



1. The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John:

This introduces us to the one Book in the Bible that has probably given rise to more speculation and imaginative interpretations than any other. Even the title that it bears in many Bibles gives us a glimpse into the confusion that reigns regarding this Book; a common one is: “The Revelation of Saint John the Divine.” However, as we can see from the first five words of this verse, that is not at all accurate.

We may have heard of the end times as being referred to the *Apocalypse*; the Greek word translated as *revelation* is *apokalupsis* (*ap-ok-al'-oop-sis*), hence the transliteration.¹ The word *revelation* means uncovering, disclosing or revealing²; therefore, we would expect that what follows will serve to open or broaden our understanding. However, this is not specifically a revelation about Jesus Christ, as we might think, but rather it is Jesus Who is providing the disclosure of truth concerning things previously unknown.³ The Lord Jesus has been given the Revelation by God the Father for the express purpose of putting on exhibit (*shew*) for His servants (those who are walking in faithful obedience to Him) that which will, of necessity (*must*), quickly (*shortly*) come into being.⁴

When Jesus faced persecution from His own people for not conforming to their understanding of how a Jew was to conduct himself, He said to them, “For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth: and he [the Father] will shew him greater works than these, that ye may marvel” (John 5:20). We cannot comprehend how the Godhead functions, but Jesus stated that the Father shows Him everything, and He will show Him things greater than healing – things that will make the Jews wonder. Probably the greatest thing that was revealed was the mystery of the promised Messiah: “that the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Ephesians 3:6). This not only made the Jews wonder – it made them stumble (Acts 15:1,5). However, this is a book that speaks, not so much about who we are in Christ, but of what has been given to the Lord Jesus by the Father, and which He, in turn, wants to reveal to us about future events.

The idea of *shortly* has given rise to a little consternation among some because over 1900 years have passed since the Apostle John penned these words. From our perspective, that would hardly seem to be quickly. However, it is equally possible that this phrase could refer to the events, about to be described, as unfolding with speed. Indeed, many of the judgments spoken of within Revelation appear to come in quick succession – they are being fulfilled rapidly.

What is also evident is that the early Christians lived in anticipation of the Lord’s return at any moment. “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ ... That ye be not soon shaken [distressed] in mind ... that the day of Christ is at hand [be here]” (2 Thessalonians

¹ Strong’s Online.

² Friberg Lexicon.

³ Strong’s Online.

⁴ Ibid.

2:1-2).⁵ There were some at Thessalonica who were being deceived into believing that Christ had already returned, and that they had been left out. From our perspective, we might well wonder about such an expectancy among the early believers, but Christ told them to be prepared for His return, and they were. Despite being told by the Lord of many things that would take place before He returned, they remained ready. Jesus said, “Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matthew 24:42); although many, through the years, have attempted to determine when the Lord will return, Jesus made it clear that we absolutely cannot know the time of His coming. We must bear in mind that God’s perspective on time is very different from ours; it would probably be similar to the way that we might look at a foot ruler – we can see where it starts and where it ends, and all of the markings of measurement in between. God, from His eternal perspective, views time from its beginning to its ending, and what for us might appear to be a significant passage of time, is not so for Him (Psalm 90:4; 2 Peter 3:8).

Jesus made known (*signified*) this unveiling of things to come by His messenger (*angel*).⁶ The primary meaning of the Greek word *aggelos* (*ang’-el-os*) is messenger or envoy;⁷ within English, the word *angel* typically conjures up the image of a spirit being. In this case, the *angel* was very likely a spirit messenger from Jesus (His angel), for we read later of John being transported in the spirit into other realms. John is the recipient of what Jesus desires to make known to us (*his servants*). Although there is no definitive proof that this is the Apostle John, it is generally accepted to be so.



2. Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

John is the one who bears witness to, or declares, the word of God.⁸ The Book that follows is a record of John’s declaration of what God desires to be expressed. *Word* is from the Greek *logos*; John is testifying concerning the *Logos* of God. The exact same phrase appears in Revelation 19:13, where it is used as a name for Jesus Christ; John’s testimony is the word of prophecy that follows, but, as being part of God’s entire revelation to us (the Bible), it also speaks of Jesus Christ (His *testimony*). What follows is a record of all that John saw.



3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.

Here is something that is unique to this Book of the Bible – a special blessing. First of all, the one reading (present tense) the writings (*logos*) of this prophecy is called blessed, or happy.⁹ As this writing would have been circulated from one *ekklesia* to another, there would have been one person who read the writing in the hearing of all of the rest; there would not have been a copy for

⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

⁶ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁷ Strong’s Online.

⁸ Friberg Lexicon.

⁹ Strong’s Online.

everyone to be able to read his own. The primary application of this word (*readeth*) is that of a public reading.¹⁰

In addition, we see that this blessing is extended to those who are hearing the words and keeping what is written therein. The Greek construction, at this point, brings the hearing and the keeping together into the same persons;¹¹ in other words, this is not a blessing intended for someone who is only hearing. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving [*paralogizomai* (*par-al-og-id’-zom-ahee*) – from or beside reason, hence to reason falsely¹²] your own selves” (James 1:22). Someone who only hears the words of God, and does not act upon them, is deluding himself if he thinks that he is pleasing to God; there is no blessing for the one who only hears. The Greek word translated as *keep*, is very common within the Apostle John’s writings, and it means to attend to carefully.¹³ Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep [same Greek word – attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15). “And he that keepeth [same Greek word] his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him” (1 John 3:24a). If we do not do what Jesus says, are we attending carefully to His commands? Obviously, not! Hearing Jesus’ words and not acting upon them is not reasonable according to James – we reason falsely if we think that hearing is enough. It is only as we actively obey the Lord’s commands that we demonstrate our love for Him, and it is only through this obedience that we will also be assured of abiding in Him. Such intimacy with the Lord Jesus Christ is not available to those who only hear. Therefore, it is only reasonable that the blessing being pronounced here is upon those who hear **and** do what is written in the Book of Revelation.

The reason for the blessing is because the time for what is written is near (*at hand*). Although this fits perfectly with the *must shortly come to pass* from verse one, within our time frame we have difficulty viewing the passing of nearly 2000 years as being either *shortly* or *at hand*. However, the Book of Revelation was not a completely closed book to the early Christians; it was sent to the various assemblies with words of exhortation for their elders, specifically, and to all who were attentive to the Spirit. Although some of the prophetic passages might have been difficult for the early Christians to understand (as they are for us today), the warnings given were immediately pertinent to the overseers, and then to the groups; likewise, the warnings are equally pertinent to us today – we must read and be warned about how we are to live. As already indicated, ever since the promise was made that Jesus would return in the same manner as He departed from this earth (Acts 1:11), believers have lived with the hope of His soon return. As we look at what we think that we understand from these prophecies, we might well scoff at the early believers for living in anticipation of the Lord’s return. However, Jesus said, “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13); several times He repeated this warning to be alert. We are to live with an expectancy of the Lord returning (and the equal possibility of our death, and meeting the Lord that way); therefore, we understand the heightened importance of not only hearing but also attending carefully to His Word. We must not be careless, supposing that we have a full understanding of eschatology – “for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44).

¹⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹² Vine’s Expository Dictionary, “beguile.”

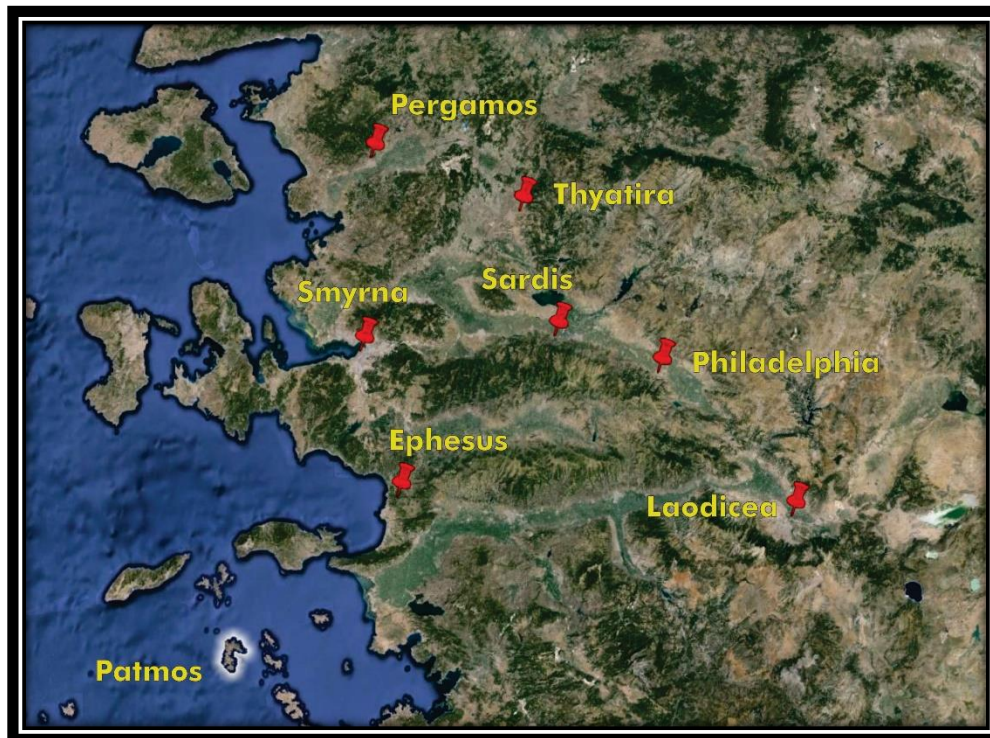
¹³ Strong’s Online.



4. John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne;

After confirming the source of what will follow, and the blessing inherently linked to attending carefully to the words of this prophecy, John now begins to write what he has been given.

John addresses this prophecy to seven specific assemblies in Asia (generally taken to be the



western portion of modern-day Turkey), although he doesn't name them until later. There is much speculation about the significance of there being *seven*. This is commonly referred to as the number of completeness,¹⁴ where the first seven is the completed week of God's creative activity (Genesis 2:2-3). This

would fit with the tenor of the book, and even the use of the number within this verse. However, there are some who speculate that there were only seven assemblies in Asia at the time that John wrote this prophecy. Although our Bible includes the letter to the Colossians, which was written as early as AD 60 compared to about AD 96 for the book of Revelation (Colossae was in Asia), and it, in turn, refers to Hierapolis (Colossians 4:13), history tells us that the three cities, Laodicea, Colossae, and Hierapolis, were destroyed in an earthquake c. AD 61;¹⁵ it is surmised that only Laodicea was promptly rebuilt. However, whether these were the only seven gatherings left in this area, or if the seven, specifically addressed later in this chapter, were selected for particular reasons, it matters little to the unfolding of the book.

We must remind ourselves that these *churches* are not like what we would call to mind in the 21st century. Paul's greetings to Priscilla and Aquilla are extended to the assembly in their house (Romans 16:3-5), as are his greetings to Nymphas (Colossians 4:15). There is no evidence that the

¹⁴ <http://www.christcenteredmall.com/teachings/symbolism/numbers.htm>

¹⁵ <http://religiouslyincorrect.com/Articles/TriCityAreaEarthquake.shtml>

early believers met in independently owned buildings; to the contrary, it appears that they met in houses. This would fit well with their expectancy for the soon return of the Lord Jesus Christ – why invest in buildings when they could be left idle at any time? At this time it was only the pagans who had elaborate temples for the worship of their various gods and goddesses. It is interesting to note the shift that has taken place over the centuries; could it be that Christians today pay far less heed to the possibility of the Lord’s soon return, and are more prone to ignore His many warnings to be ready?

The word translated as *churches* is the plural form of *ekklesia* – literally, called-out ones.¹⁶ A quick check of an etymology dictionary (providing word history) for the word *church*, shows that it comes from the Greek word *kyrios*, which means *ruler* or *lord*.¹⁷ It is unfortunate that the KJV uses the word *church* as a translation of *ekklesia* because of the baggage that the word carries with it. Even at the time of translation, the unbiblical connotation of the word was as great as it is today, but the translators’ freedom in this regard was specifically restricted by King James when he authorized the translation work. He imposed fifteen rules upon the translators, and there were two



King James I

that directly impacted this particular situation: Rule #1 – “The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit,” and Rule #3 – “The Old Ecclesiastical Words to be kept, viz. [namely] the Word Church not to be translated Congregation &c.”¹⁸ Under Rule #1, the Bishops Bible translated *ekklesia* as *church*, and, in his desire to retain control of the Church of England, King James imposed Rule #3 to ensure that no other word was used that might undermine the application of the Bible texts to the church that was under his charge, which included almost all of the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, except for the pope. Nevertheless, we must not read the modern implications of the word *church* into the text of Scripture; this book is addressed specifically to seven groups of *called-out ones* in Asia – groups of believers who were under the oversight of elders. There would have been no “pastors,” no constitutions, no building projects, and no elaborate programs – only gatherings for the purpose of exhortation through the

Word of God (Hebrews 10:23-25).

John begins his writing by extending a greeting of *grace* and *peace*. This is very typical of almost all of the NT letters (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:2; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:2; 1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2; Titus 1:4; Philemon 1:3; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Peter 1:2; 2 John 3). The

¹⁶ Strong’s Online.

¹⁷ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=c&p=26&allowed_in_frame=0, “church.”

¹⁸ <http://garycottrell.wordpress.com/2011/04/11/rules-governing-the-king-james-translators/>

source of this *grace* and *peace* is typically ascribed to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. However, at this point, John breaks with tradition.

The first source of the *grace* and *peace* is noted as “from Him who is, and who was, and who is coming.”¹⁹ The Psalmist grasped something of the eternality of God when he wrote: “Of old [Beforetime²⁰] hast thou laid the foundation of the earth: and the heavens *are* the work of thy hands. They shall perish, but thou shalt endure: yea, all of them shall wax old like a garment; as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they shall be changed: But thou *art* the same, and thy years shall have no end” (Psalm 102:25-27). Compared to the eternality of God, the creation of His hands is temporary. Isaiah wrote, “Who hath wrought and done *it*, calling the generations from the beginning? I the LORD, the first, and with the last; I *am* he” (Isaiah 41:4). In our verse, the eternality of God is expressed as the One Who was in the past, the One Who is in the present and the One Who is coming. God does not occupy time as we do; He is God from eternity past and will continue to be God to eternity future (we speak of eternity past and future from our perspective within the confines of time; the reality is that eternity does not have a past and future – it just *is*). “Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou *art* God” (Psalm 90:2). The blessing of *grace* and *peace* comes, first of all, from the eternal God before Whom we must all give account (Romans 14:12).

The second identified source of the *grace* and *peace* is *the seven Spirits*. Are there seven Spirits? When Jesus said that He would send the Comforter so that He might abide with us forever (John 14:16), the word that He used for *Comforter* (*parakletos* - *par-ak'-lay-tos*) is singular.²¹ When Paul wrote to the Romans concerning the role of the Spirit as our intercessor (Romans 8:26), he used the word *pneuma* (*pyoo'-mah*), which is also singular.²² Likewise, John stated, “And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24b), and, again, the word *Spirit* is singular, even though it is applied to *us*, plural.²³ When John the Baptist saw the Spirit descend upon Jesus at His baptism (John 1:33), the word used for the Spirit is *pneuma*, and it is singular.²⁴ Therefore, we would conclude that the Spirit of God is singular, one of only three members of the Godhead – “For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father (singular), the Word (singular), and the Holy Ghost (singular): and these three are one” (1 John 5:7). Why would John, then, refer to *seven Spirits*?

As we have already noted, the number seven is often used in Scripture to metaphorically speak of fullness, or completeness; although we interpret the Bible literally, we must take note of times when poetic language is used – when words are used metaphorically, rather than literally. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh day (Genesis 2:2-3), thereby completing a full week – a measure of time. These were literal days (based on the repeated reference to *the evening and the morning*), resulting in a seven-day week. On the birth of Obed, the women of Bethlehem pronounced a blessing upon Naomi (the grandmother), and declared Ruth, the Moabitess, to “be better to thee than seven sons” (Ruth 4:15); that is, she was better than the

¹⁹ Young’s Literal Translation.

²⁰ YLT.

²¹ Stephanus’ 1550 NT, *Bibleworks* 8.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

fullness of family, expressed here as *seven sons*. What is expressed in our verse is that the fullness of the Spirit of God is present *before his throne*.

When John the Baptist baptized Jesus in the Jordan, he testified that he saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove and abide (*meno* – to remain) upon Jesus (John 1:32; Matthew 3:16). When Jesus spoke of the coming Spirit of truth to His disciples, He said, “... for he dwelleth (*meno* – is presently abiding) with you, and shall be in you” (John 14:17); the Spirit of God was abiding in Jesus in the presence of the disciples, and, when Jesus was departed, He was going to send that same Spirit to be *in* them (fulfilled in Acts 2:1-4; *Holy Ghost* is singular). To the Colossians, Paul declared, “... in him [i.e., in Christ] dwelleth [*katoikeo* (*kat-oy-keh'-o*) – a permanent dwelling²⁵] all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9); in Christ is the full expression of God, being one



Traditional site of Jesus' baptism.

member of the Godhead. Paul's prayer for the Ephesians was “that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Ephesians 3:19). The word *might* expresses the subjunctive mood of the verb *be filled*; being filled with the fullness of God is a possibility, perhaps even a desire, but not a certainty. Peter challenges us to “grow in grace, and *in* the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18); this growth is something that we are to be doing; this is our progressive sanctification in the Lord. The reality is that, in this life, we will never attain to the full expression of the Spirit of God because we continually bear with us that body of sin into which we were born. However, that is not to discourage us from yielding to the Spirit so that we might learn the truth that He has been sent to show us (John 16:13), and that we might, therefore, show forth the righteousness of the Law of God as we walk according to the Spirit's leading (Romans 8:4). If we continually reckon our sin nature to be dead, we will then live in Christ (Romans 6:11) – therein is the essence of abiding in Him. How do we demonstrate that we are abiding in Christ? There is only one way – by living in obedience to His commands (John 14:15; 1 John 3:24). In our earthly bodies, we might not feel the fullness of the Spirit, but, as we practice obedience, we will experience a growing measure of His fullness; occasionally we will fail, but He is faithful to draw us back, if we confess our failure to Him (1 John 1:9).

John is pronouncing the blessing of *grace* and *peace* from the fullness of the Spirit of God – *the seven Spirits which are before his throne*. The fullness of the Spirit is in front of (*before*) God's throne.²⁶ A *throne* is a royal seat, and, by implication, it alludes to power. Interestingly, this speaks of God's *throne*; yet Solomon, at the dedication of the magnificent temple that he had built for Jehovah, declared that “the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain” God (1 Kings 8:27) –

²⁵ Strong's Online.

²⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

how much less can a temple. Of how much greater inadequacy, then, to speak of a *throne* as being where God sits. However, as we think of the heavens as being the dwelling place of God, and the center of His power, so we can understand the *throne* to be the focus of His presence and power. Our words are so limited when it comes to describing the Almighty, and so John writes of God's all-pervasive presence and power within terms to which we can relate.

What do we read of God's throne? "The LORD *is* in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne *is* in heaven ..." (Psalm 11:4); this confirms the holiness of God, and that His throne is far above the earth, in the heavens (plural).²⁷ "Thy throne, O God, *is* for ever and ever ..." (Psalm 45:6); His throne (power, sovereignty) is eternal; therefore, we know that the heavens referred to are not those created by God – there is an eternal habitation of God that we call the heavens. "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven *is* my throne, and the earth *is* my footstool ..." (Isaiah 66:1); the *heavens* (plural) are the throne of God.²⁸ In the eternal heavens is the throne of God, and there, before it, is the fullness of the Spirit.

This is another evidence of the omnipresence of God; His presence is continuously and simultaneously in all places. Here we are told of the fullness of the Spirit of God in the presence of His throne in the eternal heavenlies, yet this is being addressed to those who, through faith in Christ, have the abiding presence of the Spirit of God within (1 John 3:24). When Jesus was on earth, ministering through His physical body, He spoke of being in heaven; "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, *even* the Son of man which is [present tense] in heaven" (John 3:13).²⁹ So we have the Spirit in fullness before the throne of God in the eternal heavens, while at the same time He is abiding within us, and guiding us in our walk on earth – little wonder that He is a living intercessor for us (Romans 8:27). We must not hesitate to live in obedience to His Word – what a great God Whom we serve!



5. And from Jesus Christ, *who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood,*

The final source for the blessing of *grace* and *peace* is Jesus Christ. Here, again, is evidence of the three Persons of the Godhead: God, the Father Who was, is and is to come, the full expression of the Spirit, and Jesus Christ.

Jesus is referred to as the *faithful witness*; *witness* comes from the Greek word *martus* (*mar'-toos*), which speaks "of one whose witness or attestation ultimately leads to death."³⁰ It is from this that our word *martyr* comes.³¹ To what was Jesus a witness? To His disciples Jesus said, "...all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John 15:15). Jesus is the eternal God, the Creator of all things (John 1:3), and, as such, He came in the flesh (Colossians

²⁷ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, *Bibleworks* 8.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Strong's Online.

³⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

³¹ Vine's "witness."

2:9) according to the eternal purposes of God. Eternal God stooped to take on the form of sinful man (a physical body free of sin) so that He could finalize, forever, the means of man's redemption (Philippians 2:6-8; 1 Peter 2:24) in fulfillment of the promise made to Satan in Genesis 3:15. Jesus bore witness to God's love for mankind, and His desire to restore man to fellowship with Him; "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world [the world was already condemned]; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). Jesus willingly gave Himself to die on the cross (John 10:17-18) in fulfillment of God's eternal intention (1 Peter 1:18-21); He was faithful to this eternally prepared plan (a *faithful witness* – *martus*).

Although Jesus came because of His great love for mankind (as part of the Godhead, Jesus holds a great love for all men), it is not this love that is being emphasized within Evangelicalism today. Evangelicals speak much of God's love, but they have neglected to place His love within the framework of His holiness. Consequently, they have desecrated God's love to such an extent that they ascribe to Him a tolerance for worldliness in an effort to seek to justify their own careless living. However, it was God's holiness that required the penalty for man's sins to be paid before His love could find expression in a relationship with man. We read, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ..." (John 3:16a); it was that holy Gift Who worked reconciliation between a holy God and sinful man (1 Timothy 2:5), for the express purpose of instilling God's love into the hearts of those who come to Him through faith. God's holiness prevents us from fellowshiping with Him until our sin has been covered by the blood of Christ, which only happens when we place our faith in Him for our deliverance from sin (we *believe* – are persuaded). Once faith in Christ has been established, we then face new responsibilities. We are to put on the new man, created by God in righteousness and true holiness (Ephesians 4:24); it should not be surprising that a holy God will require His children to live in holiness (1 Peter 1:15-16). Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15); obedience to the Word of God is essential if we are to call ourselves disciples of Jesus Christ. We must learn to walk in accordance with the leading of the Spirit of God (Who now abides within us) so that the righteousness of the Law of God might find expression through us (Romans 8:4). We must remain steadfast in our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 3:6), lest we succumb to a heart of faithlessness (unbelief) and fall away (Hebrews 3:12). We must remember that God's calling requires something of us (Luke 9:23); counting the cost of following the Lord might be unheard of from the mouth of the average Evangelical preacher, but it remains a Biblical requirement.

Jesus is called the *first begotten of the dead*, or, literally, *the first born from the dead*.³² We might think of Lazarus and Jairus' daughter, who were both raised from the dead during Jesus' earthly ministry, but the clarity of the matter is that they would have died again. Their resurrection was a restoration to life as they had it; they were not raised to eternal life, nor were they resurrected in glorified bodies. Jesus was the first to physically rise from the dead, never to die again; "But this *man* [Jesus Christ, our High Priest], because he continueth [*meno* – abideth] ever [forever], hath an unchangeable priesthood" (Hebrews 7:24).³³ His resurrection to life was complete and permanent – He conquered the death that Adam brought upon all of mankind. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, *and* become the firstfruits [the Greek word is singular] of them that slept [perfect tense – metaphorically, those who have died]" (1 Corinthians 15:20); He is the first to physically experience unending life, but, clearly, He will not be the last. As Paul expounded the

³² Stephanus 1550 NT.

