

THE CHRONOLOGY OF MAJOR ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS
IN CHAPTERS 4 TO 19 OF REVELATION

by

Ian Macintyre

LL.B., University of the West Indies, 1985

A THESIS

Submitted to the faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
Religion
at Reformed Theological Seminary

Charlotte, North Carolina

July 2013

Accepted:

Dr. Simon Kistemaker, Ph.D.
Thesis Mentor

Second Reader

ABSTRACT

The thesis supplements arguments against the view that believers will not experience the Great Tribulation by seeking to demonstrate that this view is inconsistent with the chronology of the major eschatological events in Revelation 4 to 19. After outlining the incompatibility of this view with Jesus' eschatological discourses in the Synoptic Gospels and with Pauline teaching, the chronology is developed from an examination of the structure of Revelation and a futuristic interpretation of the visions in Revelation 4 to 19.

Revelation 4 and 5 are viewed as introductory to the whole apocalyptic section of Revelation comprising chapters 4 to 22. The visions in Revelation 6 to 19 are seen as portraying a cohesive story which answers the question of whether God will judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge the blood of the martyrs. The answer is that the blood of the martyrs will be avenged after all those who are destined to be martyred are killed, the final set of martyrs being an innumerable multitude who will be killed during the Great Tribulation on account of their refusal to worship the Antichrist or his image. When all the martyrs have been killed, God will inflict terrible judgments on the worldwide kingdom of the Antichrist, but will provide special protection for the remnant of believers on earth. The divine judgments will culminate with the return of Christ who will destroy the kingdom of the world and establish His own kingdom instead.

The eschatological events depicted in Revelation 4 to 19 are presented as building on the chronology in Jesus' eschatological discourses by providing additional information

with respect to the rise of the Antichrist and the False Prophet, the persecution of the Great Tribulation, the preservation of a remnant of believers and the judgment of God on the Antichrist, the False Prophet, major cities in the kingdom of the Antichrist, and the kings, armies and other inhabitants of the earth who follow the Antichrist.

Readers are therefore encouraged to be vigilant and spiritually prepared for the advent of the Antichrist and the onset of the Great Tribulation.

CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vi
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. STRUCTURE OF REVELATION.....	8
3. STRUCTURE OF REVELATION 4:1-22:9	14
4. THE INTRODUCTORY NATURE OF REVELATION 4:1-5:15	23
5. THE CHRONOLOGY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS IN THE SEVEN SEALS.....	30
6. THE CHRONOLOGY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS IN THE SEVEN TRUMPETS AND THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH.....	43
7. THE CHRONOLOGY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS IN REVELATION 12-15 AND 17-19.....	58
8. CONCLUSION.....	70
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	73

ABBREVIATIONS

AD	Anno Domini
Rev.	The Book of Revelation

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The belief that Christians will be raptured and will not experience the Great Tribulation is widespread among evangelical believers. Dispensationalism, as summarized by Berkhof,¹ advocates that the rapture of the saints can occur at any moment, since there are no predicted events which must precede Christ's second coming. At the rapture, Christ does not come down to earth, but, on the basis of 1 Thess. 4:13-17, the saints are caught up to meet him in the air. The rapture is also referred to as the coming of the Lord **for** his saints. It is followed by an interval of seven years during which the world is evangelized,² Israel is converted,³ the Great Tribulation occurs,⁴ and the Antichrist or the man of lawlessness will be revealed.⁵ After these events there is another coming of the Lord **with** his saints,⁶ which is called the revelation or the day of the Lord in which he comes down to earth. At this

¹ Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 695-696.

² Matt. 24:14.

³ Rom. 11:25-26.

⁴ Matt. 24:15-27.

⁵ 2 Thess. 2:1-8.

⁶ 1 Thess. 3:13.

coming, Christ judges the living nations⁷ and ushers in the millennial kingdom.⁸ As Berkhof points out, however, Matthew 24:9 to 12 and 21 to 24 and similar text in Mark 13:9 to 22 attest to the occurrence of the Great Tribulation before the second coming of Christ.⁹

Some Christians believe that the Great Tribulation has already taken place and that there is no need for Christians to be concerned about it. In *Last Days Madness*,¹⁰ Gary de Mar argues that the events which Christ predicted would take place before his second coming, have already taken place and that the second coming of Christ which marked the end of the age was the destruction of the temple in AD 70. If this is the case and Revelation was, according to Irenaeus, written in the early AD 90s “at the end of Domitian’s reign”,¹¹ then the prophecies of Revelation would have nothing to do with the second coming of Christ.

John was in exile on the island of Patmos when he received the visions recorded in Revelation. His exile was a result of persecution by the Roman Empire. There is debate as to whether the persecution was under Nero in AD60s or Domitian in AD90s. Several points indicate that it was under Domitian. Nero’s persecution was restricted to Rome. Nero blamed Christians for burning Rome, and the Christians in Rome were persecuted as a result. Domitian’s persecution was more widespread throughout the Roman Empire. Domitian declared himself to be a god and required all his subjects to worship him. It is more likely that John was in Asia before his exile to Patmos than in Rome. It is therefore more than

⁷ Matt. 25:31-46.

⁸ Rev. 20; Berkhof, 695-696.

⁹ Berkhof, 700. Berkhof also cites Luke 21:22 to 24 as a reference to the Great Tribulation, but it is arguable that this passage refers to the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70. See discussion on page 7.

¹⁰ Gary De Mar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), 30, 49, 159.

¹¹ Eusebius, *History of the Church*, ed. Andrew Louth, trans. G. A. Williamson (London, England: Penguin Books, 1989), 81.

likely that Revelation was written in AD 90s.¹²

In addition to his statement that the apocalyptic vision was seen in the time of Domitian's reign, Irenaeus is also quoted as saying that "the church in Ephesus, founded by Paul, and lived in by John until the time of Trajan (AD 98-117), is a true witness of the tradition of the apostles."¹³ Hendriksen calls the testimony of Irenaeus "strong and definite evidences" and opines that "we are forced to the conclusion that the late date (AD 95 or 96) is correct" when we also take into consideration that "the Apocalypse reflects an age in which Ephesus has already lost its first love; Sardis is already "dead;" Laodicea—which was destroyed by an earthquake during Nero's reign—has been rebuilt and is boasting of its spiritual wealth (3:17); John has been "banished"—a very common form of persecution during Domitian's reign; the Church has already endured persecutions in the past (20:4); and the Roman Empire, as such, has become the great antagonist of the Church (17:9)."¹⁴ Guthrie is less convinced than Hendriksen, but nevertheless recognizes that the majority of scholars prefer a date in the time of Domitian, especially because of Irenaeus' testimony.¹⁵

De Mar identifies the destruction of the temple in AD 70 with the end of the age because he fails to recognize an important distinction between the great distress referred to in Luke 21:22 to 24 and the Great Tribulation referred to in Matthew 24 and Mark 13. The passage in Luke predicts the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 since the passage speaks of Jerusalem being surrounded by armies and being trampled by the Gentiles

¹² D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 712.

¹³ William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1940), 14.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990), 962.

until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The tribulation mentioned in Matthew 24 and Mark 13 is, however, the Great Tribulation which will occur immediately before the return of Christ. This event is triggered by the presence of the Abomination of Desolation in the holy place. It is described as the greatest tribulation ever to occur and is curtailed for the sake of the elect. It will be immediately followed by cosmic signs that presage the imminent return of Christ.¹⁶ De Mar's argument that the Great Tribulation has already taken place is, therefore, fundamentally flawed as well as improbable in view of the best evidence for the date of the Revelation.

Perspectives that deny that Christians will experience the Great Tribulation in the future may have the effect of encouraging a certain spiritual laxity among evangelical Christians—a laxity that fails to prepare Christians to be ready to die for their faith. Prevalent apostasy will accompany the onset of the Great Tribulation¹⁷ because many professing Christians will not be prepared to die for their faith and will deny Christ and accept the mark of the beast¹⁸ to their eternal doom.¹⁹ Even for the elect, the decision to remain faithful to Christ will be an extremely difficult one to make.

The technology for the mark of the beast is already in existence. A person will not be able to buy or sell unless he has the mark on his right hand or his forehead. Microchip technology allows incredible amounts of information to be store on the head of pin. The mark could be a microchip implanted on the right hand or forehead of a person. Such a microchip could, like debit and credit cards, facilitate access to a person's bank and credit

¹⁶ Matthew 24:15-31; Mark 13:14-27.

¹⁷ 2 Thess. 2:3.

¹⁸ Revelation 13:16-17.

¹⁹ Revelation 14:9-11.

card accounts for the purposes of purchasing and selling goods. While one cannot be certain that the mark of the beast will be a microchip, believers should not overlook the fact that if the Antichrist were to assume power today, the technology to implement the mark of the beast would be available for him to use.

It therefore behooves believers to revisit Revelation from time to time in light of the possibility that the Antichrist could appear at anytime. While we cannot be sure that Christ will return in our generation, the Church has an obligation to do its best to come to a proper understanding of what Scripture predicts and to pass on the truth to the next generation. To the extent that Scripture clearly teaches that the Great Tribulation and an equally great apostasy will occur immediately before the second coming of Christ, much work needs to be done to dispel the widespread belief that the Church will not go through the Great Tribulation.

An important aspect of the task of proving that believers will experience the Great Tribulation is understanding the chronology of the major eschatological events portrayed in Revelation. This thesis seeks to prove the chronology of these events through an examination of the structure of Revelation and the content of Revelation 4 to 19.²⁰ The thesis seeks to show that Revelation is relating one cohesive story that is “a dramatic and romantic pageant, a cosmic stage play with distinct acts.”²¹ The various parts of the story are not presented in chronological order and this makes it difficult to discern the story and structure of Revelation.²² The story of Revelation can be better appreciated when its parts are put in

²⁰ Consideration of chapters 20 to 22 is omitted due to space constraints and because views on the millennium, the final judgment and the new heaven and earth do not materially affect the question of whether believers will experience the Great Tribulation.

²¹ Robert Surridge, "Redemption in the structure of Revelation." *Expository Times* 101 (1990): 233.

²² *Ibid.*

chronological order and this better appreciation of the story of Revelation can add great value in interpreting and teaching Revelation.

The thesis is based on the assumption that Revelation, like the rest of the Bible, is the inspired word of God and must be interpreted in a manner that is consistent with other passages of Scripture, especially those which predict eschatological events. These events must have a chronological order since they occur in time, but this does not exclude the possibility that they may occur simultaneously or over an extended period of time.

The thesis is based on a futurist approach to the interpretation of Revelation, but agrees with Mounce that there is value in other approaches, such as the preterist, historicist and idealist approaches.²³ In keeping with the futurist approach which views most of Revelation, beginning at 4:1, as predicting events which will be take place “just before, during, and after Jesus’ return to this earth”²⁴, the thesis will demonstrate that Revelation 1:19 is descriptive of the overall structure of the book, which consists of four main sections, namely, an introduction (1:1-8), “the things which you have seen, the things which are” (1:9-3:22), “the things which will take place after these things” (4:1-22:9) and a conclusion (22:10-21).

The thesis will propose a literary structure for 4:1-22:9 and, through examining the content of 4:1-19:21 in particular, identify the major eschatological events and demonstrate how these events relate to each other and other passages of Scripture, such as Jesus’ eschatological discourses in the Synoptic Gospels and 2 Thessalonians 2. Finally, the thesis will summarize the chronology of the major eschatological events in Revelation and

²³ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 29.

²⁴ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 41.

reflect on the implications of the chronology of the major eschatological events for the Church. It is hoped that the chronology of these events would assist believers to understand the times in which we live in relation to the return of Christ and to prepare spiritually “as we see the day approaching.”

CHAPTER 2

STRUCTURE OF REVELATION

Chapter 1 of Revelation contains several statements which summarize the contents of the book. Revelation 1:1 states that the revelation was given to show servants of Christ the things which must soon take place. Revelation 1:11 states that John heard a voice say, “Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches.” In Revelation 1:19, Christ says to John, “Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.” These three verses in the first chapter of Revelation give an indication as to the contents of the entire book, namely a description of the visions that John saw, “the things which are” and “the things which will take place after these things” (including “the things which must soon take place”).

Matthew Henry refers to Rev. 1:1-2 as the substance and pedigree of the book because it declares that the book is the revelation which God gave to Christ who, as the prophet of the church, the one through whom all revelation comes and the great trustee of divine revelation, “has made known to us the things that shall be hereafter . . . [that is to say,] great events, which not being produced by natural causes, but wholly depending upon the will of God, could be the object only of divine prescience, and must come to the created mind only by revelation.”¹

¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition Complete and Unabridged in Six Volumes* (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994), 6:901.

A major concern of Revelation is to reveal what is and what will be, while acknowledging that redemption has always been in God's purpose.² According to Walvoord and Zuck, "[t]he purpose of the Book of Revelation is to reveal events which will take place immediately before, during, and following the second coming of Christ."³

These verses must however be interpreted in context. A strict literal interpretation would clearly lead to untenable positions. For example, Rev. 1:1 cannot be interpreted to mean that everything in Revelation took place soon after the book was written as suggested by De Mar. He argues that the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in AD 70 marked the second coming of Christ, the passing away of heaven and earth and the establishment of the new heaven and earth.⁴ The difficulties with his interpretation include (a) Acts 1:9 to 11 in which two angels tell the apostles that Jesus will come back in the same way they saw him go into heaven; (b) 1 Thess. 4:13 to 17 which states that at the coming of the Lord, the dead in Christ will rise first and believers who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and (c) the description of the new heaven and earth in Rev. 21:1 to 22:7 as a place where there will be no death, sorrow, crying or pain.

