compared to the prophetic work of Moses and Elijah. This too is sweet for it means the prophetic work of God continues.
 - 5) But their witness, powerful though it be, must face the "beast from the Abyss", a creature which the reader has not yet meant, though John has seen other creature from the Abyss, fearsome and warlike. This new figure will be explained in chapter 13, so this is a foreshadowing in John's vision.

- (a) The Beast kills them, having overpowered them.
 - (b) They lie unburied (a true insult to a Jew) in the streets of "the great city"
 - (c) This "city" has two symbolic names: Sodom and Egypt, both places where judgment fell (see earlier comments in this study).
 - (d) This "city" is the place where their Lord was crucified, and so must be Jerusalem of national Israel, or places where national Israel exerts its influence in the Empire.
 - (e) Gloating and joy abounds at their death which silences their ministry for 3 1/2 days (a much shorter period of time, by comparison to their actual ministry). This is the life of the prophet who is without honor in his own country.
 - (f) But God breathes life back into them and they are taken "up in a cloud" to heaven, a Hebrew way of saying they are vindicated by God in the presence of their enemies. This is sweet.
- 6) Commentators over the centuries have spilled much ink trying to identify "two" people who fit the description of the witnesses described here. Yet, this is misguided, since the language combine many images to describe their work.
- (a) They are like the anointed ones in Zechariah, priest and king, in need of the Spirit to empower their work.
 - (b) They are like the prophets Elijah and Moses, confronting the oppressing powers around them and calling on the God of heaven to make himself known.
 - (c) But they are Christian witnesses nonetheless who live in the world of the first century, confronting the Beast who arises from the Abyss, paying dearly for their testimony.
 - (d) They are, on all accounts, the witnessing community already encountered in the fifth seal (chapter 6) who faces martyrdom and cries to God for vindication. When God breathes his life into them, that vindication comes.
 - (e) As we have noted before, "the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church" (Tertullian).
 - (f) And they are the witnessing community from that time until now.
- 7) A word about "time numbers". We will have more to say about the use of numbers like "42 months" and "1260 days" in our discussions of chapters 12 and 13. The three chapters, 11-13, show considerable interest in this time period.
- (a) There is good evidence that John's prophecy has in mind the events between 66 and 70 C.E. which we have referenced throughout this study. That timeframe satisfies the requirement of 3 1/2 years.
 - (b) Daniel, throughout his prophecy, spoke of similar numbers. When he did it was in contexts where this question loomed large: "How long until the end?" (compare Revelation 6:10). How long until all of this is finished. The number 3 1/2 is half of seven, the number of adequacy or completeness. It may well be this is in view when John is told about the 42 months and 1260 days.
- 8) In response to their treatment, at that very hour, an earthquake destroys a tenth of the city with the loss of life. Now a new twist to the tale: "The survivors (remnant) were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. With this, the "second woe", that is, the sixth Trumpet is completed.

The Seventh Trumpet: 11:15-18

1. This trumpet consists of a royal proclamation which fulfills the promise of chapter 10 that the mystery of God would be accomplished.
2. Heaven becomes noisy with worshipful sounds and a royal proclamation: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever" (11:15), words which have found their way into Handel's *Messiah*, and for good reason.
3. Once more the worship scenes of chapters 4, 5, and 7 return to the text, with the elders falling down before God. This time their praise takes this form:
 Revelation 11:17 We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, **the One who is and who was**, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

4. Notice that this time, God is no longer addressed as "the one who is to come". Once the mystery of God is accomplished, and all of creation is united in Christ, there is no more "future". Once God through Christ begins to reign, the future is already assured and can no longer be spoken of as having a separate existence.
 - a. The vision now speaks of the anger of the nations met by the wrath of God. Here is a play on words:
 - 1) Anger, in human terms, results from resentment and fear.
 - 2) Wrath, in divine terms, has nothing to do with human emotions, but proceeds from the pure holiness of God who cannot allow sin to continue in his creation.
 - b. The judgment of the living and the dead is here described in terms nearly recognizable by the Apostles' Creed.
 - 1) Judgment entails reward
 - 2) Judgment entails destruction
 - 3) True judgment does not discriminate between the small and great, but only regards those who reverence the name of God.
 - c. This, then, is the last trumpet.

The War Scroll: Signs in Heaven and on Earth: (11:19-15:4)

Introduction and Background

1. One mark of the "vision", the apocalypse, is its lack of strict chronology. *Rev* records its message much like the unfolding of a dream, with patches of plot and scenery appearing and disappearing throughout. We must remind ourselves how the vision began: John is taken into heaven to view "things after this". Whenever the vantage point of the prophet changes from earth to heaven, the way the vision unfolds also changes.
 - a. *Rev* operates within the framework of two spatial registers: upper and lower, heaven and earth. This is a bit like the difference between the way we see things as they actually happen and how we see them in our "mind's eye" after they happen. The mind is able to trace and retrace already experienced events almost at will, what IT specialists call "random access memory". The mental vision is not bound by the conventions of sequential time, while the sensory vision must obey that chronological constraint. Similarly, the "mind of God", revealed to John in his visions, does not necessarily present material apocalyptically in time order, but can jump backwards and forwards as needed to put the emphasis where it needs to be at that point in the story. *Rev* alternates between heaven and earth, and so its presentation of material is not necessarily on a timeline.
 - b. The section of *Rev* we now consider (11:19-15:4) begins a new "scroll" which we are calling simply "The War Scroll". This is an appropriate title because of the "conflict" which appears throughout this portion of *Rev*, climaxing with the establishment of the "New Heaven and the New Earth" (chapters 21-22). A battle is underway and its commencement involves key figures described in this section:
 - 1) The woman
 - 2) The dragon
 - 3) The man-child
 - 4) The earth (land)
 - 5) The beast from the sea
 - 6) The beast from the land
 - 7) The 144,000
 - c. John identifies within this part of his vision seven "signs" (Greek: *sēmeia*). The NLT translates this word "significant event". John's gospel uses the word for the seven "miracles with meaning" performed by Jesus.
 - 1) Three signs are "in heaven": 12:1; 12:3; 15:1
 - 2) Four signs are "on earth": 13:13-14; 16:14; 19:20
 - 3) The classical Greeks used this word to speak about the stellar constellations: these were more than just stars in the sky but pointed to real-world objects, such as Virgo, Pisces, Scorpio and the like.

- 4) Used in John's context, they call attention to the deeper significance of the images they use, and in this case, underscore the "deeper conflict" at work in the *Rev* plot.

The Ark in Heaven

1. *Rev* 11:19 introduces the beginning of the War Scroll by showing the reader that God's ark of the covenant is, in fact, now in heaven. Having disappeared at the time of the Babylonian captivity in 586 B.C.E., the ark remained an expectation during the years leading up to the coming of Jesus. Its reappearance would signal God's coming to living among his people once again in fulfillment of his gracious covenant (see Jeremiah 3:16-17). But it also served as a reminder that God would come to judge the wicked. The ark was always the lead component in battle throughout Jewish history. When John sees it in his vision, he is also told that the Temple now exists in heaven, consistent with the activities in chapter 11 where the outer, earthly temple is destroyed. Here is the assurance that God's heavenly Temple is in full operation, completed with the quintessential symbol of the throne, presence and covenant faithfulness of God, the ark.
2. The phenomena of lightning, thunder, hail and earthquake signal the "coming of God", as had been the case when he descended on Mount Sinai to give his Torah to Moses and Israel (Exodus 19).
3. The section which follows (12:1-15:4) contains a series of visions introduced by the words "and I saw" or "look!"
4. These sections underscore the deeper dimension of the conflict between the people of God and the world which has been played out in the previous eleven chapters. We now see the role of Satan in empowering earthly power structures, whether Roman or Jewish, in his battle for dominion in God's universe. We also see that Satan is not all-powerful, but that he must bow to the kingdom of Christ which has already begun to rule from heaven over the world.
5. To the followers of the Lamb, this is good news, for it encourages them to see the final victory while at the same time they are in a struggle with evil and are being tempted to compromise their faith under extreme intimidation by the satanic forces all around them.

The Woman and the Dragon (Chapter 12)

1. Curiously, the images of the woman and the dragon found in this section echo with themes found in pagan literature from various parts of the world. Yet the real source material is the Old Testament, starting with Genesis 3:15 where God foretells the history-long conflict between the woman and the serpent in which the "seed of the woman" eventually crushes the head of the serpent, while the serpent bruises the heel of the woman's offspring. *Rev* consistently equates serpent and dragon in a reptile picture of evil.
2. The woman's appearance, including the sun, moon, and star scenery, derives from Genesis 37:9 where the patriarch Joseph dreams of his future in terms of the very same images. Since he belongs to the Twelve tribal brothers of Israel, the transition to this text is not difficult. There are also suggestions of the Jewish Zodiac where Virgo appears as God's woman. Of course, *Rev* does not subscribe to the pagan notion that constellations control human affairs, but instead shows Christ holding the stars in his hands in chapter 1.
3. The crown of twelve stars has counterparts in *Rev* (2:10; 3:11, 4:4, 10; 14:14) where it refers to the sharing of rule by God's people in his kingdom. Accompanied by the sun and moon symbols, this transforms the image of the woman into a perfect representation of God's people, living in the light of his glory, bearing his glorious image (1:16; 10:1; 21:23; 22:5).
4. The woman, then, is the archetype for "the people of God". The Old Testament frequently mentions Israel as God's woman, both his holy spouse and his unfaithful wife. In the end of times, the prophets foresaw God's people restored as his faithful consort (Isaiah 52:2; 54:1-6; 61:10; 52:1-5, 11; 66:7-13). Saint Paul picks up the theme, as we have already seen in a previous study, of "the Jerusalem above...who is our mother" (Galatians 4:26-27, citing Isaiah 54:1). John uses similar "elect lady" language in 2 John 1, 5, along with 3 John 9. We know that Paul calls the church "the bride of Christ" (Ephesians 5:31-32). And, at the end of *Rev*, the vision of the fully glorified people of God shows them as "a bride adorned for her husband" (22:17; 21:2, 9). The Twelve tribes of Israel continue their existence as God's woman in the Twelve apostles of the Lamb.

