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Revelation: Chapter-by-Chapter Commentary

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Transcript

The Book of Revelation is perhaps one of the most difficult books to understand in the whole biblical canon. Perhaps more than any other book of the Bible, there's a tangled skein of issues and questions with which this book presents us right at the outset. The big questions and the small questions of this book are mutually implicating to a remarkable degree.

Likewise, while most biblical books could largely be approached with minimal reference to the rest of the canon while still achieving significant understanding, one's approach to the Book of Revelation will be unusually dependent upon the approach to the entirety of the scripture and the theological frameworks that you have drawn from it. How we answer any one of the most basic questions about the book – author, dating, geographical origin, canonicity, hermeneutical approach, genre – all questions upon which there are extraordinary levels of debate – has extensive implications for our reading of its contents, reading that in turn has implication for our answering of these questions. We are trying to construct here a cumulative case for a picture of best fit, a synthesis which brings together hundreds of different interpretative considerations on

different levels into an impression of how it all hangs together, an impression that, given the unusual character of the book, is far more extensively revisable than such pictures generally are.

Ian Paul helps the observed that interpretative approaches are commonly treated as if they were interpretative strategies with which we begin, they actually function more like interpretative conclusions which we have arrived at through extensive reading and re-reading of the text itself. Nevertheless, we always and unavoidably come to the text of a book like Revelation with a number of tentative conclusions or preconceptions at the least, not least about the sort of book that we are reading, which all shape our angle of approach. This process of reading and re-reading is essential for understanding, representing a process that Grant Osborne has termed the hermeneutical spiral.

We are constantly developing our reading of the details and our reading of the big picture, synthesising our reading of the details into the big picture which we then bring back to the text and test against the details. The interpretative strategies that we take are a result of numerous corrective iterations of this process, a process that we never abandon. Sometimes the corrections that we make will be minor, but on occasions fundamental features of our approach will be reconsidered and revised with far-reaching implications for our understanding of vast swathes of details.

The interpretative approach that I take to the book of Revelation is largely what is called a preterist one, but there are a great many texts where such an interpretative approach, like all others, must run the gauntlet of texts and questions that its commitments render difficult, taking maybe damaging blows and perhaps even being held below the waterline. The proof of the pudding will always be in the eating. My interpretative approach, like that of other commentators, has been arrived at through many, many readings of the texts, both with and without companions and guides.

As I walk through the text again, it is entirely possible that my interpretative strategy will be foiled by obstacles that the text itself presents. This should be the case for any responsible strategy of interpretation. A good interpretative approach will be the vision by which the reader is enabled clearly to perceive both the further distant object of the whole book and its place in the wider scripture, and the much nearer objects of specific texts and passages within it.

Such an approach will bring the logic and meaning of particular passages and the import of their imagery into crisp focus, and as we raise our eyes from the texts immediately before us, will enable us also to see the rest of the book and the entirety of the scriptures from an arresting and revelatory new vantage point. In part due to its difficulty and its favour among certain heretical groups, there was ambivalence and uncertainty around the book's canonicity in some quarters of the early church. However, its apostolic authority and authorship had very widespread early support, and the book also enjoyed

great popularity.

Papias, Irenaeus, Justin Martyr and Melito of Sardis, all writing at various points in the 2nd century, all seem to regard the book as scripture, written by the Apostle John. It is also included in the list of New Testament books in the Muratorian canon, quite likely also from the 2nd century. Craig Kester, who helpfully discusses the history of the reception of the book, specifically connects much of the opposition to, or ambivalence about revelation, to anti-montanism and anti-millennialism, both heretical movements that made much use of the book.

He discusses Dionysius of Alexandria, who writing in the 3rd century disputed the apostolic authorship of the book, observing the difference in writing style, literary form and theology between it and the Gospel of John. Marcion also rejected it early on, on account of its pronounced Jewish character. Uncertainty about the status of revelation continued for a bit longer in the East.

Questions of canonicity are naturally tied to questions of apostolic authorship. The author identifies himself early on as John, in the very first verse. He is connected with churches in the province of Asia in verse 4, churches to whom he writes directly in chapters 2 and 3. He is the witness of the entire prophecy, as we see in chapter 22 verse 8, exiled on the island of Patmos, one of the Dodecanese islands in the south of the Aegean Sea, off the coast of the province of Asia, about level with Miletus.

Beliefs about authorship depend upon considerations both internal and external to the text. Early attributions of authorship, internal claims, style and various other considerations will inform our judgment on this matter. A number of possibilities immediately present themselves.

The first possibility is that it is pseudonymous or pseudepigraphical. Jewish writers of apocalypses, the genre to which revelation principally belongs, typically wrote under the guise of some ancient figure. Richard Borkum has argued that such writing was not necessarily intended to be deceptive, but was understood within the conventions of the genre.

However, early Christians do not seem to have accorded the same indulgence to such factually inaccurate attributions of authorship, even under the forgiving terms of genre norms. Nor, as R.H. Charles makes clear, did Christians share the same convictions about the state of prophecy that invited the conventions of pseudepigraphical apocalypses among their non-Christian Jewish contemporaries. Some early Christians who rejected the authority of the book attributed it to Corinthus, albeit with no serious evidence in their favour.

One argument against such pseudonymity, raised by Greg Beale, is how lightly the author refers to himself. Pseudepigraphical works typically over-egg the pudding of their

identifications. But in Revelation, very little is made explicitly to rest upon John's apostolic identity.

He doesn't even refer to himself as an apostle. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why we have this debate about authorship to begin with. A second possible identification of the author is as John the Elder.

Mentioned by Papias, this is presumably a different figure from John the Apostle. This figure is also mentioned later on in Eusebius. For some commentators, this particular identification rests in part upon the assumption that John the Apostle never lived in Ephesus.

A third proposal was put forward by J. Massingbird Ford, who makes the case that the book largely comes from John the Baptist and his disciples. I don't know of anyone else who has followed her in this particular position. John Mark is a fourth suggestion that seems to have little or no support.

Finally, there is the fifth and traditional association of the authorship with John the Apostle, the son of Zebedee. Traditionally, it has been held that the same John who wrote Revelation authored the Gospel of John and the Epistles of John. However, some commentators argue that Revelation was written by the Apostle John and the Gospel of John by a different hand.

Most scholars question Johannine authorship nowadays, both of John's Gospel and of the Book of Revelation. Nevertheless, conservative scholars generally continue to argue for it. David Owen notes several features that give weight to the identification of the author as a Palestinian Jew who had fled Palestine for the Diaspora.

The author knew the Old Testament exceptionally well, which he largely quoted in what Owen terms a Semitizing Greek, more characteristic of an Aramaic or even Hebrew speaker, rather than a person who spoke Greek as his first language and used the Septuagint. He was familiar with the Jewish cult of the Temple, aspects of the life of Jerusalem and Palestine, and he wrote in a genre that particularly belonged to the region of Palestine. His conceptual world was also very distinctively Jewish.

While such a description would likely fit the Apostle John well, he wouldn't be the only possible candidate. The differences between the style of the books of John's Gospel and Revelation is perhaps one of the strongest arguments against the same John being the author of both. The style of Revelation is quite distinctive.

It differs sharply from that of the Gospel in several respects. The case against Johannine authorship on the basis of style is an old one. It dates back to Dionysius of Alexandria at the very least, and is strongly presented by such as R. H. Charles.

Arguments against common authorship need not entail a radical disconnection of the

Johannine material, of course, as the author might have been a disciple of John or someone in his near orbit. One could also make a case for the involvement of some other figure or figures in the composition of one or both of the books in question alongside John, who would have led to the divergence of the styles. There is early external evidence for the authorship of the Apostle John, of course.

Internally there are arguments for common authorship of the Gospel and the Epistles and Revelation, or at the very least extreme affinity. In the Gospel, 1 John and Revelation, but nowhere else in the New Testament, with the debatable exception of Hebrews, the Son is referred to as the Logos. There are other strong theological affinities, such as between their presentations of Christ as the Bringham, or the presentation of Christ as the Divine Lamb.

In a far more extensive and daring case, Warren Gage and Fowler White have argued that the two books are a two-volume work which can be structured chiasmically. They observe even more remarkable parallels between specific passages in the two books, whose specificity weighs in favour of very close affinity between the two volumes. One should also note the prominence of witness-bearing in both books, and the importance of a character named John who bears witness at the outset of both.

The traditional claim that the Apostle John authored both the Gospel and the Book of Revelation should not be jettisoned, even though it may have difficult questions to answer on the front of style. Another very key question concerns dating. Depending on one's dating of the book, certain fundamental interpretative approaches to the entire book may be ruled out, or made more or less likely.

As a specific and especially keen example of this, a reading that regards the book as largely referring to events of AD 70 obviously rests heavily upon a pre-AD 70 dating. The majority of modern scholars hold a date toward the end of Domitian's reign, claiming the support of a statement of Irenaeus. Domitian's reign offers a backdrop for the book in escalating emperor worship and the persecution of Christians.

A minority of scholars, among whom I count myself, advocate an earlier and formerly much more common dating towards the end of the 60s AD, with the dominant setting being not the Roman Empire, but apostate Judaism prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in the Jewish War in AD 70, which is a culminating event in that reading of the book. This question is one in which there are liberal and conservative commentators on both sides. Kenneth Gentry has written extensively on the question of the book's dating.

He presents both external and internal evidence for the position. Among the internal evidence that the Temple is seemingly still standing in chapter 11, John alludes to Jesus' statement of Luke 21-24 concerning the destruction of the Temple as something yet to occur in 11-2. He argues that the seven kings in Revelation 17 are clearly Roman emperors in context, and that the reigning emperor must be Nero.

The extremely Palestinian character and conceptual provenance of the book also weighs in favour of an earlier date. He cites the shepherd of Hermas, Papias, the moratorium canon, and Clement of Alexandria as external evidence in support of a pre-AD 70 date. He questions the clarity and the strength of the evidence of the Irenaeus quotation cited by most scholars in favour of a later date.

Besides these considerations, we should also consider the importance of AD 70 and the destruction of Jerusalem as the dominant prophetic horizon of the rest of the New Testament. There is no conclusive argument on either side of this debate, however considering the reasonableness of a pre-AD 70 dating and the stronger internal and wider canonical considerations for an AD 70 horizon, I favour the earlier dating. Revelation is typically classed as apocalyptic literature in genre, although clearly other genres are present, such as the letters of the first three chapters.

Reading Revelation well depends heavily upon knowing what type of material we are reading. While its canonicity was disputed by some, one could argue that Revelation is the most canonical book of all. Scriptural allusions and echoes, though seldom direct citations, pervade the entire book.

Unless you are already profoundly familiar with the rest of the scripture, you probably shouldn't expect to be able to understand the book of Revelation. Many modern people like to read the book of Revelation as if it were a strange prophetic text by a Nostradamus-style figure, cryptically foretelling events in the far distant future in a sort of impressionistic form or in some sort of symbolic code. Their interpretative strategies are drawn from cultural notions about the sort of thing that prophecy is, rather than scripturally informed ones.

However, this is to approach Revelation without learning the lessons of how to read it from the rest of the scriptures, especially the Old Testament prophets, who employ symbols in a very different manner from this. John is told that the events foretold are shortly to come to pass. The events in question are not random big world events that are awaited, but events that will serve as the fulfilment of the covenant in judgement and salvation.

The book is deeply symbolic, depending upon the dense matrix of symbolism and typology that pervades the scripture. Without extensive familiarity with that, we will be seeing Apache helicopters and all sorts of other fanciful imaginings in its symbolism. As we go through the book, what such an approach means in practice will become more apparent.

Once again, the proof of this approach will be seen in the success of its application, in illuminating the book in ways that are not merely idiosyncratic to the imaginative interpreter, but which follow clearer and non-arbitrary principles provided to us by the rest of the scripture. Symbolism is not code. Rather, symbolism is apt for prophecy

because of the numerous connections that it invites, the way that it brings elements together.

While code tends to require a one-to-one correlation, symbolism fills out by relating things to other things and to deeper patterns and realities. There are four commonly recognised fundamental approaches to the book of Revelation. Again, these approaches are proposed syntheses of the teaching of the book in big pictures that are constantly related to and framing the details.

These approaches inescapably shape the way that people read the details, but the movement should also be going the other way, as the details inform the big picture. Ian Paul lists them as follows. First, Idealist.

The Idealist approach is concerned with perennial spiritual truths about the relationship between the church and the world and about God's plans in history. The second is the Futurist approach. This approach believes that the book is concerned with the events at the final end of history, an apocalypse often regarded as imminent in the days of the interpreter.

The third approach is the Historicist one. This believes that the book is concerned with events over the entire history of the church. Again, it is commonly the case that interpreters advocating this approach see themselves as much nearer to the conclusion of this history than to its beginning.

Finally, many people read the book as referring to contemporary historical events within the lifetime of John and his readers, or a Preterist reading. The book is about events that are shortly to occur, and there are various forms of this position. Some relate the book primarily to Christians in the Roman Empire suffering persecution, while others, like I do, relate it primarily to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

While one of these angles of approaches will almost invariably predominate, they need not be absolutely mutually exclusive, but can include dimensions of one or more of the others. Peter Lighthouse and Robert Mounce both make this point well. Divinely orchestrated history establishes fundamental theological and typological patterns, so reflecting upon events of the first century should teach us about patterns by which we can better understand events that are yet future.

Furthermore, scriptural prophecy often exhibits a telescoping character, referring to various levels of fulfilment simultaneously. While the immediate fulfilment of the prophecy is mostly, but not exclusively AD 70, later events can develop that fulfilment or raise it up to a new level. The first chapter can be neatly divided into verses 1-8 and 9-20, which can in turn be loosely mapped onto each other.

The book is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the one who is unveiled within it, and

he is also the one who is doing the unveiling. The revelation is not about random future events.

It is about Christ. A good reading of the book should always take this as its starting point. It is an important key to the whole.

And there is a movement of this revelation. It starts off with God, moves to Jesus Christ, to the angel, and then the servant John, who then delivers it to the church. The revelation is signified or symbolised by the sent angel.

The angel here is literally the messenger. Knowing that the term simply means messenger, we need not presume that angel requires that the figure in question be some specific type of heavenly being. Peter Lighthouse argues that the figure in view is the spirit as the messenger of the sun.

The revelation is given by the father, shown by the son, and signified through the spirit. It is a Trinitarian pattern. And as it is signified, the book needs to be read as symbol.

We must read it in terms of patterns of prophecy and apocalypse that can be found within the Old Testament already. The revelation concerns things that must soon take place. These are events on the near horizon, not in the very far distant future.

This is immediately relevant to the addressees. It's not some event over 2,000 years away from them in the future. John is a witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

And he sees this vision. Just as the Gospel of John begins with a witness named John, who has to bear witness to the light, here we have another John who bears witness to the risen Christ, the one who is dazzling in his splendour. The prophecy is designed for public reading and hearing in the church, and those who do so are blessed.

Its contents must be kept. It is a spur to practical faithfulness, obedience, and endurance for its hearers. It's not just some mysterious prophecy to be speculated about.

It is written for a specific body of people, to prepare them for faithfulness in tribulation. It's addressed to the church. It's a word for their situation.

It's relevant to them, because the time is near. The crises that the book speaks of are on the very near horizon. More particularly, it is addressed to the seven churches in Asia.

These are seven specific bodies of Christians in the province of Asia, in the west of modern Turkey. The Apostle John has seemingly been based in Ephesus for a while. The churches that he writes to are neither in Palestine nor in Rome, but they're caught between these two worlds.

It's written to Christians with a strong Jewish background. And he starts with a Trinitarian

benediction, him who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Father, the seven spirits before his throne, the Spirit, and Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the Son. There are Trinitarian benedictions in Paul, and here we see one in John.

These are early evidence of the fundamentally Trinitarian form of Christians' faith. The title him who is, and who was, and who is to come, is an unpacking the meaning of the revelation of the divine name, Yahweh, I am who I am, the name declared to Moses in Exodus chapter 3. It also draws upon language in places such as Isaiah chapter 41 verse 4, I the Lord, the first and with the last, I am he. The seven spirits are connected with the Spirit.

The lampstand with seven lamps as the eyes of the Lord in Zechariah 4 might come to mind. In Isaiah chapter 11 verse 2, there is a sevenfold reference to the Spirit. This is connected also with the imagery of flame.