Mounce, on the other hand, interprets Rev. 1:19 as a command expanding on the command in Rev. 1:11 to write what he is about to see. He treats "the things which are and the things which will take place after these things" as being expegetical of "what you have seen." He therefore equates "what you have seen" with "what you are about to see." He therefore translates Rev. 1:19 to read "Write, therefore, the things you are about to see, that

² Robert Surridge, "Redemption in the structure of Revelation," *Expository Times* 101 (1990): 233.

³ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition* (Colorado: Cook, 1985), 927.

⁴ Gary De Mar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church* (Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1999), 192.

is, both what now is and what lies yet in the future.”⁵ He agrees with Moffat that “the contents of the vision . . . consist of what is and what is to be.” While the conclusion that the main contents of Revelation relate to what is and what is to be is absolutely correct, it seems to be unnecessary in light of the context, to interpret “what you have seen” to mean “what you are about to see.” The removal of the sense of the past tense from Rev. 1:19 results in an interpretation that is contrary to the plain meaning of the words used. John heard a voice behind him telling him to write what he sees before he begins to see the vision. He turned around and saw a vision of Christ. He fell at the Lord’s feet like a dead man. Jesus then placed his right hand on him, reassured him and told him to write what he saw before he fell like a dead man at His feet, the things which would describe the things that were taking place, and the things which will describe the things that were about to take place. Thus, apart from the vision of Christ which caused him to fall like a dead man, the main content of Revelation comprises the things which existed at the time of writing and the things which were yet to occur.

Rev. 1:19 is, therefore, a description or summary of the contents of the book – the things that were seen, the things which were current and the things which were about to take place. The question is whether 1:19 is also a description of the structure of the book. It has been argued by several scholars that 1:19 is a description of the main structure of the book since the contents of the book are arranged in the same order stated in that verse - the things that were seen (Rev. 1:9 to 1:20), the things which were current (Rev. 2:1 to 3:22) and the

⁵ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 62.

things which were to take place after these (Rev. 4:1 to 22:7).⁶

Mark Seaton Hall argues that Rev. 1:19 is insufficient as a structural marker for the Revelation.⁷ The views that Rev. 1:19 is a structural marker are flawed because they either consider 1:19 (γράφον οὖν ἃ εἶδες, καὶ ἃ εἰσι καὶ ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα) to be predominant to 1:11, the first command to write (Ὁ βλέπεις γράψον εἰς βιβλίον), or as in the case of Beale, they consider 1:19 to be equal to 1:11 and all of the verse embracing the whole book. Hall also regards these views as weak because they ignore the distribution and impact of μετὰ ταῦτα throughout the book.

He does not view 1:19 as dominant or equal to 1:11, but subordinate to it. 1:11 sets the context for the εἶδες and the rest of 1:19. 1:17 is resumptive of 1:11 and is the primary governing verse, not 1:19. The force of 1:19 is inferential from 1:17. 1:19 is therefore syntactically subordinate to 1:11 and to 1:17.

Hall, however, does not explain why the fact that 1:19 is syntactically subordinate to 1:11 and 1:17 prevents it from being a structural marker for the book. There is no general rule that a structural marker must be syntactically dominant. Further he admits that the later command in 1:19 is more specific than the command in 1:11 and that it is “a specification of the whole writing process that acts as a model for the whole book.” He therefore recognizes that 1:19 embraces the whole book in a sense. If anything, the combination of 1:19’s specificity and coverage of the whole book commends the verse as a possible structural marker for the book.

⁶ Mark Seaton Hall, “The hook interlocking structure of Revelation: the most important verses in the book and how they may unify its structure,” *Novum Testamentum* 44 (2002): 280.

⁷ Hall, 280-283.

It should be noted that in 4:1, Jesus calls John up to heaven in order to show him “what must take place after these things.” This is further proof that 1:19 is properly interpreted as referring to John’s first vision of Christ among the golden lampstands as the things which he saw, to the contents of the letters to the churches as the things which were current and to the visions described in 4:1 to 22:7 as the things which must take place after these things. “Ταυτα” in 1:19 must necessarily refer, in particular, to the things which were current—the contemporary condition of the seven churches.

It is reasonably clear, therefore, that 1:19 describes three main sections of the book in chronological order. In the words of Wallis, “John was commanded: “Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place hereafter.” This is generally understood as indicating something of the structure of the whole book in relation to time.”⁸ It is obvious that what John had seen when Jesus spoke the words of 1:19 was the vision of Christ among the seven golden lampstands and that that vision is the main subject of the first main section. It is also plain to see that the contemporary situations described in chapters 2 and 3 make up the second main section which relates “the things which are.” Further, it cannot be denied that 4:1 begins the third main section which focuses on the things which must take place after “the things which are.”

This approach to the interpretation of Revelation is known as the futurist approach. This approach is based on a literal interpretation of the book and emphasizes the second coming of Christ. It views Rev. 4:1 to the end of the book as being prophetic of the

⁸ Wilber B. Wallis, "The coming of the kingdom: a survey of the Book of Revelation," *Presbyterion* 8 (1982): 18.

events that will take place just before, during and after the return of Christ.⁹ The adoption of the futurist approach is suitable for the purposes of this thesis because it asserts that the visions recorded in Rev. 4:1 to the end of the book are telling a story of events which will take place in the history of mankind and that the story can only make sense if the events which make up the story can be placed in a chronological order.

Further, the chiasmic structure of the visions of the book may also be noted. The Prologue [Rev. 1] is balanced against the Epilogue [Rev. 22:10-21]. The Church on Earth [Rev. 2 and 3] is balanced against the Church Triumphant [Rev. 21 and 22]. The Throne and the Opening of the Judgment Scroll by the Lamb [Rev. 4 to 7] is balanced against the Second Coming of Christ, the Doom of Babylon, the Antichrist, the False Prophet and Satan, the Judgment of the Dead before the Great White Throne and the Destruction of Death and Hades [Rev. 17 to 19]. The Seven Trumpets [Rev. 8 to 11] are balanced against the Seven Bowls of Wrath [Rev. 15 and 16]. Rev. 12 to 14, which relate the entire conflict between the Seed of the Woman and the Seed of Satan, therefore, assume the central scene of the story of Revelation. The Apocalypse is indeed “a well-balanced drama with a definite central fulcrum point.”¹⁰

⁹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 41.

¹⁰ Leroy C. Spinks, "Critical examination of J W Bowman's proposed structure of the Revelation," *Evangelical Quarterly* 50 (1978): 218-219.

CHAPTER 3

STRUCTURE OF REVELATION 4:1-22:9

According to Beale, the following literary outline of Revelation 4 to 16 is broadly representative of a general consensus among commentators, although there is disagreement about where the successive sections precisely end and begin: 4:1-5:14 (introduction); 6:1-8:1 (seven seals); 8:2-11:19 (seven trumpets); 12:1-14:20 (seven signs); and 15:1-16:21 (seven bowls).¹

Beale identifies three main issues with respect to this outline.² One issue is whether 4:1-5:14 represents an independent section, part of the seals section, or an introduction to the seals, to 6:1-11:19, to 6:1-16:21 or even to 6:1-22:6. It is suggested that 4:1-5:14 should be regarded as the introduction to 6:1-22:9 for the following reasons. In chapter 4, John is taken in the Spirit before the throne of God which is surrounded by four living creatures and twenty-four elders. This is the setting for chapters 5 to 11 (the scroll, the seals and the trumpets) as well as for chapters 15 and 16 (the bowls of wrath). Reference is also made to the throne, the living creatures and the elders in chapter 14, where the 144,000 saints are seen standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion and singing a new song before the

¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 108-109.

² Beale, 109.

throne, the four living creatures and the elders.³ In 17:3, one of the angels who had one of the seven bowls carries John in the Spirit into a desert to show him the punishment of the great prostitute. In chapter 18, John sees another angel come down from heaven and hears a voice from heaven. In chapter 19, amid the shouts of praise of a great multitude in heaven, the twenty-four elders and four living creatures are seen worshipping God on the throne.⁴ Again, in 21:9, one of the angels who had the seven last plagues carries John in the Spirit to show him the bride of the Lamb and then, in 22:1, the river of the water of life. Then, in 22:8, John refers to this angel as the angel who had been showing him the visions. The fact that all the visions recorded in chapters 17 to 22:9 are shown to John by one of the angels who had one of the seven bowls establishes a connection between chapters 15 and 16 (the bowls of wrath) and those chapters.

Further, there are connections between chapters 12 to 14 and chapters 6 to 11 and 17 to 22:9. Satan, who is introduced as the angel of the Abyss, Abaddon and Apollyon in 9:11 and as a great red dragon in 12:3 is finally destroyed in chapter 20. Chapters 17 to 19 relate the final judgment of Babylon, the Antichrist and the False Prophet, who are introduced in chapters 13 and 14. Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet are seen working together in 16:13 and 14 and the judgment of Babylon is mentioned in 16:19. The people who receive the mark of the Antichrist referred to in 13:16-17 and 14:9 and 11 are punished in 16:2. Those who were martyred because they did not receive the mark of the Antichrist come to life and reign with Christ in 20:4. The imagery of 144,000 servants of God is used in 7:1-8 as well as in 14:1-5.

Chapter 4 therefore sets the scene not only for the opening of the scroll and the

³ Rev. 14:3.

⁴ Rev. 19:4.

trumpet-judgments, but for the whole apocalyptic section comprising 4:1 to 22:9. Chapter 4 establishes the Lord God Almighty sitting on His throne in all His awesome majesty and holiness as the ultimate basis, authority and justification for the prophetic visions of chapters 6 to 22:6. Chapter 5 focuses on the worthiness of the Lamb to take the scroll from the right hand of God, to open its seals and reveal the contents of the scroll. Chapter 5 should therefore be considered to be introductory to chapters 6 to 11 (the seals and trumpets). To the extent that the trumpet-judgments are connected to chapters 15 and 16 and thus to chapters 12 to 14 and 17 to 22:9 as explained above, chapter 5 should also be considered to be the introduction to 12:1 to 22:9. Chapters 4 and 5 should be grouped together as the introduction of the apocalyptic section because they are preliminary to the revelation of future events in 5:1 to 22:9.

The second issue is whether 7:1-17 (sealing of the 144,000 and the multitude of saints from the great tribulation) and 10:1-11:14 (the angel and the little scroll and the two witnesses) should be separately delineated. The first passage (7:1-17) occurs between the sixth seal and the seventh seal. The second passage (10:1-11:14) occurs between the sixth trumpet and the seventh trumpet. The repetition of the interpolation of visions between the sixth and seventh seals and trumpets is a clear indication of the existence of a structural feature. It may, therefore, be proper to view these passages as parentheses or interludes within their respective numbered series and, indeed, many commentators have done so.⁵ As shown below, however, the existence of a structural feature may also be interpreted as a deliberate expansion of the sixth seal and trumpet.

The third issue is whether 8:2-5 (the preparation for the sounding of the seven

⁵ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 244.

trumpets) and 15:2-8 (the preparation for the pouring of the seven bowls) belong to the sections that precede them as conclusions or to the sections that follow them as introductions. According to Beale, 8:2 introduces the trumpet judgments⁶ and 8:3-5 is a literary interlocking device which serves both as a conclusion to the seals and as an introduction to the trumpets.⁷ Mounce sees 8:3-5 as a prelude to the seven trumpet judgments which is similar to the vision of the twenty-four elders with golden bowls of incense in 5:8.⁸ After the Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of God but before He begins to open the seals, the elders and four living creatures fall at His feet with golden bowls of incense which are the prayers of the saints and worship Him.⁹ Similarly, in 8:3-5, before the sounding of the trumpets, much incense is taken from the altar where the martyrs are crying out for justice and added to the prayers of the saints and the smoke of the incense together with the prayers of the saints ascend to God. The angel then takes a censer full of fire from the altar and hurls it at the earth.¹⁰ The implication here is that God is not only about to answer the prayers of the saints, but in particular, the cries of the martyrs for vengeance on the inhabitants of the earth.¹¹ The answer comes in the form of trumpet judgments.¹² Rev 8:3-5 therefore connects the seven seals with the seven trumpet-judgments by placing those judgments in the context of God's response to the prayer of the saints, especially the pleas of the martyrs for justice.

⁶ Beale, 461.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 173.

⁹ Rev. 5:7-14.

¹⁰ Rev. 8:5.

¹¹ Beale, 461.

¹² Kistemaker, 267.

Structurally speaking, however, it would appear that the seven seals end with the storm theophany in 8:5 in the same way that the seven trumpets end with an expanded storm theophany in 11:19 and the seven bowls of wrath end with a further expanded storm theophany in 16:18-21. The reference to flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder coming from the throne in 4:5 is not a structural marker but only puts the reader on notice that a storm theophany is intended when such phenomena appear because they proceed from the throne of God. Thus no mention is made to the throne of God in 8:5, 11:19 and 16:18-21.

The storm theophanies of 8:5, 11:19 and 16:18-21 should therefore be viewed as structural markers. This would mean that the content of the seventh seal is not only the solemn silence in anticipation of the seven trumpet-judgments in 8:1, but also the preparation for the sounding of the seven trumpets in 8:2-5. Consequently, 8:2-5 would mark the conclusion of the seven seals.

Rev. 15:2-8, however, is a prelude to the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath on the earth. Believers who have been victorious over the Antichrist, his image and the number of his name are seen in heaven with harps of God, singing praises to God. They are victorious because they chose to become martyrs instead of abandoning their faith or succumbing to the threats of the Antichrist.¹³ The temple in heaven opens and the seven angels with the last seven plagues come out and are given seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God. The temple is filled with smoke from the glory and power of God and no one can enter the temple until the last seven plagues are completed.