³³ Strong's Online.

centrality and necessity of Jesus' resurrection to our faith, he asked, "O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:55). Jesus has conquered physical death, but death will not be destroyed until God casts it into the lake of fire on that final judgment day (Revelation 20:14). We know that after Jesus rose from the dead, His body was not the same as before, for He appeared (John 20:19) and disappeared at will (Luke 24:31). The hope of every true disciple of the Lord is, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). It is within this hope that we can see the Lord as the *first begotten of the dead*, or the Firstfruit of the resurrection to life eternal.

Jesus is referred to as *the prince of the kings of the earth*. This might not seem all that noteworthy, but the Greek word translated as *prince* could be better shown as *ruler*. Jesus Christ will be the *ruler* of the kings of the earth. In his letter to Timothy, Paul referred to Jesus as the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Timothy 6:15); indeed, we find out that this is written upon the clothing of the Lord Jesus Christ: "And he hath on *his* vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS" (Revelation 19:16). We can see this *rule* fulfilled both historically and prophetically. "The king's heart *is* in the hand of the LORD, *as* the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Proverbs 21:1). Solomon acknowledged that the heart of the king is under the Lord's control – yet even **he** ended up in apostasy (1 Kings 11:5), evidence that he did not heed the commands of the Lord, and that the Lord will not force obedience upon anyone. He is not "willing that any should perish" (2 Peter 3:9), but that does not remove the reality that the unrepentant and apostate will perish! As we look forward, we see that the kingdoms of this world will one day belong to Christ (Revelation 11:15), and He will reign. Christ will rule the nations (Revelation 19:15) in righteousness for 1000 years (a sure sign that the kings of the earth will be under His authority) yet, at the end of that time, Satan will be loosed and will muster an army as numerous as the sand of the sea (Revelation 20:7-8). Jesus will not change a heart that has no desire to change; we must be willingly living in obedience to Him – there is no other way to remain faithful!

At this point there seems to be a shift in the focus of the text, as if John is overcome with the magnitude of the triune God and breaks forth into praise to Him. The latter part of this verse is tied directly to what follows, namely, John's doxology of praise to the Lord Jesus Christ.

He begins by directing our attention to the One Who loved us. We have already considered God's love for us, and shown that it is not the insipid, tolerant love that Evangelicals think that it is. God is so much higher than we could ever think (Isaiah 55:9), and, therefore, His love is also much higher and more pure than what we could ever imagine. We, who are sinful by nature, are the subjects of God's undeserved love, so that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8b). Even while we stood in sharp contrast to the holiness and purity of God, He demonstrated His great love for His creatures (those made in His own image) in that He died to deliver us from slavery to sin and the devil. The majestic holiness of God required that the penalty for man's sin must be paid in full before He could enjoy fellowship with His creatures once again; since we are without hope (in ourselves), He stepped in to complete the transaction on the cross of Calvary. It is God's holiness that makes His love for us a liberating love. His holy love lifts us out of our sinfulness into the glorious light of life in Christ under the guidance of His Spirit (Romans 8:1-4). By contrast, Evangelicals ascribe a love to God that leaves them in their error, compromise and accommodation of evil; they proclaim, "God is love," even while they participate in their ecumenical ways, which are a violation of God's commandments. It would only seem appropriate

that if we are *in Christ*, that we would then live in obedience to Him – for we are to walk according to the leading of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:4). John affirmed this when he wrote, “And hereby we do know that we know him [God], if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:3-4). We must take heed that we do not fall into the Evangelical trap of self-deception; if we *know* God (this is a perfect tense verb – indicating a past action that will only happen once, never to be repeated), then we will live in obedience to His Word; if we are not obedient, then we have no claim to Christ (James 2:17). We have been created anew in Christ unto good works, which God has prepared for us before we were made new in Him (Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:14). With obedience comes assurance, “And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby [through obedience] we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us” (1 John 3:24).

Marvel of marvels, Christ loved us so much that He *washed us from our sins in his own blood*. Notice that we have been washed *from* our sins; the Greek word is *apo*, which speaks of a separation.³⁴ If we have been separated from our sins by the blood of Christ, why, then, would we ever think that it is acceptable to continue living in disobedience to God’s Word (i.e., in sin)? To the Romans Paul declared, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed [abolish, bring to an end³⁵], that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Romans 6:6). Our *old man* of sin is to be accounted as dead with Christ (Romans 6:11) so that we might live unto God in newness of life, according to the “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:24). This is our standing before God as long as we are *in Christ*; “For by one offering he [Christ] hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified [made holy]” (Hebrews 10:14).³⁶ In Christ, we have been cleansed *from* our sins and *sanctified* unto His holiness; we are accepted by God when we are found to be *in Christ* (Romans 8:1). The *offering* that Christ made, whereby we are sanctified, is the offering of His own blood; “... Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption *for us*” (Hebrews 9:12). If we have placed our faith in Christ for our deliverance from sin, then we have been cleansed so that we may live in righteousness and true holiness unto God (Romans 8:4; Ephesians 4:24). However, we must remain steadfast (Hebrews 3:12; Mark 13:13)!



6 And hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Christ has made us (those who are bought out of sin through faith in Him) *kings* or rulers; the obvious question is: of what? Throughout Jesus’ ministry on earth, He spoke much of the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, and the Gospel of the kingdom. Peter admonished us to “... give diligence to make your calling and election sure ... for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:10-11). The kingdom of the Lord is described as being eternal (*aionios*), which can mean without

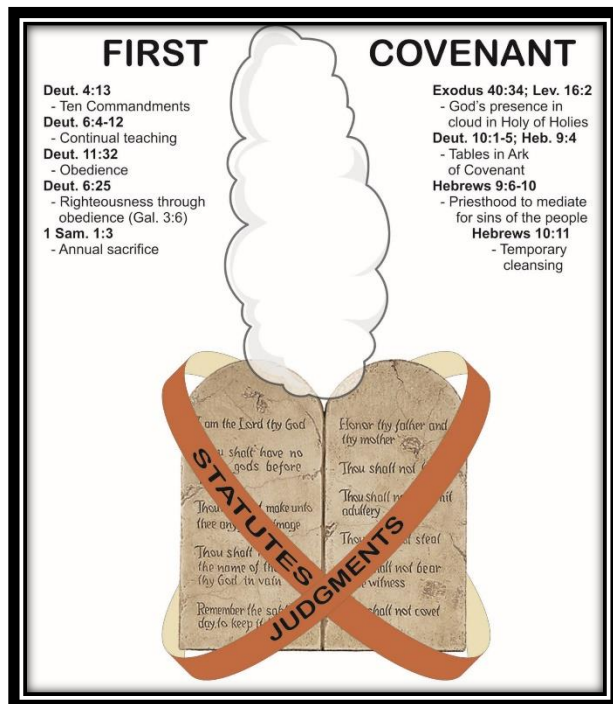
³⁴ Strong’s Online.

³⁵ Gingrich Lexicon.

³⁶ Strong’s Online.

beginning, without ending or without either beginning or ending. The angel who came to Mary declared that the kingdom of Jesus would have “no end” (Luke 1:33), which would seem to indicate that it did have a beginning.

When God created mankind, He charged them, “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish [fill] the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over [rule] the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (Genesis 1:28).³⁷ If we look forward from this point, it seems clear that God intended for man to rule over all of the earth and the creatures in it. However, when sin entered the world, man’s dominion over the world changed. Indeed, man has exercised rule over all of the creatures of the earth, but it has been under the hand of Satan, to whom Adam submitted, rather than under God, as it was designed to be. Nevertheless, with the creation of man, we see the beginning of the kingdom of God, a kingdom where the righteousness of God will flourish under the leadership of the Lamb. Although Adam’s sin changed the course of history, it did nothing to alter God’s plan. Throughout history, we see God’s righteousness being expressed through men and women of faith, providing us with glimpses of what it is that God desires, but we never see His kingdom completely established. We just looked at the time when Jesus will be the ruler of kings, when He will have dominion over all of the earth and everyone in it – a time when He will rule with a rod of iron (Revelation 11:15, 19:15). We read elsewhere that “If we suffer [*hupomeno* – to endure, to stand one’s ground], we shall also reign with *him*” (2 Timothy 2:12); Jesus said, “He that shall endure [*hupomeno*] unto the end, the same shall be saved” (Matthew 24:13).³⁸ Looking forward, it is said of those who are “blessed and holy” that they shall have part in the first resurrection (those who are saved), and that they “shall reign with him [Christ] a thousand years” (Revelation 20:6). As we remain faithful to Christ and His holy calling on our lives, so we will reign with Him on this earth during the millennium. It is



in the new heaven and earth that we will see the kingdom of God flourish in holiness and righteousness forever because the throne of God and the Lamb will be in the midst of the New Jerusalem and God will dwell among the redeemed who, in this life, have been made new through the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 21:3; 22:3).

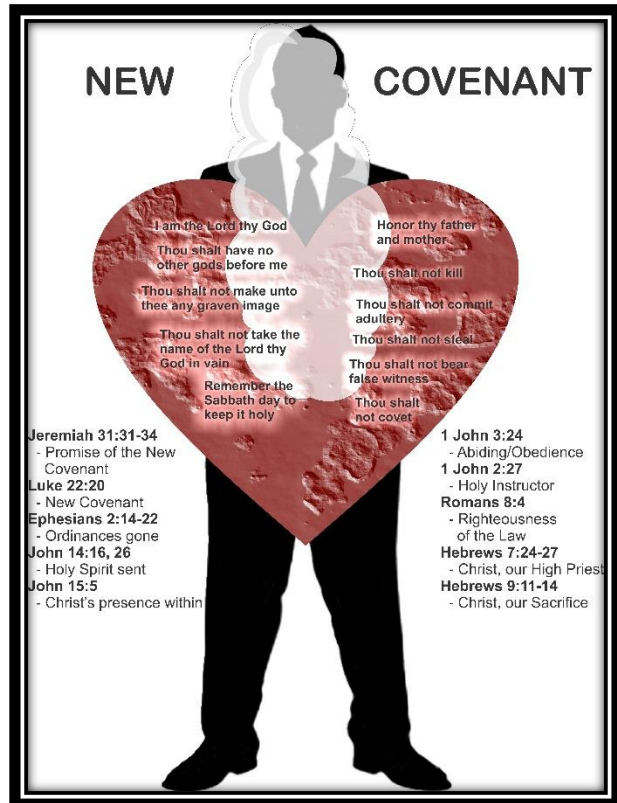
Christ has made us to be *priests unto God*. “Unto you therefore which believe *he* is precious [speaking of Christ as the Cornerstone] ... ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you **out of darkness into** his marvellous light ...” (1 Peter 2:7-9). This is the transition that takes place when we are persuaded that Christ is our Savior (we believe), and we place our faith in Him. When God had

³⁷ Strong’s Online.

³⁸ Friberg Lexicon; Strong’s Online.

taken the children of Israel out of Egypt, He said to Moses, “And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel” (Exodus 19:6). The role of the priest, in the OT, was as an intermediary between man and God; God desired Israel to be a kingdom of priests – those who would show God to the nations around them, and to whom the nations could come to learn of Him. As you trace the history of Israel, you never see this fully accomplished.

Under the New Covenant, everyone who is born-again by the Spirit of God is a priest. Under the Old Covenant, the Law of God (comprised of the Ten Commandments) was written upon tables of stone, and kept in the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies (the innermost chamber of the tabernacle/temple) where the high priest went once a year to make atonement for the sins of the people (Deuteronomy 10:3-5; 1 Kings 8:6-9; Leviticus 16:2, 29-34; Hebrews 9:7). However, Jehovah spoke of a new day coming when “I will make a new [fresh] covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day *that* I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:31-33).³⁹ When Jesus met with His disciples at what is called the Last Supper, He said to them, “This cup *is* the new [fresh] testament [covenant] in my blood, which is shed for you” (Luke 22:20)⁴⁰; as He described the New Covenant to His disciples on the evening before



His death, He used the same words as spoken to Jeremiah many years earlier. As we place our faith in the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ (as we enter into the New Covenant), God writes His Law (the Ten Commandments) upon our hearts, and the Spirit of God enters our hearts to guide us into all truth (John 16:13). The writer of Hebrews tells us that the Holy Spirit gives testimony to us that the Law of God has been written in our hearts (Hebrews 10:15-16); the fulfillment of Jeremiah’s prophecy takes place when we believe (are persuaded) that Jesus died for our sins (John 20:31). Therewith, we are made priests of God, armed with His Spirit and His Word.

What is our responsibility as priests of God? There are a couple of Scriptures that speak to this matter very specifically. “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, **to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ**” (1 Peter 2:5).

³⁹ Strong’s Online.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

The role of a priest has typically been one of offering specific sacrifices required to atone for sin in order to bridge the gap between man and God (or god); the term *priest* is not innately Christian, even though it is religious by denotation. Hence, Peter writes that we, as the born-again children of God, are made a holy priesthood by God for the express purpose of making spiritual sacrifices that are welcomed by Him. The Greek word translated as *acceptable* is in a strengthened form signifying a very favorable acceptance.⁴¹ *Offer up* is in the active voice, which means that we, as members of the priesthood of God by faith, are to do the offering. What can we offer that will be a spiritual sacrifice that is so thoroughly welcomed by God? “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable [not a strengthened form, meaning fully agreeable⁴²] unto God, *which is your reasonable service*” (Romans 12:1). The Greek word translated as *present* is a “religious technical term in relation to sacrifice,” something with which a *priest* would be involved.⁴³ Peter speaks of us as being *lively stones* – stones who are alive, being built upon the “foundation of the apostles and prophets” (Ephesians 2:19-22). Paul calls us to present our bodies as a *living sacrifice* – *lively (stones)* and *living (sacrifice)* are different forms of the same Greek word, and both describe our status in Christ – alive! Our bodies are the most significant link that we have to this life; therefore, presenting our bodies as offerings to God demonstrates our commitment to walk with Him. “Neither yield ye your members *as* instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God” (Romans 6:13); *yield* comes from a form of the same Greek word translated as *present* in Romans 12:1. Paul encourages us to present our bodies to God as a living sacrifice; this comes after admonishing us to reckon ourselves dead unto sin (Romans 6:11). A sacrifice is typically killed; although we are to become a living sacrifice (we are not to kill ourselves), we are to reckon ourselves as being dead to sin. As holy priests of God through faith in Christ, we are to offer our bodies as a sacrifice unto Him – living to His glory, yet, of necessity, reckoning our bodies to be dead unto sin. This is our first responsibility as a priest of God.

The second reference that we have to the activities of this *royal priesthood* is this: “But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; **that ye should shew forth the praises of him** who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light ...” (1 Peter 2:9). God is the One Who has called us out of darkness into His light; therefore, our activity is to be focused on Him. The phrase *shew forth* comes from the Greek word *exangello*, which means to report widely, proclaim throughout, and to tell everywhere,⁴⁴ but, even more so, it indicates to publish completely, to make a complete proclamation.⁴⁵ This is to be a wide proclamation with nothing left out. The word *praises* embodies our message; it comes from a Greek word that speaks of virtue and excellence.⁴⁶ We are to proclaim the entire goodness of God everywhere – the One Who has paid for our salvation. Peter emphasizes our liberation from sin in this verse, clearly marking it as the basis for our proclamation of God’s goodness. We have already noted that we have been called *out of darkness into his marvellous light*; however, this is the second emphasis,

⁴¹ Vine’s “acceptable.”

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁴⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

⁴⁵ Vine’s “shew.”

⁴⁶ Strong’s Online.

the first is buried in a phrase that we don't truly understand – *peculiar people*. The Greek word translated as *peculiar* means possession or property;⁴⁷ we are God's acquired possession, purchased through the sacrifice of Christ. "[The Holy Spirit] is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession ..." (Ephesians 1:14); this elaborates on what Peter has stated in his epistle – we have been purchased by God, the Holy Spirit being the deposit confirming God's desire to complete our salvation someday.⁴⁸

Our responsibility as priests to God is to, first of all, offer ourselves as a holy sacrifice unto Him, and, then, to proclaim His majesty everywhere we go. Our role as priests for a holy God obviously requires that we live in holiness before Him (1 Peter 1:15), in obedience to His Word (John 14:15).

To Him belongs glory and power – splendor and majesty,⁴⁹ and a strength that affords supremacy⁵⁰ or sovereignty.⁵¹ This is a description of the One with Whom we will reign, and the One for Whom we work as priests declaring His superb majesty! As John is caught up in declaring the majesty and glory of God, he breaks out in what we call a doxology – a spontaneous pronouncement of praise to God. *Amen* – let it be so!⁵²



7. Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.

John has been describing Jesus, and what He has done for us; he continues to speak of Jesus, but in a more prophetic vein.

Jesus ascended from His disciples, while standing with them on the Mount of Olives (Acts 1:12). In Zechariah 14:4 we are told, "And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west ..." This is speaking of the day when the Lord will return to earth to establish His kingdom and authority (Zechariah 14:9). The events of Jesus' ascension are described for us: "And when he [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and **a cloud received him** out of their sight. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall **so come in like manner** as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11). Even as Jesus was taken up into a cloud on His way to the right hand of the Father, the promise of the heavenly messengers is that He will return in the same way – in clouds to the Mount of Olives, except that the *clouds* will then be the armies of heaven (Revelation 19:14). Daniel, in one of his

⁴⁷ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁴⁸ Strong's Online.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

⁵¹ Gingrich Lexicon.

⁵² Friberg Lexicon.



Mount of Olives

visions of what is to come, “saw ... and, behold, *one* like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven ...” (Daniel 7:13), and, subsequently, this Son of man is given all the peoples of the earth for His dominion (Daniel 7:14). When the Jews looked for a Messiah (at the time of Jesus), this was the Leader Whom they sought – Someone Who would come from heaven and establish His rule over the Romans – they longed for political release. When Jesus stood before the high priest during His mock trial, He declared, “Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming

in the clouds of heaven” (Matthew 26:64b). The response of the high priest to Jesus’ comment shows that he knew Daniel’s prophecy, and understood exactly what Jesus had just said: “Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy” (Matthew 26:65). Rather than falling before Him in worship, the priest took offense at Jesus’ claim of being the Messiah, and condemned Him for blasphemy, thereby being used to fulfill the prophecies of the suffering Messiah.

The Jews read Isaiah’s words: “For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6), and they looked forward to the Messiah Who would come to establish His rule on earth. They were less inclined to give their attention to: “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he *was* wounded for our transgressions, *he was* bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace *was* upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:4-6). They so desperately desired a savior who would free them from their Roman bondage that they failed to see their greater need of being freed from their sins – they were content with the temporary cleansing that was obtained through the sacrificial system that was established by God through Moses, and closed their eyes to the many prophecies of the One Who would come to fulfill Genesis 3:15. When Jesus, as the suffering Savior, identified Himself as also being the victorious Messiah, the Jews were offended because they could not reconcile the two as being one Person.

Returning to our text, it is interesting to note that the Greek word for *cometh* is in the present tense; He is coming. Jesus said, “Watch therefore, for ye know [*oida* – have knowledge] neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 25:13); the word *cometh*, here, is from the same Greek word as used in our verse.⁵³ It bears what is termed as a “futuristic present” tense; it is a present tense verb used to describe a future event, but it adds the “connotations of immediacy and certainty.”⁵⁴ Jesus told His followers, “Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matthew 24:44); the same Greek word is again used for *cometh*. The Son of Man is definitely coming, and, although we do not know the day or the

⁵³ Strong’s Online.

⁵⁴ <http://www.bcbsr.com/greek/gtense.html>

hour (Matthew 24:36), we have been given signs to tell us when the day is approaching. It seems that the early believers anticipated the Lord's return during their lifetime – perhaps because they did not have all of the NT Scriptures that we have today. When Jesus gathered with His disciples upon the Mount of Olives just before He was taken to heaven, they asked Him if He was going to restore the kingdom to Israel *at this time*. Jesus responded: "It is not for you to know the times [chronos] or the seasons [kairos] ..." (Acts 1:7);⁵⁵ this took place before the coming of the Spirit of God and it appears that the disciples were still expecting the physical kingdom of Israel to be established with Jesus as its King. The Spirit Who was coming to guide them into all truth (John 16:13) would help them to understand that Israel would never be a kingdom again – even during the millennium when Jesus (as a descendant of King David) will rule from Jerusalem, it will in no way resemble the former kingdom. To the Thessalonians Paul wrote: "But of the times [chronos] and the seasons [kairos], brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you" (1 Thessalonians 5:1);⁵⁶ clearly the Gospel that Paul preached included some instruction about the return of the Lord. Despite this, the Thessalonians became concerned that they had missed it because they had been told that His return had already taken place (2 Thessalonians 2:2). We must be prepared for the Lord at all times, for even if His return will be preceded by some very specific signs (*times* and *seasons*), we have no idea when our time will come to leave this life – we must be ready!

Before we look further into this verse, perhaps it would be appropriate to take a step back in order to provide an overview of prophetic events. To do this, we must consider Daniel's prophecy that provides a timeline for future events.

Seventy weeks [seventy seven-year periods or 490 years] are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up [close up, make an end⁵⁷] the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. Know therefore and understand, *that* from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince *shall be* seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof *shall be* with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make *it* desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate" (Daniel 9:24-27).

The seventy weeks (the word translated as *weeks* means "seven of years"⁵⁸) spoken of here provides an overview of what will happen to Israel, as a nation, in the days ahead. What we must notice is that the seventy-week period is broken into three pieces: seven weeks (or 49 years), 62

⁵⁵ Strong's Online.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ BDB.

weeks (434 years) and one final week (7 years). The first two periods are identified with 1) restoring and rebuilding Jerusalem (v.25), and 2) the cutting off of Messiah (v.26).

Several details identify the work of Christ on the cross as the final payment for the sins of mankind: *finish the transgression* (v.24: finish the punishment for transgression⁵⁹ – Christ is the only sacrifice for sins [Hebrews 9:13-14]), *make an end of sins* (it is in Christ that sins are dealt with in finality [Hebrews 9:12]), and *make reconciliation for iniquity* (Christ has atoned for, or covered, our sins – Hebrews 2:17). However, there are also details given that allude to a coming day: *bring in everlasting righteousness* (this speaks of the work of the Spirit of God in the life of the faithful disciple of the Lord, which will find a greater expression during the millennial reign of Christ, and its final reality in the new heavens and new earth), *to seal up the vision and prophecy* (a closing or conclusion that comes through fulfillment, which will only take place at the end of time itself – 1 Corinthians 13:8-10), and *to anoint the most Holy* or the Holy of Holies (Christ entered the heavenly Holies to make atonement for our sins, but there will come a day when sin will be completely vanquished – Revelation 21:27).⁶⁰ In typical prophetic style, this hits the highlights of many, many years without identifying the years that bridge these events.

The next words (Daniel 9:25) provide a beginning and ending event and tell us how many years will fall in between these two events, thus providing a means of identifying a specific period of time (the sometimes hidden valleys of time are, therefore, eliminated in this case). *From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem*, is the identified beginning. There has been much confusion about this, but, if we consider the words carefully, we must recognize that the command given will be for the rebuilding of Jerusalem, and **not** for the rebuilding of the temple. Ezra 6:3 states, “In the first year of Cyrus the king *the same* Cyrus the king made a decree *concerning* the house of God at Jerusalem, Let the house be builded, the place where they offered sacrifices, and let the foundations thereof be strongly laid; the height thereof threescore cubits, and the breadth thereof threescore cubits” This decree was issued well before the command to rebuild the city of Jerusalem, which was given by Artaxerxes to Nehemiah (Nehemiah 2:1-8). Therefore, the *going forth* to which Daniel’s prophecy is speaking, is the decree that was issued by Artaxerxes. There is some dispute as to the precise year that Artaxerxes began to reign, but the majority of sources that I checked seem to peg it as 465 BC⁶¹; then, according to Nehemiah, the edict to rebuild the city of Jerusalem would have been issued in 445 BC (twenty years later – Nehemiah 1:1) – at which point we can begin Daniel’s prophetic clock. The time period of seven and sixty-two weeks (for a total of 483 years) will conclude during the time of Messiah. Therefore, from the decree to rebuild Jerusalem, the first 7 weeks (or 49 years) comprise the period during which Jerusalem is restored to being a functioning city for the Jews (although not to its former glory). The second period counts the time to the days of Messiah, Jesus.