The principles for the union and separation of flame differ from those of typical solid objects. The one fire of the Spirit can be sevenfold on the lampstand, much as the divided tongues of Pentecost, which first lit the church as a lampstand, are the one flame of the Spirit that has descended upon her. We have three titles of Christ given here, faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, ruler of kings, and three actions also, he loves us, freed us, and made us a kingdom and priests.

Christ's redemptive death has liberated the church. There are allusions here to Exodus chapter 19 verses 5 to 6, now therefore if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Verse 7 is, as Lighthart suggests, the theme verse of the book.

Christ is coming with the clouds, he will be seen even by those who crucified him, and the tribes of the land will mourn. The context is especially one of first century Palestine, of the Jews and their tribes in the land, where people responsible for the crucifixion of Christ were still alive. It's reminiscent of Jesus' statement to the high priest at his trial in Matthew chapter 26 verse 64, but I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of power and coming on the clouds of heaven.

This draws upon two key prophecies, the first is in Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 to 14. I saw in the night visions and behold with the clouds of heaven there came one like a Son of Man and he came to the ancient days was presented before him and to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples nations and languages should serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed.

The ascension of the Son of Man to reign and the ascension of the saints in him and his triumph over the beasts, especially the fourth beast, is a Daniel background for the book

of Revelation. This prophecy will be fulfilled in the near future. Also in the background is Zechariah chapter 12 verse 10.

And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and pleas for mercy so that when they look on me on him whom they have pierced they shall mourn for him as one mourns for an only child and weep bitterly over him as one weeps over a firstborn. Jesus is the pierced shepherd of the book of Zechariah. He's the one who's lifted up in his crucifixion and in his resurrection and ascension to God's right hand.

People will see Christ lifted up from the earth on the cross and later the evidence that he is established in heaven and coming on the clouds as the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel. Christ is the firstborn son who dies for the people and lifted up he is the one to look to for life. He's the one who gathers all peoples to himself.

The mourning here is likely twofold. For some it is the mourning of repentance while for others it is the mourning of those who suffer judgment. The same term is later used in Revelation chapter 18 verse 9 of the kings of the earth mourning the downfall of Babylon the great.

This is another fulfillment of Zechariah chapter 12. John addresses the seven churches of Asia. He introduces himself as their brother and partner.

He's someone suffering in the same tribulations as they are. He also uses a similar form of introduction as Daniel does on several occasions in his prophecies. He has been exiled to Patmos on account of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.

It should be noted that this expression the word of God and the testimony of Jesus parallels verse 2 as verses 9 to 20 can be loosely mapped onto verses 1 to 8. The testimony of Jesus might be either the testimony that Jesus himself bore or the testimony about Jesus or perhaps the ambiguity is intentional. It may be both. John is in the spirit on the Lord's day.

What is the Lord's day here? It might perhaps be a reference to the day of the gathering of the The day of the Lord in the Old Testament prophets is the great day of judgment and salvation. Perhaps this is also an early reference to Sunday as the day when the people of God gathered. The day of the Lord, the day of Christ, the day of his resurrection.

John is in the spirit. He experiences a vision. He is moved by the spirit and he moves in the spirit.

He hears a voice like a trumpet and he turns. This is similar to the trumpet at Sinai associated with the theophany there. It's also similar to Ezekiel chapter 3 verse 12.

Then the spirit lifted me up and I heard behind me the voice of a great earthquake. There are a great many allusions to the book of Ezekiel and Daniel in the book of Revelation. This is a sort of prophetic commissioning, a sort of thing that we find in various places in the Old Testament.

John is instructed to record the vision in a book to be sent to the seven churches of Asia. He turns to see the voice. It's an embodied voice and he then goes on to describe the one who speaks.

There are seven golden lampstands. These represent the churches lit with the spirit on the day of Pentecost. It's a vision of the holy place with a glorious Christ, the one like the son of man, in its midst as priest and brigam.

He's in the midst of the lampstands and he's the one who tends and guards them. He gives them the oil of the spirit they require. This is also reminiscent of the lampstand vision in Zechariah chapter 4. There's a description of the whole body of this son of man.

The description here should remind us of the wasifs of the song of songs and also the visions that we see in places like Daniel 10 and Ezekiel chapter 1. In the song of songs the lovers describe each other from head to toe and Jesus is described in the same way here. He is the lover, he is the brigam and we are moving towards the wedding. He is dressed in glorious garments like a priest.

He has dazzlingly white hair like the ancient of days described in Daniel's vision in Daniel chapter 7 verse 9. His eyes are like a flame of fire like the throne of the ancient of days although likely also connected to the seven eyes of the spirit mentioned in Revelation chapter 5 verse 6 and Zechariah chapter 3 verse 9. Christ's eyes are the eyes of judgment. They don't merely receive things but they go out throughout the earth with their searching and consuming gaze. The description here should remind the hearer of Daniel chapter 10 verses 5 to 6 and Daniel's vision of Michael which I believe is a reference to Christ.

I lifted up my eyes and looked and behold a man clothed in linen with a belt of fine gold from Euphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude. This is just one example of literally hundreds of occasions when the book of Revelation would be picking up imagery from the books of Ezekiel or Daniel or some other part of the Old Testament.

If you do not know these Old Testament texts you will struggle to understand what John is referring to in his prophecy. Daniel's response to this vision is very similar to John's. Both Daniel and John fall down as dead or in deep sleep.

The metallic elements here should also remind us of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar and

the statue of various metals in Daniel chapter 2. As Lighthouse observes Christ is also like an empire. The statue represented all these different kingdoms and Christ is the one who gathers peoples and nations in himself. He is going to form a new kingdom, a kingdom that is represented in this glorious body, a body that represents not just Christ as an individual but Christ as the church.

The face of Christ shines like the sun. The sun is described as like a bridegroom leaving his chamber in Psalm 19 and Christ here is the bridegroom who has the brilliance of the sun. He is the true light that came into the world as we see in John chapter 1. Out of his mouth comes a two-edged sword, the sword of the word that judges and divides.

He holds in his hand seven stars, perhaps a reference to the seven of the sun, moon and the five visible planets of Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus and Saturn, traditionally also associated with the days of the week. Coming face to face with the glory of God, the prophet becomes as dead as in the story of Isaiah or Daniel for instance. Faced with the glory and the holiness of God, the prophet realizes his mortality and his sinfulness.

Christ however lifts John up and declares himself. He is the I am. He is the first and the last.

He is the one who cannot be bounded by time. He bounds time himself. As the risen one, he is the one who has conquered death and taken its keys.

He is the living one, the one over whom death has no power. John is instructed to record what he has seen, both those things that currently are, the things that are not seen in the heavens above and also those things that have not yet taken place. The seven stars are the angels and the seven lampstands the churches.

The angels might refer to human messengers, sent like the spirit of God. The letters of the next two chapters are addressed to the angels, who are described in a way that suggests that they are not perfect beings but rather are beings who are flawed and sinful. It is quite likely that they are the pastors of the churches in question.

A question to consider, why is lampstand imagery appropriate for the church? From what other parts of scripture can we develop lampstand imagery? In Revelation chapter 2 we begin the letters to the seven churches. When we are reading a book as complicated as the book of Revelation, it is important to pay attention to the structure. As in the process of assembling a jigsaw puzzle, paying attention to the shape of all of the pieces is extremely important.

As we do so, we will be able to put things together in ways that we would not otherwise. And there is great structure to the book of Revelation, something that will be apparent in this particular section. When assembling a jigsaw puzzle, we also pay a lot of attention to the images on a piece.

And as we go through the book of Revelation, this will be extremely important. When reading the book, we will so often find it to be the case that one particular detail reminds us of something that we have read in the prophets in the Old Testament, or perhaps something in the Gospels, or maybe something later on in the book of Revelation. Recognising this helps us to put things in their proper place.

When we do not have this knowledge of scripture that we bring to the text, so many of its references will completely pass us by, and we will be in considerable danger of forcing things into places that they do not belong. The letters to the churches are addressed to the angels or the messengers of the churches. Some have seen these as the guardian angels of the churches, but it might be best to see them as the leaders of the churches, the pastors.

These figures are associated with the seven stars at the end of chapter 1, and the churches themselves are connected with the seven lampstands. To understand this sort of symbolism, we need to know the Old Testament pretty well. The Old Testament presents us with the lampstand as part of the furniture of the tabernacle.

The lampstand has seven branches. The lampstand is placed in the holy place. The lampstand is also like a tree in certain respects.

It has almond blossoms. It is connected with the almond tree. Exploring the symbolism of the lampstand a bit more deeply in the Old Testament, we can also see a connection with the high priest.

Aaron's rod produces almond blossoms, connecting him with the lampstand. It is also like a burning bush, a golden tree that is on fire without being consumed. Each of the letters written to the seven churches follows a similar pattern.

Ian Paul breaks down the pattern as follows. First, to the angel of the church in right. Second, thus says he who, and some reference to an element of Revelation chapter 1. Third, I know your some characteristics or actions of the church.

Fourth, but this I have against you. Fifth, command to repent or amend ways. Sixth, whoever has ears let them hear what the spirit says to the churches.

And finally, seventh, to those who conquer with the promise of a gift or reward. The letters move through different periods of history. This is something that James Jordan, Peter Lighthouse and David Chilton have all noted.

In chapter 2 verse 7, the tree of life is in the paradise of God in Eden. In chapter 2 verse 10, people are thrown into prison and tested before receiving a crown. Might remind us of the story of Joseph.

2 verse 14 and 17, reminders of Balaam and Balak and promise of hidden manna,

reference to the time in the wilderness. Chapter 2 verses 20 and 26, Jezebel and rule over the nations like the Davidic king and the kingdom period more generally. Chapter 3 verses 2 and 4, exile and remnant, soil garments of the high priest in the book of Zechariah.

Chapter 3 verses 7 and 12, restoration, Eliakim in Isaiah chapter 22 as an anticipation of Cyrus as the one who opens doors. In chapter 45 verse 1 of the book of Isaiah, a pillar in the rebuilt temple of God. And then finally in chapter 3 verse 16, it's a reference to the Israel of Jesus' day, to the Pharisees and others who are proud but fail to recognize their nakedness and blindness.

We should also note the way that the letters to the churches draw upon the imagery of the vision of Christ and the description of him in chapter 1. This is arranged in a broken chiasm with that chapter. The details included are as follows. First, walking among the lamps with stars in hand.

In the second letter, he's the first and the last, he's the living one. In the third, there's a sword in his mouth. In the fourth, his eyes are like fire and his feet like bronze.

In the fifth, seven spirits of God and seven stars. In the sixth, the key of David and the keys of death and Hades. And then seventh, amen and faithful witness.

The letters are loosely arranged chiastically. The first letter, the letter to Ephesus, there is a promise to eat the tree of life which is paralleled with the last letter to Laodicea, an invitation to eat with Christ. The second and the sixth are paralleled also.

Smyrna, the Jews are a synagogue of Satan and there's coming tribulation. And in Philadelphia, the Jews are a synagogue of Satan and there is tribulation coming soon. In Pergamum, the third, it is paralleled with the fifth of Sardis.

There's a white stone, a new name received and Jesus is coming to them soon. In Sardis, there's a white garment, a name in the Bible, and Jesus is coming soon. And then in the centre, you have Thyatira, Jezebel and the need to hold fast.

The first and the last churches are promised a single gift and all of the middle ones are offered a double gift. The gifts are as follows. First, Ephesus, eating from the tree of life.

Second, Smyrna, a crown of life and rescue from the second death. Pergamum, the third, hidden manor and white stone with a new name on it. Fourth, Thyatira, authority and a rod of iron and the morning star.

Fifth, Sardis, white garments and a name not to be erased from the book of life, confessed by Jesus. Sixth, Philadelphia, made a pillar in the temple and receiving the name of God and the new Jerusalem. And then seventh and finally, Laodicea, to sit with Jesus on his throne.

Peter Lighthouse suggests that these gifts can be arranged with the seven days of creation, especially as they are fleshed out and developed in the creation pattern structure of the tabernacle instructions in Exodus chapter 25 to 31. I'm less persuaded by some of the connections that Lighthouse draws here, but I suspect he is right in seeing some general association. Here are some of the associations that we could think about.

The first day, there's a focus on the tree of life, the lampstand, as in Exodus chapter 25. It's the light at the heart. Christ is the light bearer, the one with the seven stars in his hand.

On the second day, there's much weaker connections. Perhaps we should see the division between death and life as associated with the firmament. On the third day, there's the land divided from the sea and plants from the earth and that's associated with stones and manor.

Perhaps the contrast between the bronze altar and eating food sacrificed to idols. Again, this is fairly weak. On the fourth day, we have the creation of the heavenly lights in Genesis and oil for the lamp in the tabernacle in Exodus.

The son of God is a ruler with fiery eyes who promises rule and the morning star and this fits rather well. The fifth day is associated with fish and in Exodus with the priest's garments. Here, attention is given to the garments of the Sardis church.

Again, this might be a neat fit. The sixth day is associated with the formation of humanity and the consecration of the priests who are invested with garments declaring them to be holy to the Lord, crowned and placed in the tabernacle. This fits rather neatly with the Philadelphia letter, especially in chapter 3 verses 11 to 12.

Then finally, on the seventh day, there is rest and the Sabbath. It's the promise of sitting in rest with Christ on his throne and eating with Christ and the wedding feast. So much of the book of Revelation depends upon recognizing these deeper patterns and structures.

Sometimes they're very weak and tentative and other times they bear a lot more weight. As we go through the book, we'll see the significance of the number seven in the structure and the details of the book. It is not accidental that John is writing to seven churches.

There are seven lampstands, there are seven stars, there are seven seals, there are seven trumpets, there are seven bowls, there are seven of a great many things in the book of Revelation. This should inspire us to look deeper to try and see patterns that we might have missed. The letters anticipate the themes of the rest of the book of Revelation.

Perhaps the rest of the book of Revelation is supposed to be read as a letter to an eighth

church. David Chilton and James Jordan and Peter Lighthouse have all pointed this out. Jordan writes, for instance, moreover the seven letters anticipate revelation as a whole.

The enemy of the seven churches are the Nicolaitans, literally people conquerors, Judaizers, the false apostles pictured in Ephesus, chapter 2 verse 6. The Jews Judaizers of Smyrna take the main focus in chapters 6 to 12. The beast and false prophet, Balak and Balaam, literally people eater, are in chapter 13 and Pergamum. The harlot Jezebel, chapter 17, is in Theretara.

The judgment on Jerusalem, chapter 18, is threatened against Sardis. The conquering army of saints, chapter 19, is pictured in Philadelphia. The choice whether or not to enter the new Jerusalem is set before Laodicea, chapter 3 verse 20.

Austin Farrer has argued for several connections between the letters and the rest of the book, observing different literary parallels and contrasts. Lighthouse lists both the promises and the enemies highlighted in the letters and shows that they anticipate the rest of the book. First the promises, Ephesus, the tree of life, which is referred to in chapter 22 verse 2. Smyrna is promised escape from the second death, which is referred to in chapter 20 verse 6. Pergamum is promised the hidden manor, the stone and the name, which corresponds with invitation to supper and a name in chapter 19 verse 9 and 12.

A rod of iron is mentioned in the letter to Theretara. It is also mentioned in chapter 19 verse 15. Sardis are told that they will walk or ride with Christ in white.

In chapter 19 verse 14 we see him in that position. Philadelphia is promised that there will be a pillar in the new Jerusalem and the new Jerusalem and its pillars are declared to us in chapter 21 verse 2 and 9 to 10. Laodicea is told that they will sit on Jesus' throne with him and the saints will reign with Christ in chapter 22 verse 5. The letters and the rest of the book should not be separated from each other.

Second, the enemies or the threats can also be paralleled. Lighthouse doesn't see any threats or enemies corresponding to the first or last churches, Ephesus and Laodicea, but the other five have connections. Smyrna with the synagogue of Satan, the demon horde from the inverted temple in chapter 9 verses 1 to 11.

Pergamum with Satan, Balak and Balaam is connected with Satan and the two beasts or the beast and the false prophet in chapter 12 and 13. Theretara, Jezebel is associated with the harlot of Babylon in chapters 17 and 18. Sardis, the threat of lethargy with Jesus as she comes with chapter 16 verse 15.

And Philadelphia, the synagogue of Satan and the coming testing relates to the harvest of chapter 14 verses 14 to 20. One of the effects of recognizing all of this is that it will invite us to read the epistles to the seven churches as a sort of apocalypse in miniature

and the apocalypse that follows as if a longer letter to another city. It also invites us bring the rest of the letter into correspondence and dialogue with these letters to the seven churches to see in the larger body of the text some clues to reading these particular parts.