As 8:3-5 placed the trumpet-judgments in the context of God's response to the prayers of the saints and the pleas of the martyrs, 15:2-8 places the seven bowls of wrath in

¹³ Mounce, 285; Kistemaker, 428.

the context of God's response to the reign of terror of the Antichrist. Indeed, the first, fifth and sixth bowls clearly indicate that the bowls of wrath are intended to punish, in particular, those who have the mark of the Antichrist and worship his image,¹⁴ the throne of the Antichrist and his kingdom¹⁵ and the kings of the whole earth who follow the Antichrist and the False Prophet.¹⁶

The purpose of 15:2-8 is therefore to draw attention to the bliss of those who remain faithful to Christ and choose to die rather than accept the mark of the Antichrist or worship the Antichrist or his image and also to prepare the reader for the contrasting doom of the Antichrist and his followers which begins to unfold when the bowls of wrath are poured out. Indeed, the contrast between the unbelieving world and the victorious saints is a ubiquitous feature of Revelation.¹⁷ Rev. 15:2-8 should therefore be viewed as part of the introduction to the seven bowls.

It is less feasible to regard 15:2-4 as continuing the final judgment scene in 14:14-20 as suggested by Beale¹⁸ because there is nothing in the language of both passages that would seem to suggest such a connection. In fact, 15:2-4 is more of a continuation to 14:9-12 than it is to 14:14-20. Further, there is nothing in 15:2-4 to suggest that the saints are praising God after the return of Christ depicted in 14:9-12. Rather, 15:1-8 in general, and the use of the future tense in 15:4 in particular, indicate that the saints are praising God in anticipation of the final judgment of the world which will result in everyone glorifying the

¹⁴ Rev. 16:2.

¹⁵ Rev. 16:10.

¹⁶ Rev. 16:13-14.

¹⁷ Kistemaker, 426.

¹⁸ Beale, 462.

name of the Lord and all nations worshipping Him.

Chapters 12 to 14 are, in my view, rightly regarded as a separate section. The section presents seven signs or visions—two signs and five visions. The two signs are the Woman (12:1) and the Dragon (12:3). The five visions begin with the words “I saw” or “I looked, and there before me was” as follows: (1) the Beast out of the Sea (13:1-10); (2) the Beast out of the Earth (13:11-18); (3) the Lamb and the 144,000 (14:1-5); (4) the Three Angels (14:6-13); and (5) the Harvest of the Earth (14:14-20). The Seven Signs and Visions (12:1-14:20) and the Seven Bowls of Wrath (15:1-16:21) both begin with the appearance of a great and wondrous or marvelous sign in heaven, and these appearances may therefore be considered to be structural markers and should be distinguished from the sign of the Dragon in 12:3 which is described merely as another sign in heaven.

The Seven Seals, the Seven Trumpets, the Seven Signs and Visions and the Seven Bowls have a similar structure in that each section has a group of four followed by a group of three, with the sixth element comprising a trio of visions. The group of four in the seven seals comprises the four horsemen. In the seven trumpets, it consists of judgments directed to the environment, that is to say, the earth, the sea, sources of fresh water and heavenly bodies. In the seven signs, the group of four is the Woman, the Dragon and the two Beasts and in the seven bowls, it comprises plagues affecting mankind and the environment in general.

The group of three in the seven seals consists of (1) the martyrs calling for vengeance; (2) a trio of visions in the sixth seal consisting of (a) the Day of the Lord; (b) the sealing of the 144,000 and (c) the multitude of saints from the Great Tribulation in white robes; and (3) the solemn silence in heaven and preparation for the trumpet judgments. The group of three in the seven trumpets is also referred to as the three woes and consists of (1)

the attack of the locusts on those who do not have the seal of God, (2) the trio of visions at the sixth trumpet comprising (a) the release of four angels bound at the Euphrates; (b) the angel and the little scroll and (c) the measuring of the temple and the two witnesses; and (3) the kingdom of the world becoming the kingdom of the Lord. The group of three in the seven signs consists of (1) the Lamb and the 144,000; (2) the trio of visions in the sixth sign comprising (a) an angel proclaiming an eternal gospel; (b) an angel proclaiming the fall of Babylon; and (c) an angel proclaiming the doom of those who worship the Antichrist; and (3) the harvesting of the earth. The group of three in the seven bowls consists of (1) the envelopment of the throne and kingdom of the Antichrist in darkness; (2) a trio of visions comprising (a) the drying up of the Euphrates; (b) three evil spirits from Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet; and (c) the gathering of the kings at Armageddon; and (3) the Day of the Lord.

With respect to the structure of chapters 17 to 22:9, it should be noticed that the enemies of God introduced in chapters 12 to 14 (Satan, the Antichrist, the False Prophet and Babylon) undergo final judgment in reverse order in chapters 17 to 20 (Babylon in 17:1-19:10; the Antichrist and the False Prophet in 19:11-21 and Satan in 20:1-10). Chapters 17 to 20 therefore form a chiasmic contrast with chapters 12 to 14.¹⁹ Another chiasm contrasting the final judgment of unbelievers and the final reward of believers follows in 20:11-21:8, in which the doom of unbelievers is highlighted in 20:11-15 and 21:8 and the reward of believers is seen in 21:1-7. As mentioned above, 21:9-22:9 comprises a separate section on Jerusalem as the bride of the Lamb and the river of the water of life.

There are however certain structural markers within 17: 1-22:9. John's being carried in the Spirit marks the commencement of new sections in 17:1-3 (the Fall of

¹⁹ Beale, 110-111. Beale considers that 17:1-21:8 may be in chiasmic contrast with chapters 12-14.

Babylon) and 21:9-10 (the Bride of the Lamb) as it did in 4:1-2 (the Throne of God). Both sections end in 19:9-10 and 22:6-9 respectively, with a declaration that the preceding message is true, John attempting to worship the angel but being prohibited from doing so and an exhortation to worship God instead.²⁰ It may be noted here that 22:6-9 may also be regarded as the marker ending the whole of the apocalyptic section which began in 4:1-2.

The Fall of Babylon (17:1-19:10) comprises three subsection which begin with the words “I saw” as follows: (1) the vision of the woman on the scarlet beast (17:3-5); (2) the explanation of the woman on the scarlet beast (17:6-18); and (3) a sevenfold cycle comprising three woes and four hallelujahs (18:1-19:10).

Another marker indicating the commencement of a section is the vision of heaven standing open in 19:11 which is similar to the door standing open in heaven in 4:1. This section (the Seven Last Things) consists of seven visions beginning with the words “I saw” as follows: (1) the Rider on the White Horse (19:11-16); (2) the Invitation to the Great Supper of God (19:17-18); (3) The destruction of the Antichrist, the False Prophet and the kings of the earth and their armies (19:19-21); (4) the binding of Satan (20:1-4); (5) the millennial reign of Christ (20:5-10); (6) the great white throne judgment of the dead (20:11-15); and the new Jerusalem (21:1-8).

The structure of 4:1 to 22:9 may therefore be summarized as follows: 4:1-5:14 (introduction); 6:1-8:5 (seven seals); 8:6-11:19 (seven trumpets); 12:1-14:20 (seven signs and visions); 15:1-16:21 (seven bowls); 17:1-19:10 (fall of Babylon); 19:11-21:8 (final judgment of God’s enemies and the reward of believers); 21:9-22:9 (the bride of the Lamb and the river of the water of life).

²⁰ C. H. Giblin, “Structural and Thematic Correlations in the Theology of Revelation 16-22,” *Biblica* 55 (1974): 490; as cited by Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 110.

CHAPTER 4

THE INTRODUCTORY NATURE OF REV. 4:1-5:14

In chapter 4, John sees a door standing open in heaven. He hears the voice which he had first heard speaking to him like a trumpet—the voice of Christ¹—say, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”² This is therefore a clear indication from Jesus that John is about to see, from a heavenly perspective, the future events³ which Jesus himself had already commanded John in 1:19 to record. Jesus’ invitation to John therefore validates the task of identifying the major eschatological events referred to in the ensuing chapters.⁴

John is then immediately transported to heaven in the Spirit.⁵ Thus, while there is no way of knowing for sure just when and how John recorded his visionary experiences,⁶ it is reasonable to suggest that experientially he was taken up to heaven though his body was

¹ Rev. 1:10; Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 183.

² Rev. 4:1.

³ Kistemaker, 183-184.

⁴ Contra William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1940), 40-41, who sees the seals, trumpets and bowls not as referring to specific events, but to principles that are operating throughout the history of the world, especially between the first and second coming of Christ—the new dispensation.

⁵ Rev. 4:2.

⁶ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 117.

actually still on the island of Patmos.⁷ It would further appear that John's recording of his visionary experiences did not occur simultaneously with the visions. This is substantiated by his use of the past tense throughout the book in describing what he *saw* and *heard* and also by the theory that when a person has a vision when he is "in the Spirit", there is a suspension of conscious contact with the physical environment and the soul is drawn away from all surrounding objects and wholly fixed on the things which are shown in the vision.⁸

John sees the throne of the Lord God, the Almighty, the Creator of all things. Twenty-four elders and four living creatures surround the throne and worship God constantly. The four living creatures bear striking resemblances to the four living creatures described in Ezekiel 1 and 10 and who are called the cherubim in Ezekiel 10:20.⁹ While there are differences between Ezekiel's and John's descriptions of the four living creatures, it is reasonably clear that in John's vision, the four living creatures are meant to represent the cherubim. The cherubim are high-ranking angels assigned to protect and guard the holy things of God, such as the tree of life (Gen. 3:24) and the ark of the covenant (Ex. 25:20).¹⁰ They also carry the chariot-throne of God in Ez. 1 and 10.¹¹ It is therefore expected that they should be represented in the heavenly Holy of Holies.¹²

With respect to the twenty-four elders, there is a view that in as much as they are dressed in white and wearing crowns of gold on their heads, that they have already been

⁷ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition* (Colorado: Cook, 1985), 943.

⁸ Hendriksen, 82.

⁹ Hendriksen, 86-87.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*; Kistemaker, 190-192.

¹¹ Mounce, 125.

¹² Hendriksen, 87.

judged and rewarded and that they therefore represent the Church raptured prior to this time and rewarded in heaven.¹³ Such an interpretation favours the view that the Church would be raptured before the Great Tribulation, but the unscriptural nature of that view has already been dealt with in Chapter 1.

It is important to recognize that what John is seeing is a vision of God on His throne and one should therefore refrain from asserting that there is an actual, material throne of God in heaven surrounded by twenty-four literal, physical thrones.¹⁴ Rather, it is more acceptable to say that chapter 4 describes God and his throne in heaven¹⁵ and portrays the manner in which God is eternally adored in heaven,¹⁶ both by angelic beings and the Church which comprises both Old Testament and New Testament believers. Thus, one should also conclude that the vision of God on His throne in chapter 4 does not yet mark the commencement of the revelation of future events, but is only preparatory thereto. All of chapter 4 is an introduction to the main point of chapters 4 and 5, that is, to introduce the scroll with its seven seals.¹⁷

In chapter 5, John sees in the right hand of God the Father a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. Only Jesus, the Lamb, is worthy to open the scroll. After taking the book from the right hand of the Father, Jesus is praised and worshipped. The term John uses is “scroll” which normally had writing on its smooth inner side, although prior to and during the first century, scrolls with writings on both sides were used for private

¹³ Walvoord and Zuck, 943.

¹⁴ Hendriksen, 82.

¹⁵ Kistemaker, 200.

¹⁶ Mounce, 117.

¹⁷ Walvoord and Zuck, 945.

and public purposes. They were called opisthographs and an example of such is seen in Ezekiel 2:9-10.¹⁸ The scroll in that passage contained words of lament, mourning and woe. They were prophetic words, the words of God. Ezekiel was ordered to eat the scroll, to fill his stomach with it and then speak God's words to the house of Israel.¹⁹ Similarly, the scroll which John sees in the right hand of God contains prophetic words of God which will reveal the future events that John is to record.

Whereas the scroll in Ezekiel's vision is unrolled before the prophet,²⁰ the scroll in John's vision is sealed with seven seals, which is an indication that it contains prophetic material which had been sealed up and had not been revealed. It naturally brings to mind the vision that Daniel was told to seal up because it concerned the distant future,²¹ and the scroll which Daniel was told to seal until the end time.²² It is therefore preferable to regard the scroll as a scroll of destiny containing what God in His sovereign will has determined as the destiny of the world,²³ instead of viewing the scroll as revealing God's complete plan and purpose for the entire world throughout the ages from beginning to end.²⁴

At the time of writing, God had already made known to mankind His plan of salvation through faith in Christ, the mystery of his will to bring all things in heaven and on

¹⁸ Kistemaker, 201.

¹⁹ Ez. 2:10-3:4.

²⁰ Ez. 2:10.

²¹ Daniel 8:26.

²² Daniel 12:1-4, 9.

²³ Mounce, 129.

²⁴ Kistemaker, 202.

earth together under Christ²⁵ and the administration of this mystery through the Church.²⁶

The main purpose of the sealed scroll would not therefore be to reveal matters which had already been revealed to mankind. Thus, it may be said that even though the scroll may contain prophetic material that had already been revealed, the primary purpose of the sealed scroll is to reveal future events concerning the end time which had not yet been revealed.

Since the vision of the throne of God flows naturally into the breaking of the seals and ultimately to the revelation of the end of history, it has been suggested that it is best to understand chapters 4 and 5 as referring essentially to a time in the future.²⁷ This view may be based on the assumption that the opening of the scroll is Christ's actual performance of the supreme service of bringing history to its foreordained consummation.²⁸ In other words, the events which flow from the opening of the scroll will only occur when the scroll is opened.²⁹ The difficulty with this view is that the events described upon the opening of the first five seals were already taking place in the first century before the writing of Revelation. The gospel was already being preached throughout the Roman Empire and many souls were already being saved,³⁰ many false Christs or antichrists had already gone out into the world,³¹ there were already many wars which had resulted in men killing each other,³² there had

²⁵ Eph. 1:9-10.