Daniel goes on (Daniel 9:26a) to note the concluding events of the span of 483 years (69 weeks) more specifically. He writes that *after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself*. When was Christ, the promised Messiah, cut off (or killed)?⁶² It can refer to nothing other than His crucifixion, for Daniel also includes the detail that the Messiah would be cut off,

⁵⁹ BDB.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/36741/Artaxerxes-I>

⁶² Strong’s Online.

but **not** for Himself – it would not be because of what He had done that He would die. “For him who did not know sin, in our behalf He did make sin, that we may become the righteousness of God in him” (2 Corinthians 5:21).⁶³ What a marvelous description of the work that Jesus came to do! “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, **the just for the unjust**, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit ...” (1 Peter 3:18). Therefore, we can conclude that from the issuing of the decree to rebuild Jerusalem (445 BC) to the crucifixion of Jesus upon the cross was 483 years. What we must not overlook, is that these are Jewish years (360 days – lunar based), not Gregorian (as per our calendar – solar based, 365.242 days). The year 445 BC is computed based on the Gregorian method of counting years, so we cannot simply subtract the 483 years to arrive at the year of the Lord’s crucifixion. Since the days (Jewish and ours) are the same, we can use that as a conversion factor to convert the 483 Jewish years into 476 of our years.⁶⁴ If we then subtract 476 from 445 BC, we arrive at AD 31; however, because there is no year zero, we reduce this by one to arrive at AD 30 for the year of Christ’s crucifixion.⁶⁵ This brings the first sixty-nine weeks of Daniel’s seventy-week prophecy to a conclusion.

Daniel now goes on to describe what will take place after the end of the sixty-nine weeks (Daniel 9:26b). He writes of *the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary*. Again, we have a clear description of an event to come after Jesus’ crucifixion. What we must not miss is that this will be part of the seventieth week. This is readily identifiable as the work of the Romans in the destruction of Jerusalem. Let’s consider this time and see how it fits with what we read here.

Throughout the time of the Roman rule of Judea, there had been periodic Jewish uprisings that were typically small, poorly organized and easily squelched by the Romans. Gamaliel, when he cautioned the Jewish leaders concerning the action that they would take against the disciples, spoke of two such uprisings – one led by Theudas and another by Judas of Galilee⁶⁶ (Acts 5:36-37). As Gamaliel noted, these men and their followings were quickly subdued, and came to naught. However, toward the fall of AD 66, the Jews came together in their efforts, and actually defeated a Roman force sent from Syria to put an end to their most recent rebellion.⁶⁷ In February of AD 67, Nero appointed Vespasian to regain control of Judea and suppress the Jewish rebellion that had seen some success the previous year.⁶⁸ Through the years AD 67 and 68, Vespasian



Vespasian

Titus

⁶³ YLT.

⁶⁴ $483 \text{ years} \times 360 \text{ days} \div 365.242 \text{ days/year} = 476.07 \text{ years}$.

⁶⁵ http://www.biblecalculator.com/learning_no_year_zero.html ;
http://star.wind.mystarband.net/bib/passion_week.html

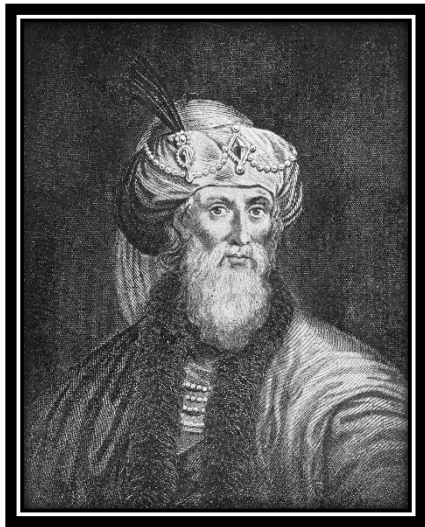
⁶⁶ Judas led an uprising in about AD 6; <http://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionaries/smiths-bible-dictionary/judas-of-galilee.html>

⁶⁷ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/303631/First-Jewish-Revolt>

⁶⁸ <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/626856/Vespasian>

worked his way throughout Judea, removing the resistance in all of the smaller settlements, after which he arrived at Jerusalem. It was while here that he turned his attention to becoming emperor of Rome (Nero had died), and, consequently, he left the rest of the suppression of the Jews' rebellion to his son, Titus. During Vespasian's campaign, any Jewish town that surrendered was spared the slaughter that inevitably came with resistance; even at Jerusalem, Titus, in like manner, sought terms of surrender, but these were rebuffed by the zealots who were in control of the city.⁶⁹ Even those within Jerusalem who desired to surrender, were not permitted to do so by the zealots. Jesus spoke of this time, "And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh. Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto" (Luke 21:20-21). Jerusalem fell to Titus in August of AD 70, which resulted in the destruction of the temple, despite Titus' desire to leave it intact.⁷⁰ With the destruction of the temple, Jewish traditions, surrounding this central aspect to their daily lives, came to an end. From the announcement by Nero that the rebellion in Judea was to be suppressed, through to the destruction of Jerusalem, was a period of three and a half years – half of Daniel's seventieth week. The attempts by Vespasian and Titus to have the Jews surrender, rather than be killed, would fit with Daniel's observation that the covenant between God and Israel was to be confirmed – the Roman leaders' first desire was for surrender, not bloodshed, which would have permitted the Jews to continue their Jewish traditions without interruption.

In their conquest of so much of the known world of that day, the Romans chose not to suppress the conquered peoples and force them to learn Roman culture, which would have required much time and effort on their part. "Instead of conquering an area, teaching them Roman ways and religion, and forcing their new people to be more 'Roman' they merely made the conquered people



Flavius Josephus

swear fealty [allegiance] to Rome and then pretty much left them alone."⁷¹ This would have been the tactic used by Vespasian and Titus as they approached the rebels in Judea. The covenant, referred to by Daniel, is the one that was established between God and Israel at Mt. Sinai; this is not a new covenant to be implemented, but an existing one that is affirmed or supported (to *confirm*); the Romans would have permitted the Jews to carry on with all of their religious practices if they had simply sworn allegiance to Rome; by doing so, Vespasian confirmed, or promised to protect, the existing Mosaic covenant.⁷² Josephus wrote, "How often Titus, out of his desire to preserve the city and the temple, invited the seditious to come to terms of accommodation."⁷³ However, the Jewish zealots refused to accept such terms, and, consequently, the Romans defeated them, and both Jerusalem and the temple

⁶⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_%2870%29

⁷⁰ http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/vespasian.shtml ;
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Siege_of_Jerusalem_%2870%29

⁷¹ <http://iml.jou.ufl.edu/projects/Spring04/Tyler/LandR.html>

⁷² Albert J. Dager, "What is the True Gospel?" *Media Spotlight*, Volume 24, No. 3.

⁷³ Flavius Josephus, *The Jewish War*, Preface, No. 11.

were destroyed. At this time, the Jews still adhered to the Mosaic covenant, and the temple was central to their traditions; the Jewish Christians, who would have discontinued their participation in the sacrificial practices, were mostly scattered from Jerusalem because of an earlier persecution (Acts 8:1). The Jews clung to their customs, which the Roman conquerors would gladly have permitted them to practice if they simply would have submitted; as it was, they were decimated by the Romans (Josephus cites 1.1 million killed and 97,000 taken captive).⁷⁴

With the defeat of the Jews complete, and the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple behind them, the Romans celebrated their victory. “In a final desecration to the Temple, sacrifice was made to the Roman standards in the Temple court.”⁷⁵ This was a celebration to the gods and goddesses whom the Romans believed had aided them in their battles against the Jews; taking place on the location of the destroyed temple for Almighty God, there could have been no greater desecration of this holy site in the minds of the Jews. From this point on, Jerusalem has never been a strictly Jewish city; indeed, there have been times when Jews were specifically banned. Within three and half years (February, AD 67 to August, AD 70), Vespasian and Titus had fulfilled some very specific prophecies made by Daniel, and we see that there still remains a three-and-a-half-year period of time when Israel and Jerusalem will once again be in God’s spotlight. It is this future period of time to which the Revelation speaks; this is the reign of the Antichrist when the prophecies of the *two witnesses* will take place within Jerusalem (Revelation 11:3). All efforts to silence them will fail (Revelation 11:5) until Satan comes against them; they are killed and their bodies become a worldwide spectacle that stirs an equally broad celebration (Revelation 11:7-10). Clearly, their prophecies will be largely ignored.

Before we leave the subject of Daniel’s 70-weeks, it is noteworthy that this time has been *determined*, decreed, or marked-off for Daniel’s *people* (Israel) and Jerusalem, his *holy city* (Daniel 9:24). The Hebrew word translated as *determined* is only used here in Scripture, it comes from a Hebrew root that means *cut*, and it is used in a perfect-passive form, which means that the determination has been completed and it is the Lord Who has *cut* what lies ahead for Israel.⁷⁶ What this means is that when the 70th week closes, what God has *determined* for Israel will be finished; hence, at the end of the final 3½ years of Daniel’s 70-weeks, when Jesus returns to defeat the Antichrist at the Battle of Armageddon (Revelation 19:20), the time when the Lord will deal specifically with Israel is over. The 70-weeks that were marked-off within God’s determination for Israel will be completed; therefore, what follows the return of the Lord with the armies of heaven (which some call His second advent) and the Battle of Armageddon, namely the millennial reign of the Lord, will **not** be focused on Israel. Despite the clarity of this matter as it was brought to Daniel, Evangelicals primarily look at the thousand-year reign of the Lord as being the *fulfillment of Israel’s restoration* that will take place with the *second advent of Christ*.⁷⁷ Along with a restoration of the nation of Israel, many hold to a modified form of the old Mosaic Covenant being instituted, including the sacrifices – although they concede that they *will be memorial* in character rather than atoning (which is their way of keeping their dispensational theology intact while acknowledging, at least to a degree, that that aspect of the Mosaic Covenant has truly been

⁷⁴ Flavius Josephus, *War of the Jews*, Book VI, Chapter 9.3.

⁷⁵ John Donahue, “*Titus Flavius Vespasianus (A.D. 79-81)*,” <http://www.roman-emperors.org/titus.htm>

⁷⁶ Strong’s Online; Theological Wordbook of the OT (*Bibleworks* 8).

⁷⁷ Pentecost, *Things*, pp. 504-5.

ended).⁷⁸ However, if we carefully consider Daniel's 70-weeks and Hebrews 8:13 (which describes the Old Covenant as being obsolete), it should be very evident that the Mosaic Covenant has been ended – it has been replaced by the New Covenant implemented through Jesus' shed blood (Luke 22:20). Following the close of Daniel's 70 weeks, Jesus will rule over all peoples for one thousand years (Revelation 20:6), and, even though He will reign from Jerusalem (Revelation 20:9), His kingdom will not resemble historical, national Israel – the Lord's faithful from all ages will reign with Him and be His priests to the millennial world.

Returning to our verse, we have the promise that Jesus will *come with clouds*. There remains some question as to whether this refers to the time when He will return for those who are *in Christ*, or when He will return to establish His rule over the earth, or if both of these will occur at the same time. Let's give this matter some consideration.

There are several passages in Scripture that speak very clearly of the time when Jesus will return to be united with those who have placed their faith in Him, and who yet remain on the earth. "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep [die], but we shall all be changed, In a moment [*atomos* (*at'-om-os*) – that which cannot be divided], in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).⁷⁹ What we can glean from this is that there will be some saved (those who have placed their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and who are living in obedience to His Word) who will be alive on the earth when Jesus comes to call them to Himself (*we shall not all sleep*); with the sound of a heavenly trumpet, the dead *in Christ* shall be raised physically to incorruption, and those who are still alive will have their bodies changed from corruptible to incorruptible. This change will take place in an indivisible amount of time (*moment*), yet with a sound that will be unmistakable. Jesus said, "And then shall he [the Son of Man] send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven." (Mark 13:27). This will take place "after that tribulation" when the sun, moon and stars will no longer give their full light (Mark 13:24). Jesus said, "Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here *is* Christ, or there; believe *it* not. ... For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (Matthew 24:23, 27). We should not believe those who say that Christ has returned, for when He comes, everyone will know it. This does away with the Evangelical concept of people simply vanishing – being caught away in a silent rapture.

It would also seem, from a careful study of the Scriptures, that the time when Jesus returns for His own, and when He returns to establish His kingdom, are two different events. Matthew tells us that "after the tribulation of those days ... they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven ... and he shall send his angels ... [to] gather his elect from the four winds ..." (Matthew 24:29-31). This clearly speaks of the gathering of the saved (the *elect*, those who are found to be *in Christ* – Ephesians 1:4) unto the Lord – what Revelation calls the "first resurrection" (Revelation 20:5). We read of Christ coming (Revelation 19:11-13), leading an army dressed in white linen, to destroy the work of the Anti-Christ, and to usher in His reign of a thousand years (Revelation 20:2-4). The fine, white linen is identified as the righteousness of the saints (those who have put on the new man, "created in righteousness and true holiness" by God [Ephesians 4:24], and are living faithfully for Him [Romans 8:3-4]) – that which is worn by the Bride of the Lamb of God

⁷⁸ Pentecost, pp. 524-5.

⁷⁹ Strong's Online.

(Revelation 19:7-8). Therefore, this army, which is following Christ, can be none other than the saints (the elect) who have been gathered to Christ from the ends of heaven and earth (Mark 13:27). These are two different occasions, separated, I believe, by the outpouring of God's wrath (*thumos*) upon a world that no longer has anyone righteous in it (Matthew 24:29-31; Revelation 16:1).

Continuing with our verse, we read, *Every eye shall see him*. Unlike the word *cometh*, *see* is future tense – this declares the truth that every eye shall look upon the Lord Jesus Christ. We understand that all people, from all times, will at some time be resurrected to see the Lord. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28-29). Everyone will be resurrected, but what we learn from Revelation 20:5 is that there are two separate resurrections: first of the righteous (before God's wrath is poured out – known as the rapture), and at the end of the thousand years when the heaven and earth are removed, the millennial faithful will be resurrected along with the unrighteous from all ages to be judged according to their works – they will be glorified only if their name has been written into the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 20:12-13). However, will every eye see the Lord when He comes to gather His saints? This verse indicates that they will.

Consider what Jesus revealed through relating the experiences of the rich man and Lazarus: “And in hell he [the rich man] lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:23). The rich man was in hades (*hell*), which is the place of torment where the unrepentant await the day of their final resurrection, while Lazarus was in paradise, in the bosom of Abraham. Nevertheless, the rich man could observe Lazarus from where he was; there was a great gulf between hades and paradise, but those in the place of torment could see what was happening in the place of comfort. Ephesians 4:8 tells us that, when Jesus ascended to the Father, He led “captivity captive”; i.e., those who had been dwelling in paradise (the bosom of Abraham) became the resurrected firstfruit unto the Lamb (Matthew 27:52-53; Revelation 14:4). Those who had been in paradise were *captives*, albeit in a wonderful place, but, with His resurrection, Jesus emptied paradise and took these purchased captives with Him, so that now, when we (who have been bought by His blood) are absent from the body, we are present with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8), not present with Abraham in paradise. What we must not overlook from Jesus' account of the rich man is that he could see what was taking place within the spiritual realm; therefore, it would be in keeping with this truth to say that all of those who will be in Hades when Christ returns for His own, will see what is taking place.

It is apparent that all of those who are alive on the earth, at the time when the Lord returns to gather His own, will see Him. “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes [peoples] of the earth mourn [the same Greek word as *wail* in our verse], and they shall see [to catch sight of] the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30).⁸⁰ We are not told what the sign will be, but we are assured that everyone will know it when they see it. First Corinthians 15:52 confirms that we will be transformed in an indivisible amount of time when the trumpet sounds, but that does not mean that the coming of the Lord for His own will be over in an instant. The Lord's return to gather His own will take long enough for everyone on the earth to see Him, and they will mourn (literally to *beat one's breast* as a strong expression of grief or remorse⁸¹), for they will recognize Him as God and

⁸⁰ Friberg Lexicon.

⁸¹ Friberg Lexicon.

realize that they have missed out. This is so dramatically different from the Evangelical hoax that millions will disappear from the earth, and no one will know why they're gone.

And they also which pierced him – continues with the thought of those who will see the Lord Jesus Christ. The KJV uses the connecting word *and*, while supplying *also*; Robert Young, on the other hand, chose the word *even* to more accurately express the closeness of this phrase with the previous one.⁸² When Jesus stood before the high priest, during His trial, he was asked directly if He was indeed the Christ; He confirmed His identity, and added that they (His accusers) would “see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power [this took place when Christ ascended (Mark 16:19)], and coming in the clouds of heaven [this will take place when He returns for His redeemed (Mark 13:26-27)]” (Mark 14:62). This lends further credence to those in hell (hades) being able to see what is taking place within the spiritual realm. Even those who sought to do away with Him, while He was on earth, will see Him – even as the rich man could see Lazarus, they, too, will, from hades, see the coming of the Son of man.

The next phrase reads, *all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him*. The Greek word translated as *kindreds*, most often appears in the KJV as *tribes*, and is used when speaking of the various tribes of Israel. However, in this case it refers to the tribes *of the earth*, and, in a more general sense, it refers to all of the races among the peoples on the earth.⁸³ When will the people of the earth mourn (*wail*) to see the Lord? When Jesus was telling His disciples about the destruction of the temple, the sign of His return and the end of the world, He said this: “... then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall **all the tribes of the earth mourn**, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matthew 24:30). This is exactly the same phrasing as used in Revelation⁸⁴; the only variation is that, in John’s account, the words *because of Him* are added to identify the reason for their wailing. Jesus is speaking here of His return to gather His called-out ones to Himself. It seems evident that His return will be known to everyone on the earth; the obvious reason for the people mourning is that they will realize their mistake, but that it will be too late. These who are left behind “received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12). Note: because they refused (*received not* identifies this as being their choice) a love (*agape* – a love based upon a willful choice) for the truth of God, He will send them a *strong delusion* – their rejection of the truth opens them up to a complete deception where they will be convinced (*believe*) that **the** lie of the Antichrist is truth.⁸⁵ The reason that they will be mourning when Christ returns is because they absolutely refused to accept a love for God’s truth; if we accept God’s truth, then we must also live accordingly – if we do not live in obedience to the Word of God, then we absolutely cannot say that we have a love for His truth. It is very important that we do not deceive ourselves in this matter, or let others persuade, or influence, us to believe that it is not necessary to walk in obedience to God’s commandments. “Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience” (Ephesians 5:6). “He that saith, I know [have known (perfect tense)] him, and keepeth not [is not carefully attending to] his

⁸² YLT.

⁸³ Strong’s Online.

⁸⁴ Stephanus 1550 NT.

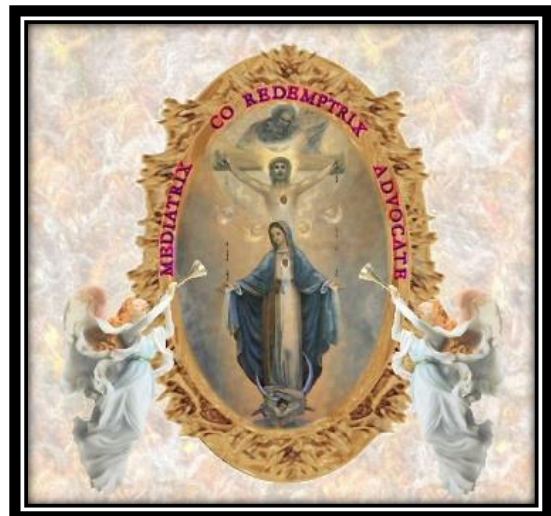
⁸⁵ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT.

commandments, is a liar, and the truth is [absolutely] not in him. But whoso keepeth [may be carefully attending to (subjunctive mood)] his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected [made complete – perfect tense, done only once]: hereby know [present tense] we that we are in him” (1 John 2:4-5).⁸⁶

The final phrase, *even so, amen*, could just as well be translated as *Yes! Let it be so!*⁸⁷ John’s enthusiasm for the return of the Lord is obvious; it will mean mourning for those who have rejected His truth, but it will be joy beyond description for those who have faithfully endured to the time of His return. “For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold [may hold fast (*hold* is in the subjunctive mood, making the *holding* a possibility, not a certainty)] the beginning [the origin] of our confidence [that which forms a foundation] steadfast [may hold fast] unto the end ...” (Hebrews 3:14).⁸⁸ The *end* referred to will either be physical death or the day when the Lord returns to take us to Himself. The Scriptures are replete with warnings against apostasy; we must take heed!

Consider, for a moment, the warnings that were sounded by Peter against being caught up in heresy that can easily lead to apostasy. “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake *as they were* moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Peter 1:21). This provides a contrast to what Peter is about to explain in some detail. In the formulation of the Scriptures, holy men were moved by the Spirit of God to proclaim and to write His Word – it was not their determination as to what was to be declared, rather, it was the words of God.

“But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction” (2 Peter 2:1). Peter now draws a contrast to the holy men of old who were compliant with the moving of the Spirit of God. First of all, even while the holy men of old proclaimed the truths of God, there were also false prophets among the people – those who sought to present themselves as godly men, but who, in reality, were tools of Satan to bring confusion and sow seeds of doubt. Peter then draws this forward and makes an application to the assemblies of believers who will be infiltrated by false teachers. These false teachers will secretly (*privily*) introduce *damnable heresies* – utterly destructive false teachings.⁸⁹ Any teaching that draws someone away from the truth of God is both false and completely detrimental. Peter goes on to state that some of these false teachers will even go so far as to deny the Lord Jesus Christ; however, that does not make it the litmus test for identifying falsehood. The ecumenical thrust today, which has virtually infiltrated all of Evangelicalism, seeks to justify bringing all denominations together through a common work and fellowship, and, very typically, this will include Evangelicals and Catholics. Think



⁸⁶ Strong’s Online.

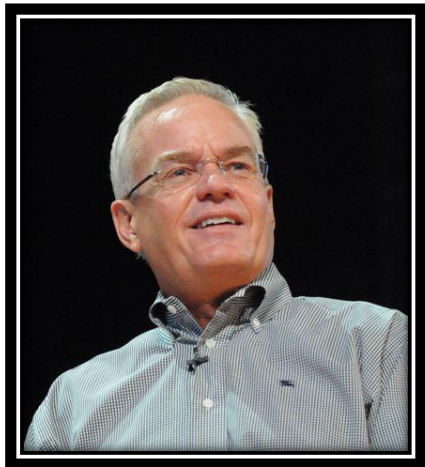
⁸⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

about this! The Evangelical will profess that Jesus is the only way to the Father, whereas the Catholic believes that Mary works alongside of Christ to open the way of salvation. For these two groups to work and/or fellowship together, the Evangelical must either deny or ignore the fact that Jesus is the only way of hope. Ecumenical activity demands that some of the fundamental truths of Scripture must be set aside for the sake of unity; the ecumenist is truly guilty of denying *the Lord that bought them*. If that ecumenist happens to be an Evangelical, then that Evangelical is guilty of denying the Lord Who died to pay the price for his sins. We must not be surprised that a professing Christian will deny the Lord – you need look no further than the ecumenical gatherings in your own community; the denial of the Lord Jesus Christ is happening all of the time! Paul clarified that even a teaching that is simply alongside of (*contrary to* – the Greek word is *para*) the truth (it does not need to be completely opposite to the truth, nor does it need to deny the truth, it is simply different in some respects from the Gospel) is to be avoided (Romans 16:17). The message of life is very exclusive and restrictive; Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me” (John 14:6). That is a narrow Way, and anyone who would seek to broaden that way, in any respect, is a false teacher, and has denied the Lord!

Peter goes on to say that these false teachers will *bring upon themselves swift destruction*. They are not victims; this *swift destruction* is of their own doing. *Destruction*, as it is used here, comes from exactly the same Greek word that is used to describe the heresies that they have subtly introduced (*damnable*). If these false teachers have never known God (but only perpetrated a



Bill Hybels

charade), then they remain under the wrath of God (as do all of the children of disobedience – Romans 1:18); if they are apostate (i.e., they have fallen from the grace of God), then they no longer have any hope of eternal life (Hebrews 10:26). Their destruction is imminent (*swift*), for God has already determined their judgment for their utterly destructive lies. However, they will not be alone; Peter goes on: “And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of” (2 Peter 2:2). This is a plain declaration that these false teachers will gather a following – those who will choose to follow their utter destruction (*pernicious ways* – this comes from the same Greek word that has been used to describe both their heresies and their end, in the previous verse).