The first of the seven churches addressed is the church at Ephesus. The apostle Paul had ministered in the city of Ephesus for a number of years in Acts chapter 19 with the message of the gospel spreading from there throughout all Asia. On his return from his third missionary journey, Paul had met up with the Ephesian elders in Miletus.

In Acts chapter 20 he had told them about the danger of wolves arising among their number and that the sheep will be threatened. It seems from the letter to the church of Ephesus here that this had come to pass. The description of Christ here is as the one who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.

Whereas no such description is given in chapter 1, here Jesus is walking around. The lampstands could be compared to trees. They are associated with the holy place as well.

Jesus being described as walking among them might be like the Lord walking in the midst of the garden of Eden, the gardener tending the trees. Christ praises the church for three virtues and three actions which are possibly paralleled. They're praised for their work, their toil and their patient endurance.

Their works might be paralleled with the fact that they cannot bear with those who are evil, their toil with their testing of the false apostles and their patient endurance with enduring patiently and bearing up and not having grown weary. Nevertheless, Christ does have something against this church, against the church or more particularly against the angel of the church, most probably the pastor. He is charged with having abandoned his first love.

He must consider what he has fallen from. This is the first stage of repentance and then he must return to his first works. His first love and his first works should be connected together.

The love that has grown cold that he must return to is probably a love not just for Christ but also for the body. These two things naturally go together. The fact that a threat of removing the lampstand is given to the angel, seemingly dependent upon the angel's action, maybe highlights the danger of a bad guardian.

He's supposed to protect and to tend this lampstand and yet if he's failing to do so, the lampstand may be removed. This threat of removing the lampstand would leave that city in darkness. It would be the loss of the light within that particular place.

Ephesus is the one city of the seven that has given this warning. Christ is the priestly

custodian of the lamps and under him are the angels that he has sent as messengers that must represent his guardian care over these particular churches. They are praised for having hated the works of the Nicolaitans.

It's not clear who these people were. The etymology suggests people conquerors. Some have suggested that this is a play on a Jewish etymologisation of Balaam's name as the consumer of the people.

We do have a possible clue in verses 14 to 15. They seem to have supported the eating of food sacrificed to idols and the practice of sexual immorality. They're compromising with the pagan society and pagan worship was very important in the city of Ephesus as we saw back in Acts chapter 19 with the riot there.

There will be a great many temptations to compromise and fortunately the guardian of this city has stood against that. Food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality are mentioned in a number of points in these letters. We see the importance of these issues for the early church in Acts chapter 15 as these are part of the requirements that are sent out by the Jerusalem council to the Gentiles that are converting to the gospel.

We also see it in 1 Corinthians as Paul writes on both of these matters to the Corinthian church. The formula he who has an ear let him hear what the spirit says to the churches is similar to statements that we find in the Old Testament and also in the teaching of Jesus. This requires some spiritual insight.

To understand what is being said here you need some sort of spiritual insight and scriptural literacy. The promise for those who overcome is that they will be able to eat of the tree of life, something that we see later on in the book. This is associated with the garden of Eden.

In the book of Genesis those who eat of the tree of life live forever. The second letter is to the church in Smyrna. It's structured as a chiasm.

Here Christ is introduced to us as the first and the last, the one who died and came to life. This is language drawn from the prophet Isaiah. The fact that it is language used in the context of the vindication of Israel maybe gives it a particular resonance in this context.

He is the first of creation. He is the first of the new creation. He is the one who is the first born from the dead.

All of these themes are explored in more detail in the great poem in Colossians chapter 1. He is the last. He is the one who is the climax, the one who sums up and perfects everything in himself. He is the goal and the end of everything.

He is the alpha and the omega. He speaks of the tribulation that they have suffered.

They have suffered slander from those who say that they are Jews and are not.

It is likely that the Christians in Smyrna were suffering persecution from ethnic Jews of the diaspora. They were accusing them of not being Jews so that they would lose their privileges and protections as those who practiced a form of Judaism. Through this slander and through the accusations that they levelled against them, the Jews would get them persecuted by the Romans.

The Romans would cast some of them into prison and they would be tested and tried there. But the Jews that are accusing them are not true Jews. They are a synagogue of Satan.

They are children of the evil one, as Jesus teaches the Jews who accuse him in the Gospel of John. Gregory Beals suggests that the reference to ten days of tribulation might refer back to the story of Daniel and the testing of Daniel and his friends for ten days concerning the food that they ate. They would not eat food that had association with idols and so they only ate vegetables.

As a result, they were blessed by the Lord and these people will be tested for seven days too. As noted earlier, this testing in prison also brings back memories of the story of Joseph. If they are faithful to death, they will get the crown of life.

There's an irony here. As they lose their lives, they will gain them. And as we see in the next verse, this is an act of overcoming, even as they are being killed.

The person who overcomes in this way as a faithful martyr will not be hurt by the second death. He's escaped death by dying faithfully. The angel of the church in Pergamum is the third to receive a letter.

He is addressed by the one who has the sharp two-edged sword. This is the one whose word judges and divides. Christ describes the Christians in Pergamum as dwelling where Satan's throne is.

This might be a reference to the great throne of Zeus or his altar that was shaped like a throne on the conical hill that was behind Pergamum, which contained a great many temples and other places for deities. Such a center of pagan worship was a site of demonic and satanic authority. While false teachers accusing the eating of food sacrificed to idols thought it was nothing, it was really consorting with demons and with Satan himself.

The church is praised for holding fast to the name of Christ, not denying the faith under trial. We are told here of Antipas, the Lord's faithful witness. The language of faithful witness is the way that Christ himself is described in the previous chapter.

Here is a servant who is like his master. He was faithful to death, but also a model of the

sort of persecution that the other Christians in Pergamum might face. However, despite its resilience against external threat and trial, there are internal problems in the church in Pergamum.

They have compromised in a number of different ways. There are some within the church that have not been rooted out who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel. In the story of the book of Numbers, King Balak tries to get Balaam to curse the people of Israel.

Balaam, a mercenary prophet, fails to do so and he is stopped by the angel of the Lord bearing a sword on the way. His donkey will not move forward. Later on, however, rather than directly cursing Israel, he compromises Israel by getting them to have sexual relations with the daughters of Moab, who then invited them to celebrate sacrifices with them.

The connection with sexual immorality and sacrifice is then very important for understanding the story of Balaam. It's also important for understanding this. Sexual infidelity is connected with spiritual infidelity.

The people of Israel were warned both about intermarriage with pagans because it would lead them to sacrificing their gods and warned against sacrificing their gods because it would lead to intermarriage and assimilation to the pagan nations. Here there is a triad, Satan, Balak and Balaam, which corresponds with the dragon, the beast and the false prophet. That archetypal triad will be seen later on in chapters 12 and 13.

The Nicolaitans are another group that are a problem within the city of Pergamum. If they do not repent soon, Christ will come to them and he will war against them with the sword. This warning connects with the description of Christ at the beginning of the letter as the one who has the sharp two-edged sword in his mouth. It is also yet another example of the way in which these are mini apocalypses.

Christ is coming soon on this grander scale to destroy the city of Babylon and to establish his bride. He's also coming to these specific churches to act against them, to judge them. The one who overcomes is promised some of the hidden manna that might be connected with the manna that's hidden in the Ark of the Covenant.

This, along with other details of this particular letter, is associated with the wilderness period of Israel's life. Along with the hidden manna is promised a white stone, or more literally, a dazzling stone. Many suggestions have been put forward for what this might be.

Some have connected the white stone with the Urim and the Thummim, suggesting that they are a white and a black stone. Others that the stone is one that is used for declaring innocence. Perhaps there is a connection with the stone mentioned in the book of

Zechariah chapter 3 verse 9. For behold on the stone that I have set before Joshua, on a single stone with seven eyes, I will engrave its inscription, declares the Lord of hosts, and I will remove the iniquity of this land in a single day.

As already noted, the elements of the letters to the churches anticipate the rest of the book. Could this help us to figure out the identity of this white stone? As I've already mentioned, Lightheart argues that the enemies of the letter to Pergamum relate to the dragon Satan, the beast Balak, and the land beast or false prophet Balaam in chapters 12 and 13. Are there clues here? The woman pursued by the dragon is nourished in the wilderness, as Israel was nourished by the manna.

The beast causes people to be marked on their right hands and foreheads with his mark. This is an inversion of God's marking out of his people on their foreheads. Is there an association with the two gifts of the church at Pergamum here? If there is, then the white stone might be designed to be worn on the forehead also, as we see the servants of God sealed on their foreheads in chapter 7 verse 3. We might also consider the onyx stones with the names of the tribes of Israel on the shoulders of the high priests, Ephod.

In Exodus chapter 28 verses 9 to 12, he was to bear these into God's presence as a memorial. However, there is another possibility that the stone is a brilliant, shining, or dazzling stone, not just a white one, and is associated with the golden stone on the high priest's forehead, something suggested by Beal. This might not be the most initial probable reading of the white stone, but the argument for it can be bolstered in a number of different ways.

It is a stone with a name written upon it. Again, we should note the parallels with the letter to Sardis, where the person is clothed in white and his name is confessed before God. In both cases, we will be seeing an emphasis upon the garments of the high priest.

The Balaam-Balak connection also suggests a connection with Phinehas, who overcame in Numbers chapter 25 and was given a covenant of peace and a perpetual high priesthood. The gifts or rewards mentioned in the letters to the churches also turn up later in the book in ways that might shed further light upon their meaning. In chapter 19 verse 12, Christ wears many diadems and has a name written which no one knows but himself.

Again, the association with the diadems suggests that the stone might be worn on the forehead. We should see the background in Isaiah chapter 62 verses 3 to 5, and also note the contrast with both the dragon and the harlot. What the connection between chapter 19 verse 12 and 2 verse 17 implies is a sort of context of marital intimacy between Christ, the bridegroom and his bride, with each believer enjoying a stone with a name upon it.

Each stone doesn't necessarily bear a unique name, they could all bear the name of the

Lord, but only truly be known by those who receive them. The name in chapter 19 verse 12 seems to be a divine name, but one only known by the one who bears it most intimately. The fact that both Christ and the one who overcomes bear this unknown name stresses both the marital intimacy that exists between Christ and his people, and underlines the priestly connotations.

A question to consider. Of these three churches, the church in Smyrna is the only one that is not rebuked in some manner. How, looking at the church in Smyrna as a positive example, and the churches in Ephesus and Pergamum as both positive and negative, do we learn what Christ desires from a faithful and true church? The fourth and the fifth messages to the churches are to Thyatira and Sardis, coming at the end of Revelation chapter 2 and the beginning of Revelation chapter 3. There is a repeated pattern for all of these messages.

First, the angel of the church in so-and-so right. Second, thus says he who some element of Revelation chapter 1. Third, I know your some characteristics or actions of the church. Fourth, but this I have against you.

Fifth, some command to repent and to amend their ways. Sixth, whoever has ears let them hear what the spirit says to the churches. And then finally, seventh, to those who conquer and some promise of gift or reward.

The messages to the churches both pick up elements of the opening vision of chapter 1 and anticipate later parts of the book. They are like miniature apocalypses, preparing us for the greater apocalypse that is addressed to a final city, the city of Jerusalem. There are structures of seven throughout the book, seven messages to the churches, seven seals, seven trumpets, seven bowls.

These are structures of creation, seven days of creation and structures of recreation. Is there any discernible order to the messages? There seems to be illusions within them that move us through different periods of redemptive history. Eden, Joseph, the manor, high priest garments, Balaam and Balak.

And having gone through these elements in the previous three letters, in Thyatira we arrive in the kingdom era with David and Jezebel. Sardis is the period of the exile and the remnant with the soil garments of the high priest. Beale notes that we can observe concentric patterns of faithfulness and unfaithfulness in the ordering of the messages.

The two outside messages, numbers one and seven, to Ephesus and Laodicea, are to churches in danger of losing their status as churches. The churches in positions two and six, Smyrna and Philadelphia, receive very positive messages, praising them for their faithfulness. The three central messages, Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis, positions three to five, receive messages that are a mixture of praise and rebuke.

Besides the ways in which the churches are ordered in literary and symbolic ways, there is a very practical ordering of them, in terms of the most direct journey that a person bearing the book of Revelation from Patmos would take to reach all of the cities of the churches to which the book is addressed. Such a messenger would begin with Ephesus, the nearest of the churches to Patmos, head north to Smyrna, then Pergamum, travel east inland to Thyatira, south to Sardis, then further east to Philadelphia, then southeast to Laodicea, the final city on the itinerary. Thyatira is the fourth church in the sequence.

There are elements of the vision of chapter one here at the very outset. The son of God with eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze. Christ here is like the figure in Daniel's vision by the river Tigris in Daniel chapter 10 verse 6. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

As usual, the interpretation of Revelation depends very heavily upon our knowing the rest of the scriptures, perhaps especially books like Daniel, Ezekiel, and Zechariah. If we do not know these exceedingly well and pay very close attention to the patterns and connections internal to the book itself, we will struggle to understand. Without such knowledge of the scriptures and attention to the text before us, we really won't know where to start when we hit the sort of complicated and obscure visionary passages that we encounter in the book of Revelation.

The meaning of these is not arbitrary or impressionistic, rather we generally find reliable keys to their interpretation within the scriptures themselves. When people have failed to read Revelation on its own scriptural terms, it can soon become a sort of Rorschach inkblot in which the reader will discern their own psychological projections and fancies. Deeply acquainting ourselves with scriptural symbolism will protect us from falling for this error.

The book of Revelation also reveals the immense power of scriptural symbolism, its profound coherence and intricacy. Symbolism, as we have already seen, is not code. When trying to decipher a code, we are typically looking for one-to-one correlations.

This is not the case with scriptural symbolism. The strength of scriptural symbolism is seen in its capacity to connect and unfold its reference, associating them with other elements, causing them to operate on different levels of meaning, adding various enriching countermelodies, ordering them within significant patterns and motifs, juxtaposing them with other things in illuminating relations of similarity and difference, and many other such things. Much of the meaning of scripture more generally is communicated on this level, but this is much more the case in a text like Revelation.

We should take skills of reading that we have practiced elsewhere in the scriptures to Revelation and take the skills that we learn or develop in reading Revelation back to the

rest of the scriptures. Jesus is the one who walks amidst the lampstands, like God walked in the midst of the Garden of Eden. He tends the lampstands like a gardener tends trees.

The angels or messengers of the churches seem to be responsible to tend the lampstands, which each bear the divided flame of the sevenfold spirit of Pentecost. The lampstands have seven branches and there are seven of them. Once again we see the importance of this specific number.

Here Jesus praises the angel of Thyatira for his works, expressed in four different ways, his love, his faith, his service, and his patient endurance. Indeed, in contrast to the angel of Ephesus, who had abandoned his first love, the angel of Thyatira's latter works have exceeded his first. However, the message to Thyatira has a very serious accusation against the angel, who has been far too tolerant and has allowed a woman, whom Christ calls Jezebel, to seduce his servants to sin.

The historical character of Jezebel in 1st and 2nd Kings is very important to understand if we're going to read this passage. The wife of King Ahab of Israel, she was famous for persecuting and killing the prophets. She seduced Ahab and Israel to idolatry, to the service of Baal.

She was a bloodthirsty woman who killed the servants of God. And later on we have another related woman called Athaliah, who leads the people of God to unfaithfulness again and also destroys the seed in 2nd Kings. Jehu's word to Joram in 2nd Kings chapter 9 verse 22 concerning Jezebel is important to consider here.

Jezebel here is spoken of in ways that connect with adultery and also with idolatry. She anticipates in the later chapters of the book of Revelation the whore of Babylon, the wicked, bloodthirsty, idolatrous and adulterous queen, who will suffer a gruesome end being consumed by beasts. That's what happened to the original Jezebel.

There is some pattern of that in this Jezebel and this will also be the fate of the character of the whore of Babylon, who is a third Jezebel. The angel is supposed to be a guardian of the bride. He's supposed to be a guardian of the people of God and defend them against such seduction.

Paul describes himself in this way in 2nd Corinthians chapter 11 verses 2 to 3. Jezebel's sin is here presented in sexualized terms. Idolatry and fornication have deep affinities. A good example of this being the story of Israel yoking itself to Baal of Peor in Numbers chapter 25.