5. The suffering of the woman, in the pangs of childbirth, corresponds to the Jewish idea of the "Messianic Woes" which would accompany the fulfillment of God's purpose in the last days. All forms of trial and tribulation already depicted in *Rev*, fit this metaphor. Jesus used such language about the believing Jewish community in John 16:19-22. Both *Rev* and the New Testament teaching about the Messianic suffering derives from Isaiah 26 and 66 where a woman in birth labor delivers a reborn nation of Israel.
6. As the days of Jesus' arrival in the world approaches, Judaism was in travail and suffering, longing for the coming of Messiah. Once he came, the community called into existence around him also shared in the suffering of their Lord both at the hands of failed Judaism and Rome.
7. The woman's suffering is interpreted in light on the second sign in the chapter: "the great red dragon", whose seven heads and ten horns prefigure ideas discussed later in the book, but not emphasized here. In ancient Israel, Pharaoh was depicted as such a mythical creature, an evil sea monster, pursuing the children of Israel as they left Egypt, heading for the Red Sea (Isaiah 30:7; 51:9; Ezekiel 29:3; 32:2-3, and others). The Hebrew word "Rahab", the sea monster, equates to Egypt and Babylon, the oppressors of Israel. In the end, Rahab meets defeat at the hands of God. In John's time, he is Satan, embodied in the forces of political power all around the people of God, including Rome.
8. The dragon's power is cosmic in scope, sweeping the stars down to earth with his tail. Jewish writers see references to Daniel 8 where the stars seem connected to earthly kings and rulers swept up in the evil conspiracy against God's people. Some writers see the stars as Satan's confederates in his original fall from heaven alluded to in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28. We know from reading Daniel that angels, good and evil, locked in combat for the future of the nations. In John's time, earthly powers conspired to do damage to the people of God, but they are not the only combatants as these visions show.
9. The dragon has a single purpose: to devour the child about to be born to the woman.
 - a. Throughout Hebrew history, the remnant offspring of the holy people were threatened by evil forces in the world, whether Egypt, Babylon, the Hellenistic Antiochus (defeated by the Maccabees) or Herod the Great, presumptive king of the Jews who tried to kill God's Messiah.
 - b. The most likely intention of this vision is the effort of Satan to destroy Jesus once the nation of Israel had given birth to him. The Virgin Mary embodied the holy nation in her role as his mother. Her travail did not end with his birth, but continued with her flight to Egypt and later with her suffering of soul at his cross. But the image of the woman is larger than Mary, since it encompasses the whole people of God who suffer as the kingdom comes to earth.
 - c. Through the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness, his combat with demons in his public ministry, and finally his suffering and death on the cross, the "man-child" confronts the dragon until the final triumph in his resurrection and ascension to heaven. The dragon fails to devour the child.
10. Now the woman becomes the "pilgrim people of God", living in the wilderness, much like ancient Israel after the Exodus. Her sojourn there is for 1260 days, a number we have seen in other forms and which finds its roots in Daniel where it symbolically comes to mean "for whatever time is left". We will have more to say about numbers in *Rev*, at the end of our studies. In this text, her "place" is prepared by God. To the first readers, this would come to mean the place called Pella where the Hebrew Christians would go to escape the scourge of the Jerusalem battleground in 70 C.E. This was the place Jesus told his followers to seek as refuge.
11. What happens on earth always has counterparts in heaven. This is the case with the dragon, who takes his battle heavenward, no doubt in pursuit of the ascended man-child. The battle scene, the first in this section of the War Scroll, shows the familiar figure of Michael the archangel who played a key role in battling the evil powers arrayed against Israel in events recorded by Daniel, particularly in Daniel 12. Some writers argue that Michael is really to be understood as a symbol for the risen and reigning Jesus who is now seated at God's right hand in heaven. If this is so, then once ascended, Jesus gains a victory over Satan who is forced out of heaven and is thrown down to earth.
 - a. Jesus alludes to the imminent defeat of Satan:
 John 12:31 Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.
 John 14:30 I will not speak with you much longer, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold on me,
 John 16:11 and in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned.

Mark 3:26 And if Satan opposes himself and is divided, he cannot stand; his end has come.
Luke 10:18 He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."

- b. Paul uses "triumph" language to describe the imminent end of Satan's power:
Romans 16:20 The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you.
 - c. Because of Jesus' defeat of Satan on the cross and in the resurrection, he is now crowned Lord of heaven and earth and cannot allow Satan any place in his kingdom. Once in heaven, a battle led to Satan's overthrow and this event inaugurated the kingdom of God. But it also resulted in a changed state of affairs on earth. In once clear sense, Satan was bound and cast to a confined place, earth, his prison.
12. The victory hymn is sung in 12:10-12 where the accuser of God's people no longer is permitted audience with the heavenly throne now occupied by Jesus. Heaven rejoices, along with its residents, the redeemed from all the ages, gathered around the throne. Yet, the consequences for earth are woeful and dire.
- a. Terror comes to land and sea "for the Devil has come down to you in great anger, and he knows he has little time". To paraphrase Satan's situation: he is a sore loser who, like a caged, trapped animal, cannot extend his influence beyond the borders of his earthly confinement. The heavenly kingdom is free of his power, but the earthly landscape must endure his rage.
 - b. The people of God do endure it and this vision gives the reader an insight into the cause of evil: the rage of Satan, defeated at the cross and the empty tomb, cast out of heaven and forced to vet his agenda on the restricted battlefield of the visible cosmos. Through the suffering and death of the martyrs, Satan's defeat intensifies, and his earthly temptation of the people of God continues to fail.
13. Seen collectively in the figure of the woman, God's people of the New Covenant live out their lives much like their counterparts in the Old Covenant: in the wilderness, carried there by God (see Exodus 19:4 where he carries Israel on eagle's wings; also, Deuteronomy 32:10-12). Protection from the dragon is afforded her and her offspring by God himself. Though the dragon throws the primeval sea at her as he did when Pharaoh pursued ancient Israel at the Red Sea, God will prove faithful and roll back the flood waters, rescuing her on the other side. Often the Old Testament employs water metaphors to describe an army spreading out in conquest. In one case, Daniel 9, the prophet is told that in the days of the Messiah, judgment will sweep away Jerusalem. In the case of the remnant people of God, that flood does not reach them, but is left behind inside the borders of Israel, while the remnant flees to a place of promised protection.
14. But though the New Israel escapes the "overwhelming flood" of the events around 70 C.E., Satan declares war on her offspring "who keep God's commandments and the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). This reference clearly pushes the activity of the dragon beyond the boundaries of the events in Judea and forward to the coming history of the people of God. The church will face the persecution of the dragon during its wilderness sojourn. Victory, not mere survival, happens because God's people remain faithful to God and to Jesus during this time.
15. To further his agenda against the newly formed people of God, the dragon will enlist the help of other confederates. The chapter which follows details that development and paints an even clearer picture of the drama being told by the War Scroll.

The Two Beasts (Chapter 13)

1. If the power of the sea thrown out like a flood at the people of God is insufficient to defeat them, the dragon intends to conjure up even more formidable foes. He plants himself like a wizard on the shore of the sea and summons forth a monster like himself.
 - a. Already the dragon's seven heads and ten horns have been described in chapter 12. What amazes the reader is that the monster from the sea looks just like the dragon. He is the dragon's "son", the "seed of the serpent" foreshadowed in Genesis 3:15.
 - b. The sea monster's many heads are branded with "names of blasphemy" which, in Jewish terms, no doubt points to their claim to be divine.
 - c. This is a composite beast: leopard, bear and lion congeal to form an image which echoes the prophecies of Daniel 7 where the earthly powers before and after Daniel's time are compared to these same beasts. To the informed reader of the first century, the first impression left by this consolidation of beast-images

is that the beast from the sea is the currently ruling world power which combines in itself all of the previous world kingdoms by conquest. This is the Roman Empire. In John's time, this Empire is being animated by the dragon, used by him to fulfill his own will and purpose in the world (13:2).