²⁶ Eph. 3:9-11.

²⁷ Mounce, 117.

²⁸ Mounce, 130.

²⁹ Hendriksen, 89.

³⁰ cf. Acts of the Apostles.

³¹ 1 John 2:18.

³² E.g., the war which resulted in the destruction of the temple in 70AD.

already been a severe famine throughout the Roman Empire during the reign of Claudius,³³ people were already being killed by sword, famine and plague³⁴ and many believers had already been martyred by wild beasts and other means.³⁵

The sealed scroll is therefore a scroll which reveals greater detail concerning future events which will bring history to a close. As mentioned in Chapter 1, some of the details of some of these events had already been revealed by Christ in the Gospels and by Paul in his letters to the Corinthians and Thessalonians. While reference may be made in the sealed scroll to some of these formerly revealed events and to events which had already taken place in order to place the new revelations in their proper context, it is axiomatic that the primary purpose of the sealed scroll is to reveal matters which had not yet been revealed. Thus, chapters 4 and 5 are not depicting future events, but are setting the stage for the revelation of eschatological matters which had not yet been revealed to mankind. This view is consistent with the view expressed in the preceding chapter that chapters 4 and 5 are introductory to the apocalyptic section of Revelation, that the breaking of the seals in 6:1 to 8:5 are introductory to the contents of the scroll and that the contents of the scroll begin with the sounding of the first trumpet in 8:6 and run to the end of the book.

For some, the trumpets and the bowls, in particular, are viewed as the contents of either the scroll or the seventh seal, or most often, of both. The reason often given for subsuming 8:2 to the end of the book under the seventh seal is that this seal appears to have

³³ Acts 11:28.

³⁴ Sheryl Persson, *Smallpox, Syphilis and Salvation: Medical Breakthroughs that Changed the World* (Wollombi, Australia: Exisle Publishing Limited, 2009), 109. In the first century a plague broke out in Libya, Egypt and Syria. Its symptoms suggested bubonic plague and included acute fever, pain, agitation and buboes behind the knees and around the elbows.

³⁵ Stephen—Acts 7:59-60; James, the brother of John—Acts 12:2; John Foxe, *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, rev. and ed. John Malham (Philadelphia: J.J.Woodward, 1830), 1:18.

no content of its own.³⁶ It has, however, been shown in the preceding chapter that the seventh seal contains the preparation for the sounding of the seven trumpets and therefore places the trumpet-judgments in the context of God's response to the prayer of the saints, especially the pleas of the martyrs for justice in the fifth seal. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the main account of the judgment on the inhabitants of the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs does not begin until the first trumpet is sounded in 8:6. It cannot, however, be doubted that eschatological events are referred to in the opening of the seals. The question is what are the events referred to and what is their relationship to the trumpet-judgments and the rest of the book.

³⁶ H. B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London: Macmillan, 1906), 106; as cited by Beale, 117; G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 81, 95-96; Mounce, 46-47, 151, 163.

CHAPTER 5

THE CHRONOLOGY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS IN THE SEVEN SEALS

In chapters 6 and 7, Jesus breaks the first six seals. Visions accompany the breaking of each seal. It should be noted, at the outset, that Jesus' eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels serves as a parallel to the first six seals.¹ In Matthew 24, Jesus predicts that the following will occur before the end of the age: the advent of false Christs, wars and rumours of wars, nations and kingdoms rising against each other, famines, earthquakes, the persecution of believers and martyrdom, great apostasy, betrayals, hatred, false prophets, the increase of wickedness, a lack of love and the preaching of the gospel to all nations as a testimony. The beginning of the end will be marked by "the abomination that causes desolation" standing in the holy place. This will signal that the onset of the Great Tribulation, which will be unequalled in the history of the world. Jesus advises believers to flee for their lives. The days of the Great Tribulation will be cut short so that the elect could survive. During the Great Tribulation, false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles. Immediately after the Great Tribulation, the sun will darken, the moon will not give its light, the stars will fall from the sky, the heavenly bodies will be shaken, the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, all the nations will mourn and see Christ coming on the clouds with power and great glory. Jesus will send His angels with a loud

¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 224; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 140.

trumpet call and they will gather His elect.

Mark 13 and Luke 21 are consistent with Matthew's account. Luke adds pestilence, fearful events and great signs from heaven to famines and earthquakes. Mark and Luke, taken together, add that believers will be handed over to local councils, synagogues and prisons, be flogged in synagogues and stand before governors and kings as witnesses. Luke does not mention the Great Tribulation but focuses on Jesus' prediction of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem which occurred in 70 AD. In connection with the return of Christ, Luke states that nations will be in anguish and perplexity at the roaring and tossing of the sea and that men will faint from terror, apprehensive of what is coming on the world.

In comparison to the Synoptic Gospels, it can be shown that the first seal refers to military conquest,² the second seal to war,³ the third seal to famine,⁴ the fourth seal to death by sword, famine, plague and wild beasts,⁵ the fifth seal to martyrdom,⁶ and the sixth seal to the return of Christ (including the phenomena and terror that accompany His return),⁷ the preservation of the last generation of believers⁸ and the Great Tribulation,⁹ all of which are mentioned in Jesus' end time discourse.

The first seal reveals a man with a bow on a white horse. He is given a crown and goes out conquering and to conquer. This vision is often interpreted as referring to the future

² Mounce, 142.

³ Mounce, 143; Kistemaker, 225-227.

⁴ Mounce, 144; Kistemaker, 228.

⁵ Mounce, 145; Kistemaker, 225.

⁶ Mounce, 146.

⁷ Mounce, 149-153; Kistemaker, 236-237.

⁸ Mounce, 154.

⁹ Mounce, 164.

ruler of the world, referred to as the Antichrist.¹⁰ This interpretation is supported by the argument that the use of the term “there was given” in Revelation refers to “divine permission granted to evil powers to carry out their nefarious work.”¹¹ It is also felt that the white horse as the first in a set of four must be seen as part of a destructive force of war, famine and death.¹² According to Walvoord, the ruler has a bow without an arrow, indicating that the world government which he establishes is accomplished without warfare, but in accordance with 1 Thess. 5:3, when the people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them and they will not escape.¹³

Hendriksen interprets the first seal as referring to the conquering Christ on the grounds that throughout Revelation, Christ is represented as the conqueror.¹⁴ Further, he argues that the horse is white and, especially in Revelation, the colour white is always associated with that which is heavenly or holy, such as “white garments,” “white cloud,” and “white throne.” Also, in 14:14, Christ is seen wearing a crown of gold and in 19:11, He is seen riding a white horse and wearing many crowns.

Kistemaker views the first seal as referring to the unstoppable Word of God

¹⁰ John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition* (Colorado: Cook, 1985), 947.

¹¹ G. B. Caird, *Harper's New Testament Commentaries: A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 81; as cited by Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 142. cf. the use of the phrase in connection with the occupants of the Abyss (9:1, 3, 5), the beast out of the sea (13:5,7), and the false prophet (13:14, 15).

¹² Kistemaker, 221.

¹³ Walvoord and Zuck, 947.

¹⁴ Rev. 1:13ff.; 2:26,27; 3:21; 5:5; 6:16; 11:15; 12:11; 14:1ff.; 14:14ff.; 17:14; 19:11; as cited by William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1940), 95.

which goes forth into all the world conquering and to conquer.¹⁵ The emphasis is, however, on conquest as indicated by the crown which symbolizes victory and the double use of “conquer” in the phrase “conquering and to conquer.”¹⁶ The horse is used in warfare and the bow is a weapon. The white horse refers to the custom of having the victor ride on a white horse when he returns from battle.¹⁷ The crown is a victor’s wreath.¹⁸ The second, third and fourth seals give clear indications of to what each is referring. There is, therefore, no reason why the first seal should not be interpreted in a similar manner as referring simply to military conquest in general.¹⁹

It should be noted that whether the first seal is referring to the Antichrist, the conquering Christ or the unstoppable Word of God that wins the souls of mankind through the preaching of the Gospel, or military conquest, all of these themes are contained in Jesus’ eschatological discourse and do not affect the argument that the first six seals are parallel to Jesus’ discourse.

The second seal brings a man on a red horse. He goes out to take peace from the earth and cause people to kill each other. He is given with a great sword. Consistent with his view that the first seal depicts the Antichrist, Walvoord sees the rider of the second horse as the ruler of the world.²⁰ Hendriksen views the second seal as referring to religious persecution of God’s children and the great Roman short-sword (*machaira*) as the sacrificial

¹⁵ Kistemaker, 224.

¹⁶ Kistemaker, 221.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Mounce, 142.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Walvoord and Zuck, 947-948.

knife.²¹ According to Kistemaker, although the slaughter of Christians is a proven fact throughout the ages, the reference to the large sword which is given to the second rider does not preclude general warfare and the verb “to slaughter” is not only used in relation to prophets and saints (cf. 18:24).²² Mounce notes that the use of *machaira* in the New Testament fails to substantiate its meaning as a sacrificial knife.²³

The second seal is consistent with Jesus’ prediction that there will be wars and rumors of wars. Mounce and Kistemaker agree that the warfare referred to is general warfare, anarchy and bloodshed which extend from the time of the original readers to the end of the age.²⁴ The third seal presents a man with a pair of scales on a black horse. This vision is usually interpreted as symbolizing famine.²⁵ A voice in the midst of the four living creatures is heard saying “A quart of wheat for a denarius and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.” The four living creatures surround the throne of God, thus the voice must be that of God or the Lamb imposing limits on the effects of the famine.²⁶ The fourth seal therefore corresponds to Jesus’ prediction that there will be famines.

The fourth seal brings an ashen horse ridden by Death with Hades following after him. They are given authority to slay a fourth of the earth with the sword, famine, pestilence and wild beasts. This vision predicts the death of a major fraction of the world’s population

²¹ Hendriksen, 99-101.

²² Kistemaker, 227.

²³ Mounce, 143.

²⁴ Ibid.; Kistemaker, 225-227.

²⁵ Kistemaker, 228; Mounce, 144.

²⁶ Kistemaker, 228.

by God's four dreadful judgments²⁷—sword, famine, pestilence and wild animals.²⁸ The death of unbelievers is in view. Hades follows after Death to gather the souls of the dead, but Hades is the place where the souls of unbelievers are kept, while the souls of believers go to be with Jesus.²⁹ The specific reference to one fourth of the world's population does not, however, exclude believers. The large number of victims leads some to believe that the vision tells of a specific future catastrophic event³⁰ or a major judgment during the Great Tribulation.³¹ It may, however, be that the fourth seal represents an intensification of the first three seals.³² Military conquests involve war, which in turn causes death by famine and disease. Further, death by wild animals could occur in areas that are decimated by war.³³ It is therefore possible to view the death of a quarter of the world's population as represented in the fourth seal as being accomplished through the cumulative result of universal woes which affect both believers and unbelievers throughout history.³⁴

The fifth seal reveals martyrs calling on God to judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge their blood. The martyrs are referred to as those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.³⁵ They are given a white robe and

²⁷ cf. Ezek. 14:21.

²⁸ Kistemaker, 225. Kistemaker notes that the symbolism of the second, third and fourth seals echoes the sequence sword, famine and plague in the prophecy of Jeremiah, who uses this triad fifteen times as an ominous refrain.

²⁹ Kistemaker, 230.

³⁰ Kistemaker, 231.

³¹ Walvoord and Zuck, 948.

³² Mounce, 145.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Hendriksen, 105.

³⁵ Rev. 6:9.

told to rest a while until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been had been completed. The references to avenging blood and to believers who had been killed and to others who will also be killed, are clear indications that the author's focus is on believers who were killed on account of their faith—those who gave their lives in faithfulness to God as revealed in and through Christ.³⁶ Ladd interprets this passage widely to include all believers who faithfully follow Christ as martyrs, whether or not they actually suffer physical death for Christ.³⁷ Kistemaker agrees with Ladd and adds that since John presumably died a natural death, the apostle would be excluded if he was only referring to believers who were killed for their faith.³⁸ The cry of the martyrs, however, very specifically calls on God to avenge “our blood”, so the passage should be limited to those who died for their faith. The cry of the martyrs is not for revenge but for God as holy and true to vindicate those who gave their lives for Christ.³⁹

The martyrs are promised that their blood would be avenged by judgments on the inhabitants of the earth when all those who are to be martyred have been killed. The martyrdom of the saints represented in the fifth seal therefore occurs throughout the period between Jesus' ascension and return, thus paralleling the scenes of the first four seals.⁴⁰ In particular, however, martyrdom would cease before the commencement of the judgment of the inhabitants of the earth for the blood of the martyrs.

It has already been shown that the trumpet-judgments will, in response to the

³⁶ Mounce, 147.

³⁷ G.E. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 104.

³⁸ cf. Kistemaker, 232, 235.

³⁹ Mounce, 148; Kistemaker, 233; Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Lamplighter Books, 1983), 82.