Many have also connected this with the original Jezebel, who is both the idolatrous queen and the one who leads people astray by her wiles, the one who wields power through her wifely influence over her husband Ahab and the one who paints her face before Jehu puts her to death, perhaps hoping that seduction will save her from her fate.

This Jezebel fancies herself a prophetess and teaches people within the church. The character of Jezebel in the Old Testament is the wife of a failed guardian of the nation, Ahab.

Elsewhere in the New Testament there are limits placed upon women teaching and exercising authority over men in the church and upon their involvement in the judging of prophecy. The character of Jezebel invites us to reflect upon this a bit more. She seems to be someone who's exercising some sort of authority and teaching within the church.

There are clearly prophetesses who are presented in a positive way in scripture. We could think about Deborah, or we could think about Huldah, or we could think about the four daughters of Philip. However the figure of the prophetess has often been a dangerous one in church history, a figure whose supposed charismatic authority has been at the heart of a number of heretical movements such as the Montanists.

The prophetess could represent a sort of ecstatic and charismatic authority that was seen to override the authority of the appointed guardians of the church and the rule of orthodoxy. Perhaps something along that lines had occurred in Thyatira. The messenger of the church, the angel that's appointed to guard it, had failed somehow to adequately test and judge prophets both male and female and as a result this one particular prophetess was causing all sorts of mayhem within the church.

The angel of Thyatira has failed in his tolerance. We might here think of Deuteronomy chapter 13 where one of the virtues required of the children of Israel when faced with a false teacher, a false prophet who would lead them astray to serve other gods, is not to pity, to be willing to take firm and decisive action in judging that person and removing them entirely from the congregation, not showing any mercy on account of them being a family member or a close friend. This is one of the virtues that is especially important for guardians of the church.

The angel of the church in Thyatira is responsible to protect the congregation from wolves like this Jezebel character and if he does not do so he will have to be removed. The two sins in question here, sexual immorality and eating food sacrificed to idols, were both condemned in the Jerusalem Council. Jezebel's sin is presented as a sort of spiritual seduction involving actual encouragement to and excusing of fornication.

Her sin is associated with the bed, with physical and spiritual sins of adultery. In a punishment befitting the crime she will be cast onto a bed of sickness. Those who follow her teachings, described as those committing adultery with her, will be thrown into tribulation.

Unless they repent they will be killed with death. This intensification of the notion of death is something that might bring to mind the warning in Genesis chapter 2 connected with the forbidden fruit, dying you shall die. While the faithful minister teaches the deep

things of God, an expression used in places like 1 Corinthians chapter 2 verse 10, Jezebel by contrast teaches the deep things of Satan.

She is an adulterous minister of the servant, a serpentine form of Eve willfully tempting Adam with the fruit. The faithful in Thyatira don't have a further burden laid upon them, but the angel must remove Jezebel and her followers. As the woman in question is called Jezebel, the angel of Thyatira is being invited to take up the mantle of Elijah, Elisha and Jehu.

The one who overcomes here is promised an authority that's reminiscent of that of the Davidic king in Psalm 2 verses 7 to 9. I will tell of the decree. The Lord said to me, you are my son, today I have begotten you. Ask of me and I will make the nations your heritage and the ends of the earth your possession.

You shall break them with a rod of iron and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel. The faithful servant shares in the rule of his master. We might here recall the parable of the miners in Luke chapter 19 in which the faithful servants are rewarded with rule over cities, sharing in the authority of the nobleman who has gone away to receive a kingdom.

The faithful servant is also promised the morning star, which Christ himself is characterized as in Revelation chapter 22 verse 16. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify to you about these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.

In receiving the morning star, which is described as rising in the hearts of the faithful in 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 19, the faithful share in Christ's own authority. Once again, the imagery here, as we've been moving through the story of the scriptures, is associated with the era of the kingdom. It's positive imagery in contrast to the negative imagery of the figure of Jezebel.

Sardis is the fifth church. Christ is here described as the one with the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. Once again, this is drawing upon the vision of chapter 1. Peter Lighthouse writes concerning these details, Uniquely, chapter 3 verse 1 links seven stars with seven spirits, and that connection underlies the complex of symbols.

The angels are seven stars, which are also seven lamps on the lampstands of the churches. In heaven, the seven lamps are the seven spirits. Seven earthly stars are seven lamps.

Seven heavenly spirits are seven heavenly lamps. The heavenly seven is replicated in the church on earth. Earth is not, however, simply a mirror of heaven.

At the end of Revelation, heavenly lights descend to earth as the light of the lamb, which is also the light of the bride. Even at the beginning, the earthly stars or lamps shine

because they participate in the heavenly lamps of the The heavenly temple has lampstands burning with the spirit. The earthly temple of the church also has seven lights burning by the spirit.

Prosaically, the light of the spirit in heaven shines through the church's pastors and overseers. All this is in the right hand of Jesus. His hand is full of the spirit, and he holds the churches and their angels in his strong right hand in the power of that spirit.

The church in Sardis is not what they appear or they are presumed to be. Fittingly, given the introductory focus upon light bearing, the church fails by not being people of the light and by being awake. They seem alive, like people of the day, but they are really dead and asleep.

Their master Jesus died but is alive forevermore, but they are in something akin to the opposite position, seeming alive but in fact being dead. Christ is coming like a thief and they must be prepared. It's worth considering the use of the language here of the Olivet Discourse and how much the Olivet Discourse lies behind the book of Revelation.

The Gospel of John does not record the Olivet Discourse, but the book of Revelation could be considered John's Olivet Discourse. Luke chapter 12 verses 35 to 40 has many details in common with the statement given to the church in Sardis. Stay dressed for action and keep your lamps burning and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home from the wedding feast, so that they may open the door to him at once when he comes and knocks.

Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will dress himself for service and have them recline at table, and he will come and serve them. If he comes in the second watch or in the third and finds them awake, blessed are those servants.

But know this, that if the master of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Once again, the message to Sardis anticipates elements of the larger message of the book, as each of the messages to the seven churches is a refraction of the total message of the book.

We can see this in Revelation 16, verse 15. Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake, keeping his garments on, that he may not go about naked and be seen exposed.

We have three elements here that remind us of the message to the church in Sardis. The reference to coming like a thief, the reference to staying awake, and also the importance of the garments. Some at Sardis have been faithful, but others have soiled their garments.

We might consider the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew chapter 22 as a text with some affinities to this. The king inspects the guests that have been invited and finds one without a wedding garment, and he is judged by being cast out. There are various references to wedding garments and white robes later on in the book of Revelation, chapter 7, verses 13 to 14 for instance.

Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, Who are these clothed in white robes, and from where have they come? I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are those coming out of the great tribulation. They have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

We see it again in Revelation chapter 19, verses 7 to 8. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. It was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure, for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. In these texts we see two different aspects of the white garments.

On one level they represent the deeds of the people wearing them, but in another respect they are given to the wearers. They are also washed in the blood of the Lamb. They represent the deeds of the wearer, but the deeds of the wearer have been washed and cleansed.

There might also be a reference here back to Zechariah chapter 3, verses 1 to 7. Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the Lord, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the Lord said to Satan, The Lord rebuke you, O Satan! The Lord who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you. Is not this a brand plucked from the fire? Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments.

And the angel said to those who were standing before him, Remove the filthy garments from him. And to him he said, Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments. And I said, Let them put a clean turban on his head.

So they put a clean turban on his head, and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the Lord was standing by. And the angel of the Lord solemnly assured Joshua, Thus says the Lord of hosts, If you will walk in my ways and keep my charge, then you shall rule my house and have charge of my courts.

And I will give you the right of access among those who are standing here. Besides being clothed in white garments, the one who conquers is promised that his name will not be blotted out of the book of life. Although there is here a promise that the name will not be blotted out, it implies that names could be blotted out.

The book of life in question is quite likely a sort of historical document, a sort of

genealogical record of those who belong to the people of God. The final promise given to the one who overcomes is that Christ will confess his name before his father and also before the angels. Here we might think of Matthew chapter 10 verses 32 to 33.

So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my father who is in heaven. But whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my father who is in heaven. A question to consider, where else in scripture do we have a reference to someone being blotted out of God's book? Is there any way in which it might help us to understand what's being spoken of here? The final two of the messages to the seven churches come at the end of Revelation chapter 3, the messages to Philadelphia and Laodicea.

The messages to the churches in Revelation chapter 2 and 3 are ordered with the most positive messages in the second and the second last positions. The penultimate message here is to the angel of the church in Philadelphia. In Jesus' self-declaration at the beginning of each message, we typically see some element of the vision of the first chapter being taken up.

In the message to the angel of the church in Philadelphia, that element is less clear. However, in the vision of the first chapter, Jesus spoke of himself in the following way in verse 18, I died and behold I am alive forevermore and I have the keys of death and Hades. Here, Jesus again has a key, this time described as the key of David.

As we have been going through these messages, we have also observed that they roughly follow the pattern of redemptive history in their allusions. They begin with allusions to the garden of Eden, then to Joseph, then the Exodus and characters like Balaam and Balak, and then David and Jezebel and the Kingdom Era, then on to the exile and the remnant with death and soiled garments. Now in the church in Philadelphia, we are moving into the restoration era, with the establishment of a new Jerusalem and the references to the key of David and the open door.

The language of the key of David should draw our minds back to Isaiah chapter 22, where the Lord replaces Shebna, who has been an unfaithful steward, with Eliakim, the son of Hilkiyah, granting him administrative authority over Judah. The figure of Eliakim and the way that he has given administrative authority over the house of David, authority that is removed from his unfaithful predecessor, illuminates the nature of Christ's own authority. Isaiah chapter 22 verses 20 to 22 reads as follows.

Gregory Beale raises the possibility that there might be a polemic against the local synagogue here. He writes, As is so often the case in Revelation, the symbolism and allusion are deeply resonant. The attentive hearer, who knows the rest of the scripture well, will often discover remarkable theological insight within such echoes.

Beale notes the way that the language of the statement made to Eliakim crackles with

elusive significance. In the New Testament, references to the house of David tend to have messianic overtones. And in the context of Isaiah, the language used of Eliakim connects him with other key characters within the book.

The Lord calls him, My servant, language which, apart from being used once to refer to Isaiah himself and once to David, is exclusively used of the servant in the book. He is described as a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. He has the key placed on his shoulder.

In chapter 22 verse 23, we are told that he will become a throne of honor to his father's house. These turns of phrase might make us think of Isaiah chapter 9 verse 6 to 7. For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty Guard, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace, there will be no end.

On the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness, from this time forth and forevermore, the zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. Beals suggests that the intentionality of these allusions is made clearer by the way that verse 9 picks up elements of the servant passages. Isaiah chapter 43 verse 4, Because you are precious in my eyes and honored, and I love you, I give men in return for you, peoples in exchange for your life.

Chapter 45 verse 14, Thus says the Lord, the wealth of Egypt and the merchandise of Cush and the Sabeans, men of stature, shall come over to you and be yours. They shall follow you, they shall come over in chains and bow down to you. They will plead with you, saying, Surely God is in you, and there is no other, no God besides him.

Isaiah chapter 49 verse 23, Kings shall be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. With their faces to the ground they shall bow down to you and lick the dust of your feet. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Those who wait for me shall not be put to shame. We should also hear an allusion to the figure of Cyrus in this description of Christ, again picking up the language of Isaiah in chapter 45 verse 1, Thus says the Lord to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I have grasped, to subdue nations before him and to loose the belts of kings, to open doors before him that gates may not be closed. Cyrus opens the doors of the grave of exile, enabling the Jews to return to the land without hindrance.

Jesus knows the works of the Philadelphian church, a fact that is a source of comfort and assurance. They will be vindicated and rewarded for their faithfulness. The church in Philadelphia seems to face strong opposition from the unbelieving Jewish community in the city, which Jesus describes here as the synagogue of Satan.

In John chapter 8 verse 44, Jesus had described the unbelieving Jews as being of their

father the devil. Here they are described as a synagogue of Satan, the same language that is used of the unbelieving Jews in Smyrna in chapter 2 verse 9. I know your tribulation and your poverty, but you are rich, and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. The messages to the churches are concentrically or chiasmatically ordered, and the second message and the sixth message parallel each other, these expressions being key instances of that paralleling.

In both Smyrna and Philadelphia, Jesus denies the claim of the unbelieving Jews opposing the church of the city to be called Jews. It is important to remember that the church in this apostolic era was overwhelmingly Jewish, with its leaders and core members being overwhelmingly Jews. The church was a movement of Jewish origin and largely Jewish composition.

The chief persecutors of the church were also other Jews, who contested the church's claim that Christ was the one who bore and fulfilled Israel's true destiny. The division between Christians and unbelieving Jews was a division within Judaism that was playing out over these last few decades, and will continue to play out for a number of decades to come. All of this is hugely important to bear in mind if we are to understand why the fall of Jerusalem is so significant to churches in the province of Asia, many days' journey from Palestine to a first-century diaspora Jew in somewhere like Ephesus.

The fall of Jerusalem might be like the destruction of Mecca for a Muslim in Pakistan. While a diaspora Jew was not in direct danger of losing his life in the fall of Jerusalem, with the fall of Jerusalem such a person might understandably feel that the bottom had fallen out of their world, leaving them shell-shocked and disoriented. The entire world order that had been established by God at the heart of Israel had seemingly collapsed with the temple.

The temple had been perhaps one of the greatest causes of opposition to Christians. Christ himself had been condemned in part because of statements that he was reported as making concerning the temple. The same was true of Stephen.

The Jews sought to kill Paul because they accused him of defiling the temple. The early Christians declared that the temple would be destroyed and that God did not dwell in temples made with human hands. The destruction of the temple would be a powerful vindication of the Jewish Christians and a devastating blow to their adversaries.

Beyond this fact, the shock waves of the change in the world order were felt in various ways in many quarters beyond Palestine. The significant majority of the Jewish population lived outside of Palestine during this period, perhaps even as many as five million, but they would have looked to Palestine and Jerusalem for identity and religious meaning and a sense of orientation. The world order that had been established by God was one in which the great empires of the wider inhabited known world were also implicated.

Jesus foretells an hour of trial coming upon the whole oikumene, to try those who dwell upon the earth or the land. Perhaps the land or the earth here refers to Israel in particular. The whole world, the inhabited world of the Roman Empire, was about to get shaken up and Israel especially would be tried through this shaking up.

While Jerusalem was destroyed and is the focus of Revelation's prophetic horizon, the shaking up of this period affected everywhere in the Roman world. Rome underwent huge upheavals involving civil war and four emperors within a single year. At this point the Christian movement was predominantly a marginal Jewish one.

Christians and Jews were still worshipping together at this period in history too. In a few centuries time however, the church and Judaism had clearly parted ways. By the fourth century Christianity was the established religion of the Roman Empire and by the fifth Christians would outnumber Jews in Palestine.

This was a radical transformation of the world order and the book of Revelation presents some of the most decisive initial events by which God set the world on course for this. Jesus declared that he was coming soon. The coming in question need not be presumed to be a physical coming, rather it is a coming in judgment and deliverance.

Their Jewish opponents would be put to shame and the Philadelphians would be vindicated in their message. The Philadelphians are reassured in their struggle of faith and encouraged to hold fast. They will be rewarded and should be certain not to allow anyone to rob them of their crown, their enjoyment of a share in Jesus' victory.

The promise to the one who overcomes here is that they will be made into pillars in the temple of God. The people of God are like living stones being fashioned into a glorious house, a habitation for God by his spirit. The temple is built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ as the chief cornerstone.

In Revelation chapter 21 verse 14 we see the apostles as part of the architecture of the city of the New Jerusalem and the wall of the city had 12 foundations and on them were the 12 names of the 12 apostles of the Lamb. In the temple of Solomon there were two prominent pillars at the entrance to the temple, Jacob and Boaz. These pillars seem to represent the rulers of the people, in particular the king and the priest who were the guardians of the people.

In promising that the one who overcomes will be made a pillar, Jesus promises that those who faithfully endure will be established as prominent leaders and guardians of his people. They will never leave the house but will dwell there eternally. The one who overcomes will bear the name of God, the name of the New Jerusalem and Jesus' own name.

There seems to be a Trinitarian pattern here, the name of God is associated with the

Father, the name of the New Jerusalem is associated with the Holy Spirit in which the communion of the new city is formed and will descend from heaven and the name of Jesus of course is associated with the Son. The final church to receive a message is the church in the city of Peter Lighthouse suggests that this church in the historical sequence of allusions should be associated with the intertestamental history and the Israel to which Jesus comes. Jesus is introduced in this, the seventh message, as the Amen, the faithful and the true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

Once again this picks up language from the first chapter, in verse 5 for instance, where Jesus is described as the faithful witness. As the Amen, Jesus is the confirmation of all of God's speech, the guarantee of all of his promises. We might think here of 2 Corinthians 1, verse 20, for all the promises of God find their yes in him, that is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.