Consider some examples: Bill Hybels leads a congregation of some 24,000 and has held leadership summits touching as many as 80,000 church leaders;⁹⁰ Rick Warren leads some 22,000 weekly, and has trained some 400,000 church leaders worldwide;⁹¹ Joel Osteen speaks directly to some 43,500 people every week,⁹² reaches some 100,000 homes via television, and about 1 million download his podcasts every week.⁹³ Indeed, *many shall follow their pernicious ways!* These are only three very popular men among the hundreds who have compromised the message of the Scriptures and crafted an empty gospel that tickles the ears of the average Evangelical. There is a tremendous love for a soft gospel that places no requirements upon

⁹⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willow_Creek_Community_Church

⁹¹ <http://pastors.com/about/>

⁹² <http://www.turnbacktogod.com/10-biggest-churches-in-united-states/>

⁹³ <http://www.joelosteen.com/Pages/About.aspx>

its hearers; however, such a gospel, Paul would call anathema (*accursed* – delivered over to God’s wrath), for it does not agree with the Word of God (Galatians 1:8).⁹⁴ It is through the work of these false teachers that the *way of truth* is blasphemed (*evil spoken of*).⁹⁵ Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life ...” – these men and women are proclaiming a message that is blasphemy against Jesus; even as they profess His name, they deny Him. Undoubtedly, they would all vehemently disagree that this is true, but we must evaluate their message and activities against the Scriptures – we cannot simply take them at their word; we are compelled to judge righteously (John 7:24). Jesus would have the same word for these men and women as He had for the religious leaders of His day: “But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in *yourselves*, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in” (Matthew 23:13). God’s desire for us is purity of heart and life so that we might exemplify His holiness; it is only as we avoid those who teach doctrines that are *alongside of* the Word of God that we will be protected from such destructive error. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to [alongside of] the doctrine which ye have learned; and **avoid them**” (Romans 16:17).⁹⁶

Peter goes on: “And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Peter 2:3). Through greed (*covetousness*), these false teachers will use false (*feigned*) words to exploit (*make merchandise of*) those who follow them – if we are not alert and prepared to weigh all that we hear and read against the Word of God, then we might well be numbered among the exploited ones. Jesus said, “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4); the reality is that we can be deceived, if we are not watchful. In 2 Peter 2:1 we saw that these false teachers will bring *swift destruction* upon themselves; now we see that their condemnation (*judgment*) is already prepared (*lingereth not*), and their utter destruction (*damnation* – the fourth time that the Greek word has been used in this short passage) is not asleep.⁹⁷ God has decreed their end, and it is sure!

“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast *them* down to hell, and delivered *them* into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). In order to emphasize the fact that the judgment of these false teachers will not fail, Peter draws our attention to the angels who followed Satan (Lucifer) when he aspired to take God’s place. The phrase used here, *cast them down to hell*, is unique in the NT, and means to thrust down to Tartarus, a place that, in Greek tradition, was below hades (the word that is most often translated as *hell*).⁹⁸ This would not indicate that there are different levels of hell, but that the angels who sinned are not dealt with in the same manner as the unrighteous who have died, and are now in hades. These angels have been bound with *chains of darkness* in hell, which is distinctive to them. The Greek word *zophos*, translated as *darkness*, is used to describe the thick darkness of the nether world where the condemned are confined and held until judgment.⁹⁹ By implication, this would indicate a darkness that is more than just the absence of sunlight (which is the Greek word *skotia* – Matthew 10:27). In Revelation 16:10 we are told of a darkness that filled the kingdom of the Antichrist, which results in men

⁹⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

⁹⁵ Strong’s Online.

⁹⁶ Friberg Lexicon.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Strong’s Online.

⁹⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

gnawing their tongues in pain; that is an oppressive darkness, yet the Greek word used is *skotoo* (*skot-o'-o* – the verb form of *skotia*), speaking only of an absence of light. These fallen angels, on the other hand, are bound with darkness – they are restrained with thick blackness pending their judgment.

Peter goes on to provide illustrations from history: “And [God] spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth *person*, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly; And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned *them* with an overthrow, making *them* an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly; And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds;) The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished” (2 Peter 2:5-9). Included here are illustrations of God’s ability to deliver *the godly*, even when they are surrounded by the wicked, and how He will surely judge the ungodly – keep in mind that the ungodly, about whom Peter is specifically writing here, are the false teachers who will spring up among us.

“But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous *are they*, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2 Peter 2:10). Peter now returns to addressing the subject of this passage (the false teachers). He has just written of God’s ability to *reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment*, and now he goes on to apply this especially (*chiefly*) to those who *walk after the flesh*. Romans 8:1 says, “*There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.*” Conversely, there is a condemnation reserved for those who walk after the flesh. If we are *in Christ* and *walk after* (according to) *the Spirit*, then we are not under God’s condemnation. Peter clearly identifies these false teachers as walking *after the flesh*, which means that the righteousness of God’s Law will not be lived out through them (Romans 8:4). Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15); if we do not carefully attend to (*keep*) Christ’s commands, then we do not love Him and His truth is absolutely not in us (1 John 2:4).¹⁰⁰ No matter how godly these false teachers might appear to be (remember, their doctrine might only be somewhat different from the truths of Scripture, and not necessarily in direct opposition to God’s Word), they are outside of Christ, and are living according to the desires of their own pollution (*lust of uncleanness*) – they want what they want, and will not abide hearing the truth.¹⁰¹ They are comfortable with their system of doctrine, and refuse to consider anything that would impact it, even the truth of the Word of God, which they claim to love. One Calvinist told me that he couldn’t understand why I wasn’t able to grasp his doctrine, because, in his mind, it all fit together so wonderfully – except that it so obviously contradicted the Scriptures. Man’s theologies will often hold together very well, as long as you do not measure them against God’s truth. These false teachers will be closed to hearing the truth of God’s Word; they are enamored with the logic of their error (which they call truth), and will not give heed to anything else. Peter adds that they will *despise government* – they will show disdain for authority or lordship.¹⁰² This will reveal itself in their unwillingness to submit to the authority of Scripture and the Lord Jesus Christ; their theology will hold them captive, and they

¹⁰⁰ Strong’s Online.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

will be arrogant (*presumptuous*) and stubborn (*self-willed*) in their doctrine.¹⁰³ They will even go so far as to blaspheme (*speak evil of*) glorious beings (*dignities*) without any sense of fear.¹⁰⁴ In essence, these men and women will be unimpressed with the truth, for they are determined to follow the pathway that they have made for themselves, or that which someone else has blazed, and to which they are committed. By contrast, the heavenly beings do not show such arrogance: “Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord” (2 Peter 2:11). Incredibly, these false teachers will blaspheme the glorious hosts of heaven without any sense of fear (often done through speaking flippantly or carelessly of God and heavenly things), whereas the angels (part of that glorious host being blasphemed, and of far greater power than these men) will not bring an accusation against these men and women before the Lord. This shows the utter arrogance that is tied up with these false teachers.

“But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption” (2 Peter 2:12). These false teachers, identified here as creatures without reason (*natural brute beasts*), who blaspheme what they do not understand (namely, the truth), will be destroyed (*utterly perish*) in their own ruin (*corruption*).¹⁰⁵ “And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots *they are* and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you” (2 Peter 2:13). Peter identifies these men and women as *spots* and *blemishes*. Christ died for the sins of mankind so that He might present to Himself a Body of believers who are spotless and have no blemish (Ephesians 5:27). These false teachers are spots and blemishes who revel in their deceptive ways and, therefore, they have no part in the Body of Christ – even though they might well participate in activities with true believers and profess to be Christians. Peter describes them as “Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children” (2 Peter 2:14). The *adultery* spoken of here is used in the sense of faithlessness or apostasy (spiritual adultery);¹⁰⁶ their eyes are filled with whatever is not of God (a natural result of living according to the flesh). Jesus said, “But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness [*sloteinos* – dark without the ability to discern right from wrong; blindness]. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness [*skotos* (spiritual ignorance) the eye is seen as the gate through which light enters the body (Matthew 6:22)], how great *is* that darkness!” (Matthew 6:23).¹⁰⁷ False teachers have their eyes filled with faithlessness (darkness), and, in their great darkness, they cannot stop sinning – they are continually deceiving, or enticing, (*beguiling*) those who are easily convinced, or who are not fixed on the truth (*unstable souls*).¹⁰⁸ We must heed the many warnings in Scripture to be steadfast in our faith in Christ (Colossians 2:6-7).

“Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam *the son* of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness; But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man’s voice forbad the madness of the prophet” (2 Peter 2:15-16). These false teachers have abandoned (*forsaken*) the true way (*right way*), and have been led away from the

¹⁰³ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁰⁴ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁰⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁰⁶ Strong’s Online.

¹⁰⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

truth (*are gone astray*); they have rejected the Way (John 14:6) – *forsaken* (being in the active voice) confirms that this is something that they have initiated. On the other hand, the Greek word *planao* (*plan-ah'-o*), translated as *are gone astray*, is in the passive voice, which means that this is something that has been done to them. They have been deceived, but it is because they have, of their own free will, chosen to forsake the Way of Life. The example cited here is of Balaam, who knew that God had blessed Israel, but, because he longed for the reward of Balak (he sought for wealth and a life of ease), he set aside what he knew that God desired. In like manner, false teachers willfully abandon the truth of God's Word, even as they are duped into believing a lie that they think permits them some luxury that they highly value. "These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever" (2 Peter 2:17). These false teachers are called *wells without water* – they appear to offer refreshing, thirst-quenching water, but instead are empty; they purport to present the way of life, but their message is one of deception and death. They are as black, ominous clouds promising rain, only to blow over with nothing. It is for these that the blackness (*mist*) of darkness is prepared as their final destiny. The Greek word for *mist* (*zophos*) is the same word translated as *darkness* in verse four, that which makes up the chains used to bind the fallen angels until their day of judgment. False teachers and fallen angels share a common destiny.

"For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error" (2 Peter 2:18). When false teachers proclaim their boastful words (*great swelling*) of emptiness (*vanity* – their words do not contain life), they lead astray (*allure*) those who give heed to them, and they accomplish this through the lust of the flesh and sensuality (*wantonness*).¹⁰⁹ Eve saw that the fruit was good for food (Genesis 3:6), and the lust of the flesh played a role in her deception; likewise, those who are convinced by the false teachers will find something in their false doctrine that makes sense to them, or appeals to their desires. The modern Emergent Church movement is steeped in activating the senses in coming to experience God; their sensuality takes priority over the teachings of Scripture. Peter then describes those who are being led astray by these purveyors of false doctrine as having once been truly (*clean*) escaped from those who are living in deception (*error*);¹¹⁰ those who are being duped had been liberated by the blood of Christ, but have failed to heed the many warnings to be alert and vigilant. Incredibly, the target of these false teachers will always be anyone who is walking in accordance with the Word of God. Satan has no concern with those who are living in delusion; it is someone who is holding to the truths of the Scriptures who draws his fire – a very good reason that we should be dressed in the protective armor that God has prepared for us (Ephesians 6:11-17).

"While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage" (2 Peter 2:19). The purveyors of falsehood will proclaim liberty and freedom to everyone who will stop to listen. Satan told Eve that by eating the fruit their "eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5); what a wonderful blessing will come through disobeying the word of God! The slogan has not changed in all of the intervening years – the promise is still indescribable freedom. However, God has told us that "to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness" (Romans 6:16).

¹⁰⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹¹⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

Even as the false teachers proclaim liberty to all who listen to them, they speak from a position of being slaves to sin; they proclaim their slavery to sin to be liberty – “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Isaiah 5:20).

Peter now turns his attention to those who are being snared by these slaves of sin who proclaim a false liberty. “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning” (2 Peter 2:20). He begins by clarifying that they are truly born-again – they have been freed from the defilement (*pollutions*) of the world through a precise and correct knowledge of Jesus Christ as both Lord and Savior.¹¹¹ They have been made new by faith in Christ! However, they are then led astray by the persuasive eloquence of the false teachers; the reality is that they are then entangled again in the world – that from which they had been freed through faith in Christ. The conclusion of this matter, Peter explains, is that they are now worse off than they were before they had come to know Christ. “For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Peter 2:21). Here, in a nutshell, is the reason why those who are lured back into the world are worse off than they were before they knew Christ in the first place. It is of greater advantage to have never had a thorough understanding of the way of righteousness, than to have so known the truth of God’s Word, and then to turn away from it.¹¹² The word *turn* is in the active voice, which clarifies that it is a believer in Christ who is now turning away from God’s truth. “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge [precise and correct] of the truth, there remaineth [absolutely] no more sacrifice for sins ...” (Hebrews 10:26).¹¹³ What Peter is proclaiming here, for everyone to read and understand, is that apostasy is a reality against which we must guard; those who are truly born-again can be enticed to fall away. Jesus said to His disciples, “Take heed that no man deceive you” (Matthew 24:4); we must continually give careful attention to what comes our way so that we may not be led away from the truth.¹¹⁴ The significance of this is that if we do give heed to seducing spirits, then we have willingly turned away from the only sacrifice made for sins – Jesus Christ! For those who have been lured away from abiding in Christ, there is no longer any hope of salvation: “For it is **impossible** [unable to be done] for those who were once enlightened [imbued with saving knowledge] ... If they shall fall away [and falling away], to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6).¹¹⁵ The state of apostasy is irreversible. On the other hand, for those who have never come to salvation in Christ, there is always hope that they will be enlightened and turn to Him; for the apostate, such hope is gone. These are sobering words to which we must give careful attention. “He that saith, I know him [God], and keepeth [to attend to carefully] not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him” (1 John 2:4-5).

¹¹¹ Strong’s Online.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Strong’s Online; Stephanus 1550 NT; Gingrich Lexicon.

We must continually walk in accordance with the Spirit of God (which means obedience to His Word), so that we might harbor a living hope of being with the Lord one day. “Examine yourselves [present tense imperative (PTI) – we must be continually examining ourselves], whether ye be in the faith; prove [test, scrutinize – PTI] your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates [not standing the test]?” (2 Corinthians 13:5).¹¹⁶ We must guard our hearts so that the coming of the Lord in the clouds will be a time of rejoicing, and not a time of wailing!



8. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

When we looked at the source of grace and peace from John’s greeting in verses four and five, we saw the expression of the triune God – the Father, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ. Here we have some of the same words repeated, *which is, and which was, and which is to come* (is coming), a description that we attributed to God the Father. Some ascribe the words spoken at the beginning of this verse to Jesus; I would rather follow the parallel from John’s earlier greeting and say that this verse is about God the Father.

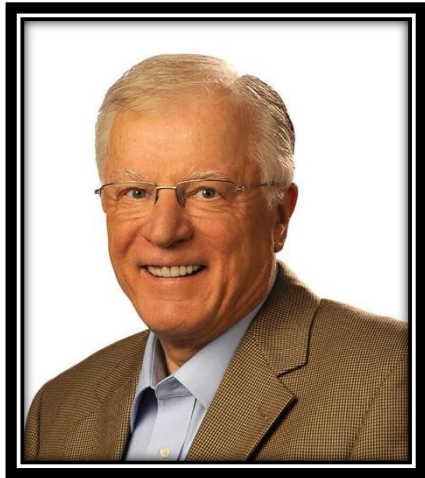
As we all know, *Alpha* and *Omega* are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet; God is figuratively stating that He is both first and last – He then emphasizes this by the next phrase, *the beginning and the ending*. “Hearken unto me, O Jacob and Israel, my called; I *am* he; I *am* the first, I also *am* the last” (Isaiah 48:12; also Isaiah 41:4). Clearly this is proclaimed within the context of time for us, for eternity, where God is dwelling, has neither a beginning nor an ending. Of the beginning (*Alpha*), we read, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. ... And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters” (Genesis 1:1-2); “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). The three members of the triune God were there when time began. When we look at the end of time (*Omega*), we see all Three present as well. In the new heaven and earth, there will be no night (Revelation 22:5; therefore, time, as we know it, will have ceased), and God will provide light through the Lamb (Revelation 21:23); out of the throne of God and the Lamb will flow a river of water of life (Revelation 22:1), and the Spirit of God will call all to come and drink of this living water (Revelation 22:17).

God declares that He *is* (present tense) the *Alpha and Omega*. Within our time restraints, we would consider the beginning as being past tense, and the ending, future tense. However, God is outside of time, and, from His eternal perspective, all of time *is* – He views it all as simply being. Isaiah spoke of this: “Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure ...” (Isaiah 46:9-10). Out of this we come to understand a little of the sovereignty of God; the overall purposes of God will be accomplished.

However, we must also be careful to maintain a Biblical balance between the sovereignty of God and the free will of man. If we place an undue emphasis upon God’s sovereignty, then we

¹¹⁶ Strong’s Online.

squelch the will of man and God becomes responsible for all things, including sin. We find this unbalanced position expressed in the Reformed doctrines of the Puritans (commonly called Calvinism). “**God** from all eternity, **did**, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and **unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass ...**” (emphasis added).¹¹⁷ To offer some clarification on this matter and to downplay the idea that God is the author of sin, they go on: “Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; **yet has He not decreed anything** because He foresaw it as future ...” (emphasis added).¹¹⁸ The contradiction between these two statements is obvious. However, undeterred, the Savoy and Westminster documents express this conclusion: “By the decree of God for the manifestation of his glory, **some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life, and others fore-ordained to everlasting death**” (emphasis added).¹¹⁹ This is the essence of the Reformed doctrine



Erwin Lutzer

of predestination. There may be a few Scriptures that might seem to lead to this position, but there are numerous other Scriptures that they must choose to ignore in order to hold to this teaching. Jesus said: “For God so loved the world [*kosmos* – humanity, all people], that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever** believeth [is believing – present tense, active voice (the *whosoever* is doing the believing)] in him should not perish [*perish* is used within a strong Greek negative; the one who *is believing* will not *perish*], but have [is having] everlasting life” (John 3:16).¹²⁰ This is very different from being predestinated to life, and these are the very words of Jesus, God incarnate! To the Ephesians, Paul clarified this matter: “... he [God] hath chosen us in him [Christ] before the foundation of the world ...” (Ephesians 1:4), “... unto good works, which God before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). In

order to balance this with other Scriptures (like John 3:16), the emphasis must be placed upon us being in Christ (*in him*) and not on *chosen us*; the “predestination” (of being chosen by God in Christ unto works of service to Him) finds expression for those who are *in Christ*, and walking according to God’s desire for us. There are numerous other problems to which this Reformed position gives rise; once again, a man-designed theology dictates what God has said in His Word. Unless we measure our understanding according to God’s Word, we will fail to arrive at the truth.

Today we have Reformed theology presenting itself with a new face – New Calvinism. This new appearance of the Reformed position is somewhat less well-defined: you will see evidence of it in the ministry of John MacArthur, who is perceived to be conservative, and you will find an even greater expression of it in the work of Mark Driscoll, who is often described as being crude. In between, you will find men like John Piper, Albert Mohler and Erwin Lutzer – perhaps somewhat more “free” than MacArthur, but not quite so off-the-wall as Driscoll. Overall, there is

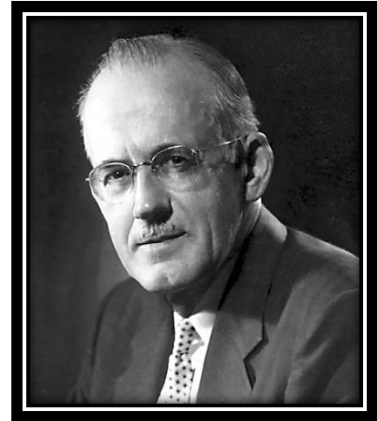
¹¹⁷ http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/; Chapter III.I; interestingly, the Westminster Confession of 1646 (from which this quote is taken) is virtually identical to two other Puritan documents: the Savoy Document of 1658 and the Baptist Constitution of 1689 (<http://www.creeds.net/congregational/savoy/index.htm>; <http://www.vor.org/truth/1689/1689bc03.html>).

¹¹⁸ http://www.reformed.org/documents/wcf_with_proofs/; Chapter III.II.

¹¹⁹ <http://www.creeds.net/congregational/savoy/index.htm>; Chapter III.III.

¹²⁰ https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-negation.htm.

an endeavor to contextualize the Gospel message in order to make it fit into the existing cultural setting, with varying degrees of concern for the integrity of the Gospel. This is really only a variation of the theme of New Evangelicalism that determined to establish a stronger social presence, commonly accompanied by a sub-agenda to redeem the culture. The misuse of Romans 6:14-15 (“not under the law, but under grace”) rears its head within the New Calvinism, again, to varying degrees; this attitude is given the name *antinomian* – literally, against law, and finds expression in an aversion to the Law of God and a moral “freedom” within God’s grace.¹²¹ A.W. Tozer is quoted as saying, “The creed of the Antinomian is easily stated: We are saved by faith alone; works have no place in salvation; conduct is works, and is therefore of no importance. What we do cannot matter, as long as we believe rightly. The divorce between creed and conduct is absolute and final. The question of sin is settled by the Cross; conduct is outside the circle of faith and cannot come between the believer and God. Such in brief, is the teaching of the Antinomian ... It takes the teaching of justification by faith and twists it into deformity.”¹²² The full application of Antinomianism is really hedonism (self-indulgence), but the varied faces of New Calvinism will cloak that negative reality according to the particular cultural context in which it finds itself. The foundation for this popular New Calvinism deception is to make a superficial acceptance of what is commonly known as right doctrine, but do not go so far as to apply that teaching to everyday living – faith and works are absolutely separated. However, Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep [attend carefully to] my commandments” (John 14:15); that, very clearly, is doctrine (His commandments) being applied in our daily living!



A.W. Tozer

If we swing the pendulum to the free will of man, then we undo God’s oversight and control over the events of time. Probably the clearest expression of this is found in the teaching that is called progressive omniscience, openness theology, free will theism or open theism. There are several basic doctrines to which proponents of this thinking adhere. First of all, they unequivocally state, “We believe love is the primary characteristic of God ...,”¹²³ yet the seraphim cried, “Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts!” (Isaiah 6:3), being overwhelmed with His holiness, not His love. Advocates of open theology (such as Greg Boyd and the late Clark Pinnock) also declare that “God has chosen to exercise general rather than meticulous providence ... it is both God and humanity who decide what the future shall be.”¹²⁴ This is very egocentric, and seeks to elevate man to the level of control that is uniquely God’s. Within this framework, God is restricted to working within the restraints of time and in response to what man does – He knows all that has happened and all that is happening, but He does not know all that will happen simply because it has not happened yet. As they put it: “God is everlasting through time rather than timelessly eternal”; in other words, God has a “psychological experience of temporal sequence” as He relates to us.¹²⁵ Through this “reasoning,” they seek to make God subject to time and restricted by the unknowable future events;

¹²¹ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=a&p=34&allowed_in_frame=0

¹²² <http://www.newcalvinist.com/>

¹²³ <http://www.opentheism.info/>.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ John Sanders, *The God Who Risks*, p. 15.

although most will consider God to be omniscient (God knows all), the dispute is about what is actually knowable.¹²⁶ We have already looked at Isaiah 46:9, which states very clearly that Jehovah declares the “end from the beginning,” which requires that God have a thorough foreknowledge of what will take place. This is verified further in the numerous specific prophecies in the OT that have been fulfilled without variance. God’s sovereignty is undeniable, and it is clearly more than simply a *general providence*.