- d. A deadly event occurs in the life cycle of the beast from the sea: one of its heads (it has seven) receives a mortal wound. No known remedy is forthcoming, yet mysteriously the head is healed resulting in an even deeper worship of the beast. The patriots of the Empire find no equal to their collective power and imagine themselves invincible.
 - 1) During the fateful days of Emperor Nero's rule (54-68), the Empire witnessed an increase in emperor worship and militarization. Nero fought battles on many fronts, all the time accepting the divine accolades from his subjects in the provinces. His images were deified. His armies surrounded Israel. Persecution was thrown at the church like a flood.
 - 2) Yet Nero was forced to take his own life, an event which sent chills through the body politic of the Empire, leading to a painful civil war and "the year of three (or four) Emperors" (68-69). Nero's death was a mortal wound to the Empire and until Vespasian came to power (69-79) many imagined the worst.
 - 3) Some even thought Nero would return from the dead (the *Nero Redivivus* myth) and march with the Parthian hordes out of the east to retake Rome and be proclaimed as Lord and God. This of course did not happen, but Vespasian's rise to power confirmed that Rome was far from dead and, in the end, was victorious over Jerusalem (70).
 - e. Emperor worship had already made its inroads within the Empire. Even Caligula (Gaius) (37-41) had attempted to place his images in the Jerusalem temple. Later Emperors would accept the worship of their subjects, requiring sacrifices be offered in their name. Among the guilds where the various tradespeople made a living, expectations grew for all guild members to pay homage to the Emperor. A Christian member of such guilds would find it increasingly difficult to either buy or sell with fellow members if they did not compromise their beliefs and join in the religious veneration of Rome's cult. These were the conditions present at the time John sees his vision.
 - f. John's vision includes a fateful proverb: the rise of the sea beast means people are going to prison and even to death. No Christian can live in the world of the sea beast and not experience the war he wages against all who would challenge his power (13:9-10, compare 13:7). The followers of the Lamb have a heavy burden placed on them: "to endure" and continue to believe. Peter would remind his readers (1 Peter 4:19) that during the coming trial, God's people who need to "entrust their souls to a faithful Creator in doing what is right". The call to perseverance is found throughout *Rev*. Part of the purpose given for the giving of the vision is to afford the followers of the Lamb an insight into the world they were facing and guidance in how to act in such a world.
2. The beast from the sea points to Rome and the heart of the political Empire. The sea is a changing, chaotic, yet powerful element within nature. It encompasses the many peoples, languages and nations that comprised the Roman Empire. Large and often unwieldy, Rome posed a challenge to whoever would rule it. Nero's death happened during turbulent, sea-like times, when the winds and the waves could churn the Empire in unexpected ways. But the dragon had other accomplices in his mission to defeat the seed of the woman in world history: the beast from the land.
 - a. The description given to John included "two horns like a lamb" and the "voice of a dragon". The readers of *Rev* have already met one Lamb--the one who allowed himself to be slain, but is now alive as the ruler of heaven. Who is this "other lamb" who makes his appearance at the behest of the dragon? It is, of course, the counterfeit lamb, the parody of the true lamb. Elsewhere in *Rev* this beast is called the "false prophet" (20:10).
 - b. Drawing on imagery from the time of Moses, this second beast behaves like the magicians in the court of Pharaoh, attempting to duplicate the signs performed by God's prophet. The magic of this second beast is orchestrated by him to "deceive" the people of this world into accepting the lordship of the first beast (13:14). False prophets were included in the sign-list given by Jesus to warn his followers about the coming "end of the age". Inside Jerusalem, during the days of its fall, false prophets arose claiming to be the ones who would deliver Israel from Rome's oppression. But here, the false prophet is

intending to cement loyalty to the Empire. He has religious, political and even economic roles to play. He is the embodiment of Roman culture and belief, arrayed in support of the Empire, but, in the case of the Christians, hostile to the true kingdom of God.

- c. The land beast is false religion as it existed in the first century. All major cities, by the end of the first century, had temples built to the Emperor. He claimed the divine name, but he needed the support of the provinces to consolidate this veneration. The Imperial Cult accomplished that in conjunction with the economic power wielded by the trade guilds. Together, religious and economic pressure was brought to bear on anyone who questioned Rome's authority or the Emperor's divinity.
 - d. The primary expression of the second beast in John's time was the provincial councils made up of political representatives from the major towns. Priests of the imperial cult were included in these ruling bodies. These councils existed before the time of Rome, and Rome exercised its local rule through them. The beast from the sea ruled through these indigenous, local authorities who corporately were part of the second beast. Sadly, even the provinces of Israel (Judea, Samaria, Galilee, and Perea) were ruled by sovereigns (the Herods) who had sold out their own holiness for the power and influence a marriage with Rome could afford. Even among the Jews, Rome had its lackeys in service to the land beast.
3. Now we come to the disputed "number of the beast" and its associated "mark".
- a. First the mark
 - 1) Slaves were branded, literally, to mark them out as property of their masters.
 - 2) Official documents bore the branding of the Emperor's seal.
 - 3) The followers of the Lamb are, in *Rev*, sealed with God's mark to identify them as belonging to him.
 - 4) There is nothing about the "mark" (Greek: *charagma*) that would have been unusual to a reader in the first century. The "mark" is a person's mental and physical "stamp of approval" for Emperor and Empire. The simple verbal declaration "Caesar is Lord" would "mark a person" as belonging to the loyal subjects of Rome. The coins of the realm bore the image of the Caesar (remember Jesus' question about the coin: "whose image is on it?").
 - 5) There are economic benefits to making such a declaration. Once you commit yourself to Caesar and his program, you have a freedom to buy and sell not accorded to those who resist the Empire's claim to Lordship. As already indicated, the trade guilds and the local councils were capable of exerting substantial coercive power in the lives of the citizenry. Failure to comply with the request to worship the Emperor put anyone at serious risk in any of these areas.
 - 6) Early Christians were being called upon to bear either the stamp of the world or the image of Christ. Much like Paul's words in Romans 12:1-2: "Don't let the world pour you into its mold, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds," Rome wanted its subjects to conform their thinking and their service to the purposes of Emperor and Empire. Christians who declared "Jesus is Lord" were in effect refusing the "mark" that "Caesar is Lord".
 - 7) Through its coercive measures, the land beast furthered the purposes of the sea beast, and, in the final analysis, carried out the will of the dragon to wage war against the seed of the woman.
 - b. Now the number: "666"
 - 1) Sufficient ink has been spilled over deciphering the meaning of this number. I will not add any more to the debate. There are probably few additional suggestions left that have not already been made.
 - 2) Different approaches have been taken, historically, to deciphering this number.
 - (a) The number is a form of *gematria*, the Jewish science of decoding numbers by assigning numeric values to letters of the alphabet.
 - (b) If you take the Greek letters, for example, of the name "Jesus" and add up their numeric values the result is the number "888"

I	10
H	8
Σ	200
O	70
Y	400

Σ	200=888
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- (c) In a similar fashion, gematria can be applied to the Hebrew spelling of Nero's definitive title: Nero Caesar with the result equal to "666"

Nun	נ	50
Resh	ר	200
Waw	ו	6
Nun final	ן	50
Qoph	ק	100
Samech	ס	60
Resh	ר	200
		666

- (d) But the mere decoding of a name would not be very important unless there was some lesson to be learned from it. And the text reminds the reader that "666" is a "human number", that is, it is only a man we are talking about here, not a god. Men are mortal and can die. This sea beast may fancy itself to be God and the land beast may lend credence to that claim through signs and deceiving miracles. But the sea beast is only human. John is in effect being told, add up the numbers of the Emperor's name and see what result you get. It's a human result. God has Nero's number; he's not fooling anyone. Nero's successors may make similar claims. But God knows their numbers too. Not "777" or "888", but "666" is the number of the beast.
- 3) While it might be tempting to play the "numbers game" with modern day "sea beasts" or would be world rulers, the contemporary reader of *Rev* should take note of the significance of "numbering the beast". It was not as if Nero's true nature was any secret. Even historians who wrote about him after his death called him a "monster". The real question confronted in the text of *Rev* 13 is simply "what do you do with a human being who claims to be God?" To the Christian who answers the question, the reply is simple: "Unless his name is the Lord Jesus Christ, you reject him and refuse to worship him. You deny the validity of his claim and withhold service to his vile Empire. For if Jesus is Lord, Caesar is not".
- (a) Should human rulers today act like little gods, the response of the Christian is no different.
- (b) When Dietrich Bonhoeffer heard Adolph Hitler demand the title "**Der Führer**", he instantly declared on German radio that such a title belonged only to God and not to man. In so doing, he became a modern day seed of the woman who refused to take the mark of the beast but courageously called out "Hitler's number". Whether gematria applies to Hitler's actual name is irrelevant. What is relevant is that Bonhoeffer recognized the signs of the "beast" and his propaganda machine and declared them to be false.

The Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5)

1. The vision now draws the reader into a different place.
 - a. Not the shore of the sea, watching the sea beast being conjured up by the dragon.
 - b. Not the wilderness where God's woman and her seed are pursued by the dragon.
 - c. But instead, "Mount Zion" where the redeemed people of God, coded as the 144,000, stand, not with the mark of the beast, but with the Lamb's "name and his Father's name on their foreheads" (14:1).
 - d. What we hear is not the raging of the sea, but the roaring of a waterfall, of thunder, like the sound of "many harpists playing together" (14:2).
2. The image of the people of God gathered on Mount Zion stands in stark contrast to the Empire of the beast, built by coercive power, policed by false religion and fortified by the blood of the martyrs.
 - a. On Mount Zion is the free man's worship of the God who redeemed him.
 - b. Here the 144,000 stand before the throne of God and "learn a new song", the song which only the redeemed can sing. Who can write a symphony like one whose sins have been forgiven? Who can sing the Hallelujah Chorus like one who has eternal life?
 - c. The worship on Mount Zion is not like the worship in Jerusalem, which lies in ruins, or Rome ruled by the king who would be God.

3. What best defines the new people of God?
 - a. "They follow the Lamb wherever he goes" (1:4). It is an odd metaphor, for one expects lambs to follow the Shepherd. Yet in kingdom terms much human evaluation is turned on its head. Unlike the Roman power brokers or their Jerusalem lackeys, the new people of God know that it is the meek who inherit the earth, and the poor in spirit who find themselves heirs of the kingdom of God.
 - b. They are "First-fruits" of an ever-developing harvest God is about to reap in the world. What God is doing for the first-century followers of the Lamb, he intends to do for succeeding generations. They were the first-fruits, but we are the harvest. John's vision will affirm this in even stronger pictures shortly. Jeremiah wrote centuries before that when God called Israel out of Egypt, he was gathering "the firstfruits of his harvest" (2:2-3). There is a close correlation in scripture between the idea of the first-fruits and the idea of the "remnant" (see 2 Kings 19:30-31; Ezekiel 20:40).
 - c. Escaped from the conflagration of Jerusalem in 70 C.E., the first Jewish remnant of the new covenant became the first-fruits of what God was about to do throughout the whole world. This was the message of *Rev* 7 where we saw both the 144,000 and the "multitude which no one could number" from every conceivable language or ethnic group.
 - d. The 144,000 first-fruits exhibit an ethical purity which puts the Roman Empire to shame. These followers of the Lamb:
 - 1) Do not commit spiritual adultery
 - 2) Are pure
 - 3) Follow the Lamb wherever he goes
 - 4) Are redeemed
 - 5) Are first-fruits
 - 6) Tell the truth
 - 7) Are blameless
 - e. When asked by Roman inquisitors, "Are you a follower of Jesus who is called the Messiah?", they respond truthfully, "I am", even if it means martyrdom.
 - f. When asked by a trade guild associate, "Will you join us in a ritual sacrifice to the Emperor?", they respond faithfully, "I will not", even if it means they cannot buy or sell.
 - g. To call these "first-fruits" means more than just saying they are the "first to be fruit". It means here are examples of living the life of a Christian. Here's what it means to "follow the Lamb".

The Three Angels (14:6-13)

1. Three heavenly messengers now appear in the vision, each with a different mission:
 - a. First Angel: Proclaims the Eternal Gospel to all the world.
 - b. Second Angel: Announces the fall of "Babylon the Great", an expression not yet explained in *Rev*, but soon to be revealed in chapters 17-18.
 - c. Third Angel: Warning about participation in the worship of the sea beast.
2. These three messengers set out an agenda for the people of God living in the world.
 - a. They put the most important part of the mission first: the proclamation of the good news: Fear God, give God glory, judgment is near, worship the creator of all things. It is to these things that the Gospel points. And it is for "every nation, tribe, language and people". The preaching of the Gospel is God's means for bringing in the harvest.
 - b. The fall of Babylon the Great, at first notice, implies the end of those earthly powers which hold the people of God captive. After all, Babylon was the great captor of Israel in the Old Testament. But who is the Babylon of John's time? The text does not tell us here, but will reveal the identity of Babylon in chapters 17-18. Yet, it is heartening to know that the captivity of God's people is coming to an end and her return from exile is underway. This was, of course, the great hope of Israel, that the exile would finally come to an end. This angel proclaims that very good news.
 - c. Vigilance, however, is needed by the people of God. The coercive pressures within the Empire make faithfulness to God difficult. Following the Lamb wherever he goes is not easy. The demand for worship claimed by the Empire conflicts with the call to worship God alone.

- 1) It takes "patient endurance on the part of the saints" (14:12) who "obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus".
- 2) Some will die in the crucible of their time. To them, *Rev* offers the promise, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on...they will rest from their labor for their deeds will follow them" (14:13).
- 3) How are they blessed? In the same way Jesus was: by the resurrection of their bodies. For, as Paul puts it so concisely in 1 Thessalonians 4, "the dead in Christ rise first". Not only are the people of God living in 70 C.E. called the first-fruits of redemption, they are also offered reward as the first-fruits of resurrection.

The Harvest of the Earth (14:14-20)

1. The metaphor of the first-fruits now takes on a concrete form. John now sees the coming harvest. His vision, however, is a dual one. In effect there are two harvests:
 - a. The harvest of wheat seems in view in 14:14-16.
 - b. The harvest of grapes is explicitly described in 14:17-20.
2. These twin images correspond to Jesus' own teaching in the gospels where the harvest is both a matter of *salvation* and a matter of *judgment*. (Matthew 3:12; 13:24-30; Mark 4:26-29)
3. Chapter 14:1-5 speaks eloquently of the first-century first-fruits, the earliest followers of the Lamb who stand on Mount Zion and sing the song of the redeemed. But what are we to make of the "harvest" scenes in 14:14-20?
 - a. They are logically the sequels to the first-fruits scene and would seem to sketch out what will happen after the first generation of Christians has passed off the scene.
 - b. If the account given here parallels the 144,000 scene in chapter 7, we can expect that the harvest must include converts from among all the nations, not just Israel. This is the time of the harvest.
 - 1) On the Jewish calendar, first-fruits is celebrated around the time of Passover (March-April)
 - 2) Wheat harvest falls during May-June and is celebrated in conjunction with the Feast of Pentecost.
 - 3) Grape harvest (so-called "vintage") took place in July and August and climaxed with the feast of trumpets.
 - 4) If John's vision is following a calendaric cycle, it would seem that the visions of chapter 14 speak of a period of wheat harvest, followed by a period of vintage.
 - c. Vintage harvest is connected with the "winepress" and that is a powerful Old Testament image for coming judgment. In John's vision, the second harvest is a grape harvest and it is described in graphic ways, comparing the juice of the grape to the blood of the fallen. Jerusalem in 70 C.E. was such a winepress: "They were trampled in the winepress outside the city and the blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses bridles for a distance of 1600 stadia" (14:20).
 - d. What is the intent of the vision? That the harvest is coming: 1) for the followers of the Lamb the harvest means eternal life from among all nations; 2) for those who take the mark of the beast, it means judgment and destruction, as seen in the case of faithless Israel and monstrous Nero.

Last Plagues and the Song of Moses (15:1-4)

1. The next the sign sequence redirects John's gaze to heaven where he sees the seven angels with the "last" seven plagues. At this stage of the reading, it is understandable if the reader asks, "Is it really 'the' last?" Having come to the edge of the final chapter so many times throughout the Apocalypse, John the seer could be rather wary of accepting the next episode as the conclusion of the matter. That is why the text adds the explanation: "last, because with them God's wrath is completed."
 - a. Doubtless the timeline drawn by John's several visions is not straight but, in fact, somewhat cyclical. This explanation of the word "last" becomes necessary to justify the repeated tracings of the "end".
 - b. The reader will encounter yet more "final scenes" because the story is not being told in a linear fashion. Thus, "last" means "completed" in a non-temporal way.
2. Before John is shown these "last" plagues, he is shown the victory of those who overcame the beast, his image, and the number of his name. These are the followers of the Lamb who would not sell out to Caesar or to his false prophets.

- a. They stand by a sea of glass mixed with fire. This is no ordinary sea. It is not the sea out of which the sea beast arose in chapter 13. That sea is the Abyss where danger lurks and monsters raise their evil heads. This is the sea of purifying fire, like the melting of gold and burning up of the dross. These faithful ones have passed through the fire, suffered death and now stand before God.
 - b. Once more, the vision shows the company of the redeemed in a better place than those who surrendered themselves to the dying world around them.
 - c. Theirs is the song of Moses (sung after crossing another sea) and the song of the Lamb. The story of *Rev* is truly the story of a new exodus, and these have passed over to the throne of God. What do they sing?
 - 1) Great and wonderful are your deeds, Lord God Almighty.
 - 2) Just and true are your ways, King of the ages.
 - 3) Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name.
 - 4) For you alone are holy.
 - 5) All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.
 - d. "King of Ages" means king of time and the vision John records honors God for his mastery of human history.
 - e. Revelation is about revealing the "righteous acts" of God. It's about pulling back the veil which hide some of the purposes of God and makes them known to his people.
3. What will follow is a highly concentrated series of judgments on the world, climaxing in chapters 17-18 with God's judgment on Babylon the Great, the great city.