Jesus is also described as the beginning of God's creation. Once again this is the truth that Paul unpacks in his epistles, now in Colossians 1, verses 15-20, where he elaborates on four different senses of the opening words of the scriptures, in the beginning. This should help us better to grasp something of the richness of the claim that is being made here.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, for by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. All things were created through him and for him, and he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Indeed we might even see the threefold description of Jesus here as a presentation of him as the comprehensive word of God, the one who is and the one who was and the one who is to come.

He is the Amen, the final word that confirms everything that goes beforehand. He is the beginning of God's creation, the first word from which everything arises and in which everything coheres. He is the faithful and the true witness, every word in between.

The message for the church of Laodicea is however a sobering one. They stand in critical danger. Jesus judges them as lukewarm, neither hot nor cold.

Craig Kester challenges the common assumption that there is a reference here to the inadequate waters of the city of Laodicea. Rather, he argues, this is a reference to poor hospitality, to lukewarm wine that has neither been warmed or chilled, which would make it palatable. The wine that the church and its angel offer to Christ is a dishonouring

of him, an indication of their lack of true respect for him.

The angel faces the danger of being spat out of Jesus' mouth, which would put the entire church in great danger too. The church however is self-satisfied in a supposed self-sufficiency. They consider themselves to be rich, to have prospered, to be in need of nothing, when they are in fact wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.

This is not the first time that one of the messengers has declared that a church is not everything that it seems to be. Jesus challenged Sardis along similar lines, claiming that while they had the reputation of being alive, they were in fact dead. Jesus counsels the Laodiceans to buy refined gold from him, white garments and soles for their eyes, to address their poverty, their nakedness and their blindness.

Obtaining these items is a matter of great urgency, if the church is truly to be prepared for the advent of Christ. We might think here of the parable that Jesus gives in the gospels, of the wise and the foolish virgins, the need to prepare for the coming of the bridegroom. The fact that they have to buy these items and yet they are poor, suggests that there is something more complicated going on here.

We might think of Isaiah chapter 55 verses 1-3, Peter Lighthouse raises the possibility that there is a connection between the different items that they are told to obtain and different things within the temple. The solve is to anoint their eyes, but Lighthouse suggests that in the background here is the idea of the eye as the lamp of the body. Christ's eyes are burning, as we see in the vision earlier on, and the eyes of the Laodiceans need to be lit like the lampstand.

The oil for their eyes is like the oil for the lamps. The white garments are connected with the garments of the high priest, and the gold also connects with the treasures of the holy place and the most holy place. I've already mentioned the idea of preparing for the advent of the bridegroom, and at the end of the message to the Laodiceans we see a further possible allusion to the coming of the bridegroom.

The bridegroom is standing at the door and knocking. Here we should recall the song of Solomon chapter 5 verses 2-6. I slept, but my heart was awake, a sound.

My beloved is knocking. Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one, for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night. I had put off my garment.

How could I put it on? I had bathed my feet. How could I soil them? My beloved put his hand to the latch, and my heart was thrilled within me. I rose to open to my beloved, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with liquid myrrh, on the handles of the bolt.

I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but found him not.

I called him, but he gave no answer. Themes from the song of Solomon subtly pervade the book of Revelation. Christ is the bridegroom, and the church is the bride.

The whole book moves towards a wedding feast, a dining with the bridegroom. And here Christ wants to come in to eat with his people. This is an anticipation, an anticipation that might be Eucharistic in character.

Christ eats with his bride and tests his bride at the table. To the one who conquers, they will enjoy the privilege of sitting with Christ on his throne. Christ has conquered and sat down with his father and his bride will sit down beside him, the queen sitting alongside the king.

A question to consider what other details in the book to this point might recall the book of Song of Solomon? Where else in the New Testament do we see these themes being developed? Key phases in the progression of the book of Revelation are marked off with the expression in the spirit, much as the related expression in the hand of the Lord was upon me works in the book of Ezekiel. In Revelation chapter 4 verse 2, we encounter the second of these expressions. Chapter 4 opens up the main body of the book after the messages to the seven churches.

The next few chapters show a sort of heavenly worship service in the divine throne room. The worship in heaven drives the events on earth. It will initiate the sequence with the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls.

There are connections here with what has preceded. There's the voice like the trumpet, there's the open door, there's enthroned figures in white garments wearing crowns. All of this picks up imagery of the first three chapters.

The heavens are opened at the very beginning here. Heaven is God's dwelling place, it's the realm of his throne, and the door is the opening or the entrance to the temple. It begins with the trumpet summons.

We have trumpets back in Numbers chapter 10 which played an important part in Israel's worship and the coordination of its camp. Earlier in chapter 1 there was a loud voice on the Lord's Day while John was in the spirit in verse 10 of that chapter. John is told that he will see what must take place.

We might perhaps hear an allusion here to Daniel chapter 2 verses 28 to 29. This is what must occur in the last days. This is not necessarily after the events referred to in chapters 1 to 3. The whole vision that John sees focuses upon the throne.

Everything is ordered around that throne. In scripture there are a number of different throne or divine council visions. We might perhaps think of the vision of Micaiah in 1 Kings chapter 22 or the vision of Isaiah in Isaiah chapter 6. In some cases these are commissioning scenes.

In these scenes people have a theophanic vision. They see the Lord enthroned and they are often set apart for their work. One especially significant example of this is in Exodus chapter 24 verses 9 to 10.

Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu and 70 of the elders of Israel went up and they saw the God of Israel that was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone like the very heaven for clearness. We tend to think in terms of God abstracted from his creation, of God reigning in his eternal transcendence. But yet the visions of God's reign in scripture tend to focus upon a throne room.

God reigns surrounded by a company. When God says let us do so and so he is probably addressing this company. He is not just speaking to himself.

In scripture God reigns from heaven and in the visions of the heavenly throne room there are many different figures involved. There are living creatures, there are seraphim and cherubim, there are the seven spirits before the throne, there is the lamb, there is the son of man, there's the ancient of days. All these different descriptions to describe a throne room from which God rules his creation.

The character of this throne room is important. It's a place in which creatures are present. It is a place to which we are supposed to be raised up.

It mediates between the eternal uncreated God who is transcendent above his creation and the creation within which he is present and over which he rules. It situates sovereignty within creation not just over and apart from creation. God rules his creation from within the creation.

Of several scriptural images of divine throne room visions there are two that particularly stand out which are important background for John's vision here. The visions in question are found in Ezekiel chapters 1 and 2 and in Daniel chapter 7. Ezekiel chapter 1 verse 1. In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the exiles by the Chibar Canal, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. And then in verses 4 to 10 of that chapter, as I looked, behold, a stormy wind came out of the north, and a great cloud with brightness around it, and fire flashing forth continually, and in the midst of the fire, as it were, gleaming metal.

And from the midst of it came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance. They had a human likeness, but each had four faces, and each of them had four wings.

Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the sole of a calf's foot, and they sparkled like burnished bronze. Under their wings, on their four sides, they had human hands, and the four had their faces and their wings thus. Their wings touched one another.

Each one of them went straight forward, without turning as they went. As for the likeness of their faces, each had a human face. The four had the face of a lion on the right side, the four had the face of an ox on the left side, and the four had the face of an eagle.

The vision of Ezekiel has a similar focus upon the throne as central to the vision. It also has a similar elusiveness in the description of the one who's upon it, giving the reader a sense that the occupant of the throne is too dazzling properly to describe. It's like gazing directly into the sun.

In Revelation, as Peter Lighthouse points out, there is literally a seating upon the throne. Ezekiel chapter 1 verses 25 to 28 describes the scene. And there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads.

When they stood still, they let down their wings. And above the expanse over their heads there was the likeness of a throne, in appearance like sapphire. And seated above the likeness of a throne was a likeness with a human appearance.

And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him, like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain. So was the appearance of the brightness all around.

Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking. In Revelation, as in Ezekiel, there is a bright rainbow of glory, presumably also symbolizing God's mercy, as in the covenant with Noah.

It surrounds the throne, which is also surrounded by fire. In Ezekiel 1.13 there are also flashes of lightning proceeding from the fire. In Revelation, the fire is associated with the seven spirits of God, which are like seven torches of fire.

Like the seven lampstands of chapter 1, these can be a sort of counterpart in heaven. In Ezekiel 1.22 there is also an expanse like crystal, which corresponds to the sea of glass like crystal, in Revelation 4.6. There is a further vision that gives a good background for this, and it's found in Daniel 7.9-14. As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool.

His throne was fiery flames, its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him. A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousands stood before him.

The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was

killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire.

As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season at a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him.

His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed. Greg Beale notes that there are extensive parallels with Revelation chapter 4 and 5 here. He lists them as follows.

First, there is the introductory vision phraseology. Second, a throne or thrones set in heaven. Third, God sitting on a throne.

Fourth, God's appearance on the throne. Fifth, fire before the throne. Sixth, heavenly servants surrounding the throne.

Seventh, books before the throne. Eighth, the books opened. Ninth, a divine or messianic figure approaching God's throne to receive authority to reign forever over a kingdom.

Tenth, the kingdom's scope, all peoples, nations, and tongues. Eleventh, the seer's emotional distress on account of the vision. Twelve, the seer's reception of heavenly counsel concerning the vision from one of the heavenly throne servants.

Thirteenth, the saints given divine authority to reign over a kingdom. And fourteenth, concluding mention of God's eternal reign. These are visions of a temple throne room, and as we look through it we'll see many different elements that are associated with the earthly temple.

However, they are not separated out into different rooms, they all are in the same place. The throne, for instance, should be related to the Ark of the Covenant and the mercy seat. The Lord is enthroned upon the cherubim, and the ark is the footstool of his throne.

The torches of the spirit might be compared to the lampstands. The jasper, carnelian, and emerald of verse 3 anticipate the many precious stones of the vision of the New Jerusalem at the end of the book. They also recall the imagery of further Old Testament visions, such as that of Ezekiel chapter 28, where the holy mountain and the garden of God are described as having stones of fire, with precious stones as the covering for the guardian cherub in verses 13 and 14.

The stones in Ezekiel chapter 28, as Daniel, Bloch, and others have observed, closely resemble the stones on the high priest's garment. More importantly, the figure has the appearance of jasper and carnelian, or sardis. These are the first and the last stones on the high priest's breastplate.

They're ordered according to the names of the tribes of Israel. The figure on the throne, then, is the divine origin, of whom Israel is a pale earthly reflection. The throne is surrounded by various figures, by elders and living creatures, 24 of the former and 4 of the latter, 28 in total.

What do they represent? Some have suggested that they represent 12 tribes and 12 apostles. Some connect them with 24 hours of the day. Lightharts suggest that they relate to the 24 courses of priests in the temple.

Like the priests and the Levites, they offer musical worship and offer incense. They are chief priests, dressed in white garments like priests, and crowned with golden crowns. They are likely heavenly angels, ministers of the old covenant, representing the people of Israel.

Before the book of Revelation is finished, other figures will have taken their place. With the four living creatures, we have 28, 4 times 7, representative figures. Perhaps there are four companies of elders, each associated with one of the living creatures, who are four-fold correspondence to the seven-fold spirit of God.

The throne room and its scenes here are similar to scenes of ancient throne rooms. This should not be presumed to be accidental. Earthly throne rooms are modelled after the heavenly throne room.

There are flashes of lightning, rumblings and thunder. This is reminiscent of Sinai, of course, but these also reappear at key points in the book, following the seals in chapter 8 verse 5, following the trumpets in chapter 11 verse 19, and following the bowls in chapter 16 verse 18. There are seven torches of fire, which are the seven spirits of God.

These are lights above, represented by lights below, corresponding with the lamp stands that we've seen in the previous chapters. The seven spirits of God are the one spirit of God, but seven-fold, just as flame can be divided into different tongues and then joined back together, so the spirit is one but can nonetheless be seven-fold. The crystal sea seems to relate to the firmament.

It's the boundary between heaven and earth, established on the second day of creation. This is described from below in Exodus chapter 24 and also in Ezekiel chapter 1, but here it is described from above. The sea is glass.

The waters are pacified in heaven, although they are unruly on earth. The living creatures are like the living creatures in Ezekiel chapter 1, although they're not accompanied by wheels, because this is not a movable throne in Revelation. Ezekiel's living creatures, or cherubim, each have four faces, whereas John's each have one of the faces of the four.

The living creatures are each situated on a particular side of the throne. The ordering

seems to be significant. There are various occasions in scripture where ordering according to points of the compass is stipulated.

We see this in the ordering of the camp of Israel in Numbers and in Ezekiel and then later in Revelation. The living creatures of Ezekiel are also ordered according to the compass. Lighthart suggests that there might be astral imagery at play in the heavenly throne room.

The throne corresponds to the sun. The seven torches correspond to the seven planets. The four living creatures to the principal zodiacal sign for each of the points of the compass.

They are full of eyes in front and behind. It would not be unreasonable to connect the eyes with stars. We've already seen burning eyes in previous chapters.

The 24 living creatures might also correspond to the deacons, the celestial deities. Isaiah has a throne vision in Isaiah chapter 6 verses 1-4. The living creatures are like the seraphim in having six wings and in their statement of God's holiness to each other.

The seraphim are quite literally burning ones who are like living lightning. The appearance of the living creatures in Ezekiel's vision in chapter 1 verse 14 is also described as being like flashes of lightning. The declaration holy holy holy is the Lord God Almighty who was and is and is to come adds to the antiphonal statement of Isaiah's seraphim the further title of the Lord who was and is and is to come and the threefold name Lord God Almighty.

The title who was and is and is to come draws our mind back to the name that God declares to Moses in Exodus chapter 3. The living creatures here initiate the movement of worship that the 24 elders will then take up praising God on account of his creation. The chapters that follow will all take their starting point from this vision of an ordered realm the place from which God reigns in glory and whose great order will be impressed upon the earth as God's will will one day be done on the earth as it is done in heaven. A question to consider why might it be significant that there are apparent parallels between the highest heavens where God dwells and the visible celestial heavens? In chapter 4 John was brought up to witness the worship of the heavenly temple now in chapter 5 the great events that will shake the entire world events that will play out of the chapters that follow start to be set in motion.

The chapter begins with a scroll and with a problem there is a scroll on the right not necessarily in the right hand of the one on the throne it's sealed with seven seals although a mighty angel asks who is worthy to open it no suitable candidate is found. The right hand is associated with authority and rule and deliverance the lack of anyone to open the scroll implies the lack of anyone suitable to be at the father's right hand. Peter Lighthart argues that we get some sense of the significance of the book by

considering the hymns that follow.

Receiving the book is connected with receiving power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. It's written on the front and on the back this might suggest that there's some sort of covenant document in exodus chapter 32 verses 15 to 16 this is the way that the tablets of the covenant are described. Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand tablets that were written on both sides on the front and on the back they were written the tablets were the work of God and the writing was the writing of God engraved on the tablets.

Perhaps we should see the sealed document as the fulfillment of this covenant. A similar description of a book is given to us in Ezekiel chapter 2 verse 10 and he spread it before me and it had writing on the front and on the back and there were written on it words of lamentation and mourning and woe. Elsewhere in Daniel chapter 7 we see another heavenly throne room scene with books that are opened.

As in Daniel chapter 7 this passage describes the advent of a figure to the heavenly throne room a figure who will receive immense authority and as we look at these two passages alongside each other we'll see a great many parallels. This passage we should assume is set before the ascension. Christ as the slain lamb is ascending into the heavenly throne room to take his place at the father's right hand.

The coming of the lion of the tribe of Judah is the coming of one to sit down at the right hand of the father. It's the Davidic son of God coming to take his place. The sealed book is most likely the book referred to in Daniel chapter 12 verse 4 but you Daniel shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end many shall run to and fro and knowledge shall increase and chapter 12 verse 9 he said go your way Daniel for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.

Now with the ascension of the son of man with the ascension of the lamb the lion of the tribe of Judah the time for the opening of the book and initiation of the last days has come to pass. The book being open then suggests that the time has come for the fulfillment of events foretold by the prophet Daniel and unsurprisingly in the next few chapters we will see several strong allusions to the prophecy of Daniel not least in the coming of the son of man on the clouds to the ancient days. The angel seeks a worthy figure to open the scroll later the living creatures the 24 elders and the entire angelic company will praise the lamb and hymns declaring his worthiness.