⁴⁰ Kistemaker, 231.

prayers of the martyrs, be the judgments that will be inflicted on the inhabitants of the earth and that these judgments will be intensified and reach their conclusion through the bowls of wrath. The trumpet-judgments will not, however, begin until the last generation of believers on earth is sealed with the seal of God so as to be saved from the destruction coming upon the earth and to be brought safely into the heavenly kingdom.⁴¹

The predictions of the first to fifth seals should therefore be viewed as occurring throughout the New Testament era. The events of the first four seals are consistent with what Jesus said must occur before the Great Tribulation at the end of the age,⁴² namely wars and rumors of wars, nation rising against nation, famine and pestilence. The persecution and martyrdom of believers occur before, and will continue during, the Great Tribulation. The end of the Great Tribulation will also mark the end of martyrdom and the commencement of judgment, beginning with judgments on the inhabitants of the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs. Jesus' division of the last days into two periods, the beginning of birth pangs in Matthew 24:8 and the Great Tribulation in Matthew 24:21, is therefore an important key in fixing the time of the events represented by the seals.⁴³

Three visions accompany the breaking of the sixth seal. The first vision in Revelation 6:12 to 17 has many elements in common with Isaiah 13:9 and 10 and 34:4, Joel 2:10 and 31 and 3:15, Acts 2:20 and the account of the second coming of Christ in Matthew 24:29 to 31, Mark 13:24 to 27 and Luke 21:25 to 27, including signs in the sun, moon and stars (such as the blackening of the sun, the moon becoming like blood, stars falling to earth,

⁴¹ Mounce, 154; Rev. 7:1-8.

⁴² Matt. 24:4-14; Mark 13:3-13; Luke 21:7-19.

⁴³ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1992), 416.

the sky splitting apart and the powers of the heavens being shaken) and people in utter dismay hiding in trepidation from the presence of God and from the wrath of the Lamb. This vision is therefore portraying the day of the Lord, which includes the second coming of Christ, the great cosmic disturbances that will herald His coming and the terror that His return will excite.⁴⁴

The second vision in 7:1 to 8 is of 144,000 bond-servants of God being sealed with the seal of God in order to protect them from being harmed by the judgments that God inflicts on the earth after the Great Tribulation in order to avenge the blood of the martyrs. They are to be sealed before the land, the sea or the trees are harmed.⁴⁵ In the ensuing chapter, the land, the sea and the trees are harmed in the first trumpet-judgment (in which a third of the earth and trees are burned up) and the second trumpet-judgment (in which a third of the sea is turned to blood).⁴⁶ In the fifth trumpet-judgment, locusts with scorpion-like stings are only allowed to harm those who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads,⁴⁷ which clearly indicates that those with the seal of God on their foreheads are on earth and are divinely protected from the wrath of God during the trumpet-judgments.⁴⁸

Hendriksen views the 144,000 servants of God as symbolizing the entire Church militant of the old and new dispensations—spiritual Israel, the Church of God.⁴⁹ While it is recognized that the number 144,000, being the product of twelve squared and one thousand,

⁴⁴ Mounce, 150-153; Kistemaker, 235-237; Hendriksen, 107-109.

⁴⁵ Rev. 7:3.

⁴⁶ Rev. 7:7-8.

⁴⁷ Rev. 9:4.

⁴⁸ Mounce, 187.

⁴⁹ Hendriksen, 111.

symbolizes completeness,⁵⁰ it should be noted that the putting of the seal on the foreheads of the servants of God in chapter 7 cannot apply to all servants of God of the Old and New Testament, because it is being done to servants of God who are on earth towards the end of the New Testament era. The seal on this occasion is not the seal of the Holy Spirit referred to in Eph. 1:13 and 14, which is given to a person upon his coming to faith in Christ. The servants of God in Rev. 7 would already have this seal, otherwise they would not be servants of God. The seal in Rev. 7 is therefore being applied to the foreheads of persons on earth who are already servants of God before the onset of judgments on the inhabitants of the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs, for the purpose of providing the servants of God special divine protection during such judgments.

Those who are sealed are described as 144,000 *from* (in Greek, *ek* or out of) all the tribes of Israel, 12,000 from each tribe. This does not mean that the total number of persons in each tribe is 12,000, but that 12,000 from each tribe is sealed. Thus, those who are sealed constitute the full remnant of the Church on earth immediately before the pouring out of judgments to avenge the blood of the martyrs, that is to say, at the end of Great Tribulation during which the final set of martyrs will be killed.

The 144,000 servants of God are said to be “from every tribe of the sons of Israel,”⁵¹ which may suggest that they are of Jewish heritage. However, ten of the twelve Jewish tribes disappeared in Assyria and the remaining two lost their separate identity when Jerusalem fell in A.D. 70.⁵² Judah is listed first, ahead of Reuben, because Christ belonged

⁵⁰ Mounce, 158.

⁵¹ Rev. 7:4.

⁵² Mounce, 158; Hendriksen, 111.

to the tribe of Judah.⁵³ This is an indication that the list of tribes has been Christianized. Dan and Ephraim are apparently omitted from the list of tribes on account of their idolatry and replaced by Manasseh and Joseph, respectively.⁵⁴ The list of tribes in Revelation therefore differs from any list in the Old Testament, both in terms of the names of the tribes and their sequence,⁵⁵ which is another indication that the ethnic tribes of the Old Testament are not being contemplated.

Further, in the New Testament, “Israel” is used to refer to the Church, inclusive of Jewish and Gentile believers⁵⁶ and unity in Christ abolishes all divisions based on ethnicity, race, social status and gender.⁵⁷ There is therefore no need to identify the 144,000 servants of God as being Jewish and one may therefore conclude that they represent the Church.⁵⁸

The 144,000 servants of God therefore represent the last generation of believers on earth who are sealed after the Great Tribulation so as to protect them during the divine judgments which will be poured out on the inhabitants of the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs. Consistent with Jesus’ eschatology, they constitute the elect for whose sake the days of the Great Tribulation will be cut short.⁵⁹ In this sense, they are the “generation of faithful believers about to enter the final turbulent period that will mark the end of human

⁵³ Mounce, 159; Heb. 7:14.

⁵⁴ Kistemaker, 250-251.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Rom. 11:26; Gal. 6:16.

⁵⁷ Rom. 10:12; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:38; Eph. 2:14-16; Col. 3:11; Kistemaker, 250.

⁵⁸ Kistemaker, 250.

⁵⁹ Matt. 24:21-22.

history.”⁶⁰

The third vision in Revelation 7:9 to 17 is of the great multitude of martyrs from all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues. They are said to have come out of the Great Tribulation⁶¹ and are seen standing before the throne of God in the eternal state, where they will be guided to the springs of the water of life and every tear will be wiped from their eyes.⁶² The vision portrays “a glorious day yet future when those who are to pass through the final persecution will enter the blessedness of the eternal state.”⁶³ While there is no doubt that all the redeemed of every generation will rejoice before God in heaven, the focus of the vision is on the faithful believers who suffered persecution and died or were killed during the Great Tribulation. This vision therefore provides a contrast with the previous vision which depicts the faithful believers who survive the Great Tribulation. The martyrs of the Great Tribulation, like all other believers, will be rewarded with eternal bliss in heaven. The survivors of the Great Tribulation will witness the temporal judgment of God on those who supported the persecution of the Great Tribulation which resulted in the martyrdom of a vast multitude of believers from every nation, tribe, people and language. Both visions assure the believer of the faithfulness and justice of God.

In 8:1-5, Jesus breaks the seventh seal and there is silence in heaven for about half an hour. Seven angels stand before God and a trumpet is given to each of them. As shown above, the content of the seventh seal is the solemn silence in anticipation of the seven trumpet-judgments and the preparation for the sounding of the seven trumpets.

⁶⁰ Mounce, 158.

⁶¹ Rev. 7:14.

⁶² Compare Rev.7:17 and Rev. 21:4 and 6.

⁶³ Mounce, 161.

Thus, the story of the seven seals is that throughout the age there will be military conquest, wars, famine, death due to wars, famine, disease and wild animals and the persecution and martyrdom of believers. The beginning of the end of the age will be marked by the Great Tribulation in which an innumerable multitude of believers of every nation, tribe, people and language, tribe will be martyred. The Great Tribulation is, therefore, the next major eschatological event that believers should expect before the return of Christ. God is just and will avenge the blood of all who are martyred throughout the age. Thus, at the end of the Great Tribulation in which the final set of martyrs will be killed, the remnant of the Church will receive special divine protection from harmful judgments which will be poured out on the inhabitants of the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs. These judgments will lead into the return of Christ and the eternal state. This chronology is consistent with Jesus' eschatological discourse in the Synoptic Gospels.

CHAPTER 6
THE CHRONOLOGY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS IN THE
SEVEN TRUMPETS AND THE SEVEN BOWLS OF WRATH

The relationship between the seven trumpets and the seven bowls makes it expedient for them to be considered in tandem.

The role of the seven trumpet-angels is to announce a series of plagues that is to fall on the earth and its inhabitants¹ in response to the prayers of the martyrs to avenge their blood.² The first five trumpets are patterned after the five plagues inflicted on the Egyptians in Exodus, with the first trumpet corresponding to Ex. 9:22-25, the second and third trumpets to Ex. 7:20-25, the fourth trumpet to Ex. 10:21-23 and the fifth trumpet to Ex. 10:12-15.³ Thus, as the exodus plagues were ultimately meant to demonstrate to the Egyptians that they were being judged because of their hardness of heart and to demonstrate Yahweh's incomparability and glory,⁴ the trumpets portray judgment on unbelievers who are dwelling on the earth⁵ because of their hardened attitude, thus demonstrating God's incomparable

¹ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 172.

² G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 472.

³ Beale, 465.

⁴ Beale, 466.

⁵ cf. Rev. 6:11, 8:13 and 11:10 where reference is made to those dwelling on the earth.

sovereignty and glory.⁶ The trumpet-judgments are not intended to evoke repentance but to punish because of the permanently hardened, unrepentant stance of unbelievers toward God and his people. The trumpet-judgments therefore anticipate, and find their climax in, the final punishment.⁷

The seven bowls are also modeled on the exodus plagues. The trumpets and the bowls follow the same order, the first judgment referencing the earth, the second the sea, the third rivers and springs, the fourth the sun, the fifth the realm of the wicked and darkness, the sixth the river Euphrates and the seventh the world with the final judgment (with the same imagery of lightning, sounds, thunder, earthquake and hail). Each judgment in both series, except the sixth, alludes to an exodus plague and in each series seven angels execute the seven plagues.⁸ Thus, the trumpet and bowl series are parallel literarily, thematically and temporally.⁹ The trumpets and the bowls cover the same period leading up to the end, each series presenting God's judgment under a different set of images.¹⁰

Kistemaker demonstrates through a comparison of the seven trumpets and the seven bowls that the basic difference between the two is generally one of increased intensity.¹¹ Indeed, the intensification of the seven trumpet-judgments by the seven bowls of

⁶ Beale, 472.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Beale, 808-809.

⁹ Beale, 809.

¹⁰ Mounce, 282. Mounce sees the seals, trumpets and bowls are covering the same period, but it has been shown above that the first five seals relate to a period beginning with the "birth pains" described by Jesus and ending a little while before all the martyrs are killed.

¹¹ Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 437-438.

wrath is well recognized.¹² The first trumpet and bowl affect the earth, but the first bowl causes people to suffer from festering boils. The second trumpet affects a third of the sea and its creatures but the second bowl kills all marine life. The third trumpet makes a third of rivers and springs bitter but the third bowl turns all rivers and springs to blood. The fourth trumpets affects a third of the sun, moon and stars, thus increasing darkness, whereas the fourth bowl causes the sun to scorch the people with such intense heat that they cursed God. The fifth trumpet causes the people who do not have the seal of God to be tormented by scorpion-like stings from creatures that come out of the Abyss, whereas the fifth bowl plunges the kingdom of the Antichrist into darkness and causes the people to gnaw their tongues in agony and to curse God because of their pains and sores.¹³ The sixth trumpet causes the death of one-third of mankind by plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur, whereas the sixth bowl causes the kings of the whole world to gather their armies to meet their doom at the battle of Armageddon on the great day of God Almighty. The seventh trumpet and the seventh bowl are almost identical in predicting the day of the Lord, except that in the bowl scene the words *It is done* sound forth from the throne to indicate finality.¹⁴

The intensification of the trumpets by the bowls and the identification of the seven bowls as the seven last plagues that complete the wrath of God suggest that the bowls follow the trumpets. Indeed, there is progression throughout the three numbered series of seals, trumpets and bowls. Whereas the cycle of the seals refers to the destruction of a fourth of mankind, and the trumpet series uses the term one-third to point to partial destruction, the

¹² Kistemaker, 438; Mounce, 282; William Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1940), 19.

¹³ The two sets of judgments appear to dovetail at this point.

¹⁴ Kistemaker, 437-438.

bowls speak of total and complete judgment. The three cycles follow each other with increasingly severe judgments, and the last one features finality.¹⁵

The fifth, sixth and seventh trumpets announce the most severe trumpet-judgments, which are described as three woes on the inhabitants of the earth. This supports again the view that the trumpet-judgments are directed towards the inhabitants of the earth in response to the prayers of the martyrs. The fifth trumpet or first woe consists of demonic locusts with scorpion-like power to torment, but not kill, those who do not have the seal of God.¹⁶ This shows again that the trumpet-judgments are in response to the prayers of the martyrs and occur after the believers who survive the Great Tribulation are protected by the seal of God and while they are still on earth.

The sixth trumpet, like the sixth seal, contains a triad of visions. This is supported by the fact that the sixth trumpet begins after the end of the first woe¹⁷ and the second woe ends after the third vision.¹⁸ The first of the three visions relate to the death of one-third of mankind by plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur. Unbelievers are the target of these plagues¹⁹ as it is stated that the rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the works of their hands, such as worshipping demons and other forms of idolatry, murder, magic arts, sexual immorality and theft.²⁰ The torment of unbelievers under the fifth trumpet is therefore intensified by widespread death under the sixth trumpet.

¹⁵ Kistemaker, 426.

¹⁶ Rev. 9:4-5; Beale, 495, equates the victims of the fifth trumpet with those who have the mark of the beast.

¹⁷ Rev. 9:12-13.