The War Scroll: The Last Plagues and Fall of Babylon: (15:5-18:24)

Introduction and Background

1. The first half of chapter 15 celebrated the victory of God's people, through their martyrdom, over the beast. The text tells how they sing the song of Moses and of the Lamb. They call God "King of the Ages" and announce that all nations will come to do homage before him.
2. Like Israel with Moses, passing through the Red Sea, and witnessing the parting of the waters, the New Israel now stands before another sea "of glass mixed with fire" (15:2). The remnant people of God have passed through the fiery trials of persecution from both Jerusalem and Rome.
 - a. The irony is, of course, that Rome and Jerusalem confronted each other in bloody battle during those fateful years 67-70 CE (the 3 1/2 years, time, times and half a time, 1260 days, and 42 months.).
 - b. It was not a question that Rome was righteous and Jerusalem was not. Both had shown a willingness to use their power to arrest, try and convict the followers of the Lamb.
 - c. Now, as if in poetic justice, they find themselves on the battlefield fulfilling Jesus' own words, "They that take the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).
 - d. Of course, Jewish history contained other examples of God using a pagan nation (like Babylon) to punish his holy nation (Israel), only to judge that pagan nation for its excesses (the theme of *Habakkuk*).
3. The final, serialized judgments recorded in *Rev* are called the "seven last plagues", poured from seven golden bowls given to seven angels by the four living creatures.
 - a. The first readers of *Rev* would think immediately of the Egyptian plagues used by God to force the hand of Pharaoh to let the Israelite slaves leave Egypt.
 - b. In Psalm 79:12 God judges the nations who afflict Israel with "sevenfold" punishments. We already noted that Leviticus 26 warned of God's "seven times" judgment on his own people for their sins.
 - c. Isaiah 51:17-22 speaks of the "bowl of God's wrath" used to judge Israel's tormentors.
 - d. From Ezekiel 9:1-10:6 this current vision draws the image of seven angels who punish those who do not have the protective mark of God on their foreheads, and it also describes the Temple being filled with the glory-filled cloud of God's presence. This leads to a temporary vacating of the Temple until the last plagues have been completed. This is much like the "silence in heaven" we observed before the opening of the seventh seal in chapter 8.

4. We must keep in mind the relevance of *Rev* for the first readers. They are about to witness God's wrath (righteous judgment) executed on the twin sources of persecution against the people of God: Rome and Jerusalem.
 - a. Historically, Jerusalem falls in 70 CE, amidst an intense internal, civil war among Jewish factions in Jerusalem, focused in the Temple.
 - b. That conflict also involves the siege by Roman legions led first by Vespasian and later by Titus.
 - c. As we have already noted, the Jewish historian Josephus was eyewitness to these events and Roman historians, like Tacitus, also fill in additional details from the Roman point of view. Included in these accounts are details of immense bloodshed, death, fire, and the raining down of millstones from Roman catapults.
 - d. For those who remained inside the walls of Jerusalem and its Temple, the events of those days eventually were seen as judgments for the sins of the nation. No one stated this with greater clarity than Josephus who described the actions of the Zealots as vile and worthy of the wrath which God poured down on the city.
5. The bowls containing the last plagues are, in part, judgments on national Israel. Yet, their reference to the "beast", his mark and his worship, also point in another direction. Even as judgment fell on national Israel, so it will also fall on the Roman Empire.
6. While fellow Jews participated in the persecution of the followers of the Lamb, the Roman Empire did as well. As we have seen, emperor worship and its support within the provincial councils and trade guilds, created a climate of hostility toward the Christian movement. Nero had blamed the burning of Rome on these Nazarenes and ordered that Christians be put to death in the public arena by the most hideous methods.
 - a. In response, John's vision reveals "the righteous acts of God" against Rome. The very burning of Rome by Nero is itself a judgment. The civil war which followed in which the factions of the empire battled for power was a judgment.
 - b. Nero, the head that was wounded in chapter 13, did not heal immediately. Only after the chaotic months of the late 60's was the rule of Vespasian finally established, during a time when three emperors ruled in bloody succession.
 - c. Nor should the reader assume all such judgments ended within the context of the first century. For the next 250 years, the fledgling Christian community would struggle against the painful realities of Roman power. Incrementally, the "last plagues" would be poured out wherever injustice reigned and the need for God's kingdom grew stronger.
 - d. It seems that John's vision paints the picture of a prototypic "judgment of the world", played out in Jerusalem, but would be continually effected throughout the days which lay ahead of the church.
7. The seven bowls of God's wrath take place in quick succession without little interspersed commentary. This stepped up pace suggests that the revelator was intent on telling the story of Babylon's fall in chapters 17-18. These plagues are, in some sense, the dramatic telescope, pointed at that momentous event.
 - a. The seven bowls partially parallel the seven trumpets, but contain new material.
 - b. Whereas the seals and trumpets described "partial judgments" (1/4, 1/3), the bowls signal final judgment.
 - c. We witness the traditional divisions of nature: earth, sea, rivers, and sky. With the bowls, we witness the final "de-creation", in preparation for the advent of the "New Creation".

The Seven Bowls Poured Out (16:1-21)

1. **Bowl One (16:2).** The sixth plague on Egypt involved "boils" which afflicted those who opposed Moses. Here, their counterparts are all who take the mark of the Beast: that is, who sell out their loyalty to Jesus as Lord, for homage to Caesar as Lord.
2. **Bowl Two (16:3).** This parallels the turning of the Nile into blood (Exodus 7:17-21) with the result that all marine life dies.
3. **Bowl Three (16:4)** Fresh water is contaminated with blood. Again a parallel to the Exodus text cited above.

- a. Why all of the blood? The angel who pours out this plague offers commentary. The blood of the martyrs, crying out from the altar of God (see chapter 6), evoke judgment on those who shed this blood.
 - b. Incidentally, the eyewitness accounts of both the fall of Jerusalem and the dark days of civil strife in Rome are full of references to bloodshed. Consider Josephus' description of the naval battle on lake Gennesareth between Vespasian and the Jewish fleets (*War*, 3:522-31):
One could see the whole lake red with blood and covered with corpses, for not a man escaped. During the following days the district reeked with a dreadful stench and presented a spectacle equally horrible. The beaches were strewn with wrecks and swollen carcasses: these corpses, scorched and clammy in decay, so polluted the atmosphere that the catastrophe which plunged the Jews in mourning inspired even its authors with disgust.
 - c. This is also reminiscent of Jesus' own words:
Matthew 23:35 And so upon you will come all the righteous blood that has been shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah son of Berehiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar.
 - d. A true contrast exists within *Rev* regarding blood: A person either drinks the blood of divine judgment or wears robes dipped in the blood of the Lamb. Blood is either judgment or it is redemption. Just as there were two harvests depicted in chapter 14, one of redemption and the other of wrath, so here we see the blood of the martyrs or the blood of God's wrath.
4. **Bowl Four (16:8-9).** Among the pagans, the sun was an object of worship, specifically in the form of the god Apollo. Similarly, when the emperor is worshipped, it is Apollo whose image he bears. The image of this bowl is, therefore, fitting. The heat of the sun, grown in intensity, kindles fires which torment the people on earth.
- a. The final days of Jerusalem and its Temple succumbed to the judgment by fire. Though General Titus tried to avoid burning the Temple, circumstances conspired against his wishes.
 - b. In 64 CE, disaster struck Rome. The Roman historian Tacitus (in his *Annals*) described the fire:
First, the fire swept violently over the level spaces. Then it climbed the hills--but returned to ravage the lower ground again. It outstripped every counter-measure. The ancient's city's narrow winding streets and irregular blocks encouraged its progress...When people looked back, menacing flames sprang up before them or outflanked them. When they escaped to a neighboring quarter, the fire followed....People believed that Nero was ambitious to found a new city to be called after himself...Of Rome's fourteen districts only four remained intact. Three were leveled to the ground. The other seven were reduced to a few scorched and mangled ruins. (*Annals*, chapter 14).
5. **Bowl Five (16:10-11)** This parallels the ninth Egyptian plague. The kingdom of the beast is, says the vision, "plunged into darkness". Intense fire, often darkens the sky of its natural light. It would be an understatement to say that the 60's were dark years for both Israel and the Roman Empire. Two destinies were bound together in destructive ways.
- a. Whether one studies the excesses of the Herods or the cruelties of the Zealots or the compromises made by the priesthood, the general impression given is "darkness" and despair within Israel.
 - b. Rome's history followed a strangely similar course. Tacitus, in his *Histories*, Book Three, Chapter 36 describes what the translators of that work called "A World Convulsed". Civil war prompted by Nero's excesses and suicide, combined with worries in the provinces (Britain, Gaul, and Germany) creates the picture of genuine darkness on a grand scale.
 - c. John's vision of this bowl of wrath leads to the comment, "they refused to repent and glorify" God.
 - d. Deuteronomy 28:28-29 warns of the blindness, madness, confusion of mind and groping about at noontime as curses for Israel's disobedience.
6. **Bowl Six (16:12-16)** In a dramatic vision, John is shown the last great battle. Drawing from powerful images, this vision depicts a demonic show-down, commenced by unholy trinity of evil: dragon, beast and false prophet. The reference to "frogs" connects this plague with the second Egyptian plague. To the Egyptians the symbol of the "frog" was not demonic, but pointed to resurrection and fertility. Here, the symbol is turned around and applied to demons who inspire the final gathering of nations "for battle on the great day of God almighty" (16:14). These frogs are seen coming "out of the mouth of" the three personages of evil. Earlier we saw the sword of God's word coming out of the mouth of Christ (chapter 1) and that same image will appear in chapter 19 when Jesus engages the armies assembled on the occasion of this bowl.