We should recall that the previous chapter ended with a statement of God's worthiness in verse 11 worthy are you our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power for you created all things and by your will they existed and were created. The figure suitable to open the scroll must demonstrate a worthiness that corresponds to God's own worthiness. There is a search for candidates in verse 3 in heaven earth and under the

earth and there is none to be found that the sea is not searched suggests that this is not a role that someone who is a gentile could perform it requires a Jew.

John's response on the lack of anyone suitable to open the scroll is to weep. He is a human participant in the scene in this action he expresses the lamentation the desire and the longing for God's kingdom to come and the deep yearning that there would be someone suitable to set it in motion. Without such a figure God's promised future would seem to be stillborn and so his lament is on account of a deep problem the lack of a figure who is worthy to usher in the age to come.

But yet he is instructed not to weep someone suitable has been found the lion of the tribe of Judah the root of David. The connection of the lion with Judah goes back to Genesis chapter 49 verses 9 to 10 and the blessing of Jacob upon the tribes. Judah is a lion's cub from the prey my son you have gone up he stooped down he crouched as a lion and as a lioness who dares rouse him.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler's staff from between his feet until tribute comes to him and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Lion imagery suggests might and power and dominion it associates Jesus with the patriarch Judah and presents the lamb as the full flowering and expression of the tribe of Judah's strength they're coming into full sovereignty. The title the root of David comes from Isaiah chapter 11 verse 1 there shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse and a branch from his root shall bear fruit.

And verse 10 in that day the root of David language connects Jesus with David but as one who exceeds him the root of David's sovereignty and rule might be the foundation of the reign and authority of David himself. We can hear recall Jesus' questioning of the Pharisees in Matthew chapter 22 verses 41 to 45. Now while the Pharisees were gathered together Jesus asked them a question saying what do you think about the Christ whose son is he? They said to him the son of David.

He said to them how is it then that David in the spirit calls him Lord saying the Lord said to my Lord sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet. If then David calls him Lord how is he his son? We have just been told of the lion of the tribe of Judah who has been conquered then but immediately after being introduced to this figure we don't see a lion but a lamb and what is more a sacrificial lamb who has been slain. This victory does not take the form that we might expect.

The jarring juxtaposition of lion and lamb imagery should startle the reader. The victory of this figure is through suffering his conquest is through death. Commentators debate it but in verse 6 the lamb might be presented as standing in the midst of the throne.

He has seven horns symbols of power and seven eyes here identified as the spirit of God. We have already seen seven torches of fire identified as the seven spirits of God in

chapter 4 verse 5. This might suggest that the lamb takes up the place of the throne and the seven spirits of God come to be associated with him and with his reign. This might be related to the vision of Zechariah chapter 3 and 4 we see in chapter 3 verse 9. The eyes now roam throughout the earth which might be a progression as Gregory Beale notes.

The spirit the seven eyes have been given to the sun and the spirit now works throughout all of the world. The eyes going out into the whole earth. We should consider the similarities between the lamb and the beast that appear later in the book.

The lamb has multiple eyes and horns and is also like a lion. We should note that the beast in Daniel chapter 7 verse 8 in the related scene has seven horns after three of his initial ten horns are plucked out. Another one of the beasts is like a lion.

The lamb approaching the one seated on the throne in verse 7 corresponds with the scene of Daniel chapter 7 verses 13 and 14. As he takes the scroll the four living creatures and 24 elders start to worship the lamb. They make music and offer incense like the priests in the temple.

The incense is connected with the prayers of the saints, presumably prayers that God's kingdom would come. The worship here is similar to that found at the end of chapter 4. That was on account of creation. This is on account of redemption.

The worship here connects the worthiness of the lamb with the fact that he was slain. His death was the means of conquest. By his death he ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.

And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God and they shall reign on the earth. This is taking up the language of Daniel chapter 7 verse 22 and 27. Judgment was given for the saints of the Most High and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom and all dominion shall serve and obey him. We also see language like tribe and language and people and nation in verse 14 of chapter 7 of Daniel.

Further Old Testament background is found in Exodus chapter 19 verses 5 and 6. Now therefore if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples for all the earth is mine and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The language of verses 9 to 10 is clearly alluding to that but it has changed. No longer is this a special people that set apart from all other peoples taken out of all the other peoples to be a treasured possession.

Now this kingly and priestly people has been taken from all tribes and tongues and

peoples and nations. This is no longer just Israel it is an international people that Christ is forming by his work. We start with the praise of the four living creatures and the 24 elders and in verse 11 it expands so much more.

The voices of the living creatures and the elders are joined by the voice of many angels myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands. John is here taking up the language of Daniel chapter 7 verse 10. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him a thousand thousands served him and ten thousand times ten thousands stood before him.

The court sat in and the books were opened. Here the worthiness of the lamb is to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. This language might allude to first chronicles chapter 29 verses 11 and 12.

Yours oh lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. Yours is the kingdom oh lord and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come from you and you rule over all.

In your hand are power and might and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. The worship of the lamb here shows just how high a Christology John has. The lamb here is receiving worship on a par to God himself in a book that clearly speaks elsewhere about not offering worship to anyone but God alone.

The chapter ends with the worship extending even further. Every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea now as are all joining in this song of worship and the worship now is addressed to the one on the throne and the lamb together. They are the joint object of the whole creation's praise.

A question to consider how might this chapter instruct us in reforming our own worship? Now that the lion of the tribe of Judah, the lamb has arrived and taken up his position at the right hand of God, the book can be opened and the prophecy concerning the events of the age to come put in motion. The lamb is the one who is worthy to open the book's seven seals from which the rest of the events of the book will unfold. The number seven is an important one in scripture more generally.

The scriptures begin with the seven days of creation and the repeated sevens of revelation are ushering in a new creation. There are the seven messages to the churches, seven seals, seven trumpets and seven bowls. Sevenfold patterns are found at various points in scripture.

Beyond Genesis chapter one, Genesis chapter two follows a modified seven-day pattern. The instructions for the tabernacle in Exodus follow a seven-day pattern. John chapters one and two have a seven-day pattern and it is possible that Jesus' signs in the gospel of

John also follow such a pattern.

The three sets of seven in the judgments and revelation, the seals, the trumpets and the bowls, have some possible points of more specific contact with the order of God's works on the seven days of creation. For the most part, the connections are less pronounced but occasionally some more obvious connection will stand out. We might see some relationships with the plagues of Egypt at certain points too.

Peter Lighthouse proposes the following connections. The first seal is the dazzling white horse which is like the light on the first day of creation. The second, the red horse that divides and separates, is like the day two firmament.

The third seal involves events concerning the grain and fruit trees which spring up on the third day. In the fourth seal, death and Hades are given authority over the earth like the sun, moon and stars on day four of creation. On the fifth seal, the saints below the altar are like the swarms created on day five.

They are also given white robes as the priest's garments were associated with day five of the creation pattern in the book of Exodus. The sixth seal is associated with doomed humanity as humanity was created on the sixth day of creation. The opening of the seventh seal leads to half an hour's silence in heaven and the prayers of the altar of incense, both things that could be connected with Sabbath.

Austin Farrow notes the parallel between the seven stars that were in the hand of Jesus in chapter 1 verse 16, corresponding with the angels of the seven churches as verse 20 of that chapter makes clear, and the seven seals in his hand now. The messages of chapters 2 and 3 were given as Jesus addressed the seven angels in his hand one by one. Now he will open the seven seals in his hand one by one.

Chapter 6 contains the opening of the first six of the seven seals, after which there is a pause before the seventh is opened. The first four of the seven seals involve the arrival of a rider upon a horse, announced by the voice of one of the four living. The horses likely find their background in the visions of Zachariah. In Zachariah chapter 1 verses 7 to 10 we read, Then I said, What are these, my Lord? The angel who talked with me said to me, I will show you what they are.

So the man who was standing among the myrtle trees answered, These are they whom the Lord has sent to patrol the earth. We see more about these in Zachariah chapter 6 verses 1 to 7. Then I answered and said to the angel who talked with me, What are these, my Lord? And the angel answered and said to me, These are going out to the four winds of heaven, after presenting themselves before the Lord of all the earth. The chariot with the black horses goes towards the north country, the white ones go after them, and the dappled ones go toward the south country.

When the strong horses came out, they were impatient, and they were afraid. So the angel was impatient to go and patrol the earth. And he said, Go, patrol the earth.

So they patrolled the earth. The horses are associated among other things with the four winds of heaven. The lamb has just gone up to the right hand of the enthronement, to the throne of God.

This might be seen as the event of the ascension. After the ascension, the seven spirits are sent out into all of the earth, and the events of the last days begin to play out. The events of chapter 6 present in the form of visionary and apocalyptic symbol what occurs after the ascension and through the events of Pentecost and the years that immediately follow.

God is shaking up the world. He is progressively unleashing the winds and fire of heaven upon it. The opening of the seals also fulfills events foretold in the Olivet Discourse and in Peter's Pentecost speech.

Matthew 24, verses 6-8 reads, And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place. But the end is not yet, for nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom.

And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pangs. The seals are the beginning of the birth pangs described here in the Olivet Discourse.

They are not the end itself, rather they are an unsettling of the old world order upon its foundations. Acts chapter 2, verses 17-20 has more along these lines. And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams.

Even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my spirit, and they shall prophesy, and I will show wonders in the heavens above, and signs on the earth below, blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day. Lighthouse stresses that the seals are not the actual prophecy that is coming to pass, rather they are preparatory for the fulfilment of the prophecy of the end.

The scroll or book can't be read until all of its seals have been opened. The judgments are written down, but they can't be put into effect until the seven seals have been opened and the seven trumpets have been blown. The opening of the first four seals exhibits a largely repeating pattern.

First, the lamb opens the seal. Second, John hears one of the four living creatures. Third, one of the four living creatures says, come.

Fourth, John looks and behold. And fifth, a horse comes with a rider upon it. There are seven seals, but these first four are very similar, so we have a pattern of four and three.

The horses and the horsemen are sent out by God. With the prophecy of Zachariah as background, the horsemen seem to be agents of God seated or perhaps even enthroned upon their horses. These are not demons.

We need to settle the identity of both the horses and the horsemen as we think through this. The advent of each horse and rider is heralded by one of the living creatures, each in succession, declaring, come. This should be seen as shorthand for the expression, come Lord Jesus.

It's the call for Christ to come in judgment and salvation. Lighthouse raises the possibility that the riders could be seen as four different responses to the calls of the living creatures to Jesus to come. Jesus, or the spirit of Christ, is the four horsemen.

Later in chapter 19, Jesus is presented as the rider on the white horse. And perhaps we can see allusions to elements of the other three horsemen's work in his description. Revelation chapter 19, verses 11 to 16.

Then I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse. The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself.

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is the Word of God. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.

He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. Perhaps we are to see the church itself in the horses.

The opening of the first seal, at the very beginning of the chapter, is heralded by a voice like thunder from one of the living creatures. This would seem to be the first living creature, which is the lion. The white horse that comes out, comes out as a conqueror.

He bears a bow and also a crown. If indeed this is Christ as described in Revelation chapter 19, the conquering may be the conquering of the gospel. Christ is King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and his word of his gospel is proving victorious wherever it goes in the world.

People are hearing and receiving it and rejecting the kingdom of Satan. The opening of the second seal brings conflict. It is announced by the second living creature, the ox, and

the horse that comes is bright red, red like fire and red like blood.

Christ is casting fire to earth in judgment, and blood in conflict and judgment will also follow his coming. The gospel brings a sword. It puts people against members of their own household.

This is part of the prophecy in Matthew chapter 24 in the Olivet Discourse. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another.

The opening of the third seal is heralded by the third living creature. Once again he calls, Come. He is calling for the advent of Christ.

This time the horse is black, perhaps associated with famine and death. The wheat and the barley are struck, but the oil and wine are not. Some, such as David Chilton, have looked for a literal fulfillment of this in the final days of Jerusalem.

While there was indeed severe famine, the reference here might not be to literal types of foods, but to different peoples. The oil and wine are associated with the new covenant. They connote rest, anointing, and reward.

The opening of the fourth seal leads to the coming of a fourth horse, the pale horse, a horse ridden by death himself with Hades in the wake. This horse is heralded by the fourth of the living creatures, the eagle. The correspondence of the living creatures as those who herald these different horses maybe suggests that there is some sort of way in which the horses are their counterparts.

The horses also seem to be associated with the four winds of heaven, much as the four living creatures are associated with the four points of the compass. With the opening of the fifth seal, the pattern changes. The opening of the seal is not announced by one of the living creatures.

Rather, we see the souls of those who have been slain for the word of God beneath the altar. The altar is associated with the earth. The altar is before the temple, it's not within the actual building itself.

The building represents the heaven, the courtyard represents the earth. The land is associated with the altar, and the labour is associated with the sea. Whereas in the opening of the first four seals, it was the living creatures that were saying come, here it is the saints who are saying Maranatha, calling for Christ to come in judgment and deliverance.

Their souls are beneath the altar because their souls are associated with the pouring out of their blood. The blood for purification offerings as we see in the book of Leviticus had

to be poured out at the base of the altar. There is a sacrificial movement in play here, but it is not yet completed.

Their calling for judgment and vengeance upon those who dwell upon the earth is a call for the sacrifice to be completed. They are given white robes that anticipate their victory, but they are also instructed to wait until the full measure of their fellow servants and their brothers are complete. The full numbers of the martyrs have not yet been reached.

Our mind should naturally turn here to Matthew chapter 23 verses 34-35. Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

The opening of the sixth seal is heralded by a great earthquake and the sun becoming black as sackcloth, the moon becoming like blood. Austen Farris suggests that we should pay attention to the colours here. We've had a white horse for victory, red horse for bloodshed, black horse for famine, and then a livid or green horse for pestilence.

And then the four horses and their colours are paralleled with elements of the next part of the seals. First there are white robes for victory, associated with the white horse for victory. Then there is an earthquake and the sun made black as sackcloth and the moon as blood.

Black and red like the second and third horses for famine and bloodshed. And finally there are seven new plagues which begin with a plague upon a third of the earth and upon the green grass, which would match with the green horse and the plagues upon a fourth of the earth. Cosmic symbolism of the lights of heaven being turned out, the heavens being rolled up like a scroll, and things falling from heaven should all be familiar to us from the Old Testament.

We also see such language in Jesus' teaching in the Olivet Discourse. Matthew 24, verse 29 for instance. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Similar language to this prophecy is used in Isaiah chapter 34, verse 3. All the hosts of heaven shall rot away and the skies roll up like a scroll. All their hosts shall fall as leaves fall from the vine, like leaves falling from the fig tree. The whole order of creation is being torn apart or unsettled here.

The ground is being unsettled through the earthquake, the sun is being made black, the

moon like blood, the stars falling from the heavens, and the sky being rolled up like a scroll. Mountains are being moved out of place and islands too. The whole of the cosmic order, which symbolises nations and rulers and authorities and powers, is being put out of joint as the seals are being opened in preparation for the finale that follows.

Everything is being shaken up. People try to flee but there is nowhere to hide. The wrath of the Lamb is coming upon the earth.

We ought to attend to the expression the wrath of the Lamb. We don't usually think about lambs having anger. But this is no ordinary lamb.

This lamb is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Like the beasts of the book of Daniel, he is a symbolic creature, a hybrid of many different elements. As the Lamb, it is perhaps his identity as the redemptive sacrifice that is most emphasised.

But that is not all that he is. He is also a kingly creature who will avenge his saints, a conqueror who will overcome those who oppose him. A question to consider.

In the previous chapter the Lamb ascended into the presence of the throne. But in this chapter we see that the saints are still at the base of the altar. They seem to need to follow the Lamb in his movement up into God's presence.

How might reflecting upon this help us to think better about the relationship between Christ and his body, his church? Six seals have already been opened. In chapter 7 of Revelation we are expecting the seventh to be opened right away. But it is not opened yet.

Before it can be opened the righteous have to be sealed. Sealing here is a response to the martyrs. The sealed persons will make up the complete number that is spoken of in chapter 6 verse 11.

Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. The chapter opens with four angels standing at the four corners. As they are standing at the four corners of the earth, the land of Israel in particular, this might perhaps be associated with the altar.

The altar, which represents the land, has one horn at each corner. They are holding back the four winds of the earth, which might remind us again of the four living creatures and the four horsemen of the preceding chapter. The winds of the spirit that shake up the land in judgment are prevented from taking their effect until the people have been sealed.