¹⁸ Rev. 11:14.

¹⁹ Mounce, 193.

²⁰ Rev. 9:20-21.

The second vision under the sixth trumpet is that of the angel with the little book.²¹ John sees a mighty angel coming down from heaven. The angel stands with one leg on the land and the other on the sea and holds a little, unrolled scroll in his hand. The stance of the angel suggests that he has jurisdiction or control over land and sea.²² The angel shouts and seven thunders respond. John is about record what the seven thunders said but is instructed by a voice from heaven to seal up their message. This is a clear indication that there are certain things which will not be revealed until the end of history.²³

The angel lifts his hand to heaven and solemnly swears by the eternal God and Creator of all things that there will be no more delay but that “within that period of time to be introduced by the seventh trumpet blast the mystery of God will be brought to completion.”²⁴ The oath indicates that the words spoken are absolutely sure and reliable and cannot be altered.²⁵ The mystery of God in this context is the purpose of God as revealed in the consummation of human history, upon which the kingdom of the world becomes the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ. This divine purpose is a mystery because it never would have been known if God had not revealed it.²⁶ Thus, in relation to the period of the sixth trumpet or second woe, the end of history is imminent and will definitely be accomplished in the period of the seventh trumpet.

The voice from heaven which directed John to seal up the words of the seven

²¹ Rev. 10:1-11.

²² Kistemaker, 315.

²³ Beale, 534.

²⁴ Mounce, 206.

²⁵ Kistemaker, 312-313.

²⁶ Mounce, 207.

thunders then instructs him to take the little, unrolled scroll from the angel. The angel tells John to eat the scroll and that it will turn his stomach sour but will be as sweet as honey in his mouth.²⁷ This happens and the angel tells John that he must prophesy again against many peoples, nations, languages and kings. The little, unrolled scroll represents the prophetic word of God. The consumption of the prophetic word of God by John is a metaphorical prerequisite for his proclamation of the prophecy—he must appropriate the message,²⁸ identify with it and submit to God’s will.²⁹ The sweetness of the message reflects the general sweetness of the word of God to believers³⁰ but the more enduring sensation is bitterness which signifies John’s anguish over the thought of inevitable judgment and that there will be many who do not repent after hearing the prophetic message.³¹ The conjunction *kai* linking Rev. 10:10 and 10:11 has the sense of “therefore” and underscores that it is especially because of the bitterness of the message that John is told that he must prophesy again against many peoples and nations and languages.³² This episode therefore prepares the reader for the prophecies of judgment in the rest of the Book.

In the third vision, John is told to measure the temple of God, the altar and those who worship in it, but not to measure the court outside the temple. The outer court has been given to the nations, who will tread the holy city under foot for forty-two months. The

²⁷ This is based on a similar occurrence in Ezekiel 2:8-3:3.

²⁸ Kistemaker, 316.

²⁹ Beale, 551.

³⁰ Kistemaker, 316; Ps. 19:10; Ps. 119:103.

³¹ Beale, 551-552.

³² Beale, 55; Rev. 10:10-11: “And I took the little scroll out of the hand of the angel and ate it. And it was in my mouth as sweet as honey, and when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. *And (Kai - Therefore)* I was told, “You must prophesy again against many peoples and nations and languages and kings.”

measuring of the temple, the altar and the worshippers is a variant of the sealing of the Church in 7:1-8³³ and therefore represents God's preservation and protection of the remnant of the Church on earth at the end of the Great Tribulation. Thus, the outer court of the temple represents those who do not have the seal of God and who are subjected to the trumpet-judgments. During the period when the remnant of the Church is protected, the unbelieving nations under the rule of the Antichrist will dominate the world and will trample on the holy city, Jerusalem, for 42 months. This period of 42 months is the same period of 1,260 days during which two prophets with special powers will prophesy to the nations and may also be the period of 1,260 days in 12:6 during which the woman who symbolizes the Church is protected from the persecution of Satan and taken care of.

The rest of the third vision concerns the ministry of the two prophets (referred to as "my two witnesses" and "the two olive trees and the two lampstands that are standing before the Lord of the earth").³⁴ They are modeled after Moses and Elijah, having power like Moses to turn waters into blood (Ex. 7:14-18) and strike the earth with every kind of plague (Ex. 8:12) and like Elijah, to consume their enemies with fire (2 Kings 1:10ff.) and stop rain from falling (1 Kings 17:1).³⁵ The prophets will wear sackcloth which was the garb of Old

³³ Kistemaker, 325. There are only two visions in the Old Testament in which something is measured. There is a complete measuring of the temple with all its holy ordinances in Ezek. 40:1-42:20 which was designed to cause the Israelites to make a separation between the holy and the common (see Ezek. 42:20; 43:10-11; 22:26). There is a measuring of Jerusalem in Zech. 2:1-5 (after the captivity, Zech. 1:1) which was designed to show that God would preserve and protect His suffering people. Thus, the measuring of the temple in Rev. 11:1-2 is to separate and protect God's people, and is parallel to the sealing of the 144,000 in chapter 7. They are sealed and measured for the same purpose. The temple (sanctuary) represents the people of God, the spiritual temple, God's dwelling place or habitation among men (1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21; 1 Tim. 3:15). The temple is measured but the outer court is left out. Thus, the temple (the 144,000 believers who are sealed – the remnant of the Church on earth following the martyrdoms of the Great Tribulation) would receive special divine protection during the outpouring of harmful judgments on the earth, while the outer court (those who are outside the Church) would not.

³⁴ Rev. 11:3-4.

³⁵ Mounce, 216.

Testament prophets and which also suggests that their message will be a call to repentance, in as much as sackcloth was the garment of mourning and penitence.³⁶ They will torment those who dwell on earth for 1,260 days or 42 months.

At the end of the 42 months, they will be killed by the Antichrist (the beast that comes up from the Abyss) and their bodies will lie in the street of Jerusalem, the great city where their Lord was crucified.³⁷ At that time, Jerusalem will, as a result its being trampled by the nations during the 42-month period and on account of its association with the oppressive anti-theocratic world kingdom of the Antichrist, its rampant sexual immorality and moral degradation and the imminence of the divine judgment to be poured out on it, cease to be “the holy city” and be spiritually or figuratively called Egypt and Sodom.³⁸

The bodies of the prophets will be gazed upon by people of every tribe, language and nation. This prophecy may be an indication that Jerusalem will be a cosmopolitan city of international importance in the world kingdom of the Antichrist. It is also possible that the prophecy may be fulfilled via satellite and other modern communications technologies. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over the corpses of the prophets and celebrate by sending gifts to each other because the prophets had tormented them. But after 3½ days, the prophets will come back to life and ascend into heaven in the sight of everyone. There will at that time be a great earthquake that will destroy one tenth of the city and kill 7,000. The survivors will be terrified and give glory to the God of heaven.

The seventh and final judgment follows upon the sounding of the last trumpet. As

³⁶ Mounce, 217; cf. Zech. 13:4; Jer. 4:8 and Matt. 11:21.

³⁷ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1995), 94.

³⁸ Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Lamplighter Books, 1983), 112; see also Hendriksen, 131.

anticipated by the oath of the angel in 10:7 and the declaration in 11:14 that the second woe has passed and the third woe is coming soon, the seventh trumpet and third woe portray the consummation of history.³⁹ Loud voices in heaven cry, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.”⁴⁰ The declaration of the heavenly host signals that the dominion and rule of this world has been transferred to God and his Christ forever.⁴¹ The twenty-four elders fall prostrate and worship God. They sing a song of thanksgiving, rejoicing in the fact that the Lord has reached the zenith of his power and authority, now publicly displayed.⁴²

The ungodly nations are pictured as being enraged against God. Following, in part, the model of Ps. 2:1-2, 5 and 10-12, the nations’ rage is counteracted by the final judgment of God in His wrath. That this is the final judgment is supported by the fact that every use of “wrath” in Revelation concerns the time of the final great outpouring of wrath at the end of history. Thus the phrase “your wrath came” is an indication of the final judgment. The third and final woe for the inhabitants of the earth is, therefore, the final judgment which is also “the time for the dead to be judged.”⁴³ In contrast to the final judgment of the dead, the bond-servants of God, the prophets and saints and those who fear His name, the small and the great, are rewarded. As mentioned above,⁴⁴ a storm theophany marks the end of the trumpet-judgments.

³⁹ Beale, 609.

⁴⁰ Rev. 11:15.

⁴¹ Mounce, 226.

⁴² Hendriksen, 133. According to Mounce, 226, the event of Christ taking up his eternal reign is so certain that throughout the song it is repeatedly spoken of as having already occurred.

⁴³ Beale, 615; cf. Rev. 6:16-17; 14:10-11; 16:19; 19:15.

⁴⁴ See page 19 above.

The seven bowls of wrath are clearly intended to punish the supporters of the reign of the Antichrist. The first bowl causes painful sores to break out on those who have the mark of the Antichrist and worship his image. The second and the third bowls result in the sea, rivers and springs being turned into blood, in response to which the angel in charge of the waters declares that these divine judgments are just because they (that is to say, the inhabitants of the earth who have the mark of the Antichrist) have shed the blood of the prophets and saints of God and God has given them blood to drink as they deserve. The first three bowls therefore support the view that the judgments of the bowls, like the trumpet-judgments, are the divine response to the martyrdom of the saints and occur in the time of the reign of the Antichrist after the Great Tribulation when a multitude of saints will be martyred.

The fourth and fifth bowls emphasize the hardening of the hearts of the followers of the Antichrist in response to the increased severity of the judgments. Their response to the aggravation of their suffering by the infliction of scorching solar heat under the fourth bowl and widespread darkness under the fifth bowl is to curse the name of God on account of the plagues and to stubbornly refuse to repent and glorify God. The repetition of this response in 16:9 and 11 is obviously intended for emphasis.

The correlation of the first four bowls and the powers of the two witnesses in 11:6 should also be noted. The powers of the witnesses are to stop the rain from falling, to turn water into blood and to strike the earth with plagues. These powers correspond in reverse order to (a) the first bowl which is poured *into*⁴⁵ the earth and results in an outbreak of boils on the people; (b) the second and third bowls in which the sea, rivers and springs are turned

⁴⁵ Kistemaker, 440.

to blood; and (c) the fourth bowl in which the lack of rain necessarily accompanies the searing heat of the sun. This correlation again supports the view that the trumpets and bowls occur in the same period between the Great Tribulation and the end of the age.

The sixth bowl refers to Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet and therefore indicates yet again that the relevant event will take place during the reign of the Antichrist. The Euphrates is dried up and evil spirits with miraculous powers go out from Satan, the Antichrist and the False Prophet to gather the kings of the world at Armageddon for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. Armageddon is probably a reference to one of history's famous battlefields at Megiddo, an ancient city to the north of the Carmel ridge and commanding the strategic pass between the coastal plain and the valley of Esdraelon.⁴⁶ It was the location of the victory of Deborah and Barak over the chariots of Sisera.⁴⁷ Regardless of the geographical location of Armageddon, the battle represents the encounter between the forces of evil (Satan, the Antichrist, the False Prophet and the armies of the nations) and Christ upon his return.⁴⁸ The connection between the Battle of Armageddon and the return of Christ is highlighted in 16:15 where as an aside following the statement that the battle will take place on the great day of God Almighty, Jesus warns that his return will be as sudden and unexpected as that of a thief and advises the reader to remain spiritually alert and prepared for his return.

The battle is alluded to in the sixth seal where the kings of the earth, the princes, generals and mighty men are seen hiding in caves and calling on the mountains and rocks to fall on them to hid them from the presence of God and the wrath of the Lamb, because the

⁴⁶ Mounce, 301.

⁴⁷ Judges 5:19.

⁴⁸ Mounce, 302; Kistemaker, 453.

great day of the wrath of God and the Lamb has come.

The Battle of Armageddon is also portrayed in 19:11-21, where in a vision of the return of Christ, an angel calls to the birds to gather for the great supper of God so that they may eat the flesh of kings, generals and mighty men. The Antichrist and the kings of the earth and their armies are seen gathering to make war against Christ and his heavenly army. The Antichrist and the False Prophet are cast alive into the lake of fire and the rest were killed and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

Thus, it would appear that, even when it becomes obvious to the inhabitants of the earth that Christ is returning, the Antichrist, the False Prophet and the armies of the nations will gather, or at least be united, in opposition to the coming reign of Christ. The kings and armies of the earth are deceived by the miraculous signs of the Antichrist into believing that victory over Christ is possible.

The expression “the kings of the earth” appears frequently in Revelation and alludes to Psalm 2:2. The kings and rulers set themselves against God and His Anointed One, but the Lord treats them with scorn and derision.⁴⁹ The allusion to Psalm 2 is also seen in 19:15 where, in the context of the return of Christ, it is said that He will strike the nations and rule them with a rod of iron. The Greek verb, to rule, is *poimainein*, which signifies “to shepherd.” The Lord therefore rules as a shepherd-king who with his iron rod, protects his people and destroys his enemies, dashing them to pieces like pottery.⁵⁰

In keeping with the allusions to Psalm 2, the Lord treats the opposition to his

⁴⁹ Kistemaker, 450.

⁵⁰ Kistemaker, 523.

return with scorn and derision.⁵¹ The portrayal of earthly armies gathering to oppose Christ and his heavenly armies is indeed laughable. Then, he “rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath.”⁵² The rebuke of the Lord is depicted in 19:15 and 21 as the sharp sword that comes out the mouth of Christ to strike down the armies of the nations. The terror incurred by the wrath of God is also seen in the sixth seal where the kings of the earth, the princes and generals and other inhabitants of the earth desperately hide and call on the mountains and rocks to fall on them because the great day of the wrath of God has arrived.