Greg Boyd

What we must be willing to accept is that, while we are in the flesh, we will not understand every nuance of God’s character or His activities since He is eternal (Isaiah 55:8-9). However, we must also avoid taking the extreme positions like the Reformed and Open Theists; it does not take much exploration of Scripture to realize that both have significant problems. We must acknowledge that God is more than generally sovereign, and, at the same time, man has been created with an active will, which God, in His sovereignty, permits him to continue to exercise. If we permit the Spirit of God to use the Word of God to grow our understanding of Who God is, then we will develop a balanced knowledge of God. The two examples that we have looked at (Reformed Theology and Open Theism) are the product of what happens when man runs beyond what God has declared. In John’s words, Jehovah is the *Alpha* and *Omega* (thereby showing that He spans all of time), and He is the eternal *Almighty*, the all-powerful One, the Ruler of All, Who still declares that whosoever is **believing** in Christ will not perish (John 3:16).



⁹ I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

John now identifies with those who are part of the assemblies, to whom this revelation is written. First of all, he is their brother – not physically, but relationally in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word translated as *companion* (*sugkoinonos*) means a joint partner, or a participant with others;¹²⁷ what is evident is that the root word is derived from *koinonia*, or fellowship. John identifies himself as a fellow-participant in tribulation (*thlipsis*). Jesus promised that in the world we would have *tribulation* (*thlipsis*) (John 16:33), and His first disciples experienced it. It was such an expected part of Christian living, that John identifies himself as their brother in the Lord and, then, as a partaker with them in the promised afflictions.

This promised tribulation is one reason why Jesus calls us to count the cost of following Him (Luke 14:27-28); unless we are willing to bear the cross that will come with following Him, we cannot be His disciple. That is very explicit language, not easily misunderstood, but, considering

¹²⁶ Sanders, p. 199.

¹²⁷ Strong’s Online.

modern-day Evangelicals, it can be easily ignored. This excludes trying to follow Christ on our own terms. Before we dismiss this thought as something of which we would never be guilty, let's pause for a moment. Ask yourself this question: "What would make me want to follow Christ, but according to my own criteria?" There are two sides to this: 1) I want to appear to be a follower of Christ, and 2) the cost of following Christ seems to be too high for me, so I will cut a few corners that no one will notice. The glowing example of the latter is found in Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-5). Perhaps the subtlety of dictating our own terms for following Christ will become more evident if we look at some Scriptures that are given to warn us. The Word of God (the command of Jesus) is that if there are those who teach a doctrine that is not in keeping with the Scriptures, then we are to avoid them (Romans 16:17). Today we live among Evangelicals who pride themselves on being ecumenical and expressing love and acceptance of those who do not follow the Word of God (there is a growing movement to embrace the Catholics, Charismatics, Mormons, etc. as though they are brothers in Christ). Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15); Romans 16:17 is one of those commandments given to us in order to protect us from evil and compromise so that we might remain pure before God. Many "Christians" will join with the ecumenical and seek to justify their clear disobedience of the Lord by saying that they are endeavoring to stem the tide of apostasy, or that they want to shine their light in the darkness of ecumenical compromise. The question that must be considered at this point is this: "Can we shine the light of God while we live in disobedience to His Word?" In fact, do we even have a light to shine when we are disobedient? How can we possibly stem the tide of apostasy through actions that are contrary to what God has commanded? The obvious answer is that we cannot! Samson, of old, loved to spend time with the disobedient (Delilah), until one day he compromised his obedience to the Nazarite pledge under which he lived. It is then that we read, "And he wist not that the LORD was departed from him" (Judges 16:20) – he did not recognize that his disobedience had resulted in the Lord leaving him. "They profess [claim] that they know [have a knowledge of] God; but in works [actions, deeds] they deny [repudiate, disown] *him*, being abominable, and disobedient [cannot be persuaded to obey], and unto every good work reprobate [worthless, not standing the test]" (Titus 1:16).¹²⁸ These *disobedient* have rejected God's truth; they are not willing to accept the truth that the Spirit of God presents to them (2 Thessalonians 2:10; John 16:13), and, consequently, they will be rejected by God (Matthew 7:21-23). "For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me [to apostatize; perfect tense describing a completed action (you can only fall away once – Hebrews 6:4-6)] the fountain of living waters [through disobedience], *and* hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water [trying to appear godly through personal effort]" (Jeremiah 2:13).¹²⁹ Jesus said, "Take heed that no man deceive you" (Matthew 24:4); we must be alert, for the enemy of our souls seeks to overpower and control us (1 Peter 5:8).

Jesus also said: "If any *man* will come after me, let him deny [a disregard for personal interests] himself [a command], and take up his cross [suffering – a command], and follow me" (Matthew 16:24);¹³⁰ here are two commands that we must obey, if we would follow Him. The significance of the latter is illustrated so obviously in the parable of the soils: "He that received the seed into stony places, the same is he that heareth the word, and anon [immediately] with joy receiveth it; Yet hath he not root in himself, but dureth for a while: for when tribulation [*thlipsis*] or persecution

¹²⁸ Gingrich Lexicon; Strong's Online.

¹²⁹ Strong's Online.

¹³⁰ Friberg Lexicon; Strong's Online.

ariseth because of the word, by and by [immediately] he is offended [falls away]" (Matthew 13:20-21).¹³¹ The one who has not counted the cost of discipleship, and then faces tribulation because of Christ, is in danger of falling away – of becoming apostate. "For *it is impossible* for those who were once enlightened ... If they shall fall away [*and having fallen away*], to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame" (Hebrews 6:4-6).¹³² There is an eternal significance to falling away; therefore, it is imperative that counting the cost of following the Lord remain a part of the Gospel message. It is unfortunate that Evangelicals have lost this important teaching of Christ; in their attempts to be more inclusive, to broaden that narrow pathway to life (Proverbs 22:28), they have opted for a false gospel that instills a false hope in the minds of its itchy-eared hearers (2 Timothy 4:3-4). The ecumenical way is to avoid suffering and feign obedience to the Lord; instead of denying themselves anything, they deny the Lord, Whom, at the same time, they proudly profess to love. Jesus' words are unaltered: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man [not even one] cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6)¹³³; the way remains narrow and very exclusive, and Jesus said that we are to count the cost before we make a commitment to follow Him.

John goes on to say that he is not only their companion (fellow participant) in tribulation, but also *in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ*. When Jesus stood before Pilate, He openly stated that "My kingdom is not of this world ..." (John 18:36), thereby identifying His kingdom (at this time) as being a spiritual entity. Keep in mind that Jesus had just declared that through His shed blood the New Covenant would be instituted; under this Covenant, the Spirit of God comes to abide within us and writes the Law of God (the Ten Commandments) upon our hearts (Jeremiah 31:33; Hebrews 10:15-17). There will come a day when Jesus will establish His rule over the kingdoms of the earth (Revelation 11:15), but the kingdom of God will always be a spiritual kingdom.

What is evidenced about us today is an Evangelical focus on being kingdom builders. The formal proponents of this thinking are called Reconstructionists, who are following a kingdom-now theology. The essence of this is that Jesus will not return until they have established a form of theocracy on earth; i.e., their mission is to subject all forms of civil government to their view of Biblical law. The basis for their position springs from Genesis 1:28 – "And God blessed them [Adam and Eve], and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." It is from this text that they get another of their many names: Dominionism. Within their thinking, "The Christian man is the only true free man in all the world, and he is called to exercise dominion over all the earth."¹³⁴ Their focus is to make this world a better place so that the Lord can then return to rule over the world that they have conquered for Him. Rick Warren has demonstrated his Dominionist tendencies through the development of his P.E.A.C.E. program,¹³⁵ through which his desire is to solve the world's problems by bringing

¹³¹ Strong's Online.

¹³² Stephanus 1550 NT.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ <http://chalcedon.edu/topics/christian-reconstruction/>

¹³⁵ P.E.A.C.E. stands for **P**lant churches that promote reconciliation (or, depending upon the setting, this appears as **P**romote reconciliation – originally it was simply, **P**lant churches), **E**quip servant leaders, **A**ssist the poor, **C**are for the sick, **E**ducate the next generation.



Rick Warren

together governments, businesses and social institutions (for Warren, the latter is the church).¹³⁶ Warren's latest push under his P.E.A.C.E. plan has seen him attempting to gain the support of the United Nations to accomplish his goals. He is so focused on making the world a better place (in his way of thinking) that he is willing to ignore the Word of God in order to make it happen. Jesus clearly identified His kingdom as being spiritual in nature, yet it is becoming increasingly commonplace for Evangelicals to speak of building the kingdom of the Lord when they refer to their social and cultural endeavors (another reason for their ecumenical fervor). There will come a day when Jesus will rule over all of the earth, and He will rule with a rod of iron (Revelation 19:15), but **He** will establish His reign – it will not be accomplished through man's efforts. John is a *companion* in this spiritual kingdom of the Lord Jesus.

Patience comes from a Greek word (*hupomone* [hoop-om-on-ay'] – from the root word *hupomeno*, which means to persevere or endure, even in times of persecution) meaning expectation or patiently waiting, “with a component of hope and confidence.”¹³⁷ John identifies the recipients of this letter as being partakers in the patient and faithful expectation of the Lord; as noted already, the first century Christians lived in eager expectation of the Lord's return. What cannot be missed is John's identification of both tribulation and anticipation of the Lord's return as being integral to the first century believers.

John now provides us with a glimpse of the setting in which he finds himself when the Revelation is given to him. He identifies Patmos as his location, an island in the Aegean Sea that, during this time, had become a place to which Rome banished its exiles.¹³⁸ However, we must not think of the island as a prison, but more of a place where Rome sent those whom they wanted to take out of circulation. The name *Patmos* means mortal,¹³⁹ or my killing.¹⁴⁰ It is a treeless island about 6 miles wide and 10 miles long.¹⁴¹ Where John wrote the Revelation is in close proximity to the seven assemblies to which it was addressed.

Although John does not specifically tell us about the island, he does elaborate on why he is there: *for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ*. The same Greek word is translated as *for* in each case; it means on account of – it was because of the Word of God and the witness of Jesus that John found himself on Patmos.¹⁴² It would seem that John would have had the freedom to roam the island, just not the freedom to book passage to leave it. As an exile, he would not be considered to be a criminal within the Roman law, just someone whom they wanted to keep away from the general population. Patmos was a place for political dissidents and those who might cause

¹³⁶ <http://www.discernment-ministries.org/ChristianImperialism.htm>

¹³⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

¹³⁸ <http://www.greeka.com/dodecanese/patmos/patmos-history.htm>

¹³⁹ Hitchcock's Bible Names.

¹⁴⁰ Strong's Online.

¹⁴¹ <http://bibleatlas.org/patmos.htm>

¹⁴² Friberg Lexicon.

Rome embarrassment. John makes it clear that he has been banished to this island because of his preaching and testifying of Jesus, and not because of any political misstep.



10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

John says that he was *in the Spirit*. Interestingly, there are those who state this to mean that John was in an ecstatic state. A.T. Robertson identifies this as “an ecstatic condition as in Acts 10:10 ... not the normal spiritual condition (... [as in] Rom. 8:9).”¹⁴³ He likens John's situation to Peter's, when he became hungry in Joppa and “he fell into a trance” (Acts 10:10), but not like the believer who is to walk “in the Spirit” (Romans 8:9). However, take a moment to compare these three phrases as they appear in the Greek:

Acts 10:10 – “fell into a trance” - ἐπέπεσεν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἔκστασις

Romans 8:9 – “in the Spirit” - ἐν πνεύματι

Revelation 1:10 – “in the Spirit” - ἐν Πνεύματι¹⁴⁴



A.T. Robertson

It does not take a Greek scholar to realize that this phrase in Revelation is identical to the one in Romans 8:9 (except for *spirit* being capitalized in Revelation), and looks nothing like the phrase in Acts. The reality is that John was simply *in the Spirit*; there is no evidence of him being in a trance, or any other form of ecstatic state of mind.

John was in the Spirit *on the Lord's day*. We need to take a moment to make sure that we understand what this means, for there is considerable misrepresentation of this phrase today. This is the only place in the Scriptures where this phrase (*kuriakos hemera*) occurs, and it simply refers to the day that belongs to the Lord.¹⁴⁵ The misrepresentation comes when Christians argue that this is the first day of the week – Sunday. Jesus said, “For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day” (Matthew 12:8; also Mark 2:28 and Luke 6:5); the Jews sought to take Jesus to task for what He was doing on the Sabbath (inasmuch as it didn't fit with their understanding of what was appropriate), therefore, He specifically pronounced His lordship over the seventh day of the week, the Sabbath (Exodus 20:10) – as the fullness of God in the flesh (Colossians 2:9), He kept the Sabbath day perfectly. Isaiah recorded the words of Jehovah regarding this day: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, *from* doing thy pleasure [or, doing thy affairs]¹⁴⁶ on **my holy day** ...” (Isaiah 58:13). Jehovah refers to the seventh-day Sabbath as *My holy day*; from this we could rightfully say that the Lord's Day is holy, and we would be referring to the seventh-day Sabbath, not the first day of the week. When God created the universe, we read, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it [to set apart as holy]: because that in it he had rested from

¹⁴³ Robertson's Word Pictures, *ESword*.

¹⁴⁴ Stephanus'.

¹⁴⁵ Strong's Online.

¹⁴⁶ BDB.

all his work which God created and made” (Genesis 2:1-3).¹⁴⁷ On completing the creation of the seven-day week, God specifically hallowed the seventh day; it is the only day upon which He bestowed His blessing – this should underscore for us the importance of the seventh day of the week. The sacredness of this day is confirmed in the Law of God (Exodus 20:8-11), confirmed by the word of Jehovah (Isaiah 58:13), and Jesus declared that He was Lord of this special day (Matthew 12:8). Jesus came to fulfill the Law, not to destroy it (Matthew 5:17), yet Evangelicals over the years have promoted the idea that Jesus destroyed the Fourth Commandment at His resurrection. Perhaps they would say *changed it*, but when we read that God’s Word is forever settled in the heavens (Psalm 119:89), and God specifically says, “I change not” (Malachi 3:6), then it would only seem evident that the original fourth Law would have to be removed (destroyed) in order to establish this change – yet the Scriptures speak against this ever happening!

On what basis, therefore, do so many believe that the first day of the week is the Lord’s Day? The earliest mention of this phrase being applied to the first day of the week goes to a document called the *Gospel of Peter*, which is thought to have been written between AD 70 and 160.¹⁴⁸ The writer refers to the night before Jesus was raised from the dead: “And in the night in which the Lord’s day was drawing on”¹⁴⁹ However, Serapion, Bishop of Antioch from AD 190, said, “We, brethren, receive Peter and the other Apostles even as Christ; but the writings that go falsely by their names we, in our experience, reject, knowing that such things as these we never received.”¹⁵⁰ Early on, there were writings circulating under the names of the Apostles, which were forthrightly rejected as being false, of which the *Gospel of Peter* is one. The writings of Paul in our Bible confirm that there were false doctrines to be dealt with, even during the time of the Apostles. Interestingly, Socrates Scholasticus, writing c. AD 439, said, “For although almost all churches throughout the world celebrate the sacred mysteries [the ordinance of communion] on the sabbath of every week, yet the Christians of Alexandria and at Rome, on account of some ancient tradition, have ceased to do this.”¹⁵¹ What is evident is that most assemblies still kept the Sabbath day, except those at Alexandria, Egypt (a center for many heresies) and at Rome (where accommodations had already been made to draw pagan and Christian subjects together under the growing control of the Bishop of Rome).

Rome was the seat of political power for many years, and with the softening of the emperors toward Christianity, there soon came a merging of the political and religious powers – what we would recognize as the foundation of the Roman Catholic Church. Constantine I (or, the Great, as he is also known) came to power as emperor in AD 306, and seven years later, he, along with his co-emperor at the time, Licinius, extended religious tolerance throughout the Roman Empire.¹⁵² This was the beginning of a reduction in the persecution that had become accepted as normal for Christians up to this time. Constantine is often cited as being the first emperor to convert to Christianity; the reality of his conversion can be strongly disputed, but he did begin to lay the groundwork for the role of the Roman Catholic pope (political and religious authority coming together in one man). “Constantine in 321 forbade the sitting of courts and all secular labor in

¹⁴⁷ Strong’s Online.

¹⁴⁸ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/index.html>

¹⁴⁹ <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/gospelpeter.html>

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus*, Book V, Chapter 22

¹⁵² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_I

towns on ‘the venerable day of the sun,’ as he expresses himself, perhaps with reference at once to the sun-god, Apollo, and to Christ, the true Sun of righteousness; to his pagan and his Christian subjects.”¹⁵³ As Constantine settled into his position of holding an increased level of religious authority, pragmatism was his guide. In his law to establish the first day of the week as the recognized day of rest, he sought to merge the practice of Christians, who were keeping the Sabbath, with that of the pagans who were keeping the first day of the week in honor of the sun god. In his decree, he called it the *day of the sun* (deferring to his pagan subjects); nowhere does he use the term Lord’s Day, for he knew that the first day was kept by the pagans and not Christians. The first day was kept to honor the sun god, *Sol Invictus* (unconquered sun, a general name that was applied to several Roman deities);¹⁵⁴ clearly, the shift took place as a matter of expediency, and cannot in any way be construed as Biblical.

Eusebius, a contemporary of Constantine, and someone who held him in very high regard, wrote: “*in this day of light*, first day and *true day of the sun*, when we gather after the interval of six days, we celebrate the holy and spiritual Sabbaths All things whatsoever that were prescribed for the Sabbath, **we have transferred them to the Lord’s day**, as being more authoritative and more highly regarded and first in rank, and **more honorable than the Jewish Sabbath** (italics in the original; bold emphasis added).”¹⁵⁵ Within the Roman society of this time, Mithras (included under the general name *Sol Invictus*) had become the primary pagan deity; as Christianity gained momentum, the struggle between these two belief systems became more pronounced. “Remains of the struggle are found in two institutions adopted from its rival by Christianity in the fourth century, the two Mithraic sacred days, December twenty-fifth, *dies natalis solis* [literally, day of birth sun¹⁵⁶], as the birthday of Jesus, and Sunday, ‘the venerable day of the Sun,’ as Constantine called it in his edict of 321.”¹⁵⁷ For our consideration, Constantine effectually shifted the day of rest from the seventh-day Sabbath to the first day of the week (Sunday) in keeping with the day that is celebrated to honor Mithras, the pagan sun-god. By this act, he placed upon Christians the choice of retaining the day of rest as established by God, submitting to their emperor and making Sunday their day of rest, or, as it became the custom for many, to keep both days.¹⁵⁸ Nowhere in his declaration did Constantine make any reference to Christ’s resurrection, nor did he call it *dies Domini* (Day of the Lord), but he referred specifically to *dies solis* (day of the sun).¹⁵⁹ Within the Roman Empire, it proved to be a means of drawing the pagan religions and Christianity together – a ploy that, with the passing of time, became increasingly common with the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church.



Constantine the Great

¹⁵³ Schaff, Philip, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume III, Section 17.

¹⁵⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sol_Invictus

¹⁵⁵ Eusebius, *Commentaria in Psalmos 91*, as quoted in *From Sabbath to Sunday* by Samuele Bacchiocchi, p. 261.

¹⁵⁶ <http://www.archives.nd.edu/cgi-bin/wordz.pl?keyword=dies+natalis+solis>

¹⁵⁷ Walter Woodburn Hyde, *Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, p. 60.

¹⁵⁸ This is attested to in footnote #789 in *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates Scholasticus*.

¹⁵⁹ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume III, Chapter 1, p. 29.

Along with bringing Christianity under the umbrella of the political power of Rome, Constantine began the erosion of the rights of the Jews;¹⁶⁰ the intensification of an attitude of anti-Semitism continued to grow and find expression through the evolving Roman Catholic Church.



Maximus of Turin

After the suppression of the Jews by Vespasian and Titus in AD 70, each successive Emperor took increasingly restrictive measures to make the lives of the Jews difficult. Under Hadrian (Emperor from AD 117-138), the Jews were expelled from Jerusalem, forbidden to re-enter it, and their customs of circumcision and keeping the Sabbath were prohibited.¹⁶¹ Although some of these restrictions may have been relaxed under Constantine, there remains no doubt that the Jews and their traditions were viewed with suspicion by those in authority. For example, a bishop, Maximus of Turin (c. AD early 400s), stated in one of his sermons, “We ought to avoid, though, the companionship not only of the pagans but also of the Jews, with whom even a conversation is a great contamination.”¹⁶²

As the Roman Catholic Church began to take shape, and its authority became more established, the Bishop of Rome found it increasingly easy to direct the course of Christianity to his own benefit. This is the tradition that was introduced by Constantine, who, “as his predecessors were supreme pontiffs of the heathen religion of the empire, so he desired to be looked upon as a sort of bishop, as universal bishop of the external affairs of the church.”¹⁶³ Once more, the pagan traditions became the pattern for the building of the Roman Catholic Church – the universal church of which the Bishop of Rome was its recognized head (the title, Pope, did not find exclusive expression for this man until the 11th century¹⁶⁴). The Council of Laodicea, AD 364, pronounced: “CHRISTIANS must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day, rather honouring the Lord's Day; and, if they can, resting then as Christians. But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ.”¹⁶⁵ However, lest we think that this Council was decidedly Christian, Canon 49 decreed that, during the season of Lent, “the Bread [communion] must not be offered except on the Sabbath Day and on the Lord's Day only.”¹⁶⁶ Lent, within the Catholic tradition, is the 40 days leading up to their Easter (fully understanding the paganism attached to the term); within the culture of ancient Egypt, the descent of the stars of Osiris (the god of the afterlife, commonly associated with Orion) triggered a period of mourning for Osiris (which lasted about forty days, depending on the year), and this was followed by a joyous celebration at the vernal equinox – the beginning of springtime.¹⁶⁷ The strong influence of paganism cannot be

¹⁶⁰ <http://familybible.org/BeitMidrash/Model/AppendixF.htm>

¹⁶¹ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, p. 159.

¹⁶² Maximus of Turin, *The Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin*, p. 156.

¹⁶³ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, Volume 3, p. 16.

¹⁶⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pope>

¹⁶⁵ <http://reluctant-messenger.com/council-of-laodicea.htm>, Canon XXIX.

¹⁶⁶ <http://reluctant-messenger.com/council-of-laodicea.htm>, Canon XLIX.

¹⁶⁷ John Landseer, *Sabaeen Researches*, p. 184.

denied as being part of these early days of the Roman Catholic Church, not only in their promotion of the days of Lent, but equally in pronouncing a curse upon those who kept the Sabbath-rest as God had prescribed.

Although it is evident that many began to look to the first day of the week (Sunday) as being the *Lord's Day*, we must also recognize that this found its expression in the midst of many gross heresies. Unless we are prepared to use church history as our sole guide in this matter, we must admit that there is no evidence from the Scriptures that any change has been made in this regard. Matthew George Easton openly admitted as much in his dictionary:

The question, therefore, as to the change of the day in no way affects the perpetual obligation of the Sabbath as an institution. Change of the day or no change, the Sabbath remains as a sacred institution the same. It cannot be abrogated [abolished]. If any change of the day has been made, it must have been by Christ or by his authority. ... As Creator, Christ was the original Lord of the Sabbath It was originally a memorial of creation. A work vastly greater than that of creation has now been accomplished by him, the work of redemption. We would **naturally expect** just such a change as would make the Sabbath a memorial of that greater work. True, **we can give no text authorizing the change** in so many words. We have no express law declaring the change. But there are evidences of another kind. **We know for a fact** that the first day of the week has been observed from apostolic times, and the necessary conclusion is, that it was observed by the apostles and their immediate disciples. This, we may be sure, they never would have done without the permission or the authority of their Lord (emphasis added).¹⁶⁸

Although Easton readily admits that there is no text of Scripture to authorize moving the day of rest from the seventh-day to the first day of the week, he appeals to church history (which we have briefly reviewed) for what is, in his mind, an indisputable "fact" regarding this matter. What is of great interest is that, in his mind, church history takes priority over the Word of God, despite the strong evidence that heresy was rampant even while the Apostles were still alive. What we might "naturally expect" must never become the basis for our doctrine, especially when the facts flow out of the darkness of days gone by. The indisputable fact, in all of this, is that the Bishop of Rome (Constantine I) legislated the first day of the week to be a day of rest (deferring to his pagan subjects) and perpetuated a long history of Jewish oppression. For ease of living (pragmatism), it might be tempting to rationalize shifting the day of rest to Sunday, and abandoning the Sabbath altogether. However, what cannot be discounted is that the Sabbath, as a day of rest, was instituted by God during creation. We must choose whether we will follow the tradition of Rome, or what God has implemented for our own good.