- a. "I come as a thief", is the warning offered in 16:15. This is for the instruction of the people of God who must "stay awake" and be "dressed" when God's judgment comes. One can't help thinking about the warnings Jesus gave to his disciples who remained in Jerusalem at the time of the siege.
- b. The battle scene is a "gathering scene". The root meaning of "har megiddon", the Hebrew word translated here as "Armageddon", is "to gather troops". Such a gathering was foreshadowed in Joel 3:2-12. There is much debate about the actual location of this battle. In John's day, the site associated with Megiddo was only a tell, some seventy feet high, and hardly a mountain, as the word "har" would suggest. Located in the valley of Jezreel, this tell was the site of some 200 battles throughout history. Perhaps this is the reason the revelator offers this image for the last great battle.
- c. "Kings from the East" may have been a literary reference to the Parthians who lived on the eastern borders of the Roman Empire and were a constant threat to the peace of Rome. The fact that the Euphrates River was associated with ancient Babylon may also explain its reference here. Soon, John will be given a vision of "Babylon the Great" (chapters 17-18) and its judgment by God. From the perspective of geography, all of Israel and its neighbors would be considered "the east". In light of the battles of 67-70 CE in Israel, perhaps the vision intends the reader to see them as a "gathering together for the battle on the great day of God Almighty".

7. Bowl Seven (16:17-21) Airborne instruments of warfare climax the seven plagues.

- a. The voice: "It is done!", echoes the words spoken at the sounding of the seventh trumpet in chapter 10: "The mystery of God will be accomplished" and "No more delay". These were among the final words Jesus spoke on the cross: "It is finished!" Another irony appears here: human beings can either experience the redemptive words from the cross or the wrathful words on the great day of God almighty.
- b. Once more, lightning, thunder, and earthquake appear together to signal an important development in John's vision. As before, these recall God's appearance on Mount Sinai when he gave his word to Moses. The gospels record unusual phenomena, including an earthquake, at the time Jesus uttered his words "It is finished!"

Matthew 27: 50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. 52 The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. 53 They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people. 54 When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, "Surely he was the Son of God!"

- c. John's vision now includes a series of rapidly occurring events, some having seismic significance:
 - 1) The great city split into three parts
 - 2) God remembered Babylon the Great with the fury of his wrath
 - 3) The islands and mountains disappear
 - 4) Hailstones of enormous weight fall on people who in turn curse God.
- d. We would say these were "earth-shattering events", for they describe intense forms of final judgment. In both the life of Rome and Jerusalem, the first century was a century of real disasters. It would not be difficult to imagine the readers of this vision looking all around them and saying, it's happening just like that--to us.
 - 1) The last days of Jerusalem were literally marked by the sort of crisis depicted here. The three powerful factions within the city fought each other (led by Simon, Eleazar and John). The machinery erected by the Romans to lay siege to the city include catapults capable of delivering death bearing stones within the walls. Josephus offers this account and even tells how the Jews cried out, "the stone comes!", each time one of them was hurled into the city. He tells us that at first the stones were "white" and could be easily seen when incoming. The Romans caught on to this defect in their strategy and painted them black with devastating results.
 - 2) Tacitus documents three earthquakes in 51, 53 and 60 CE. Seneca adds others in the 70's. Solar eclipses occurred in 49 and 52. Mount Vesuvius erupted in 79. Pliny the Younger was an eyewitness of that event and described it in two letters he wrote. At times, he wrote, the column of ash was 20 miles high. The effects on Pompeii and Herculaneum were devastating, as was the resulting tsunami.

- 3) To the ancients, these natural, cosmic occurrences were omens. To John's vision, they were signs of the coming judgment of God.
- e. Taken together, the descriptions of this last "bowl of wrath", focus the reader's attention on the next two chapters which explain the meaning of "the great city" and its demise. As we shall note, two great cities figure prominently in the *Rev* story: Jerusalem and Rome.
 - 1) These two cities have a painful resemblance: they represent "the city of man" turned against God. Though Jerusalem wanted to distinguish itself from Rome, yet throughout the prior century, a strong bond had grown up between the two.
 - 2) The Herods, starting with Herod the Great in 37 B.C.E., each aspired to become the real "king of the Jews". In this effort, they clamored for Roman support. Their kingship was a compromised one, however. It could not make a legitimate claim to the line of David. At best, these kings were Roman clients who used their political prowess to elicit favors from the powerful and the wealthy in Rome. But Rome held the final authority. When a Herod failed, he was replaced by a Roman procurator. This was an uneasy alliance where both sides wanted something from the other.
 - 3) The Herods were the "kings of the land (earth)" and their rule ended in 70 C.E. The uneven partnership between Rome and Jerusalem resulted in the destruction of the latter. They were never equal partners, although the Herods tried to emulate their pagan counterparts in courtly splendor, wealth and the brokerage of power. Rome controlled their titles, however, at times denying them kingship, granting them only ethnarchy.
 - 4) Rome's future stretches beyond Jerusalem's fall. As does its judgment. Darkness will not fully descend over the kingdom of the beast until the "Great Day of God Almighty".
 - 5) *Rev* will reveal, in time, yet a third city: a new one, which descends out of heaven (chapter 22). It stands in contrast to the city of man. Yet, with this earthly city, the heavenly one wages battle. How will that conflict turn out? Part of that answer lies in the deepening understanding of chapters 17 and 18, to which we now turn.

Babylon the Great: The Great City (17-18)

1. Scholarship has commonly assigned the symbol of the Babylonian harlot to the city of Rome. At first glance this might be the case. Later writers, influenced by the Reformation, even went so far as to suggest that it referred to the successor of the Roman Empire, the Roman Catholic Church or at least to the papacy.
 - a. Identification with political Rome is understandable. Rome persecuted the church severely throughout its history. Emperor worship was, as we have seen, a growing threat to the life of the church. *Rev* 17-18 affirms that the woman is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. She is said to be sitting astride seven hills. Her wealth, power and influence are enormous. Yet, chapter 18 foretells her doom, "her fall".
 - b. But there are some problems with this view. Chapter 17 places the woman on the same beast we encountered in chapter 13. In that context, the sea beast was the Roman Empire with its seven heads and ten horns, animated by the dragon and given worshipful recognition by the land beast with the two horns. So how can Rome sit on Rome? Does the author intend for us to see the beast as the Empire and the woman as the city? Cut off Rome and there is no Empire, yet that is exactly what the kings of the earth and the beast do to her.
 - c. This has led some to re-think her identity.
2. One recurring phrase describing "Babylon the Great" is "the great city". It first appears earlier in *Rev*: 11:8 Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. In this passage, the city is clearly Jerusalem. We should also note its aliases: "Sodom" and "Egypt". Historically these were associated with offenders against the people of God who experienced judgment in the form of fire from heaven and the plagues. This is consistent with the bowls of wrath, "the last plagues", described in chapter 16, where we also read: 16:19 The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath.

Here, a verbal connection exists between "great city" and "the Great" associated with Babylon. Throughout chapter 17-18, the following references call Babylon "the great city": 17:18; 18:10 (2x); 18:16; 18:18 (2x); 18:19; 18:21.

3. As with much of *Rev*, the language of this expression appears in the Old Testament in contexts referring to Jerusalem:

Jeremiah 22:8-9 "People from many nations will pass by this city and will ask one another, 'Why has the LORD done such a thing to this **great city**?' 9 And the answer will be: 'Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD their God and have worshiped and served other gods.'"

Lamentations 1:1 How deserted lies **the city**, once so full of people! How like a widow is she, **who once was great** among the nations! She who was queen among the provinces has now become a slave.