This is a Passover type event. The judgment upon the firstborn is coming. Israel is God's firstborn son, as we see in Exodus chapter 4, and God is marking his people out before

the destroying angels are set loose.

In verse 2 we see that the four angels are the ones that have been given power to harm the earth and the sea. These are the destroyers, the ones that are going to come and, as it were, kill the firstborn. Just as blood was put on the doorposts and on the lintel, the spared firstborn need to be marked out on their foreheads.

The forehead might be associated with the lintel. It might also be associated with the mark of the high priest, who had holy to the Lord on a special plate that was put upon his forehead. The hero of this passage might also recall Ezekiel chapter 9, another passage talking about judgment upon Jerusalem and the preparation of certain people within the city before that judgment fell.

In Ezekiel chapter 9 there are six men bringing judgment, perhaps corresponding to the six seals that have already been opened, and then a seventh man who seals people before the judgment falls. Then he cried in my ears with a loud voice, saying, Bring near the executioners of the city, each with his destroying weapon in his hand. And behold, six men came from the direction of the upper gate, which faces north, each with his weapon for slaughter in his hand.

And with them was a man clothed in linen, with a writing-case at his waist. And they went in and stood beside the bronze altar. Now the glory of the God of Israel had gone up from the cherub on which it rested to the threshold of the house.

And he called to the man clothed in linen, who had the writing-case at his waist. And the Lord said to him, Pass through the city, through Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations that are committed in it. And to the others he said in my hearing, Pass through the city after him and strike.

Your eyes shall not spare, and you shall show no pity. Kill old men outright, young men and maidens, little children and women, but touch no one on whom is the mark. And begin at my sanctuary.

So they began with the elders who were before the house. Then he said to them, Defile the house and fill the courts with the slain. Go out.

So they went out and struck in the city. And while they were striking, and I was left alone, I fell upon my face and cried, Ah, Lord God, will you destroy all the remnant of Israel in the outpouring of your wrath on Jerusalem? Then he said to me, The guilt of the house of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great. The land is full of blood, and the city full of injustice.

For they say, The Lord has forsaken the land, and the Lord does not see. As for me, my eye will not spare, nor will I have pity. I will bring their deeds upon their heads.

And behold the man clothed in linen, with the writing-case at his waist, brought back words, saying, I have done as you commanded me. In Revelation chapter 7 we're seeing the same pattern of events more or less playing out. Judgment is held back and restrained until the faithful remnant are marked out.

And then, at that point, the judgment can fall. In verses 4-8 we're given the list of those who are sealed. And there are a few things to notice about this list.

First, it is a perfected number. It's 12 x 12 x 10 x 10 x 10. This is a vision of a complete and perfected number of Israelites, with each tribe fully represented.

The omission of Ephraim and Dan, and the inclusion of Joseph and Levi, is perhaps surprising to many readers. Likewise, the ordering of the tribes might also surprise us. It exhibits some elements of order.

For instance, it begins with Judah, the leading tribe, and it ends with Benjamin, both the last born, and the other Judahite and royal tribe. Benjamin and Joseph are also next to each other, as the two sons of Rachel. But as we go through the rest of the list, it seems that there is no rhyme nor reason to it.

There are many different orderings of the tribes in scripture, according to different principles. Sometimes it's according to birth order, sometimes according to their mothers, as we see in Genesis 46. On occasion, such an order classes children of the handmaids together, sometimes separately from each other, associating them rather with one of the sisters, Leah or Rachel, to whom the handmaids belonged.

Sometimes the tribes are listed more according to their position in the land. In Numbers 2, the tribes are ordered around the camp. In Ezekiel 48, verses 30-35, the order is that of the gates of the city.

And here we should notice, Joseph is included as a tribe in his own right. Levi is also included. Ephraim and Manasseh are not mentioned.

These shall be the exits of the city. On the north side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Reuben, the gate of Judah, and the gate of Levi, the gates of the city being named after the tribes of Israel. On the east side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Joseph, the gate of Benjamin, and the gate of Dan.

On the south side, which is to be 4,500 cubits by measure, three gates, the gate of Simeon, the gate of Issachar, and the gate of Zebulun. On the west side, which is to be 4,500 cubits, three gates, the gate of Gad, the gate of Asher, and the gate of Naphtali. The circumference of the city shall be 18,000 cubits, and the name of the city from that time on shall be, The Lord is There.

Austin Farah identifies a crucial clue in the ordering of the gates in Revelation chapter

21, verses 12 to 13. It had a great high wall with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed. On the east, three gates, on the north, three gates, on the south, three gates, and on the west, three gates.

The list in chapter 7 is ordered not by compass directions, but by sides of the camp. It moves from the east to the north to the south to the west. In Ezekiel chapter 48, the senior tribes of Leah are to the north, the tribes of Rachel to the east, the junior tribes of Leah to the south, and the tribes of the handmaids to the west.

If we order the tribes as gates to the sides of the city, starting with the corner gates and working accordingly, we get four similar groupings. There's a senior and a junior group of Leah tribes, a group associated with the handmaids, and a group associated with Rachel. Working from the leading tribe, which is Judah who faces towards the east, oriented towards the rising of the sun, we get the following order, following clockwise.

Judah, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, Benjamin, Manasseh, Naphtali, Hasher, Gad, and Reuben. Working by corners, we get the following order. There's a group of Leah tribes, led by Judah, Reuben, and Simeon.

Junior Leah tribes come next, Levi, Issachar, and Zebulun. Then Rachel tribes, Joseph, Benjamin, and Manasseh, followed by the handmaids' children, Naphtali, Hasher, and Gad. This will help us to understand the omission of certain ones and the inclusion of others.

It is the same group as we see in Ezekiel chapter 48, except that Manasseh has taken the place of Dan. In Ezekiel, Dan was with the group of Rachel tribes, but here Manasseh takes his place. Joseph gets the double portion in Ephraim and Manasseh.

In this list, Ephraim is the leading of the two tribes, can be exchanged for Joseph more appropriately. Joseph is represented most of all in Ephraim. Manasseh is included to fill up the double portion and to include three natural descendants of Rachel, making up a full complement of Rachel tribes to go alongside the Junior Leah tribes, the Senior Leah tribes, and the Handmaid tribes.

Another contrast with the listing of the tribes in Ezekiel is the fact that Levi has been demoted to the Junior Leah tribes. Levi no longer has the same significance in the New Covenant, and now Simeon has taken his place. This sealed group then represents the full complement of Israel.

It should be seen as the full measure of Jewish Christians that are saved prior to the judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70. The judgment is held back until this group is marked out. Following this, we see another group, a multitude that no one can number.

This, however, is not a group of Israelites. This group is from every nation, from all tribes

and peoples and languages. They are clothed in white robes, possibly the same robes that were given to the martyrs under the altar in the preceding chapter.

Now that the faithful Israelites have been sealed, the full complement of the saved can be brought together, and this great multitude includes both the souls who are beneath the altar and also the faithful Gentile Christians that have suffered during that period. Later on in this chapter, they are described as those who have come through the tribulation. We shall perhaps understand this as a reference to all the suffering of the martyrs from the beginning of the world, from Abel to Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, who was slain between the altar and the temple.

They have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb. They have washed their robes in His blood. Thinking back to the book of Genesis, chapter 49, verse 11, this might recall royal themes.

He has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. These are the people of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. They are also a priestly company who have been cleansed by the blood of sacrifice.

In Matthew, chapter 23, we get a sense of the destruction of Jerusalem as being a comprehensive judgment upon the whole old order, stretching back to the very dawn of time in Abel and his blood that was shed by Cain. All of the blood of the righteous will come upon this city. The great multitude gather together in worship.

They are clothed in white robes with palm branches in their hands. Perhaps the themes of the Feast of Tabernacles come out here. And they lead the greater assembly in praise as they say, Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb.

The angels who are assembled all around respond to them. They are now leading the angels in their worship. They are also spoken of as attaining God's full salvation in anticipation of the new heavens and the new earth that is yet to arrive at the end of the book.

They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. The sun shall not strike them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd, and he will guide them to springs of living water, and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.

This is language that we associate with chapters 21 and 22, but it is found here anticipating what will come later. This is, as it were, a first harvest. Peter Lighthouse also suggests in here that we might hear the echoes of Ezekiel 37.

The response of John to the elder here is similar to the response that Ezekiel makes to the Lord in Ezekiel 37. In response to the question that he is asked, John says, Sir, you know. In response to the question that Ezekiel is asked by the Lord, Ezekiel responds, O

Lord God, you know.

In both cases, there is the description of the raising up of a great company. A question to consider, is there any significance to be seen in the location of the company of the multitude in verse 15? The Lamb opened the first six seals of the book in chapter 6. The opening of the final seal of the book was delayed in chapter 7 until the 144,000 of Israel could be sealed. Like the preparation for the coming of the destroying angels in the striking down of the firstborn in Egypt, with the blood placed on the lintel and the doorposts, or the marking out of the foreheads of those who mourned for Jerusalem in Ezekiel chapter 9, this protects a righteous remnant from the judgment that is coming.

There are a number of occasions where an awaited judgment tarries while a remnant is being prepared. Elijah is told to prepare devastating judgment for Israel in anointing Hazael as king of Syria, Jehu as king of Israel and Elisha as his successor. However, after he appoints Elisha, we have to wait for many chapters until any judgment falls.

In the interim, the Lord blesses and forms a faithful remnant through Elisha, bringing healing and deliverance. Now, with the 144,000 sealed, the seventh seal can finally be opened. As Peter Lighthouse emphasizes, the events of the seals should not be considered to be the actual contents of the book.

The contents of the book, commonsensically, cannot actually be read until all of the seals have first been opened. Likewise, the trumpets that follow the seals should be seen more as heralding the book and its contents than being its actual contents. Throughout Revelation to this point of chapter 8, we've observed the repeated significance given to the number seven.

It is a number associated with the creation week, and there is a sort of creation and decreation occurring here. The opening of the seventh seal looks rather different from the opening of the seals that preceded it. The immediate result of it is silence, lasting for about half an hour.

The Old Testament, as Greg Beale notes, contains several instances of silence prior to the judgment of the Lord. There might be a sort of divine judgment scene being set up here. The loud worship of the last few chapters is stilled.

An expectant hush comes over everyone as the long-awaited judgment is about to begin. We can see something of this in Zechariah 2, verse 13. Be silent all flesh before the Lord, for he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.

Or Zephaniah 1, verse 7. Be silent before the Lord God, for the day of the Lord is near. The Lord has prepared a sacrifice and consecrated his guests. Habakkuk 2, verse 20 introduces another judgment scene with similar words.

But the Lord is in his holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before him. The arrival of

the Lord to judge, described in the following chapter of Habakkuk, in chapter 3, verses 3-6, is similar to some of the descriptions of the open seals in Revelation.

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His splendour covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. His brightness was like the light, rays flashed from his hand, and there he veiled his power.

Before him went pestilence, and plague followed at his heels. He stood and measured the earth, he looked and shook the nations. Then the eternal mountains were scattered, the everlasting hills sank low.

His were the everlasting ways. The silence here might also be associated with Sabbath themes. Here in Revelation, chapter 8, the great judgment of God comes from the Lord enthroned in his temple.

The throne is there, as is the altar of incense. These are elements of the temple scene. Why is the silence for half an hour? It's not entirely clear to me.

However, it could be because we are waiting for the full hour to pass, and the completion of the substance of the seventh seal. But the first half of that time, belonging to the seventh seal, belongs to the expectant silence. The full hour of judgment has not yet been reached.

Perhaps the trumpets inaugurate the awaited hour of judgment, but don't fully bring it. The seven angels that stand before God, to whom John now turns, are described as the angels. They may be specific archangels.

Others have suggested that they are the angels of the seven churches. Considering that the angels of the seven churches are likely human beings, and earthly messengers of the churches, this identification seems unlikely to me. However, some association almost certainly exists.

What these seven angels are in heaven, the seven angels of the churches are on earth, much as the earthly lampstands of the churches correspond to the seven lamps of the spirit before God's throne. The seven angels are now given seven trumpets, and they will initiate the process of judgment. We might think here of the destroying angels of the Passover.

Reading of seven trumpets, we might also recall the story of the destruction of the city of Jericho in Joshua chapter 6, where there are seven priests with seven trumpets who circle the city of Jericho on seven successive days. Before any trumpet is blown, however, another messenger comes and stands at the altar with a golden censer, where he is given incense to offer with the prayers of the saints on the golden altar before the throne. Here we ought to think back to the opening of the fifth seal in chapter 6 verses 9 to 11.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, and told the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been. This messenger or angel, who might be the spirit himself, by whom the prayers of the saints are lifted up to God's throne, takes the prayers of the saints beneath the bronze altar of the courtyard relating to the earth, and brings them up into the heavenly temple, into God's very throne presence, and to the golden incense altar before the throne.

Fire from the golden altar of incense and God's presence is then taken and cast down to earth. The scene that follows should remind us of Sinai in Exodus 19, verse 16. On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

And again in Exodus 20, verse 18. Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off. Christ himself speaks of the judgment that he intended to bring in terms that should make us think of this in Luke 12, verses 49-53.

I came to cast fire on the earth, a wood that it were already kindled. I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished! Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division. For from now on in one house there will be five divided, three against two, and two against three.

They will be divided, father against son, and son against father, mother against daughter, and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law. Now the seven trumpets begin to be blown. There is a four and three pattern here, as the trumpets are interrupted by the announcement of the eagle.

The seals also had a four and three pattern, or perhaps a four-two-one pattern, as the first four seals were announced by the living creatures. The trumpets largely seem to involve things falling down from the heavens. The trumpets might also have some associations with the days of creation, especially on day four when the sun, moon and stars are judged.

There is simultaneously a de-creation and a new creation occurring here. There are also similarities with some of the plagues upon Egypt, as we will see. Furthermore, as Lighthouse notes, there are parallels between the trumpets and the events of chapters 12-15 that follow.

Blood, fire and hail correspond to the hailstorm in chapter 11 verse 19. The mountain cast into the sea corresponds with the dragon thrown down in chapter 12 verses 7-13. The star that comes down and makes the rivers and the springs bitter corresponds with the dragon spewing water like a river in chapter 12 verses 15-16.

The judgment of the stars, sun and moon on the fourth day corresponds with the beast from the sea in chapter 13 verses 1-8. The fifth trumpet, with the scorpions and locusts, corresponds with the beast from the land in chapter 13 verses 11-18. The army from the Euphrates and the witnesses in the sixth of the trumpets corresponds with the harvest of the 144,000 in chapter 14 verses 17-20.

And then finally, in both cases, the kingdom becomes Christ's in the seventh trumpet and then also in chapter 15 verses 1-4. The trumpets ramp up the events that are associated with the seals that proceeded, moving from a quarter to one third of things being affected. They intensify what the seals began, but also move the story further.

Three things are cast to earth after the first trumpet, hail, fire and blood. This trumpet should recall the seventh plague upon Egypt in which fire was present in the midst of the hail in Exodus chapter 9 verses 22-25. The blood that is cast down is a clue.

It is the blood of the martyrs. It comes back upon the heads of their murderers. The repeated emphasis upon the third part recalls Ezekiel chapter 5 verses 1-2.

And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword, use it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing and divide the hair. A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed.

And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them. The symbolic action of the prophet is explained in verse 12 of that chapter.

A third part of you shall die of pestilence and be consumed with famine in your midst. A third part shall fall by the sword all around you. And a third part I will scatter to all the winds, and will unsheathe the sword after them.

Lighthouse suggests that we should understand the trees and the green grass as different groups of people within the earth in the land of Israel. The striking of the grasses is a destruction also of food, leading to famine. It afflicts both the grass, the more general population perhaps, and the trees, the righteous or maybe the rulers.

But the grass is affected much more. Perhaps like the initial plagues, this is seen to afflict everyone, even the righteous within the land, those who believe in Christ. This recalls the famine in the land in Acts chapter 11 verse 8, a crisis for which relief has to be sent to the Judean Christians.

The second trumpet casts a great burning mountain into the sea. It turns a third of the sea into blood. We have a similar statement in Matthew chapter 21 verse 21.

And Jesus answered them, Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen. In Matthew chapter 21, Jesus might be referring to the Temple Mount that is just opposite. The turning of water into blood also recalls the first of the plagues on Egypt.