Clearly, unless one is prepared to trust the judgment of man over the explicit Word of God, it would seem beyond doubt that the Lord's Day refers to nothing other than the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week. Such a determination fits perfectly with the account of God's creative works, His eternal Law as written by His own finger at Mt. Sinai, and that which Jesus confirmed during His ministry on earth. In keeping with the rest of the NT Scriptures, John was keeping the seventh-day Sabbath as a day unto the Lord.

¹⁶⁸ Easton's Revised Bible Dictionary, "Sabbath."

As John is in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, he hears behind him a great voice (*megas phone*); the greatness is likened to that of a trumpet sound. Although the Greek word *phone* (*fo-nay'*) is literally a sound¹⁶⁹, it is clear from the context that the sound, in this case, was a voice.



11. Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last: and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Before he even turned around to see who spoke with him, John heard the *great voice*. As Jesus begins to speak, He identifies Himself in a very unique way – *I am Alpha and Omega*. This is a name that is ascribed to Jesus only in the book of Revelation, and it stands within the I-AM names of Jesus. You will recall that in verse eight, we ascribed this to God the Father, since it included the identification of “... is, ... was, and ... to come” – identical to verse four. However, what is evident is that this is now spoken by the Lord Jesus; He identifies Himself as being the *Alpha* and *Omega*. John wrote of Jesus as the *Alpha*: “In the beginning [*alpha*] was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ...” (John 1:1,14). The writer of Hebrews spoke of Jesus as the *Omega*: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever [*omega*]” (Hebrews 13:8). Paul wrote of Jesus as being fully God – “For in him [Jesus Christ] dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Colossians 2:9). The attributes of Jesus are the same as for God the Father and for the Holy Spirit – they are three in one (1 John 5:7).

The *first and the last* is a reiteration of the *Alpha and Omega*.

John receives his instructions before he has turned around to see Who is speaking to him. What he is about to see, he is to write into a small book or scroll; the Greek word *biblion* (as used here) is the diminutive of *biblos* (a book, roll or scroll).¹⁷⁰ Once it is written, it is to be sent to the seven assemblies in Asia; although these were referred to in verse four, they are now specifically identified by the Voice that John hears.

Ephesus was the leading city of Asia at this time; its excellent harbor served to make it a notoriously wealthy city. It was famous for its temple to Artemis (Diana), which is considered to be one of the Seven Wonders of the World.¹⁷¹ The silversmiths of Ephesus became prosperous



Ruins of Temple to Artemis

¹⁶⁹ Strong's Online.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ <http://www.ephesus.us/ephesus/ephesus.htm>

through the construction of shrines to Diana, and felt that their livelihood was threatened by Paul's message of the Gospel (Acts 19:26-27). At the time that John was writing the Revelation, it was also the slave trade center of the world,¹⁷² and hosted a population estimated to be as high as 500,000.¹⁷³

Smyrna was also a harbor city and vied with Ephesus and Pergamos for being the primary city of Asia during the time of the Romans.¹⁷⁴ It was famous for its schools of medicine and science, and had a population of about 100,000 at the time of John.¹⁷⁵

Pergamos served as the capital city of the region during the Greek dominance of that area (its name means height or elevation).¹⁷⁶ During this time, the city library is said to have contained some 200,000 volumes, and it was here that an alternative to papyrus was developed using calfskin; it was known as *pergamena* (parchment).¹⁷⁷ Today, there is a company called *Pergamena* still perpetuating the ancient art of making parchment.¹⁷⁸ The city included temples to Zeus, Dionysus, Athena and Asklepios,¹⁷⁹ and the famous Altar to Zeus, measuring over 35 meters by 33 meters, which is now housed in a Berlin museum.¹⁸⁰ Since Zeus was considered to be the king of all gods, this could be legitimately thought of as Satan's attempt at being known as the god of heaven.

Thyatira means odor of affliction.¹⁸¹ The city was known for having more trade guilds (unions) than any other ancient city; they carried out business and wielded a great influence on all aspects of life.¹⁸² At one time the city was known as Semiramis (the name of the wife of Nimrod), and included a temple to the sun-god, Tyrinnos.¹⁸³

Sardis was also a very wealthy city, and included one of the largest temples to Artemis (Diana), which was basically destroyed by an earthquake in AD 17. When it was rebuilt (with the help of Rome) the temple was divided between Zeus and the emperor, and Artemis and the emperor's wife,¹⁸⁴ as a way of showing respect to Rome.

Philadelphia was at the junction of former east-west and north-south trade routes – a key position to benefit from those who were working these routes.¹⁸⁵ This city bore many names over the years: Decapolis (as one of the ten cities of the plains), Neo-kaisaria (renamed for the Caesar

¹⁷² <http://www.ephesus.us/ephesus/ephesus.htm>.

¹⁷³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ephesus#Roman_period

¹⁷⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smyrna>

¹⁷⁵ <http://suite101.com/article/ancient-smyrna-in-asia-minor-a100265>

¹⁷⁶ Strong's Online.

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.biblestudy.org/biblepic/churches-of-revelation-pergamos.html>

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.pergamena.net/>

¹⁷⁹ <http://bibleencyclopedia.com/pergamos.htm>

¹⁸⁰ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pergamon_Altar

¹⁸¹ Strong's Online.

¹⁸² <http://bibleencyclopedia.com/thyatira.htm>

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ <http://www.welcometohosanna.com/REVELATION/Sardis.html>

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.welcometohosanna.com/REVELATION/Philadelphia.html>

when Rome helped to rebuild it after the earthquake of AD 17), and Little Athens (because of its many magnificent temples, after the pattern of Athens).¹⁸⁶

Laodicea was known for three things: “its large banking interests, its textile industry and its production of a special eye-salve.”¹⁸⁷ The salve, made from a local stone, was purported to cure weak eyesight. Cities of this time were generally established next to adequate natural resources (particularly water); however, *Laodicea* was built because of its access to the trade routes through the area. Its water supply came from some distance, and two sources were available: a hot spring about six miles away and a cold spring about ten miles away¹⁸⁸ – either way, the water that came into the city was lukewarm.

Within all of these seven cities were assemblies of believers, however, they would have been a small minority of the residents; they were living in pagan cities under the governance of pagan rulers. The Jews, who would have had settlements in all of these cities as well, were largely recognized by the Roman rulers and left to their own devices. Christians had no place among the Jews, nor were they favorably looked upon by the Romans (at this time). It is to these assemblies that John is to send his book, and who are reminded of the eternality of God (the *Alpha and Omega*).



12. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks;

John now turns to see Who it was Who spoke with him with such a great voice. As he turns, he begins to describe, in some detail, what he saw.

The first things that John saw were seven golden *candlesticks* – actually, the Greek word *luchnia* means lampstands.¹⁸⁹ The earliest use of candles dates to about 200 BC in China; however, in the Middle East and Europe, they did not come into use until sometime after AD 400.¹⁹⁰ The translators of the KJV chose to follow the lead of the Bishop’s Bible at this point. However, the difference cannot be dismissed as mere semantics; there is a marked distinction between these two. A candle is formed by wrapping a wick with a fuel source, and it will disappear as it burns because it **is** the fuel source. Therefore, a candlestick is something that would hold several candles – those light sources that will burn themselves out. A lampstand, on the other hand, is something on which a lamp would be placed. A lamp, unlike a candle, has a reservoir for the fuel that is burned to produce the light; the lamp is not consumed, but merely holds the fuel, the wick, and the fire. We’ll expand on this later and see the significance for making the differentiation.

There are many who immediately call to mind the Jewish menorah, a single lampstand that has six branches and a central tier, on which rests a total of seven lamps (Exodus 25:31-37). This was a furnishing of the Holy Place (not the Holy of Holies), placed opposite to the table of showbread,

¹⁸⁶ <http://bibleencyclopedia.com/philadelphia.htm>

¹⁸⁷ <http://www.welcometohosanna.com/REVELATION/Laodicea.html>

¹⁸⁸ <http://www.bibletools.org/index.cfm/fuseaction/Topical.show/RTD/cgg/ID/251/Water.htm>

¹⁸⁹ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Candle#History>

which was on the south side of the room (Exodus 26:35); the lamps were lit daily to provide light from evening to morning (Exodus 27:20-21). This lampstand was part of the tabernacle and later the temple, and was attended to by the priests; despite the details given by God for its construction and use, this lampstand only filled a purpose within the temporary Mosaic traditions, “until the time of reformation [setting things straight/right; a new order]” (Hebrews 9:10).¹⁹¹ Therefore, inasmuch as the Mosaic traditions have been done away with in Christ (Ephesians 2:14-15), we would also expect that this lampstand would no longer hold any further significance.



Menorah

To underscore the difference, we must look at the words used for lampstand. In Exodus 25:31 the Hebrew word *menorah* (it is translated as *candlestick*, but should be *lampstand*) is singular; it is one lampstand that holds seven lamps.¹⁹² By contrast, when John turned, he saw seven lampstands – the Greek word is plural, NOT singular. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that this was not like the lampstand that held the lamps in the sanctuary of the tabernacle/temple.



13. And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

Here we find further confirmation that John, when he turned around, did not see a menorah. In the middle of the seven lampstands, he saw One like to the Son of Man – namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Greek word *mesos* (*midst*) means in the middle;¹⁹³ there is no possible way for someone to stand in the middle of a menorah, for it is only a single item. The language used here would more likely present a circle of seven lampstands, with the Lord Jesus Christ standing in the middle.

The phrase *Son of man*, is one that appears many times in the Greek NT, but only twice in Revelation (the other is in Revelation 14:14). For the phrase that we see in English (*the Son of man*), in all of the other instances, the Greek includes the definite article *the*; however, here (and in 14:14), the definite article is not there – thus rendering the phrase *a son of man*. As John turned, he saw the seven golden lampstands, and in the middle of them was Someone like *a son of man* – he saw the glorified Lord Jesus Christ, yet He was still like a man. Remember, the last time that John saw Jesus was on the Mount of Olives when Jesus ascended out of his sight (Acts 1:9). Probably more than 60 years have passed since that last sighting of the Lord, and, it seems, John was amazed to see that He was still “found in fashion as a man” (Philippians 2:8).

¹⁹¹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹² Leningrad Hebrew Old Testament, *Bibleworks 8*.

¹⁹³ Gingrich Lexicon.

Jesus was clothed to His feet (*clothed with a garment*); a long robe typically speaks of honor or royalty – in this case, He is our High Priest (Hebrews 6:20), and the King of kings (1 Timothy 6:14-15).¹⁹⁴ The word *clothed* is in the middle voice, and, therefore, it means that He clothed Himself.¹⁹⁵ Hebrews speaks of Jesus opening the way into the Holy of holies (through the torn veil), “Whither the forerunner is for us entered, Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec” (Hebrews 6:20). The English word *made* injects a sense of Jesus receiving His priestly role through someone else – i.e., someone bestowed it upon Him; however, the Greek word means to become¹⁹⁶ – Jesus, through His death and resurrection, *became* our High Priest after the pattern of Melchisedec; it is something that He took on for Himself through His sacrifice. The parallel is striking: He clothed Himself in a long robe/He became our High Priest. Jesus, our High Priest after the order of Melchisedec, became a High Priest not in keeping with the Mosaic tradition (Hebrews 7:15-16): a new High Priest presiding over a New Covenant (Hebrews 7:22).

As our High Priest, Jesus has procured cleansing from sin for us. Just as the high priests within the Aaronic (Levitical) priesthood, which was so carefully defined by God through Moses, presented shed blood in order to atone for the sins of the individual who was making the sacrifice, so, too, Jesus shed His own blood to pay the price for the sins of all of mankind (1 John 2:2). The significant difference is that Jesus’ sacrifice was made only once – never to be repeated (Hebrews 9:28), and it was made for all of mankind (1 Timothy 2:5-6). However, even as the Mosaic sacrifice required that the shed blood be united with the faith of the one who offered the sacrifice, so the sacrifice that Jesus made is of no avail unless it is joined with our faith. “For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard *it*” (Hebrews 4:2); the Israelites heard the truth, but there was no cleansing from sin because the element of faith was missing). “... without faith *it is* impossible [cannot be done] to please [God] ...” (Hebrews 11:6).

Consider this, for a moment, as it was fleshed out within the Law of Moses: “And if any soul sin through ignorance, then he shall bring a she goat of the first year for a sin offering. And the priest shall make an atonement for the soul that sinneth ignorantly, when he sinneth by ignorance before the LORD, to make an atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him” (Numbers 15:27-28). This is someone who failed to keep the Law of Moses, recognized his failure, and brought the appropriate offering to the priest for his cleansing; the shed blood, when it was mixed with faith, resulted in the forgiveness of sins. What is amazingly noteworthy is that this applied equally to those who were not Israelites (Numbers 15:29)! However, there is more: “But the soul that doeth *ought* presumptuously [with a lifted-up hand], *whether he be* born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth [blasphemes] the LORD; and that soul shall be cut off [killed] from among his people. Because he hath despised [to regard with contempt] the word of the LORD, and hath broken [perfect tense – need only be done once] his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity *shall be* upon him” (Numbers 15:30-31).¹⁹⁷ This is someone who sins willfully, which means that they know what the Lord requires (if they did not know what the Lord demanded, then it would be a sin of ignorance); this is an act that shows disdain for the Lord and what He has commanded. What we must recognize is that, within the Mosaic tradition, there was no sacrifice

¹⁹⁴ Vincent’s Word Studies.

¹⁹⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁹⁶ Gingrich Lexicon.

¹⁹⁷ Strong’s Online.

for this kind of sin; the sinner, in this case, was removed from society. However, it is important that we understand that this is equally true under the New Covenant that Jesus established: “For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins ...” (Hebrews 10:26). Some professing “Christians” sin willfully – they know what God has commanded, but they despise the Word of God by willingly accepting those whom the Lord has said to avoid (Romans 16:17), or by participating in practices that are forbidden (Jeremiah 10:2; 2 Corinthians 6:14-17). Others are simply ignorant of the Word of God, in which case there would be serious doubt as to whether they are truly saved; how can you remain ignorant of what God requires, even while you profess to love the Lord? Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15); if you love the Lord, then you will want to know and understand what He requires of you. Evangelicalism is filled with pagans who have been deluded into thinking that they are saved and on their way to heaven – for these, there is still hope that their eyes may be opened to their true state before God, and that they will then turn to Him in repentance and faith in Christ. However, for those who have known the truth of God, and have subsequently been persuaded to embrace the heresy at hand, rather than God’s Word, we read that they are doomed (Numbers 15:31 and Hebrews 10:26). This is a very serious matter – one that impacts the eternal destiny of the soul! We must be careful to heed the commands of God; “And hereby we do know [are knowing (present tense)] that we know [have known (perfect tense)] him, if we keep [are attending carefully to (present tense)] his commandments” (1 John 2:3).¹⁹⁸ We cannot afford to delude ourselves into participating with those who hold little or no regard for the commandments of God (Romans 16:17). The crux of the matter is this: do we fear the Lord, or do we fear the disdain of those who call themselves Christians? We must accept a love for the truth of God so as to be saved and protected from delusion (2 Thessalonians 2:10); if we would walk according to the Spirit of God, then we must live in obedience to the truth that the Spirit will bring to our understanding (John 16:13).

Jesus is our High Priest; He has provided us with cleansing for our sins – will we mix His abundant provision with faith so as to be saved? God has not circumvented the will of man – He created us in His image (Genesis 1:26), and, even though we still bear the old man about with us (Romans 6:11), we can choose to obey His commands. The challenge of Joshua to Israel still rings true today: “... choose you this day whom ye will serve ...” (Joshua 24:15). A choice must be made; if we choose the Lord, then we must walk in obedience to His Word; if we choose to compromise our obedience, then we have forsaken the Lord; if we do not choose, then our choice is to remain in our sins. “For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one *point*, he is guilty of all.” (James 2:10); obedience to 99% of God’s commandments is disobedience. Jesus said, “He that is not with me is against [in a hostile sense] me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Matthew 12:30)¹⁹⁹; we are either with the Lord, and committed to obedience in all things, or we are against Him – there is no middle ground; there is no fence to straddle. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do *his commandments* ...” (Psalm 111:10). Do not let pragmatism steal your saving faith in Christ; do not fall into the pit of rationalizing your disobedience! “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).

¹⁹⁸ Strong’s Online.

¹⁹⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

Jesus appears to John clothed as a High Priest and King; His being so clothed is something that has happened once in the past, never to be repeated (it is in the perfect tense). He is our High Priest forever, not according to the Mosaic tradition (from the tribe of Levi), but after the *order* (arrangement; according to the nature²⁰⁰) of Melchisedec (Hebrews 6:20), and a King through the ruling tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10; Hebrews 7:14). Jesus is a priest to all of the faithful of the Old Testament, in the same way that He is our priest forever. There is only one Savior of mankind, only one Priest through Whom all men, from all ages, are to come to God – Jesus! It was at the cross that He fulfilled the foreshadowing of the sacrificial practices of the OT (Isaiah 53:5-6); from eternity, Jesus has been the sacrificial Lamb of God (Revelation 13:8) – truly, Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

As John turns, he also sees Jesus wearing a golden belt around His chest (*girt about the paps with a golden girdle*). The priestly garments that are described in Exodus 28 include a *curious girdle* (a cunningly woven band²⁰¹), which served to hold the ephod in place. Although this is typically illustrated as being worn about the waist, Josephus tells us that it was actually worn around the chest, just above the elbows.²⁰² The description of this belt indicates that it was made of gold, blue, purple and linen (Exodus 28:8); however, the belt worn by Jesus is entirely of gold. The furnishings of the tabernacle, that God instructed Moses to build, were either of pure gold or made of wood and then overlaid with pure gold (Exodus 25:10-11,17-18,23-24,31; 30:1-3). When the New Jerusalem descends from God (to the new earth), we are told that it is of pure gold (Revelation 21:18). Jesus wears a belt of pure gold, like unto that which proceeds from God, but different from the earthly priests whose belts included blue, purple and linen. This is another indication that the priestly ministry of Jesus is much higher than that undertaken through the priesthood of Aaron (Hebrews 7:23-25).

John turns to see Jesus wearing the garments of a priest, standing in the midst of seven golden lampstands.



14. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire;

John now provides a description of the Lord Jesus Christ – His head and hair are *white*, as if *white wool*.²⁰³ White always speaks of purity and holiness, and this is the first impression that John has as he sees Jesus. As Daniel saw the vision of the end of days and the judgment of God, he said, “... the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment *was* white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool ...” (Daniel 7:9). Both Daniel’s and John’s descriptions underscore the holiness of God – His uncontaminated purity. John emphasizes the whiteness of Jesus: his head and hair are *white*, as if *white wool*, as *snow* – there can be no mistaking the purity of the Lord. The Greek makes this a triple declaration of the whiteness, which is much stronger than what appears in our English KJV. The purity that is characteristic of the God of all creation, is the same as that which identifies those who are in Christ – those who have been washed white in the blood of the Lamb of God

²⁰⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁰¹ BDB.

²⁰² Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 3.7.2.

²⁰³ YLT.

(Revelation 7:14). Isaiah foresaw the day of cleansing: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool” (Isaiah 1:18).

Interestingly, the Hebrew language has no words for colors, and typically likens the appearance of something to something else.²⁰⁴ For example, in Isaiah 1:18, the words *scarlet* and *crimson*, in Hebrew, do not refer to colors (as we think of it), but rather to the source of those colors (in both cases to the insect [scarlet] or worm [crimson] from which the color is derived).²⁰⁵ As a result, it really isn’t possible to construct a tight color typology. However, among the dyes used at this time, scarlet and crimson were the two that were the most difficult to remove;²⁰⁶ therefore, when Isaiah speaks of our sins being as *scarlet* and *crimson*, the significance is more linked to the color-fastness of these dyes, than to the color itself – our sins are not easily removed. Just before this text, Jehovah had related that He was fed up with the ritualistic sacrifices of Israel, which had become devoid of any meaning (vs. 11-15), and He commands them to change their ways (vs. 16-17). After a series of commands to change their living, Jehovah forthrightly declares that their sins, although appearing as scarlet, will become as white as snow (*white* is a word that speaks of purity), and, though they appear to be as permanently set as crimson, they will become like unto natural wool.²⁰⁷ His promise is that the stain of sin will be completely removed. However, there is more: “If ye be willing and obedient, ye shall eat the good of the land: But if ye refuse and rebel, ye shall be devoured with the sword: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*” (Isaiah 1:19-20). God’s promise to deal with sin, with such a wonderful cleansing, is conditional – if they obey, then all will be well, but if they refuse to be obedient (*rebel*), then they will be destroyed. The necessity of being obedient to the Lord has always been in place. Jehovah placed a tree in the Garden of Eden and told Adam and Eve that they were not to eat of it; it was Adam’s subsequent disobedience to the Lord that brought sin into the world. Jehovah says to Israel (and, therefore, to us), through Isaiah, that He will deal with the sin problem, but they must live in obedience to Him. Jesus said, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but **he that doeth the will of my Father** which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:21-23). We are initially saved by faith (Ephesians 2:8), but unless that faith is expressed through works of obedience (James 2:17), for which we have been made new (Ephesians 2:10), we stand in jeopardy of not being among those who endure and realize final salvation (Matthew 24:13).

Some might say that none of this has anything to do with what we are looking at in the book of Revelation. Let me explain: the Revelation of Jesus Christ, received by the Apostle John, describes many things yet to come for the Christian, including the final chapter of eternity with God. It is while we are in this life that we must prepare for that eternal life with the Lord; to a large degree, Evangelicals no longer hold to the truths of the Bible (despite their claims), and they spend most of their time being deceived by their “spiritual leaders,” who have also been deceived (2 Timothy 3:13). The ecumenical gospel of today’s Evangelical defies God’s Word, and would

²⁰⁴ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4557-color>

²⁰⁵ Strong’s Dictionary.

²⁰⁶ [Easton’s Revised Bible Dictionary](#).

²⁰⁷ BDB.

receive Paul's condemnation as a gospel that has been perverted (Galatians 1:7-8). Unless we are firmly committed to the Word of God (Psalm 119:105), have embraced the love of the truth that He presents to us (2 Thessalonians 2:10), and are prepared to stand against the persecution that will come our way because of His truth (Ephesians 6:11), what hope do we have of hearing His, "Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21)? Paul said to the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves" (2 Corinthians 13:5a). It is through exploring God's Word, and bringing various Scriptures together, that we can be assured that we understand God's desire for us, and, through living out His desires, we free ourselves from the ecumenical web that the devil is spinning. Is it important to study the Word of God to see what He has said about what is ahead? Absolutely! However, it is fundamentally more important that we understand what He desires of us today! If we fail God today, then what hope do we have for a tomorrow with Him?

The Lord Jesus Christ appears to John in purity (the white head and hair), and, through this purity, His eyes appear as a *flame of fire*. The Greek word used for *flame* is more than a passive flame, as we might perceive it; rather, it is a blaze²⁰⁸ – it includes intensity. The exact same phrase (in the Greek) appears in 2 Thessalonians 1:8: "[Jesus] in **flaming fire** taking vengeance [or meting out punishment] on them that know not [do not have a full knowledge of] God, and that obey not [are not submitting to] the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"²⁰⁹ As John views Jesus' eyes shining through His holiness, he sees eyes prepared to administer judgment. Will we feel His judgment, or hear His "well done?"



15. And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

Fine brass is an unknown metal and a bit of a mystery. Today, brass is an alloy of copper and zinc, but it is generally understood that in Bible times, this was some form of a copper-tin alloy (which we know as bronze).²¹⁰ The feet of the Lord appeared to be such a metal, which glowed as this metal would in the process of smelting (*as if they burned*). Daniel, likewise, observed the pre-incarnate Lord: "His body also *was* like the beryl [a gold-colored stone], and his face as the appearance of lightning [the brightness of lightning], and his eyes as lamps [torches] of fire, and his arms and his feet like in colour to polished brass [a copper alloy], and the voice of his words like the voice of a multitude [sound of a roaring]" (Daniel 10:6).²¹¹ Daniel's description is very comparable to John's; *brass* speaks of strength, firmness, and something that will endure.²¹²

John has already described the voice that he heard as that of a trumpet (v.10), and we noted that the context confirmed that it is speaking of the Lord's audible voice, even though the Greek word means *tone*, or *sound*. Here the context would not make such a requirement, for the Lord spoke in verse 11 and John turned to see Who spoke to him, but Jesus does not resume speaking

²⁰⁸ Strong's Dictionary.