- a. These two texts reference the fall of Jerusalem to Babylonian captivity (6th century B.C.E.). Yet it is not original Babylon whom God calls "the great city", but Jerusalem. It is as if *Rev* is saying, the city once taken captive by Babylon has become Babylon itself: the captive has become the captor.
- b. Second Temple Judaism, embodied in the city of Jerusalem and its institutions, held Messianic Judaism captive. A hostile environment grew up within the synagogue, such that their leadership ejected the followers of Jesus from its worship. By the time Peter writes his first letter (1 Peter), the Messianic movement is widely scattered (1:1) and facing intense trials as a result. Peter describes Jesus as "the stone the builders rejected" (2:8) and his followers as "living stones" (2:4-5) built into a New Temple where spiritual sacrifices are offered. At the end of his letter, Peter then says "She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends her greetings" (5:13). Along with James, Peter had primary leadership of the Jerusalem church, and only later did he go to Rome where he suffered martyrdom. His letter, sent from Jerusalem, bears its nickname, "Babylon".
4. The Book of Revelation presents us with two great cities, antithetical to each other: Babylon, the Old Jerusalem, and the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem (chapters 21-22) is paradise consummated, the community of the saints, the City of God. The other city, which is continually contrasted to the New Jerusalem, is the old Jerusalem, which has become unfaithful to God. Most of the language describing "Babylon" is taken from other Biblical descriptions of Jerusalem.
5. We are told that she is "the great Harlot...with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication" (Rev. 17:1-2). This striking picture of a Harlot-city fornicating with the nations comes from Isaiah 57 and Ezekiel 16 and 23, where Jerusalem is represented as God's Bride who has turned to harlotry. The people of Jerusalem had abandoned the true faith and had turned to heathen gods and ungodly nations for help, rather than trusting in God to be their protector and deliverer. Ezekiel condemns Jerusalem as a degraded, wanton whore: "You spread your legs to every passerby to multiply your harlotry" (Ezek. 16:25). The specific picture of Jerusalem as a harlot in a wilderness is used in Jeremiah 2-3 and Hosea 2.
6. The Harlot in the wilderness, John says, is **seated on the Beast** (Rev. 17:3), representing her dependence upon the Roman Empire for her national existence and power; from the testimony of the New Testament there is no doubt that Jerusalem was politically and religiously "in bed" with the pagan Empire, cooperating with Rome in the crucifixion of Christ and the murderous persecution of Christians.
- a. Developing this aspect of the symbolism further, an angel tells John more about the Beast: "The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits, and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while" (Rev. 17:9-10).
- b. The "seven mountains" again identify the Beast as Rome, famous for its "seven hills"; but these also correspond to the line of the Caesars. Five have fallen: the first five Caesars were 1) Julius, 2) Augustus, 3) Tiberius, 4) Caligula (Gaius), 5) Claudius. One now is: 6) Nero, the sixth Caesar, was on the throne as John was writing the Revelation. The other must remain a little while: Galba, Otho and Vitellius together ruled barely a year and were succeeded by Vespasian. This has led some scholars to exclude the three "interim emperors" as not true Caesars. That would make 7) Vespasian and 8) Titus, the destroyer of Jerusalem.
7. The symbolic name given to the Harlot was "Babylon the Great" (Rev. 17:5), a reminder of the Old Testament city which was the epitome of rebellion against God (cf. Gen. 11:1-9; Jer. 50-51). This new and greater Babylon, the "Mother of harlots," is "drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus" (Rev. 17:6). Later John tells us that "in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and

of all who have been slain on the earth" (Rev. 18:24). That statement comes from a passage we have considered before: Jesus' condemnation of Jerusalem: Therefore, behold, I am sending you prophets and wise men and scribes; some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city, that upon you may fall all the righteous blood shed on the earth.... Truly I say to you, all these things shall come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! (Matt. 23:34-37).

8. Historically, it was Jerusalem which had often been the great harlot, continually falling into apostasy and persecuting the prophets (Acts 7:51-52); Jerusalem was the place where the prophets were killed (Luke 13:33). We cannot grasp the message of Revelation if we fail to recognize its central character as a covenantal, legal document; like the writings of Amos and other Old Testament prophets, it represents a covenant lawsuit, charging Jerusalem with breaches of the covenant and declaring her judgment.
9. John records that the "ten kings," the rulers subject to the Empire, join with the Beast against Christ: "These have one purpose and they give their power and authority to the Beast. These will wage war against the Lamb"—and what is to be the outcome? "And the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful" (Rev. 17:13-14). John assures the Church that in their terrible and terrifying conflict with the awesome might of imperial Rome, the victory of Christianity is guaranteed.
 - a. The "kings", unlike the Emperors, are not in some line of succession. They depend entirely on the will of the Empire to rule at all. When they rule, it is often for brief periods of time, according to the text.
 - b. These are "client kings", rulers like the Herods, who form temporary alliances with Rome for certain benefits expected in return. Or like the Parthians, who are hired to perform mercenary service for the Empire.
 - c. They are also procurators, Romans sent to the provinces to carry out the will of the Senate or the Emperor. As history reveals, these can also be recalled at the pleasure of Rome.
10. At this point the focus seems to shift. Just as the war between Caesar and Christ is heating up, John says, the peoples of the Empire "will hate the Harlot and will make her desolate (Matt. 24:15) and naked, and will eat her flesh and burn her up with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the Beast, until the words of God should be fulfilled" (Rev. 17:16-17; cf. 18:6-8). Jerusalem had committed fornication with the heathen nations, but in A.D. 70 they turned against her and destroyed her. Again, this picture is taken from the Old Testament prophets who spoke of Jerusalem as the Whore: they said that just as a priest's daughter who became a harlot was to be "burned with fire" (Lev. 21:9), so God would use Jerusalem's former "lovers," the heathen nations, to destroy her and burn her to the ground (Jer. 4:11-13, 30-31; Ezek. 16:37-41; 23:22, 25-30). It is noteworthy, however, that the Beast destroys Jerusalem as part of his war against Christ; early historians report that the Roman leaders' motive in destroying the Temple was not only to destroy the Jews, but to obliterate Christianity. The Beast thought that he could kill the Whore and the Bride in one stroke! But when the dust settled, the scaffolding of old, apostate Jerusalem lay in ruins, and the Church was revealed as the new and most glorious Temple, God's eternal dwelling place.
11. John tells us that the Harlot "is the great city, which has a kingdom over all the kings of the earth" (Rev. 17:18). This verse has puzzled some interpreters. Even though all the other signs point to Jerusalem as the Harlot, how can she be said to wield this kind of worldwide political power? The answer is that Revelation is not a book about politics; it is a book about the covenant. Jerusalem did reign over the nations. She had a covenantal priority over the kingdoms of the earth. It is rarely appreciated sufficiently that Israel was a kingdom of priests (Ex. 19:6), exercising this ministry on behalf of the nations of the world. When Israel was faithful to God, offering up sacrifices for the nations, the world was at peace; when Israel broke the covenant, the world was in turmoil. The Gentile nations recognized this (1 Kings 10:24; Ezra 1; 4-7; cf. Rom. 2:17-24). Yet, perversely, they would seek to seduce Israel to commit whoredom against the covenant—and when she did, they would turn on her and destroy her. That pattern is repeated several times, until national Israel's final excommunication in A.D. 70, when Second Temple Jerusalem was destroyed as God's sign that the Kingdom was now present in His new people, the New Israel of God (Rev. 11:19; 15:5; 21:3).

12. Since national Israel was to be destroyed, the apostles spent much of their time during the last days warning God's people to separate themselves from her and align themselves with the New Israel (Acts 2:37-40; 3:19, 26; 4:8-12; 5:27-32). This is John's message in Revelation. Jerusalem's apostasy has become so great, he says, that her judgment is permanent and irrevocable. She is now Babylon, the implacable enemy of God. "And she has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird" (Rev. 18:2). Because Israel rejected Christ, the entire nation has become demon-possessed, utterly beyond hope (Matt. 12:38-45; Rev. 9:1-11). Therefore, God's people must not seek to reform national Israel, but to abandon her to her fate. Salvation is with Christ and the New Israel, and only destruction awaits those who are aligned with the Harlot: "Come out of her, my people, that you may not participate in her sins and that you may not receive of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4; cf. Heb. 10:19-39; 12:15-29; 13:10-14).
13. And so Second Temple Jerusalem is destroyed, never to rise again: "And a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea (cf. Luke 17:21), saying, 'Thus will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer' " (Rev. 18:21). But "Jerusalem" is still standing in the twentieth century, is it not? How was it destroyed forever in A.D. 70? What this means is that Second Temple Israel, as the covenant people, will cease to exist. Jerusalem—as the great city, the holy city—will not be found any longer." True, as we have seen from Romans 11, the descendants of Abraham will come into the covenant again. But they will not be a distinct, holy nation of special priests. They will join the peoples of the world in the saved multitude, with no distinction (Isa. 19:19-25; cf. Eph. 2:11-22). Thus Second Temple Jerusalem, which left the covenant religion and turned to a demonic cult of sorcery, witchcraft, and state-worship, will be forever ruined. What was once a paradise will never again know the blessings of the Garden of Eden (Rev. 18:22-23).
14. God's people had been praying for Jerusalem's destruction (Rev. 6:9-11). Now that their prayers are answered, the great multitude of the redeemed breaks out into antiphonal praise:
15. "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God; because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great Harlot who was corrupting the earth with her fornication, and He has avenged the blood of His bondservants on her." And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! Her smoke rises up forever and ever" (Rev. 19:1-3; cf. 18:20).
16. Contrary to the expectations of Rome, the destruction of Jerusalem was not the end for the new people of God. Instead, it was their full establishment as the new Temple, the final declaration that the Harlot has been divorced and executed, and God has taken to Himself a new Bride. Judgment and salvation are inseparable. The collapse of the ungodly culture is not the end of the world but its re-creation, as in the Flood and the Exodus. God's people have been saved from the whoredoms of the world to become His wife; and the constant token of this fact is the Church's celebration of Communion, the "Marriage Supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7-9).