The wrath of the Lord is also depicted in 19:15 as Christ treading the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. The winepress imagery for the demonstration of wrath of the Lord upon his return is also seen in 14:17 to 20, where an angel with a sharp sickle gathers clusters of ripe grapes from the earth and throws them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. The grapes are trampled in the winepress outside the city and blood flows from the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia or approximately 180 miles. Rev. 19:15 make it clear that it is Christ himself who executes judgment by treading the winepress.⁵³

The Battle of Armageddon portrayed in the sixth bowl is therefore closely connected with the return of Christ in as much as portrayals of, and allusions to, the battle can be seen in parallel passages such as Psalm 2 and Rev. 6:12-17, 14:17-20 and 19:11-21.

As expected in light of 15:1, the seventh bowl brings the wrath of God to an end, thus a loud voice from the throne declares “It is done!” signifying that all the enemies of God have been destroyed in final judgment. The storm theophany emphasizes that the voice from

⁵¹ Kistemaker, 450.

⁵² Psalm 2:5.

⁵³ Mounce, 280.

the throne is the voice of God. The greatest earthquake to hit planet earth splits the great city in three parts and causes all the cities of the nations to collapse. The great city is the capital of the kingdom of the Antichrist. Babylon the Great is another city of international importance which is also associated with the Antichrist. It appears however that the Antichrist and a group of rulers attacked the city, thereby contributing to its downfall prior to the return of Christ.

Islands and mountains disappear and 100 pound hailstones rain down on the earth, causing men to blaspheme. This description of the end of the age is consistent with elements in the descriptions in the sixth seal and the seventh trumpet.

Thus, the story of the seven trumpets is that after all the martyrs have been killed, God will judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge the blood of the martyrs by bringing disasters that will harm a significant portion (represented as a third) of the natural environment. A third of the earth, trees and green grass will be burned up, a third of the sea will be turned to blood, a third of all marine life will perish and a third of natural fresh water supplies will be poisoned. In addition to the loss of natural resources, the effects of these disasters on mankind will include the destruction of a third of all marine vessels and the death of many by poisoning. Cosmic phenomena affecting the sun, moon and stars would cause a major increase (represented as 33.3%) in darkness on the earth. Swarms of stinging creatures will severely torment unbelievers for an extended period (represented as five months). Plagues will kill a significant fraction of mankind (represented as a third), but the survivors will still refuse to repent of their idolatry and wickedness. God will raise up two prophets will have power to stop the rain from falling and will be instrumental in turning the waters into blood and inflicting various plagues. The prophets will eventually be killed and

their bodies will lie for three and a half days in the open street in Jerusalem which, spiritually speaking, would at that time be likened to Sodom and Egypt. The prophets will come back to life and be taken up to heaven in the plain view of their enemies. A severe earthquake will cause a tenth of Jerusalem to collapse and kill 7,000 residents. The survivors will be terrified and give glory to God. The Lord will return to establish His kingdom, to judge the dead and reward His servants.

The bowls of wrath tell the story of the seven last plagues on mankind. The end of the story coincides with the end of the story of the seven trumpets, but the escalation of suffering under the first five bowls over against the first four trumpets suggests that the bowls begin about the same time as the fifth trumpet or the first woe. Thus, the bowls of wrath may be viewed as an elaboration of the three woes of the trumpet-judgments. About the time when those who do not have the seal of God (but have instead the mark of the beast) are being tormented by stinging creatures, ugly and painful sores will also break out on them. The rest of the sea and fresh water will turn to blood and all marine life will perish. The sun will sear unbelievers with intense heat but instead of repenting and glorifying God, they will curse His name. Even when the signs of Christ's return begin to appear and the sun turns black like sackcloth and the world plunges into darkness, the Antichrist and his followers will, in spite of their agony, curse God and refuse to repent. The Euphrates will dry up and the Antichrist and the False Prophet will convince the kings of the earth to gather at Armageddon to wage war with the returning Christ. The greatest earthquake ever will occur. All cities will be destroyed. All islands and mountains will disappear and huge hailstones will rain down on mankind. Christ's return will mark the end of the age.

CHAPTER 7
THE CHRONOLOGY OF ESCHATOLOGICAL EVENTS
IN REVELATION 12-15 AND 17-19

Revelation 12 is generally considered to be the centre and key to the entire book.¹ Revelation has two main parts.² Chapters 12 to 22 explain in greater detail what is only introduced and implied in Chapters 1 to 11. Chapter 12 reveals that the Devil is the deeper source of evil and develops intimations to him in 6:8, 9:11 and 11:7.³ It reveals the Devil as the grand initiator of the trials and persecutions of the saints. Satan unleashes the Antichrist and the False Prophet and is the master of the whore Babylon. Chapters 12 to 20 are chiastically structured to introduce Satan, the Antichrist, the False Prophet and Babylon in that order and then to portray their final destruction in reverse order, thus highlighting Satan as the initiator, from first to last, of all rebellion against God. It is therefore in this respect that chapter 12 can be seen as introducing the second half of the book.⁴

Chapter 12 begins with the appearance of a great sign in heaven. The Church, the true Israel comprising believers of the Old and New Testament eras, is depicted as a woman

¹ G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 620; Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 351.

² Kistemaker, 352.

³ Beale, 622.

⁴ Beale, 623.

clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head.⁵ The depiction appears to be based on Joseph's dream in which the sun, moon and eleven stars, representing Joseph's father, mother and eleven brothers, bow before him.⁶ The woman is pregnant and cries out in pain as she is about to give birth to a son who is about to rule all the nations with an iron rod. Israel is frequently pictured in the Old Testament as a woman in travail, thus the portrayal is of the true Israel in her pre-messianic agony of expectation.⁷ The birth of the son is symbolic of the birth of Christ.⁸ The woman is not Mary, the mother of Jesus, but the community of faith through which the Messiah ultimately came into the world.⁹

A great red dragon, who is identified as Satan in 12:9, tries to devour the child as soon as he is born, but the child is snatched up to God and his throne. Thus, the depiction succinctly covers the birth, persecution, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ.¹⁰ The woman flees into the wilderness where she is protected and nourished for 1,260 days in a place prepared by God, for God will never allow the Church to be annihilated.¹¹

Satan and his angels are seen fighting in heaven with Michael and his angels. Satan and his angels are defeated and cast down to earth. This battle explains the earlier depiction in 12:4 of the dragon sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven with his tail and

⁵ Beale, 625.

⁶ Kistemaker, 354; Gen. 37:9.

⁷ Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 232; cf. Is. 26:17; 66:7; Mic. 4:10.

⁸ Kistemaker, 355.

⁹ Beale, 628.

¹⁰ Beale, 623.

¹¹ Kistemaker, 359.

casting them down to earth, the stars being the angels who sided with Satan against God and were cast out of heaven with him.¹²

A loud voice in heaven declares the establishment of the salvation, power, kingdom and authority of Christ and links it with the casting out of Satan from heaven, the implication being that the death and resurrection of Christ has resulted in His victory over Satan.¹³ The victory of Christ over Satan extends to the saints who overcome their accuser by faith in the redeeming blood of Christ and by adhering to and proclaiming the gospel, even to the point of death.¹⁴ While the casting out of Satan brings rejoicing in heaven, it causes woe or suffering upon the earth and sea,¹⁵ not only suffering as a result of the persecution and martyrdom of believers, but as we have seen in the trumpet-judgments and bowls of wrath, even greater suffering on unbelievers who accept the mark of the beast.

The protection and care of God for His Church is symbolized by His giving the woman two wings of a great eagle to enable her to fly to a place of safety prepared for her, by His provision of nourishment for the woman and by His ironically causing the earth, Satan's own territory,¹⁶ to swallow the flood that Satan sent to sweep the woman away. Satan becomes furious at the woman. Unable to wipe the Church off the face of the earth, the most he can do is to persecute "the rest of her offspring" as opposed to the male child, that is to say, believers in general—those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the

¹² Kistemaker, 357.

¹³ Kistemaker, 363.

¹⁴ Rev. 12:11; cf. Kistemaker, 364-365.

¹⁵ Mounce, 239.

¹⁶ Kistemaker, 369.

testimony of Jesus.¹⁷

Thus, having presented the end of the age and the final judgment at the conclusion of the trumpet-judgments in chapter 11, chapter 12 recapitulates to a time just before the birth of Christ¹⁸ to provide the reader with the background to the persecution by Satan of the Church throughout the present age. Chapter 13, however, jumps forward to reveal details surrounding to Satan's final and worst persecution of believers in history—the Great Tribulation. In particular, chapter 13 provides information concerning the Antichrist and the False Prophet, the satanic leaders of the Great Tribulation. While persecutions in Roman history and otherwise may have aspects in common with the Great Tribulation, it must be admitted that the Great Tribulation has not yet taken place. For one thing, according to 7:9 and 14, the martyrs of the Great Tribulation would comprise an innumerable multitude from every nation, people, tribe and language, and the gospel is still to be preached to every nation, people and tribe and in every language. According to Thomas, the Great Tribulation is “a period of eschatological tribulation immediately before Christ returns in power to establish His kingdom. It cannot be simply general tribulation that began in John's time. This is a worldwide crisis among all nations that could hardly reflect the localized situation of John's time or shortly thereafter.”¹⁹ Thus, while chapter 13 elaborates on the war waged by the dragon against the rest of the children of the woman,²⁰ it focuses specifically on the

¹⁷ Mounce, 242.

¹⁸ Beale, 623.

¹⁹ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1992), 496.

²⁰ William H. Shea and Ed Christian, "The chiastic structure of Revelation 12:1-15:4: the great controversy vision." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38 (2000): 270.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

persecution carried out under the Antichrist.

The dragon empowers the Antichrist who is depicted as a beast which comes out of the sea.²¹ The beast has seven heads, ten horns and ten crowns which are symbolic of the fullness or completeness of his authority and power as the head of a satanic world government set against God and the Church.²² Chapter 13 elaborates on the authority and power given by Satan to the Antichrist. Satan vests the Antichrist with power, a throne and great authority. The Antichrist is given authority to speak great things and words of blasphemy. The Antichrist is also given power to war against and overcome the saints and authority over every tribe, people, tongue and nation. 2 Thess. 2:3-4 refers to the Antichrist as the man of lawlessness who will oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Further, 2 Thess. 2:8 makes it clear that the Antichrist will be destroyed when Christ returns. This places the Antichrist at a particular time in history, that is, in a period immediately preceding the return of Christ. Thus, although the secret power of lawlessness is already at work in the world, the coming of the Antichrist in accordance with the activity of Satan, displaying all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, is still to take place. Attempts to determine the individual to whom the number of the beast refers are merely speculative, because that individual has not yet been revealed. The identification is not yet available, but will be when the Antichrist rises to power.²³

The Antichrist has authority to blaspheme for 42 months. This period coincides

²¹ Kistemaker, 375.

²² Kistemaker, 377-378.

²³ Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1992), 185.

with the period that the Church is protected and nourished in the wilderness, the period that the outer court of the temple representing the world and the holy city are trampled by the nations, while the temple and altar representing the Church are preserved and protected, and the period that the two witnesses prophesy against the inhabitants of the earth.

One of the heads of the beast appears as if it had been mortally wounded, but the mortal wound is healed. The whole world is amazed and everyone, except those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life, begins to follow and worship the beast. Thus, the Antichrist will be a false Christ who counterfeits his own resurrection. The climax of history will include the apparent healing of an individual which closely approximates the resurrection of Christ from the dead. This amazing occurrence will win for the Antichrist worldwide admiration which will evolve into worship.²⁴ John makes it clear, however, that the worship of the Antichrist is the same as the worship of Satan, because the Antichrist is merely the instrument by which Satan is accomplishing his purpose.²⁵

A beast comes out of the earth. He is the False Prophet.²⁶ He exercises the authority of the Antichrist and makes everyone worship the Antichrist. He performs great signs and uses them to deceive the world. He instructs the people to make an image of the Antichrist and causes the image to come alive, speak and cause those who do not worship it to be killed. He requires everyone to receive a mark on his right hand or forehead and prohibits anyone from buying or selling unless he has the mark. The False Prophet is therefore the main religious assistant or henchman of the Antichrist. He captures organized

²⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 158-159.

²⁵ Kistemaker, 380.

²⁶ Kistemaker, 375.

religion in the service of the Antichrist and implements the Antichrist's agenda.²⁷

In chapter 14:1 to 5, there is a vision of Christ, the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion with the 144,000 believers who are said to be chaste and blameless, to have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and the Lamb and to follow the Lamb wherever He goes. They sing a new song (which only they can learn) before the throne of God, the four living creatures and the elders. The purpose of the vision is to contrast Christ and His people with the Antichrist and his followers and to assure believers of their eternal security, victory and blessedness, despite the persecution and martyrdom described in the previous chapter.²⁸

The picture of Christ standing on Mount Zion refers to a time after the second coming of Christ. As discussed above, Psalm 2 predicts the installation of Christ as King on Mount Zion when He returns to end the reign of the Antichrist and rule the nations with an iron scepter.²⁹ As in chapter 7, the 144,000 in chapter 13 represents the spiritual Israel, the people of God of the old and new dispensations.³⁰ The presence of the 144,000 before the throne of God, the living creatures and the elders also suggests that the vision is referring to a time after the return of Christ. The general thrust of the vision is therefore the blessedness occasioned by the physical reunion of Christ and His Church after His second coming.

Whereas the context of chapter 7 limits the 144,000 to the Church on earth immediately after the martyrdom of the Great Tribulation and before pouring out of judgments on the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs, there is no need to restrict the interpretation of the 144,000 in chapter 14 to a special group of saints—the 144,000 in chapter

²⁷ Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 173.

²⁸ Kistemaker, 399-400.