²⁰⁹ Strong's Online.

²¹⁰ http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?l=b&p=39&allowed_in_frame=0

²¹¹ BDB.

²¹² <http://bibleencyclopedia.com/brass.htm>

with John until verse 17. Could it be that the sound that John heard, as he turned to face the Lord Jesus, was the sound of many waters – the sound of the ocean? John was on a small island where he would have rarely been out of earshot of the sound of the waves. Ezekiel wrote of a similar experience: “And, behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east: and his voice *was* like a noise of many waters: and the earth shined with his glory” (Ezekiel 43:2). Once again, the context would actually oppose using *voice*; *voice* and *noise* are the same Hebrew word²¹³ – perhaps the *sound* of God was like the *sound* of many waters.²¹⁴ God does not begin speaking with Ezekiel until verse seven, after several other events. Adam and Eve, after they had sinned, “**heard the voice of the LORD God** walking in the garden in the cool of the day ...” (Genesis 3:8). This was the *sound* of Jehovah in the garden; it was after Adam and Eve heard God coming, and hid themselves, that He then spoke to them (v.9). The *sound* of God (Ezekiel) and the *sound* of the Lord Jesus Christ (Revelation) are the same. Interestingly, water, by itself, would make no sound; it is only as it comes against another object that a sound is made. The waves of the ocean make a tremendous noise as they crash into the water or onto the shore, but water at rest makes no sound. However, John is clearly describing a sound that he heard (not silence), and so the *many waters* could be the sound of rain fall, brooks, waterfalls, lakes and oceans. To the woman at the well, Jesus said, “... whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14). Jesus is the Source of living water. “And he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Revelation 22:1); again, we see Jesus as being the Source of the water of life – could it have been the sound of the water of life that John and Ezekiel heard?



16. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword: and his countenance *was* as the sun shineth in his strength.

We will look at the *seven stars* in a later verse; for now, let's consider the significance of the *right hand*.

When Israel (Jacob) was nearing the end of his life, and Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to receive a blessing from their grandfather, it is carefully noted that Joseph made sure that Manasseh, the firstborn, was to Israel's right (Genesis 48:13). However, we see that when Israel pronounced the blessing, he crossed his hands so that his right hand came upon Ephraim's head (v. 14), and this displeased Joseph. It seems clear that the greater blessing would fall to the one on whom the right hand was placed; Israel went on to explain that he had done this switch deliberately (v. 19) – perhaps recalling that he, as the younger brother, had received the greater blessing (albeit by deceit).

When the Lord delivered the people of Israel by drowning the Egyptian army in the Red Sea, Moses declared, “Thy right hand, O LORD, is become glorious in power; thy right hand, O LORD, hath dashed in pieces the enemy” (Exodus 15:6). The Psalmist echoed this, “Shew thy marvellous

²¹³ BDB.

²¹⁴ Strong's Online.

lovingkindness, O thou that savest by thy right hand them which put their trust *in thee* from those that rise up *against them*” (Psalm 17:7). Deliverance and salvation are declared to come from the right hand of Jehovah.

Jesus reinforced this concept: “When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations [peoples]: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ...” (Matthew 25:31-34,41). As is common with prophecy, this proclamation does not include the progression of time; what may sound like one event, is actually two, separated by some time. From Matthew 24:30-31, we learn that Christ will return in the clouds of the air and gather His faithful ones to be with Him forever. Subsequently, after His one thousand year reign on earth, the unrighteous dead from all ages and all who have died when the heaven and earth pass away will stand before God Who will be sitting upon His judgment throne. This great multitude will be judged according to their works (by which no one can be saved – Galatians 2:16) and the Book of Life (Revelation 20:12-13) – if their name is in the Book, then they will go to the right; if not, then they are separated to the left and destined for the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:15). What we see in Jesus’ words is the distinction between the right hand (those who are blessed of God) and the left hand (those who receive His condemnation).

It is encouraging, therefore, to see the seven stars in the right hand of the Lord Jesus Christ – they abide in His favored hand; they are in a position of having the Lord’s approval.

John sees a *sharp twoedged sword* coming out of the mouth of the Lord Jesus. *Twoedged* comes from the Greek word *distomos* (*dis’-tom-os*), which literally means two-mouthed,²¹⁵ and was originally applied to the mouth of a river that is divided, or to a fork in a road.²¹⁶ The root word is *stoma*, which is mouth, but is figuratively used for a sword’s edge.²¹⁷ Therefore, when this word (*distomos*) is applied to a sword (*rhomphaia*), it speaks of a weapon with two edges.

This Greek word (translated as *twoedged*) appears twice in Revelation (1:16 and 2:12, where it describes a large sword - *rhomphaia*) and once in Hebrews. “For the word of God *is* quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). After an exhortation to expend our energies to enter into the rest that is open for us in Christ, lest, through unbelief, we come under condemnation (*fall*), the writer goes on to explain why we should take such care to abide in Christ. The expression (*word*)²¹⁸ of God is living,

²¹⁵ Strong’s Online.

²¹⁶ Vine’s “twoedged.”

²¹⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²¹⁸ Vine’s “word.”

it is effective,²¹⁹ and it is sharper than every double-edged knife (a knife used for killing animals and cutting meat up; *machaira*).



Double-edged Sword

²²⁰ This One, to Whom we all must give account, knows the very thoughts and intentions that form in the recesses of our hearts. The *word of God*, as it is used here, is not limited to the Bible, but includes every expression of God; the exact

same Greek phrasing is used in Revelation 19:13, where it appears as one of the names of the Lord Jesus Christ. After this declaration of Who God is, in relation to who we are before Him, we are again exhorted, "... let us hold fast [continue firmly in] *our* profession [‘a statement of allegiance expressing binding assent and public commitment’]” (Hebrews 4:14).²²¹ We are challenged to continually have a firm grasp on our professed commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ; *hold fast* is in the subjunctive mood – another reminder that we can lose what we have in Christ through a heart of unbelief (Hebrews 3:12; 4:11). We might well deceive others as to the reality of our relationship with God, but we cannot, even for a moment, deceive the One Whose discernment is sharper than any two-edged knife.



Double-edged Knife

John sees such a weapon of discernment coming from the mouth of the Lord, except, in this case, the *sword* is large – a weapon of warfare.²²² This would indicate that the Lord is appearing in judgment; this is not a small knife, or dagger, being wielded as a warning that we must carefully guard against unbelief (as Hebrews 4:12), but, rather, it is a larger weapon that is used in offensive warfare. We are called upon to brandish the defensive *dagger* “of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17);²²³ by contrast, the Lord Jesus Christ will use a large sword in accomplishing the minute and fair judgment of God.

John turns to see the Lord’s overall appearance to be as the sun shining in all of its power.



17. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last:

Saw (oida) speaks of more than simply the visual activity of the eyes; it includes perceiving, or understanding, what is being observed.²²⁴ John not only saw the Lord Jesus Christ in His

²¹⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

²²⁰ Strong’s Online.

²²¹ Friberg Lexicon.

²²² Strong’s Online.

²²³ Friberg Lexicon.

²²⁴ Strong’s Online.

majestic display of glory, but he recognized Him for Who He really was, and with that perception and recognition came an immediate response – he *fell at His feet as dead*. When Daniel saw the pre-incarnate Christ (the description is very similar to what John describes), he fell into a *deep sleep* – he became unconscious (Daniel 10:9); someone who is unconscious may appear to be dead. When Jesus took John, James and Peter into the mountain where He met with Elijah and Moses, we are told that His face shone like the sun and His clothing became white as light (Matthew 17:2). At this, Peter suggested that they construct dwelling places for Jesus, Moses and Elijah; despite the glory that shone from the Lord Jesus, it seems that they were not overwhelmed with His radiance. When the radiant cloud enveloped them, and they heard the voice of God acclaim the Lord Jesus as His Son, the three disciples fell on their faces in fear (Matthew 17:5-6). There was no hesitation on the part of John this time – when he saw Who it was Who spoke with him, he immediately fell down before Him.

Jesus laid His right hand, His hand of mercy and favor, upon John, and spoke to him again. His first words were, “Fear not.” John had just turned to see the glorified Lord Jesus Christ, resplendent in glory, and with a sword of judgment proceeding out of His mouth – there is little wonder that he fell before Him as one who was dead. As God has worked with individuals throughout history, fear has been a common response.

After Abram had received the blessing of Melchisedec, the realization that he still had no heir was particularly distressing. Jehovah came to him and said, “Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield [defense], and thy exceeding great reward [or, more accurately, thy reward (for faithfulness²²⁵) is exceedingly great²²⁶] (Genesis 15:1). Jehovah assures Abram that He is there with him, and goes on to reiterate that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars of heaven.

Joshua and all Israel had just experienced the amazing defeat of Jericho – they were on an emotional high because of what God had accomplished through them. As they considered their next conquest, Ai, it seemed to be such a small challenge by comparison; surely they could defeat the enemy with only a few soldiers (Joshua 7:3). After they were trounced by the men of Ai, Joshua falls before Jehovah wanting to know what went wrong, and fearing that the surrounding people would take this opportunity to utterly defeat Israel (Joshua 7:6-9). Jehovah chides Joshua for not knowing why Israel had been defeated at Ai (Joshua 7:10-11); after all, it was Joshua who declared that Jericho and everything in it was devoted to the Lord for destruction (except the silver, gold and the vessels of brass and iron, which were to be taken into the treasury of the Lord), and that if anyone took anything from the spoils, they would bring a curse upon themselves and Israel (Joshua 6:17-19). Through a process of elimination, Joshua found that Achan had taken a garment, 200 shekels of silver and 50 shekels of gold (Joshua 7:20-21).²²⁷ By doing this, Achan disobeyed the command of the Lord by 1) taking the garment (that which had been destined for destruction), and 2) robbing God by keeping some of the silver and gold for himself. The silver and gold were to be salvaged from Jericho, but not for personal gain. As a result, Achan, his family, and all of his possessions were gathered into one place, and they were stoned and burned (Joshua 7:24-25). It is so important to do what God commands! As Joshua emerges from this experience, Jehovah says, “Fear not” (Joshua 8:1). What we need to learn is that the *fear not* comes when all is right between

²²⁵ BDB.

²²⁶ YLT.

²²⁷ Assuming that a shekel is about 10 grams, by today’s values Achan stole about \$24,000 of gold and \$1,500 of silver (using \$1,380/oz for gold and \$21.73 for silver).

the Lord and us; if we have not followed the Lord's commands completely, then we need to fear, and the Lord's "fear not" does not apply to us!

Fear not was the message that the angel of the Lord brought to Joseph, assuring him that Mary was with child by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 1:20), and again, to the women who came to complete the burial process for Jesus on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:5). This is a message of comfort for those who are walking in obedience to the Lord. After explaining the destiny of those who willfully disobey the Lord, the writer of Hebrews declares, "*It is a fearful thing [formidable, terrible] to fall into the hands of the living God*" (Hebrews 10:31).

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do [continually doing] *his commandments* ..." (Psalm 111:10).²²⁸ We must hold a fear for the Lord that will produce reverence and awe for our Creator, Sustainer, and Savior – this is the beginning of wisdom, which finds its expression through continually doing what the Lord has commanded. Unless we first learn to fear the Lord, we will never hear His, "Fear not." When the Lord says, "Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy" (Exodus 20:8), do we fear Him enough to be obedient; or, do we have a greater fear for the derision of men? When Jehovah proclaims, "Learn not the way of the heathen ..." (Jeremiah 10:2), do we have enough reverence for our Savior to avoid those activities that are filled with pagan compromise? Do we have sufficient fear for the Lord God to hear His *fear not*?

John, who knew the Lord Jesus Christ during His earthly ministry, had adequate fear to fall before his Lord as one who was dead; out of that veneration for the Lord, John hears, "Fear not."

Jesus, again, identifies Himself as "the first and the last" (same phrase as in verse 11). "Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God" (Isaiah 44:6). Jehovah, the God of Israel, declares Himself to be the *first* and the *last*; Jesus, in turn, uses exactly the same words to describe Himself. What cannot be missed is that Jehovah, of the OT, and Jesus, of the NT, are equally God; "For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father [Jehovah], the Word [the Lord Jesus Christ], and the Holy Ghost [Spirit]: and these three are one" (1 John 5:7). This testimony to the tri-unity of God has been eliminated from all modern translations (except the New King James Version). However, even in the midst of this desecration of the Word of God, for those who have eyes to see, the affirmation of Jesus as being eternally God can still be found by comparing Scripture with Scripture. Even in *The Message*, as corrupt as it is, you can find that Jesus and Jehovah are one: "GOD, King of Israel, your Redeemer, GOD-of-the-Angel-Armies, says: "I'm first, I'm last, and everything in between. I'm the only God there is" (Isaiah 44:6); "I saw this and fainted dead at his feet. His right hand pulled me upright [nothing in the Greek text supports this addition], his voice reassured me: "Don't fear: I am First, I am Last ..." (Revelation 1:17). Modern translations are condemned by God for they have added to, and taken away from, His words (Deuteronomy 4:2). *The Message* has removed 1 John 5:7 entirely, yet it still includes, "Don't add a word to what I command you, and don't remove a word from it. Keep the commands of God, your God, that I am commanding you" (Deuteronomy 4:2). The purveyors of modern translations hold no fear of God, for they continue to fill the hearts and minds of professing Christians with corrupt texts called the Bible. Despite the warnings in the very texts that they produce, they carry on violating God's Word

²²⁸ Strong's Online.

by adding to, and removing from, its holy content. With the full support of the Scriptures, we can be assured that Jesus and Jehovah and the Holy Spirit are one God!



18. *I am* he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

The *I am*, in this case, appears in italics, which means that it has been supplied by the translators; the phrase that follows is tied to the previous verse. Jesus declared that He is the First and the Last, and He Who is living and Who became dead. Jesus, eternally God (the First and the Last) and Who is presently living, is the same One Who took death on as He procured our liberation from sin. It was on the cross that “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost” (Matthew 27:50); He sent the spirit of His physical life away.²²⁹ *Yielded* is in the active voice, which means that Jesus was the One Who relinquished His physical life; He did not die as a victim of Roman crucifixion, rather, He sent His spirit away so that He might conquer death by dying and being raised to life again.

To the Romans, Paul wrote, “For the wages of sin *is* death ...” (Romans 6:23); i.e., the due recompense for sin is death. To Adam, God said, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for **in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die**” (Genesis 2:16-17). The promised wages, or payment, for disobedience was death – the foundation for Paul’s words go right back to the Garden of Eden. Clearly, Jesus could not have succumbed to death (as we do) because He was without sin; “For he [God] hath made him [the Lord Jesus Christ, as God incarnate] *to be* sin for us, **who knew no sin**; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Hebrews 7:26 declares, “... For such an high priest became [was fitting for] us, *who is* holy [pleasing to God (Matthew 17:5)], harmless [blameless], undefiled [pure], separate from sinners [“not only that Christ is *separated* from sinful people but that he is also *different* from them”], and made [become] higher than the heavens ...”²³⁰ Peter states that Jesus “did [absolutely] no sin” (1 Peter 2:22); likewise, John concurs that “in him is [absolutely] no sin” (1 John 3:5).²³¹ There was NOTHING in the Lord Jesus Christ to warrant death – He was sinless! Even when He took the sins of the whole world upon Himself, while He was on the cross, they could not bring death because they were not His sins. “The soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Ezekiel 18:20), however, Jesus remained sinless even as He bore our sins (1 Peter 2:24). Therefore, as the One bearing the sins of the world, Jesus voluntarily relinquished His physical life (Matthew 27:50) so that He might *taste* (experience) the penalty of sin (death) for all of mankind (Hebrews 2:9); there was no other way for Jesus to die physically.

When God decreed to Adam that he would die if he should disobey that one commandment that he was given, (Genesis 2:16-17), we readily recognize that this meant two things: 1) a spiritual death, or separation from God (immediate), and 2) physical death (in due time). When God made coats of skins to cover Adam and Eve, this (the shedding of blood) became the means for restoration of spiritual fellowship with their Creator, if it was accompanied by faith in God to bring

²²⁹ Strong’s Online.

²³⁰ Gingrich Lexicon.

²³¹ Strong’s Online.

the One Who would crush the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). All throughout the OT we see the acceptable sacrifice requiring two things: shed blood and faith (Leviticus 17:11; Hebrews 4:2). "And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect" (Genesis 4:3-5a); "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous ..." (Hebrews 11:4). Cain brought an offering to God, but it was of his own works, and did not include the shedding of blood according to the required pattern; consequently, his offering was rejected by God. Abel's sacrifice, on the other hand, included the required shed blood, and, being mixed with faith in God, was acceptable, and he was found to be righteous before God. A sacrifice that does not include shed blood can never bring salvation because it is an expression of rebellion against God.

Isaiah faced a situation that was quite different from the example of Cain: "To what purpose *is* the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the LORD: I am full [surfeit:²³² filled to being sickened] of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread [trample²³³] my courts? Bring no more vain oblations [useless offerings²³⁴]; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with [cannot endure²³⁵]; *it is* iniquity [worthlessness²³⁶], even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear *them*. And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (Isaiah 1:11-15). Jehovah acknowledges that Israel was busily sacrificing in accordance with the required traditions, but He makes the accusation that their *hands are full of blood*; in other words, there was much shedding of blood but no cleansing. Unlike Cain, Israel was shedding blood as required, but, like Cain, they were not being accepted by Jehovah, and were not considered to be righteous. Cain's sacrifice was an expression of open rebellion against Jehovah; for Israel, the blood flowed from the prescribed sacrifices, but it had become an empty ritual – faith was no longer present to bring salvation, they had fallen into formalism and liturgy. "Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept [command] of men ..." (Isaiah 29:13).²³⁷ Nothing had changed by the time of Jesus' ministry (over 700 years later): "Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with *their* lips, but their heart is far from me" (Mark 7:6).

Israel's problem, at the time of Isaiah, was not new. The writer of Hebrews states, "For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them [i.e., the Israelites who came out of Egypt under Moses' leadership]: but the word preached did not profit them, **not being mixed with faith** in them that heard *it*" (Hebrews 4:2). Here is the critical element that was missing at the time of Isaiah

²³² BDB.

²³³ Strong's Online.

²³⁴ Strong's Dictionary.

²³⁵ BDB.

²³⁶ Keil & Delitzsch

²³⁷ Strong's Online.

– faith! Israel had slipped into ritualism, i.e., they went through the motions (they had the liturgy right), but there was no life-giving faith to bring spiritual righteousness with Jehovah. Israel, when they were freed from Egypt by Moses, heard the word of Jehovah, but inasmuch as their hearing was not mingled with faith in God, that generation perished in the wilderness (Hebrews 3:17), with the exception of two men: Caleb and Joshua.

What is faith? “Now faith is the substance [essence or reality] of things hoped for, the evidence [proof] of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).²³⁸ The Greek word translated as *faith* is *pistis* (*pis'-tis*), meaning the conviction of the truth of anything²³⁹, a firm persuasion.²⁴⁰ Consider the correlation between *faith* (*pistis*) and *believe*: the Greek *pisteuo* (*pist-yoo'-o*) means to be persuaded of, and, hence, to place confidence in, to trust.²⁴¹ It is while I am believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior from sin that the Holy Spirit will bring saving faith, which, in turn, will grow through being exercised. *Belief* is the mental/heart persuasion of the truth of something; *faith* carries that belief into action. When we understand this essential correlation, then the critical importance of identifying the object of our belief becomes obvious; our believing must be carefully and accurately placed, in order to produce saving faith. James tells us that the devils believe in one God, and they tremble (2:19); believing in God, as the transcendent Creator and Sustainer, is not sufficient to result in the salvation of our souls. Every Evangelical and Ecumenist would adamantly proclaim their belief in God, yet they continue to live in utter contradiction to God’s Holy Word. The common expression today is that someone is a “believer,” by which we are to understand that they are a Christian, purchased by Christ, and on their way to heaven. Unless I am persuaded (and continue in that persuasion) that Christ is the only Savior of my sinful soul (believing), I have no basis for saving faith; by its very definition, saving faith, in turn, must be expressed in obedience to God’s Word (James 2:18). “And hereby we do know [are knowing – present tense] that we know [have come to know – perfect tense] him [God], if we keep [attend carefully to] his commandments” (1 John 2:3). We cannot come to *know* God unless we are persuaded that He is (we believe in Him – Hebrews 11:6); if we *know* Him, then we will do what He says (that is *belief* being worked out through *faith*) – we are so persuaded that God is true, that we will live according to His Word regardless of the consequences. The Ecumenist, the Evangelical, the Roman Catholic, etc. all have faith, but it is faith in a wrong belief about Who God is, what He has done for us, and what He requires of us. They have been persuaded (they believe), but their persuasion does not lie within the confines of God’s truth; rather, they have been deluded into believing the theology of men, whether recent or ancient, it matters not. Paul’s exhortation, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith ...” (2 Corinthians 13:5), makes perfect sense within this context. We need to test our convictions according to the teachings of Scripture so as to ensure that we have been persuaded correctly – so that our faith might, in fact, be a saving faith springing out of a Biblical belief.

Through all of this, we must also understand that Christ “will have [desires] all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge [a precise and correct knowledge] of the truth. For *there is* one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; Who gave himself a ransom [He personally paid the price of deliverance from sin] for all ...” (1 Timothy 2:4-6a).²⁴²

²³⁸ Gingrich Lexicon.

²³⁹ Strong’s Online.

²⁴⁰ Vine’s “faith.”

²⁴¹ Vine’s “believe.”

²⁴² Strong’s Online.

Within this short quote, we have two confirmations that Jesus died for all of mankind: 1) He desires all men to be saved (which only makes sense if He's paid the price for the liberation of all of mankind, otherwise it would merely be wishful thinking on His part), and 2) a forthright declaration that He gave Himself as the payment for the sins of all of mankind. He has paid the price for the sins of all men, but, unless the shed blood of His sacrifice is mixed with faith in the heart of a man, the price that Jesus paid for sins will not change the eternal destination of his soul. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth [*is believing* – that from which faith springs] in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The source of saving faith is declared to be a living belief in the Son of God (which includes all that He has done for us). "Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in **departing** [to fall away or become **faithless**] **from** the living God. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold [may hold (subjunctive mood)] the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end ..." (Hebrews 3:12, 14).²⁴³ It is not enough to begin well; we must also end well. "When the righteous turneth from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, he shall even die thereby" (Ezekiel 33:18); "For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins ..." (Hebrews 10:26). The concept of once-saved-always-saved finds absolutely no support in Scripture; it is a ploy of the devil to lull the unsuspecting into a false sense of spiritual security. We must be persuaded of the truth of what Christ has done for us, and then live in a way that confirms that we have been correctly persuaded (i.e., in obedience to the Word of God); out of this will come a growing faith in the Lord and an increased willingness to walk in His ways.

Jesus, the Creator of life, tasted death so that we might live (Hebrews 2:9); He *was* dead, but now He is *alive for evermore*! When Jesus rose from the dead, death, for the one who dies in faith, changed forever.

Jesus spoke of the rich man and Lazarus – how the rich man lived luxuriously, while Lazarus lived in poverty and broken health. When Lazarus died, he was "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom"; when the rich man died, he found himself "in hell" (Luke 16:22-23). Lazarus was given a place of honor among the righteous dead; at a banquet, to *recline on the bosom* was considered to be the place of honor and close fellowship.²⁴⁴ The rich man, on the other hand, died, was simply buried (he was not carried anywhere by the angels), and found himself in *hell* or *hades* – a "temporary underworld prison where the souls of the ungodly await the judgment."²⁴⁵ In all likelihood, the conversation that the rich man had with Abraham is where the account becomes a parable; it was used by Jesus to explain the significance of being aware of the finality of death, and the eternal consequences of what we do in this life. Abraham explains that there is a *great gulf fixed* between these two places; the places of the righteous and of the condemned are separated by a chasm that cannot be crossed.²⁴⁶ What is evident is that, upon death, our eternal destinies are sealed – hence the tremendous importance of enduring (*hupomeno*) in Christ unto the end (Matthew 24:13).²⁴⁷

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Strong's Online.