The City of Rome and Babylon the Great

1. Jerusalem becomes a byword for the other cities of the Empire. Though she claimed to be God's chosen city and attempted to elevate her status through alliances with the Emperors, all her efforts failed. The very Empire whose help she sought became her undoing. Just as her ancient ancestors forged alliances with Egypt, Assyria and Babylon, only to have those loyalties betrayed through war, exile and captivity, so Jerusalem of 70 C.E. fell into the same trap.
2. Does this overwhelming evidence that Babylon is Jerusalem rule out the possibility that Rome might also be in John's cross-hairs?
 - a. An argument could be made that the telling of Jerusalem's story, under the guise of Babylon's fall, was a coded message that **any city** who is drunk with the blood of the followers of Jesus puts itself at serious risk for a similar judgment.
 - b. The fall of Jerusalem is, then, a warning to others who would follow her example.
 - c. In telling Jerusalem's story, John was also telling Rome's. Historically, the fate of the queen of the Empire would be the same. Augustine, writing his famous *City of God*, chronicles the historical destiny

of Rome and points out the cause and effect relationships which pointed to its demise. The city of man would in the end, he argues, be supplanted by the city of God.

- d. As John's *Rev* reaches its climax in chapters 21-22, the story of God's other city comes into distinct focus. If God judges Jerusalem, the unfaithful city, so that he can now be wedded to the restored city, the Bride of Christ, he can hardly allow Rome to usurp the role as the model city. With the progress of time, Rome will prove ever more treacherous in its dealings with the Christians. Other Neros will arise (that is, the wounded head of the beast with heal) and menace the progress of growing church over the next 250 years.
3. But the difference between Rome and Jerusalem is still enormous. Rome never claimed to be the wife of God. Rome never had a covenant bond with Yahweh the God of Israel. Therefore, Rome cannot be an unfaithful wife in the same sense Jerusalem became.
4. If there is another Babylon, in the sense John portrays it, it is not political Rome. Yet, there is another possibility. Even as national Israel became the unfaithful wife of God, it is possible that the Christian community, as epitomized by the Seven Churches (chapters 2-3), might stray from the straight and narrow.
 - a. We have already observed how Jesus walks among the seven lampstands to ascertain the quality of their light. In so doing, he encounters failings which stand in need of correction.
 - b. Jezebel, Balaam and the Nicolaitans were all coded terms pointing to the dangers found within the Christian communities of the "cities" of Asia Minor.
 - c. Jesus warned that he would come and remove the candlestick from any church where the level of faithfulness had fallen critically low. Any one of the seven cities could become Babylon the Great and be judged by God for its failures.
5. In a larger sense, therefore, Babylon the Great comes to symbolizes any group claiming to be the true people of God who becomes unfaithful to that commitment. All false expressions of Christianity become part of this great religious prostitute. Indeed, throughout Christian history, Babylon the Great has come to mean the falling away from true faith by the very Church who claims Jesus as Lord.
6. What happened to Jerusalem should not be, therefore, a reason for superiority on the part of the Christian church. Paul warned the Gentile believers in Rome, that though God was breaking off the natural branches of the tree called "Israel" to make room for them, they, the Gentiles, should not become arrogant against the natural branches: Romans 11:21-22 For if God did not spare the natural branches, he will not spare you either. 22 Consider therefore the kindness and sternness of God: sternness to those who fell, but kindness to you, provided that you continue in his kindness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off.

For Paul, the impending disaster awaiting Jerusalem was no reason for the New Israel to become proud and boastful because it *replaced national Israel*, because it a real sense it did not. Through the redemptive work of Jesus the Messiah, the form and shape of the people of God had been enhanced. No longer was Israel a single nation with a political capital in Judah, but rather, the Israel of God was a new creation formed from Jew and Gentile, a heavenly city made into a holy temple where God could dwell forever. Its destiny carried great responsibility, as the book of *Rev* consistently reminds us: patient endurance on the part of the saints.

Concluding Thoughts

"Heaven came down and glory filled my soul," penned the lyricist. The massive sweep of visionary history contained in chapters 4-18 can scarcely fit into the concise imagery of *Rev*. Yet, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, a helpful landscape appears before the eyes of John and his readers. Painted on it are symbols that are both terrifying and triumphant, mysterious and magnificent, historical and heavenly. Hardly a line or phrase traces the seer's script, than we are witnesses to a developing theme of God's arriving kingdom. Kings, beasts, monsters, portents, and very human figures encounter each other in a grand drama which reaches for the climax of history. Having heard the expectant words "it is finished," we anticipate the coming of the Lord at the end of time to complete the work of creation. The downfall of evil and the uprising of good coincide in the sounding of the last trumpet when the mystery of God will be finished.

Here are visions for two horizons: the symbols of the "then" and "now," solemn reminders that as God's people we live between the "already" and the "not yet." We also see that heaven is not in a galaxy "far, far away," but as close as God Himself to the creation whom He loves, a dimension of His world not a detachment from it. Through the *Rev* we come to see heaven as at the center where God and the Lamb rule forevermore. In deep hope, we are led to await the moment of *revelation* when Christ himself appears at last, and we see that he has been, all along, the center of everything. In this lies the deeper meaning of the book and of the Second Coming to which it points.

And so, with the fall of Babylon — in its various forms — the city of man comes to its end, while every reader strains to see the city of God. In signs and symbols has it made its appearance: a woman clothed with the sun, still pursued by the dragon, in the wilderness of human history, and helped a little by the earth (chapter 12). Her nemesis, Babylon the Great, lies in ashes, while fallen humanity mourns the loss of its ill-fated civilization. But all is not lost, and when the world is called upon to rejoice over the fall of the city of man, it must ask for another city to come, whose builder and maker is God. For the revelation of God's new civilization, we must look ahead to our next study, when Jesus comes again as King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

Glory to God. Amen.

Digger Deeper: *No One Knows — Breaking the Code: Signs and Symbols*
(Bob Brown)

To gain a deeper understanding of *No One Knows — Breaking the Code: Signs and Symbols*, carefully read the selected passages below. To aid you in your study, we invite you to visit the website <http://notes.chicagofirstnaz.org>, or pick up a copy of the *Background Notes* at the **Information** desk, or from your ABF leader. Now consider the following questions, as you ask the Lord to teach you.

1. Why do we use "signs and symbols" to communicate ideas rather than plain prose? Think about the "signs and symbols" you see nearly everyday. How are they sometimes superior as means of conveying truth?
2. Carefully read Revelation 4-5, and write down as many symbols as you can identify in these two chapters. What meaning do you find in them, and how are they an effective way of telling us about God and the future? Draw a symbolic diagram of heaven based on reading these two chapters. What images are central?
3. What large question do these two chapters attempt to answer? How do they answer it? Based on this heavenly scene, what should be our main focus in studying the book of *Revelation*? What role does music and worship have in these chapters? Note: Count the number of unique hymns.
4. As you read Revelation 6-8:1, try to determine the meaning and purpose of the seven-sealed scroll. List and label each seal, and see if you can find any progression and repetition in the sequence. What is the content of the seventh seal, and how is it dramatically different from the others (8:1)? What question ends chapter 6, and how is it answered in chapter 7? What people groups appear among the New People of God in chapter 7? How are they described? What does their future look like? Read chapter 14 as a parallel text.
5. Read Revelation 8:2-10:7, 11:15-19. What purpose did trumpets/shofar horns have in the days of John? List the ways the trumpets differ from the seals in terms of content. What images do the symbols bring to mind, and how might they have been understood to John's readers? What role does the seventh trumpet have (10:1-7; 11:15-19)?
6. In what ways does 10:8-11 function as a transitional passage? What function does the symbol of the scroll continue to have? Note: Compare 10:9-10 with the following Old Testament texts: Proverbs 20:17-18; Job 20:12-14; Numbers 5:12-31; Ezekiel 3:1-11. What connections do you find which help explain the symbols?
7. In symbolic terms, what does the symbol of the "two witnesses" mean? What characteristics do they have which remind you of Old Testament figures? Evaluate the use of numbers for time, comparing 42 months, 1,260 days, and 3 1/2 days (11:2, 9, 11). Why would the master symbol-giver refer to the same period of time using different numbers and units of measure? In what ways does this suggest a non-literal view of time?
8. Notice how the seventh trumpet climaxes in 11:15-19 (see #5 above). What two hymns appear in these verses, and what is their emphasis? What unexpected object appears in 11:19, and where does it appear? What significance does this have in terms of the worship themes in *Revelation*?
9. What new characters appear in 12:1-18:23? Identify each symbolic personage, and describe them in terms of appearance, action, and words. What is the purpose of 12:10-12, 15:3-4, and 18:2-8. What kind of literature do these passages represent?
10. Distinguish the two "beasts" in chapter 13, and how do they relate to each other? Compare this chapter with Daniel 2 and 9 in the Old Testament. What is the meaning of the "beast" symbolism? How would John's first readers have understood the number "666"? Briefly discuss the frequent conflict between church and state throughout the last 2,000 years? How is this chapter a fitting symbol for that conflict? What is Babylon the Great (chapters 17-18)? What "city" seems to be in view? Note: There are at least two possibilities during John's lifetime.
11. What form does God final judgment take in chapters 15-16?
12. In what ways do the symbols of Revelation 4-18 form a *template for human history* during the past 2,000 years? What overall tone and mood do these symbols create? How do they provide the church with hopeful images for the future?