²⁹ Kistemaker, 401.

³⁰ Hendriksen, 111.

14 represents the total number of God's redeemed people.³¹ The description of the people of God as not having been defiled with women, chaste, followers of the Lamb wherever He goes, firstfruits to God and blameless does not mean that the 144,000 are a special group of believers. Indeed, an interpretation that advocates a large group of men as the recipients of special privileges from the Lord should be avoided as there is equality between male and female within the body of Christ.³²

The Church may be said to be chaste, undefiled and blameless in the sense that Christ has made her radiant, holy and blameless, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish.³³ The Church consists of disciples of Christ who take up their cross and follow Him³⁴ and are likened to sheep who follow their shepherd because they know His voice.³⁵ According to Beale, the Church may be the firstfruits to God from among mankind because the whole Church is "an offering set apart to God with no thought of more to come. This idea occurs in the OT, e.g., with respect to crops, land (Ezek. 48:8, 10, 20 LXX) or people (Jer. 2:3). Likewise, "firstfruits" here may allude to the whole people of God, as in Jas. 1:18."³⁶

In chapter 14:6 to 13, there is a vision of three angels and a voice from heaven. The angels and the voice make declarations that are related to the period immediately before the end of the age. The first angel warns the people on earth to fear, glorify and worship God because the hour of judgment has come. This is an edict that directly precedes and

³¹ Kistemaker, 402.

³² Gal. 3:28.

³³ Eph. 5:25-27.

³⁴ Matt. 10:38; Kistemaker, 405.

³⁵ John 10:4; Kistemaker, 405.

³⁶ Beale, 744.

inaugurates the last judgment itself. The immediately following *οτι* clause indicates that the commencement of the judgment is the reason the command is issued and that the time for repentance has passed.³⁷ The second angel proclaims the fall of Babylon, a major city within the empire of the Antichrist. The fall of Babylon is dealt with in greater detail in chapters 17 and 18. In contrast to the blessed eternity of the Church, the third angel declares that those who worship the Antichrist and his image and receive his mark will be eternally tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the Lamb and his angels, a foreshadowing of 20:15 where those whose names are not written in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire. The voice from heaven then declares, “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!” to underscore as it were the utmost importance of rejecting the Antichrist and remaining loyal to Christ until death.

Rev. 14:14 to 20 presents a vision of the harvesting of the earth. The harvest is a symbol of coming judgment.³⁸ In 14:14-16, one like a son of man is seen coming on a white cloud. This is a description of the Messiah which is based on Daniel’s vision in Dan. 7:13.³⁹ Jesus has a crown of gold on His head, a symbol of victory and his consequent right to act in judgment.⁴⁰ He has a sharp sickle in His hand, a symbol of the harvest. Christ is prepared to harvest the earth in righteous retribution. An angel comes out of the temple and calls to Him to take His sickle and reap, because the harvest of the earth is ripe and the time to reap has therefore come. So Christ swings his sickle over the earth and the earth is harvested. Mounce views this part of the vision as representing the gathering of both believers and unbelievers—

³⁷ Beale, 753.

³⁸ Kistemaker, 415; Mounce, 279.

³⁹ Kistemaker, 416; Mounce, 277.

⁴⁰ Mounce, 277.

the wheat and the tares. Since the harvest is a time for judgment, Christ gathers both the elect and the unsaved to reward or punish them accordingly.⁴¹ Kistemaker, however, sees Christ's reaping as symbolic of the wheat harvest, thus representing the ingathering of the saints, though he acknowledges that the time for harvesting refers figuratively to the Judgment Day.⁴² As discussed above,⁴³ 14:17-20 refers to the gathering of unbelievers on the return of Christ and their subsequent subjection to the wrath of God.

Rev 17:1-15 describes Babylon the Great, the Mother of Prostitutes and of the Abominations of the Earth and 17:16 to 19:4 reveals God's judgment of Babylon. Babylon is identified in 17:18 as the great city that rules over the kings of the earth, a major city in the kingdom of the Antichrist. The city is portrayed as a great harlot on a scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns. The beast is the Antichrist. The city therefore derives its authority, power and influence from the Antichrist. The scarlet colour of the beast represents extreme immorality and the blood of the saints. The kings of the earth are therefore said to have committed acts of immorality with the city and the peoples of the earth are said to have become drunk with the wine of her immorality. The city is also said to have made itself drunk with the blood of the saints.

Its seven heads represent both the seven hills on which the city sits and seven kings. Rome was known as the city on seven hills and the number "seven" was a universal symbol of completion or perfection. The seven hills is, therefore, an indication that the city is a type of Rome, a city of significant power and influence on a global scale.

The seven kings represent five kings who had already fallen at the time of writing,

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Kistemaker, 417.

⁴³ See pages 54-55 above.

the reigning king and another king whose reign would be brief. The Antichrist is an eighth king and is also one of the seven kings. The ten horns are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom. They will receive authority as kings with the Antichrist for one hour. They will surrender their power and authority to the Antichrist.

Thomas agrees with Walvoord that the best interpretation is that the seven kings represent seven literal Gentile kingdoms that follow one another in succession, namely the seven kingdoms that dominate the world scene and persecute the people of God in the history of mankind. The seven kingdoms are Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome and the future kingdom of the Antichrist. Rome was the extant kingdom during John's lifetime. The duration of the future kingdom of the Antichrist will be short in comparison to the duration of its predecessors. The Antichrist himself is also the seventh king who will personally sustain a death-wound and who will, upon his miraculous recovery, become the eighth king.⁴⁴

The ten kings should be interpreted as referring to an alliance of world leaders and not ten specific rulers. The number "ten" may symbolize an indefinite number or fullness. Thus, it appears that the Antichrist will have the loyal support of a multiplicity of sovereignties.⁴⁵ This alliance will wage war against the Church, but Christ will defeat them.

Babylon is also described as sitting on many waters, which represent the many peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues over which the city has power and authority. It is also described as the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth. It may therefore be that Babylon is not only a major city in the kingdom of the Antichrist, but the capital city of that kingdom.

⁴⁴ Thomas, *Revelation 8-22*, 297-299.

⁴⁵ Alan F. Johnson, *Revelation: Bible Study Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Lamplighter Books, 1983), 161.

The Antichrist and his ten kings will, however, hate Babylon, burn it and make it desolate. The city will suddenly be overtaken by pestilence, death resulting in mourning and famine. The great city will become odious to the Antichrist and his ten kings and they will have no choice but to burn it to the ground, to the lament of world leaders who indulged in its immorality and merchants who became exceedingly wealthy by trading with it. A great multitude in heaven will therefore rejoice at God's judgment of the great city on account of its immorality and murder of the servants of God.

In Rev. 19:5 to 10, the focus shifts from the doom of Babylon to the marriage of the Lamb. At the call to praise God, a great multitude responds with a resounding "Hallelujah!" and rejoicing in anticipation of the marriage of Jesus, the Lamb and His bride, the Church. The joy and blessedness of those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb stands out in stark contrast to the doom of those whose flesh is voraciously consumed by the birds at the great supper of God in the ensuing passage.

Rev. 19:11 to 21 depicts the return of the Lord. Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, returns with his heavenly armies to judge and wage war in righteousness, to "strike down the nations", to "rule them with a rod of iron" and to tread "the wine press of the fierce wrath of God." The Antichrist, the kings of the earth and their armies assemble to oppose Christ and His army—this is the Battle of Armageddon envisaged in the sixth bowl of wrath. The Antichrist and the False Prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire. The kings of the earth and their armies are killed and the birds eat their flesh.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Without repeating too much of the details of the story of the seals, trumpets and bowls of wrath, the story of Rev. 4 to 19 is that Satan tries to destroy the Messiah upon his birth in order to prevent the Church as an institution from being formed. The Messiah is victorious over Satan and ascends to His throne in heaven, which results in Satan being cast out of heaven and down to earth. In light of Christ's victory, Satan cannot annihilate the Church so, in his rage and in the relatively short time that he has before his final punishment, he focuses instead on destroying as many individual members of the Church as he can. Throughout the age, believers and unbelievers would be affected by military conquest, wars, famine and death caused by wars, famines, plagues and wild animals. Believers will, however, be persecuted and martyred. Satan's final and worst persecution of the saints will come through the Antichrist who will, as head of a satanic world government, be vested with and exercise the full authority and power of Satan.

The Antichrist will rise to power as ruler of the world as a result of his appearing to have miraculously recovered from a mortal wound or come back to life. The worldwide admiration of the Antichrist will evolve into worldwide worship. The Antichrist himself will blaspheme God and will require the whole world to worship him. The False Prophet will exercise authority on behalf of the Antichrist and will be empowered to perform miraculous signs and wonders on his behalf, so as to enable him to deceive the world. He will enforce

the worship of the Antichrist and the image of the Antichrist by placing a mark on the right hand or forehead of those who worship the Antichrist. No one will be permitted to buy or sell without the mark. All believers whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life will refuse to worship the Antichrist and an innumerable multitude of believers from every nation, people, tribe and language will be put to death as a result. This is the Great Tribulation—the greatest distress that believers will ever face in the history of the world. A remnant of the Church will, however, be preserved. Two prophets with special powers will be prophesy and torment the inhabitants of the earth. During the reign of the Antichrist, the inhabitants of the earth will be warned that if they worship the Antichrist and receive his mark, they will suffer the full wrath of God and be tormented forever in hell. After all those destined to be martyrs have been killed, God will pour out judgments on the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs. The remnant of believers on earth at the time will be specially protected from the effects of those judgments. Even when judgment is upon unbelievers, they will be warned to fear and worship the true God who created the universe, but, in spite of their suffering, they will curse God and refuse to repent.

Competing interests within the kingdom of the Antichrist will reach a head when the Antichrist and a group of rulers attack Babylon, a major city in the kingdom of the Antichrist which will become exceedingly popular with world leaders and merchants on account of its luxuriousness, immorality and prosperous trade. Following the outpouring of judgments on the inhabitants of the earth to avenge the blood of the martyrs, Christ will return. The Antichrist, the False Prophet and the armies of the kings of the earth will oppose Christ and be defeated in the Battle of Armageddon. The Antichrist and the False Prophet will be thrown alive into the lake of fire. Christ will judge all mankind. Unbelievers will

suffer eternal punishment in hell. The saints will be united with Christ, celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb and be eternally blessed in the presence of God.

The primary motivation for this thesis is to prove that believers will experience the Great Tribulation and should therefore be spiritually prepared to die for their faith. The Book of Revelation provides the most information concerning the Great Tribulation but is usually overlooked on account of its cryptic nature. It is hoped that this thesis will assist in demystifying Revelation and enable believers to understand its basic story and its message. The appearance of the Antichrist could occur at any time and is probably imminent given the existing technological capabilities to implement the mark of the beast. Any day now, a world leader could seem to have come back from the dead and be proclaimed the Saviour of the world. The Church therefore needs to warn believers to expect such an occurrence at any time.

The Church should be attentive to encouraging and exhorting believers to be prepared to relinquish their material possessions and be faithful to Christ, even if it means dying for their faith. Christians need to be warned not to accept the mark of the beast under any circumstances as, in addition to everlasting torment in the lake of fire, they will suffer terrible judgments on earth. Far from panicking at the technological developments of the modern world, the reign of the Antichrist and the Great Tribulation, believers should welcome these developments and events in the knowledge that they are signaling the return of Christ and say with the apostle John, “So be it. Come Lord Jesus.”¹

¹ Rev. 22:20.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Beale, G.K.. *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Michigan / Cambridge, U.K. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999

Berkhof, Louis. *Systematic Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

Carson, D.A., and Douglas J. Moo. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005.

De Mar, Gary. *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*. Atlanta, Georgia: American Vision, 1999.

Eusebius. *History of the Church*. In Penguin Classics, ed. Andrew Louth. translated by G. A. Williamson. London, England: Penguin Books, 1989.

Foxe, John. *Fox's Book of Martyrs*, Revised and Edited by John Malham. Philadelphia: J.J.Woodward, 1830.

Guthrie, Donald. *New Testament Introduction*. Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1990.

Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 1940.

Johnson, Alan F. *Revelation: Bible Study Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Lamplighter Books, 1983.

Kistemaker, Simon J. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001.

Ladd, George Eldon. *A Commentary on the Revelation of John*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972.

Mounce, Robert H. *The Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998.

Persson, Sheryl. *Smallpox, Syphilis and Salvation: Medical Breakthroughs that Changed the World*. Wollombi, Australia: Exisle Publishing Limited, 2009.

Swete, Henry Barclay. *Commentary on Revelation*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Kregel Publications, 1977.

Thomas, Robert L. *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1992.

Thomas, Robert L. *Revelation 8-22: An Exegetical Commentary*. Chicago, Illinois: Moody Publishers, 1995.

Secondary Sources

Hall, M. "The hook interlocking structure of Revelation: the most important verses in the book and how they may unify its structure." *Novum Testamentum* 44 (2002): 278-296.

Henry, Matthew. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: New Modern Edition Complete and Unabridged in Six Volumes*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1994.

Shea, William H., and Ed Christian. "The chiastic structure of Revelation 12:1-15:4: the great controversy vision." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 38 (2000): 269-292.

Spinks, Leroy C. "Critical examination of J W Bowman's proposed structure of the Revelation." *Evangelical Quarterly* 50 (1978): 211-222.

Surridge, Robert. "Redemption in the structure of Revelation." *Expository Times* 101(1990): 231-235.

Wallis, Wilber B. "The coming of the kingdom: a survey of the Book of Revelation." *Presbyterion* 8 (1982): 13-70.

Walvoord, John F., and Roy B. Zuck, eds. *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty: New Testament Edition*. Colorado: Cook, 1985.