When the repentant thief implored Jesus to remember him, Jesus said, “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). It would seem evident that this *paradise* is the place where Abraham and Lazarus were – a place that was occupied by the righteous who had died.

However, undoubtedly a question will be raised regarding Peter’s words: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: By which also **he went and preached unto the spirits in prison**; Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water” (1 Peter 3:18-20). A cursory reading of this might seem to indicate that Christ, when He died, went to preach to those who were being kept for judgment. The Reformed theologians use these words from Peter in support of their revered Apostles’ Creed, which includes the words: “He [Christ] descended into hell.”²⁴⁸ Does this passage really teach that Christ descended into hell?



John Calvin

Why would Christ preach to those in hell? Can those who have died in a state of rebellion against God be somehow liberated from their place of torment through Christ preaching to them? “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but **after this the judgment** ...” (Hebrews 9:27). Unlike the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, the Scriptures teach that our relationship with the Lord, upon our death, is irrevocable – there can be no repentance after death, no possible deliverance for those who find themselves confined to *hades* awaiting their final day of judgment. The rich man demonstrates that there is no way to change your destiny once you have died – death seals your eternal state. Therefore, nothing would be accomplished by Christ descending into hell to preach to those who were confined there.

However, Peter does clarify to whom he is referring when he speaks of the *spirits in prison* – it is of those who, in Noah’s day, heard the message of life that was taught by the life-giving power of the Spirit of God through Noah, but who chose to disregard God’s word to them and perished in the flood (they refused to believe, to be persuaded). It is these, who ignored the wooing of the Spirit of God, who are now (at Peter’s writing) *spirits* (the body and soul having been separated by death) confined to *hades*, awaiting their final judgment. Peter shows that even though Jesus, by the Spirit, spoke through Noah to the unrepentant prior to the flood, only eight were saved; the warning is that we must be prepared to commit ourselves to the will of God (1 Peter 4:2), lest we join the disobedient (the unfaithful) of Noah’s day.

Jesus told the thief that they would be together in paradise that very day; this was spoken to the repentant thief, not to the one who died in rebellion. *Paradise* is the place of the righteous dead, which Jesus described as being where Abraham was (Luke 16:22). Why would the Apostles’ Creed put Jesus in hell? Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, makes it very clear that he understood this to mean hell, not just the grave.²⁴⁹ However, Jesus did not tell the unrepentant thief

²⁴⁸ http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/apostles_creed.html

²⁴⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, p. 415 (CCEL pdf version).

that He would be with him in hell that day. Jesus went to paradise; on the cross He paid the penalty for sin, He died, and then went to the place of the righteous dead, which He described as the abode of Abraham and Lazarus, where the repentant thief joined Him that very day. Jesus died for our sins, yet He remained without sin (Hebrews 4:15), therefore, He could not have gone to hell, which is the place of condemnation.

In our KJV NT, two Greek words are translated as *hell*. Jesus said, “And fear not them which kill [slay] the body, but are not able to kill [slay] the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy [ruin] both soul and body in hell [*geenna* (*gheh'-en-nah*)]” (Matthew 10:28).²⁵⁰ The word used here speaks of the location of future, eternal punishment that awaits the wicked. *Gehenna* (as it is spelled in English) comes from reference to the Valley of Hinnom, a ravine where the refuse and dead animals of Jerusalem were cast, and burned;²⁵¹ it was utterly abhorrent. We are called to fear the One Who has the power to cast us into this place of eternal torment (namely, God).²⁵² “And in hell [*hades*] he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (Luke 16:23). *Hades*, on the other hand, describes, in general terms, where the ungodly dead dwell; what we learn from Jesus’ account of the rich man and Lazarus is that there **were** two areas for the dead (one for the righteous - *paradise*, the other for the wicked - *hades*), which were entirely isolated from one another by a great chasm. Even though the rich man makes it clear that he is in a place of torment, this is only *hades*, which will one day be cast into the lake of fire: “And death and hell [*hades*] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Revelation 20:14). This lake is described as a place of fire and torment that will last forever (Revelation 20:10), and carries the same idea as the Greek word *geenna* (*Gehenna*). Jesus said, “And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell [*geenna* (*Gehenna*)], into the fire that never shall be quenched [*asbestos* (Greek word) – unquenchable fire]: Where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched [*sbennumi* (*sben'-noo-mee*) – extinguished]” (Mark 9:43-44). What better description could we have of the *lake of fire*? This is a place of unending torment prepared specifically for the devil and his angels, but where all of those who are in rebellion against God (those who do not choose Him) will also find themselves (Matthew 25:41).

This provides us with a glimpse into paradise and *hades* as it was up to the time of the Lord Jesus Christ’s resurrection. *Hades*, which is prepared for the wicked, has not changed and is still in use today; however, Scripture tells us that paradise is no longer occupied. “Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, *for* the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell *among them*” (Psalm 68:18). Paul, in writing to the Ephesians, draws upon this text: “When he [Jesus] ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men” (Ephesians 4:8). When Christ ascended into heaven (Hebrews 9:24), He led as captives the multitudes who had been held in “captivity” in paradise. As Job bemoaned the day of his birth, he spoke of the dwelling place of the dead: “There the wicked cease *from* troubling; and there the weary be at rest. *There* the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and great are there; and the servant *is* free from his master” (Job 3:17-19). He saw this as the place where both the *wicked* (the guilty) and the *weary* (the one oppressed)

²⁵⁰ Strong’s Online.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

²⁵² Notice that the soul is *ruined* in *Gehenna*, not killed or annihilated; this speaks against the doctrines of the Seventh-Day Adventists and the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

are held as *prisoners*; they are confined to this place (held in captivity) after death, and freed from the burdens of life. It would seem evident that there is a separation between the *wicked* and the *weary*, for if they were held together, the wicked would then continue their oppression and the weary would have no rest. This fits precisely with Jesus' explanation of paradise and hades, where we see that the righteous, although being held as captives, are in a place of *rest* (in *Abraham's bosom* – Luke 16:23), and, in like manner, the wicked are also held, albeit in misery.

As Jesus hung upon the cross, He told the repentant thief that they would be together in paradise that very day (Luke 23:43) – that place of rest for all of the righteous (*Abraham's bosom*). However, Matthew makes this unique observation: “Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost [Jesus released His life as the sinless Son of Man so that He might experience death (the wages of sin) for all of mankind (Hebrews 2:9)]. And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many” (Matthew 27:50-53). *The graves were opened* (this is unqualified), and this is followed by the OT saints being raised from the dead **after** Jesus' resurrection. Therefore, when Jesus ascended to heaven, He took with Him these raised and glorified saints: “When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive” (Ephesians 4:8) – the OT saints were held in *captivity* in paradise until Jesus rose from the dead. Jesus is identified as being the Firstfruit – the first One to be raised from the dead to never die again (1 Corinthians 15:23); later in Revelation, John writes about a *hundred forty* and *four thousand* who are the *firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb* (Revelation 14:4). We'll look at this more closely later, but suffice it to say that these resurrected saints are the *firstfruit* (the Greek is singular) to God **and** the Lamb – the first saints to be raised in everlasting, glorified bodies unto the Lamb of God.

Therefore, Paul could declare: “We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (2 Corinthians 5:8; cp. Philippians 1:21-23). For those who have died *in Christ*, their spirits are immediately in the presence of the Lord, the glorified saints from the OT and the heavenly angels. Jesus is gathering His flock together, and there will be only **one flock** and He will be its Shepherd (John 10:16);²⁵³ despite the OT saints now being in heaven with the Lord in their glorified bodies, we have the assurance that they will not be complete without us who have come to faith in the Lord since His resurrection (Hebrews 11:40) – there is only **one flock**!

“... we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). Jesus was made lower than the angels of heaven by taking on the body of man, for the express purpose of dying, so that He might experience (*taste*) death for everyone. To Adam, God said, “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die” (Genesis 2:16-17). We have learned that, through disobedience, Adam died twice – he died spiritually immediately, and he died physically many years later. Adam's spiritual death was a broken relationship with God, His Creator. When Jesus hung on the cross, bearing the burden of the sins of the whole world, He cried out, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken [totally

²⁵³ Although the KJV says that Jesus will make *one fold*, the translators made a significant error; this is the only place where the Greek word *poimne* is shown as *fold* – it should be *flock*!

abandoned] me?” (Matthew 27:46).²⁵⁴ This took place at the time when the Passover lamb was killed (about the ninth hour or 3:00 PM); Jesus experienced this abandonment when He, as the Passover Lamb of God, bore the sins of the world. At that moment, Christ, as eternal God in the flesh, experienced separation from the Father; God the Father turned away from the sins of the world that Jesus bore. The difference between Adam and Christ is this: Adam was separated from God for his own sin; Christ, Who remained sinless through all of this, felt the pain of separation from God the Father because of the sins of the world, which He took upon Himself (1 Peter 2:24; 1 John 2:2). Inasmuch as He was sinless, He was qualified to bear the sins of the world (1 Peter 1:19) – following the pattern of the Passover lamb, which was to be spotless and without defect (Exodus 12:5). After this, Jesus, while still on the cross, said, “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (Luke 23:46), at which time He tasted physical death. As already noted, He had to relinquish His physical life since He remained without sin; because death is the consequence of sin (Romans 6:23), it had no hold on Jesus. His body remained in the tomb for three days and nights (during which time He would have been in paradise with the thief and all of the other saints) in fulfillment of the prophecy (Matthew 12:40; 27:63), and to affirm that He had truly died. The Jewish custom was to leave a tomb open for the first three days; relatives of the deceased would visit the tomb to confirm that their loved one was, in fact, dead.²⁵⁵ Contrary to this custom, the religious leaders sealed Jesus’ tomb in their efforts to ensure that He remained there, yet Jesus broke forth at the appointed time – after the three days and three nights.²⁵⁶ The angels rolled the stone away so that Jesus’ disciples could enter and confirm that He was raised from the dead.

Jesus identifies Himself to John as He Who is living, He Who became dead, and, don’t miss this, John (*behold*), He Who is alive into the ages of the ages (*for evermore*).²⁵⁷ “... But this man [Jesus], after he had **offered one sacrifice** for sins for ever [*dienekes* (*dee-ay-nek-es*’)] – unbroken, continuous], sat down on the right hand of God ...” (Hebrews 10:12);²⁵⁸ Jesus died only once, there being no requirement that He should ever die again. On that same basis, He is our “priest continually [*dienekes*]” (Hebrews 7:3), ever living “to make intercession” with God for us (Hebrews 7:25). It is also for this very reason that “if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth **no more sacrifice for sins** ...” (Hebrews 10:26). If we spurn the **only** sacrifice that was made for our sins, then we have sealed our fate forever, and can only hold a terrible expectation of condemnation (Hebrews 10:27). However, as we abide in Christ, we can be assured and rejoice that He is alive for evermore! So it is!

Jesus goes on to say that He holds the keys of *hades* and *death*. Keys are typically seen as a symbol of power or control – the one who holds the keys can open and lock doors as he determines. Jesus holds such power over *hades* and *death*. *Death* (*thanatos*), refers to the loss of life, specifically the loss of physical life.²⁵⁹ *Hades*, as we have seen, is that place where the unrighteous dead are now being held pending their final day of judgment. Jesus has authority over both of

²⁵⁴ Strong’s Online.

²⁵⁵ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3842-burial>

²⁵⁶ This is contrary to the modern thought that Jesus died on Friday and rose on Sunday morning; He actually died on Wednesday afternoon and rose at the close of the Sabbath (Saturday evening). For more on this, see <http://www.thenarrowtruth.com/realities-of-easter.html>

²⁵⁷ Friberg Lexicon.

²⁵⁸ Vine’s “ever.”

²⁵⁹ Strong’s Online.

these. At the final judgment that will take place before the white throne of God, we see Jesus' authority over these two (death and hades) being exercised one final time: "And death [*thanatos*] and hell [*hades*] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death." (Revelation 20:14). We are told that it is the wages of sin that is death (Romans 6:23); as we enter into an eternity without sin (in God's presence), death will have no place for sin has been banished! Death and hades are no longer needed – for hades has been emptied of all of its unrighteous dead (v.13) who will then stand before the Lord Jesus Christ, the righteous Judge (John 5:22), to be judged according to their works (Revelation 20:13; Ephesians 2:8-9 and Galatians 2:16 all confirm that no one from among this group will be saved).

For those who have placed their faith in the finished work of Christ, and who persevere in that faith, the wonderful message is that Christ is alive forevermore. However, for those who have neglected the salvation that He offers, and for those who have spurned the only Sacrifice for sins, the Lord also holds the authority over their fate. It is so important that we understand the necessity of continual obedience to His Word if we desire to abide in His presence (John 14:23-24).



19. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

Here is further instruction from the Lord to John: *write* appears as an imperative, a command. John is to write about what he has seen (*oida* – beyond the visual to that which is understood²⁶⁰), the things that are, and those things that are destined to take place after this (*shall be hereafter*).²⁶¹ This is a brief overview of what *the Revelation* includes: all that John sees, the things that are presently existing, and those things that are about to come after these. *The Revelation* is not limited to future events; we must view the prophecies in light of our present situation and history (what has transpired since John).



20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

The Greek word *mysterion* (translated as *mystery*) does not speak of something that cannot be comprehended, but, rather, of something that is known only to the initiated.²⁶² Very often in Scripture, it is used to refer to something that has not been understood previously but is being, or is about to be, revealed. For example, Paul explained to the Ephesians that God revealed things to him that were unknown in times past; it was previously unknown, but now was being made known (Ephesians 3:4-5).

To the Corinthians, Paul wrote: "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know [*oida* – understand] the things that are freely given to

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Gingrich Lexicon.

²⁶² Vine's "mystery."

us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth [accept, embrace] not [absolute] the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know [*ginosko* – come to know] *them*, because they are spiritually discerned [judged with the aid of the Holy Spirit]" (1Corinthians 2:12-14).²⁶³ The *natural man* abides in a natural state of separation from God (because of sin); therefore, it is not in the nature of such a person to understand, or accept, what the Spirit of God reveals. Until a sinner chooses to believe (to be persuaded) that the Lord Jesus Christ paid the price for his sins, and the life-changing presence of the Spirit of God abides within, he cannot comprehend the deeper things of the Word of God – they will remain closed to him. This is the state of many theologians (including Evangelicals); they are slaves to their own thinking, and the Scriptures remain closed to them. Through actively and continuously believing in the Lord as our Deliverer from sin (which will be expressed through our obedience to His Word – James 2:18), saving faith finds life through the continued, abiding presence of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8; John 14:16). This is why it is not sufficient to have believed in the Lord as Savior (past tense – a prayer was uttered for salvation at some time); unless we continue to actively believe, a living, saving faith has no foundation from which to flourish, and the Spirit of God will be grieved (Ephesians 4:30).

Paul likens us to branches that are grafted into the Olive Tree (the Lord Jesus Christ) and, thereby, we partake of the nourishment and life of the Tree. On the other hand, some of the original branches (those of Israel) have been broken off. He goes on to explain, "Thou wilt say then, The [original] branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in. Well; because of unbelief [either never persuaded (faithlessness), or a change in persuasion (apostasy)] they were broken off, and thou standest by faith [a conviction of the truth, belief – rooted in being persuaded, expressed through obedience]. Be not highminded, but fear: For if God spared not the natural branches, *take heed* lest he also spare not thee" (Romans 11:19-21).²⁶⁴ The reality is that, through faithlessness, we stand in jeopardy of losing our connection to the Olive Tree, Jesus Christ; apostasy, about which the Scriptures have much to say, is possible (contrary to the popular doctrine of eternal security). It is not sufficient to be persuaded that Jesus died to save us, and then, for the rest of our days, look back to that time when we believed, and think that that is adequate to assure us a place in heaven with the Lord. Unfortunately, that is the unbiblical position of most Evangelicals today. In His discussion with Nicodemus, Jesus said: "... whosoever believeth in him should not perish ..."; "... whosoever believeth in him should not perish ..." (John 3:15, 16) – a repetition in order to emphasize the importance of this statement. In both cases, *believeth* is in the present tense (it is viewed as occurring in actual time) and active voice (it is the *whosoever* who is doing the believing) – the believing must always be taking place **now**, it is not sufficient to have believed at some time in the past; with a presently active belief in the Lord Jesus Christ in place, the *whosoever* **will not** perish (the Greek sentence structure makes the *not perish* a stated outcome for the one who *is believing*).²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, we must guard against letting that active *believing* slip; there is a reason that we find warnings in Scripture: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast [a command to persevere], and hold the traditions [the substance of Paul's message to them] which ye have been

²⁶³ Strong's Online.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Strong's Online; https://www.ntgreek.org/learn_nt_greek/subj-purpose.htm.

taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thessalonians 2:15).²⁶⁶ The words of Jehovah, to Ezekiel, bear out this same principle: “When a righteous *man* turneth away [to apostatize] from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, and dieth in them; for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die” (Ezekiel 18:26).²⁶⁷ The writer of Hebrews warns, “Take heed, **brethren**, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [faithless, a change in persuasion], in departing from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). The reality of apostasy is proclaimed! We face a daily choice: will we choose to remain steadfast in the faith, or will we alter our persuasion and become apostate? Unfortunately, Evangelicals seem to prefer the devil’s version of once-saved-always-saved as they delude themselves into visions of heaven, even while they tread the broad road to hell; the doctrine of eternal security is an insurance policy that has been underwritten by the great deceiver, Satan.

This is the book of the revelation of Jesus Christ – a time for lifting the veil that may have been hiding the truth. Recognizing that we must have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ in order for the Holy Spirit to be abiding within, we do not depend upon our own intelligence to open the Word of God to our hearts, but upon the “Spirit of truth,” Who has come to us to guide us into “all truth” (John 16:13). The time for unveiling has come.

This is a continuation from the previous verse where Jesus is telling John that he must write about what he has seen (comprehended or understood), the things that are, things that are about to follow the things that are, and the mystery concerning the stars and the lampstands. To assist John in his writing, Jesus explains the meaning of the seven stars on His right (*hand* is not there in the Greek) and the seven golden lampstands. We have seen the stars in the right hand of the Lord (v. 16), then He placed His right hand upon the prostrate John (v.17), and now we see that the stars are on His right.

Jesus begins with the seven stars, and states that they *are the angels of the seven churches*; this is a simple statement of fact (*are* is in the indicative mood).²⁶⁸ We must be sure that we understand this correctly, for it will have a direct impact on what we look at next; it is part of the *mystery* to which Jesus referred, so we must ensure that we take adequate time to comprehend all that He desires at this point. The focus of this phrase is on the word *angels*. The Greek word *aggelos* (*ang’-el-os*) does not necessarily refer to spirit beings (as we might think) – it more specifically refers to “a messenger, envoy, one who is sent.”²⁶⁹ As Jesus began His earthly ministry, he quoted this passage in reference to John the Baptist: “Behold, I send my messenger [*aggelos*] before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee” (Matthew 11:10; this is taken from Malachi 3:1, where the Hebrew word translated as *messenger* is most often translated as *angel*).²⁷⁰ Therefore, we must be prepared to look beyond the spirit messenger to someone who might, in fact, be a **spiritual** messenger, one who has been sent by God to ensure that His Word remains pure within the context of an assembly – someone charged with “overseeing a group of believers.”²⁷¹ Perhaps a more familiar term would be bishop, or elder – someone who bears the responsibility of maintaining the integrity of the message that is being taught within a local *ekklesia*. The significance of using the

²⁶⁶ Strong’s Online.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Friberg Lexicon.

word *aggelos*, within this context, is that those who bear this responsibility are sent ones – they have been sent to ensure that God’s message remains pure, and, as such, they are, therefore, responsible to God to be effective.

If we take one moment to consider this carefully, we will realize just how far modern churches have departed from what God desires. “Pastors,” for the most part, are chosen by a democratic vote of the members of a local congregation in accordance with the guidelines of their constitution. Although this is an apt description of most processes today, none of that finds any basis within Scripture. The Biblical role of the bishop, or elder, within the local body, is very different from the untried authority granted to the modern-day *pastor*. The bishop, or elder, is to be God’s messenger to the local assembly (*ekklesia*), charged with the responsibility of ensuring the purity of the teaching that is taking place (1 Timothy 5:17), and being a pattern of godly living (1 Peter 5:1-3). As we move forward, it is very important that we understand this dual responsibility that is borne by these *stars* within the local *ekklesia*.

These messengers (*angels* or spiritual overseers and laborers) begin in the right hand of Jesus (v.16), and are now said to be on His right – remaining in that place of blessed favor and approval. As John turned and saw Jesus, He was holding these messengers in His right hand, even while the double-edged sword of judgment came from His mouth. His judgment was not directed at the seven *stars*, for they were held in the safety and security of His right hand. However, as we will come to see, that is not a guaranteed place for those who are not obedient. Just because they began on Jesus’ right does not mean that they will automatically continue in that place of favor; as a matter of fact, some are on the verge of losing out altogether.

What is interesting to observe is that there are seven angels and seven assemblies. As we have already noted (v. 4), the number seven often speaks of completeness. Seven assemblies are specifically identified in the Revelation, and, within this framework, they can be viewed as representing all of the assemblies that ever will be (applying the concept of completeness). In similar fashion, the seven angels would be representative of all of the elders who will provide oversight and guidance to all of the assemblies to come. It is interesting to note that the ratio is one-to-one.

We read of Paul and Barnabas returning to the assemblies that they had established, “Confirming the souls of the disciples ... And when they had ordained them elders [plural] in every church [singular], and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed” (Acts 14:22-23).²⁷² In each assembly, they appointed more than one elder. It would seem, therefore, that, out of this plurality, one elder would become the primary leader – not by appointment but probably through gifting. You might think, “Aha! That’s the pastor or senior pastor!” Not so! The word *ordained* (used in Acts 14:23) comes from a Greek word primarily meaning to raise the hand (as in, to vote), but that is not its only meaning (there was no congregational voting in those first assemblies). It also means to appoint or to install,²⁷³ and that is the meaning that fits within the context of this verse. Paul and Barnabas (*they*) appointed a plurality of elders within each *ekklesia*, and these elders would have been chosen according to their spiritual understanding, the gifting that they exemplified, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit (1 Timothy 3 ensures that we understand the integrity that these men must demonstrate, and to

²⁷² Stephanus 1550 NT.

²⁷³ Gingrich Lexicon; Vine’s “appoint.”

provide us with guidance in our selection process). As we see in Revelation 1:20, within the context of the plurality of messengers from God, one would become the primary leader – not that he would lead in isolation, rather, he would be the spokesman for the elders (those who had been appointed to the responsibility of overseeing the integrity of the group because of their spiritual maturity). The reality of this is that as the group of elders went, the assembly, for which they were responsible, would follow; within each of these seven assemblies, there was one elder who became the point of first contact.

Finally, Jesus says that the seven lampstands, which John saw, are the seven assemblies (again, this is a simple statement of fact). Each assembly had its *star*, its messenger, or sent one, who bore responsibility for the integrity of the teaching. Critical to identifying a Biblical assembly (*ekklesia*) would be the presence of God’s messenger – at least one qualifying elder to provide godly leadership and guidance in His Word. Jesus said, “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matthew 18:20). The size of the gathering has no bearing on its legitimacy as a part of the *ekklesia* that Jesus is building; rather, it is their purpose for gathering, and the Lord’s willingness to be with them, that determines their place within the *ekklesia*. Jesus also said, “If ye keep [attend carefully to] my commandments, ye shall abide in my love ...” (John 15:10); a heart willing to do the Lord’s bidding is the criteria for His presence in that group of two or three. A husband and wife, earnestly desiring the Lord’s will in their lives, can be a Biblical part of the *ekklesia* that Jesus declared that He would build (Matthew 16:18). How important it is for each of us to return to the Word of God, and to be firmly persuaded of the truths of Scripture; then, from this all-important foundation, we can be assured that our faith will flourish under the tutelage of the Spirit of Truth (John 16:13).