One of the purposes of that plague was to bring unavoidably to the surface the blood that had been shed in the river, and the great wrong that had been committed there. What is the great mountain burning with fire? Various suggestions have been put forward. Could it be Sinai, a mountain that flamed with God's presence? It could be the Temple Mountain that burns with sacrifice.

Or maybe it's the burning land that follows the first trumpet. It could be the Church, as that which burns with the presence of God and is the new mountain as it were within the land. It is most likely that the meaning here ultimately points to the polluting blood of the martyrs that spills out into the wider sea of the Gentiles, the realm of the diaspora surrounding the land.

This is the realm of ships and of living creatures. The ships are diaspora Jews who live upon the ocean of the Gentiles but are related to the land. The living creatures within the sea are the God-fearers, the Gentile adherents of Jewish faith.

In the Book of Acts we see this taking place. The Church goes out from Jerusalem. And in all these different parts of the world we see the judgment of God following in their wake.

As in city after city, Jewish communities are shaken up by the Gospel. While many Jews accept, far more Jews reject the message of the missionaries. And the blood of the martyrs that first polluted the mountain of Jerusalem starts to spread out into the wider world.

The third angel blows his trumpet and a star falls from heaven, rendering the land waters bitter. This is reminiscent of Isaiah chapter 14 verses 12 to 19. Is this the man who made the earth tremble, who shook kingdoms, who made the world like a desert and overthrew its cities, who did not let his prisoners go home? All the kings of the nations lie in glory, each in his own tomb.

But you are cast out, away from your grave, like a loathed branch, clothed with the slain, those pierced by the sword, who go down to the stones of the pit, like a dead body trampled underfoot. Many have seen this figure as Satan himself, but it is the ruler of Babylon. Nevertheless, there are clear parallels with the casting down of the dragon, of Satan from the heavens, in chapter 12 verse 9 of Revelation.

After which a deadly river proceeds from his mouth. Whoever this falling star is, behind him lurks the devil himself. This falling star turns the springs and the rivers deadly.

The fresh, life-giving waters of the land, symbolically associated with the temple, from which living waters were supposed to flow. This is the inverse of Mara. There bitter waters were made sweet by casting something into them, and now sweet waters are made bitter.

Behind this text we might also see an allusion to Deuteronomy chapter 29 verse 18 following. There Moses gives a warning about a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit. Such a person who leads others into idolatry, produces a situation where the land is afflicted and sick.

It seems likely that this star Wormwood is a poisonous source of idolatry or false worship here. Following the falling down of a ruler, angelic or human, the very temple and its worship have been made bitter and unhealthy by Satan. The fourth trumpet judges the sun, moon and stars.

This is connected with the fourth day of creation, and there would seem to be quite close parallel here. The sun, moon and stars also represent powers and authorities. Isaiah chapter 13 verse 10 Jesus teaches the same in the Olivet discourse in Matthew chapter 24 verse 29.

Immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Priests, kings and other rulers, the stars, the sun and the moon will be judged, much as Herod is struck down by the Lord in Acts chapter 12. Many of the lights are going out over Israel, darkening the land and giving it over to the forces of disorder.

The whole world, the whole firmament around Israel is gradually being torn down through these trumpets. The chapter ends with the eagle's proclamation of coming woes in the remaining three trumpet blasts. The eagle is the fourth of the living creatures, and perhaps this associates the three previous trumpets with the lion, the ox and the man respectively.

A question to consider, where might we find background to the eagle's proclamations of woes in the gospels? After the opening of the seventh seal, the contents of the book can finally be revealed. To herald the revelation of the contents of the sealed book, seven trumpets are blown. The first four trumpets bring curses upon various realms, after which there is an announcement of a series of three woes by the eagle from the trumpet blasts that will follow.

This takes us to the beginning of chapter 9. All of this material in Revelation, the seals and now the trumpets, is a symbolic presentation of historic events in the first century.

As the spirit descended upon the church at Pentecost, the message of the gospels spread out, arousing opposition and causing division in both the land of Israel and the wider empire, leading to the martyrdom of Christians. This leads to judgments upon the land and its rulers, and judgment upon the diaspora and the wider empire.

The seals followed a 4-3 pattern, beginning with four horsemen judgments announced by living creatures. The trumpets also follow a 4-3 pattern, with three woes concluding the sequence. Also, as with the seals, there will be a delay before the sounding of the final trumpet.

The blowing of the trumpets has caused a number of judgments in and from the heavens. Hail and fire, a great mountain cast into the sea, a great star falling from heaven, judgment upon the moon, the sun and the stars. The fifth trumpet also involves a star fallen from heaven.

It clearly has similarities with the third trumpet, with Wormwood, the fallen star that makes the waters bitter. There the star could have been either a human or angelic ruler who poisoned the worship of the temple. Here the fallen star seems to more clearly be a fallen angel.

Once again the fallen star is named. The first fallen star was Wormwood. This star is a Badon or a Pollyon.

A Badon or destruction is mentioned on several occasions in the Old Testament as a companion of Sheol or the grave. The blowing of the fifth trumpet releases demons to ravage the land. When the spirit of the Lord leaves King Saul and comes upon David, for instance, in 1 Samuel, Saul is troubled by an evil spirit from the Lord.

Jesus warns the Jews during his ministry that the evil spirit expelled from a man, the man in question being Israel, can return with several worse spirits. As the spirit comes upon the church, Israel is troubled by demons as a sort of inverted or demonic Pentecost occurs. The temple, which is supposed to connect the earth to heaven, increasingly comes to connect it to hell.

Jewish assemblies increasingly become the synagogues of Satan, described in the letters at the beginning of the book. As Peter Lighthouse reminds us, we were told in Revelation 1, verse 18, that Jesus has the keys of death and Hades. The fact that the fallen star has the key to the bottomless pit must be because Jesus has granted it to him.

This is also perhaps comparable to the casting out of the demons out of the Gerosene demoniac into the herd of pigs. We might also hear here allusions to at least three of the plagues upon Egypt. There is the darkening of the heavens.

The opening of the bottomless pit and the smoke emerging from it is like the sixth plague in Exodus 9, verses 8-10, with the bottomless pit represented by the kiln and the

smoke with its soot. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, Take handfuls of soot from the kiln, and let Moses throw them in the air in the sight of Pharaoh. It shall become fine dust over all the land of Egypt, and become boils breaking out in sores on man and beast throughout all the land of Egypt.

So they took soot from the kiln and stood before Pharaoh, and Moses threw it in the air, and it became boils breaking out in sores on man and beast. The scorpion locusts are also more obviously like the eighth plague of locusts in Exodus 10, verses 3-6. So Moses and Aaron went into Pharaoh and said to him, Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go, that they may serve me.

For if you refuse to let my people go, behold, tomorrow I will bring locusts into your country, and they shall cover the face of the land, so that no one can see the land. And they shall eat what is left to you after the hail, and they shall eat every tree of yours that grows in the field. And they shall fill your houses and the houses of all your servants and of all the Egyptians, as neither your fathers nor your grandfathers have seen.

From the day they came on earth to this day. Then he turned and went out from Pharaoh. At various points we have also observed loose associations between the days of creation and the corresponding seal or trumpet.

Locusts and swarming things are associated with the fifth day and here come with the fifth trumpet. The scorpion locusts form a devouring demonic cloud, much as the cherubim are within and help to form the glory cloud of Ezekiel chapter 1. The scorpion locusts are a demonic parody of this. The description of the sound that they make, for instance, should remind us of Ezekiel chapter 1 verse 24 and the description of the cherubim in the glory cloud.

And when they went I heard the sound of their wings like the sound of many waters, like the sound of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army. When they stood still they let down their wings. As composite creatures they also parody cherubim.

They bring together leonine, equine, human and aquiline features. Scorpions are like serpents, especially associated with Satan and his demonic hordes. These locust scorpions, while being like a destroying cloud of locusts, are not powerful through their devouring of crops, but more through their demonic stings.

Behind this passage we might also hear echoes of Jesus' statement to his disciples in Luke chapter 10 verses 18 to 20. And he said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that

your names are written in heaven. The demonic star then falls from the heavens, producing demonic swarms upon the earth. But those whose names are written in heaven, those sealed on their foreheads, are not vulnerable to their ravaging.

Lighthouse also notes possible parallels with the fallen star of Isaiah chapter 14, where the fall of the day star is followed by the plague of a flying fiery serpent. In verse 29, Rejoice not, O Philistia, all of you, that the rod that struck you is broken. For from the serpent's root will come forth an adder, and its fruit will be a flying fiery serpent.

The description of the scorpion locusts is perhaps a little perplexing. There are a number of things that we can observe about the description that might help. First, the head-to-tail description of their appearance is what is called a wassif, such as we have of Jesus earlier in the book.

And we also have of the figures in the Song of Songs. David Chilton, who generally looks for direct correspondences with events in the Jewish war, sees a possible reference to the Zealots. Quoting Josephus' account of the Jewish war, book 4, chapter 9. With their insatiable hunger for loot, they ransacked the houses of the wealthy, murdered men, and violated women for sport.

They drank their spoils with blood, and from mere satiety they shamelessly gave themselves up to effeminate practices, plaiting their hair and putting on women's clothes, drenching themselves with perfumes and painting their eyelids to make themselves attractive. They copied not merely the dress, but also the passions of women, devising in their excess of licentiousness unlawful pleasures in which they wallowed as in a brothel. Thus they entirely polluted the city with their foul practices, yet though they wore women's faces, their hands were murderous.

They would approach with mincing steps, then suddenly become fighting men, and whipping out their swords from under their dyed cloaks, they would run through every passer-by. The sort of hellish violence released in the madness of the Zealots certainly recalls the description of the scorpion locust in a number of respects, from the women's hair and appearance to the hidden sword under the cloak like a scorpion sting. Perhaps we are to think of the related madness of people like Saul prior to his conversion, murderers and assassins raised up against the church that ultimately led to Israel's demise.

The description of the scorpion locust is drawn in large measure from Joel chapter 2, a passage that the apostle Peter quotes at length on the day of Pentecost. Within that passage the Lord sends an army of locusts against his people and their land. Joel chapter 1 verse 6 For a nation has come up against my land, powerful and beyond number.

Its teeth are lion's teeth, and it has the fangs of a lioness. Joel chapter 2 verses 1 to 11 Blow a trumpet in Zion, sound an alarm on my holy mountain. Let all the inhabitants of

the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming.

It is near, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness. Like blackness there is spread upon the mountains, a great and powerful people. Their like has never been before, nor will again after them, through all the years of all generations.

Fire devours before them, and behind them a flame burns. The land is like the garden of Eden before them, but behind them a desolate wilderness, and nothing escapes them. Their appearance is like the appearance of horses, and like war horses they run.

As with the rumbling of chariots, they leap on the tops of the mountains. Like the crackling of a flame of fire devouring the stubble, like a powerful army drawn up for battle. Before them peoples are in anguish, all faces grow pale.

Like warriors they charge, like soldiers they scale the wall. They march, each on his way, they do not swerve from their paths, they do not jostle one another, each marches in his path. They burst through the weapons, and are not halted.

They leap upon the city, they run upon the walls, they climb up into the houses, they enter through the windows like a thief. The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble, the sun and the moon are darkened, and the stars withdraw their shining. The Lord utters his voice before the army, for his camp is exceedingly great.

He who executes his word is powerful, for the day of the Lord is great and very awesome. Who can endure it? The five months might refer to the symbolic period between Pentecost and the Day of Atonement. The five months here are also in the fifth trumpet.

Austen Farrer notes a possible connection between the description of the scorpion locus and the signs of the zodiac. This would suggest a connection between the battle that's taking place on the earth and a battle in the heavens. Lightheart describes an elaboration of this thesis in his commentary.

Their lion teeth and feminine hair suggests another connection. The constellations in the zodiac move from Leo to Virgo to Libra to Scorpio to Sagittarius, from the lion at the beginning to a woman, through Scorpio and Sagittarius. That is the sequence of John's description of the Leucorpians.

They constitute not just a single, but a series of constellations. The cash value is that these constellations stretch out over about five months of the year, the same period when the Leucorpians torment those they sting. The sixth angel blows his trumpet, initiating the next judgment, with a new set of composite creatures coming on the scene.

The golden altar was, in the preceding chapter, the place from which the angel offered incense with the prayers of the saints before the throne. The site of the command to

release the angels here might relate their release with those prayers. These creatures are described in ways that recall the Scorpion Locus, but their identity has yet to be determined.

They are matched to the Scorpion Locus in many of their features. The character of this army of fire-breathing lion horses with serpents for tails needs to be determined, though. They differ from the Scorpion Locus in their origin.

They are not brought up from the abyss by a fallen angel, but are four angels prepared for that time, released by the sixth trumpet-blowing angel. The number of them might remind us of the numbering of the servants of the Lord in Daniel 7, verse 10. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him.

A thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousands stood before him. The court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. Further clues are found in parallels between the army here and the two witnesses in chapter 11, verses 3-6.

They are so high that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they desire. Their power is the power of the word. There are two of them, corresponding to the doubling of the ten thousand times ten thousand servants of the Lord from Daniel.

They are, I believe, an opposing army to the Scorpion Locus, but both armies will afflict the land in different ways. The angels are at the river Euphrates, which is the furthest border of the land at its greatest extent. There are four of them, associated with the four corners of the land.

We've already seen four angels at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth at the beginning of Revelation chapter 7, during the sixth seal. Now, in the corresponding trumpet, four angels who have been held back are also mentioned. The specification of the hour, the day, the month and the year might recall Passover.

The hour, the day, the month and the year are all specified in Exodus chapter 12, verses 29 and 41. The sealing of the 144,000 on their foreheads also recalled Passover. The horses, once again, are likely the church, ridden by the angels of the Spirit.

In developing this point, Lightheart notes the way that Elijah and Elisha are spoken of as the chariots of Israel and its horsemen. They wear fire, sapphire and sulphur, and they speak fire, smoke and sulphur. God placed tongues of flame upon his servants at Pentecost, and thereafter they were to speak with fiery tongues.

Perhaps the power of their mouths is to be contrasted with the scorpion locusts, who, despite their lion's teeth, lack power in their mouths. The speech of the church, by contrast, is powerful by means of the fire of the prophetic spirit. Like Elisha in 2 Kings

chapter 6, the church is also accompanied by myriads of angels, with horses and chariots of fire.

These kill a third of mankind. The people killed here are people within the land of Israel, and what killing here means is not entirely clear. Are they converted, or is destruction or judgment brought down upon them? Perhaps both are in view.

We should remember that the scorpion locusts were causing people to long for death, and now people are given death. These creatures have power in their mouths, but can also poison with their tails. However, the people of the land fail to repent of their sins, idolatry especially.

Perhaps the idolatry being focused upon the temple, which is increasingly being treated as an alternative object of the people's loyalty to God himself. It's also being treated as a place in which people can take refuge from dealing with their sins, like a den of thieves. Beyond their idolatry, they also fail to repent of their murders, sorceries, sexual immorality and theft.

A question to consider, where might we see background for this passage in the book of Acts? As we reach Revelation chapter 10, it might be worthwhile to step back from the text briefly, to consider why the book is written in the way that it is. Why doesn't God just say what he means directly? If, for instance, God wants to talk about the bringing of judgment upon diaspora Jews as the gospel goes out into the wider empire, or of the corruption of the temple, why doesn't he say so expressly and explicitly? Why present these things in such obscure symbolic language, and with almost hallucinogenic imagery, which the overwhelming majority of people won't be able to understand? Indeed, it seems to be written in a way that almost invites misunderstanding. Many modern readers of the text of Revelation, for instance, have seen Apache helicopters in the Scorpion Locusts, and an immense army from an Asian block of nations in the twice 10,000 x 10,000 of the preceding chapter.

Although such readings of Revelation have countless problems, they do at least relieve some of the questions about the symbolism, believing that much of it should be taken more literally, or as more impressionistic representations of future realities, for which John and the first heroes of Revelation would not have had any words, such as four Apache helicopters. Other commentators have suggested that the book of Revelation is closer to a sort of code, adopted in order to hide the true reference of its prophecies in a context of persecution. The authorities would only perceive strange and fantastical imagery from a weird Eastern cult, but the informed Christian reader would know that it was foretelling the downfall of the Roman Empire, or something like that.

Reading the book of Revelation as if it were a sort of code, we will tend to look for one-to-one correlations between its images and real-world reference. However, as we have been working through this book, we have consistently seen that its symbolism and

imagery establishes multiple connections, associations, juxtapositions and the like. The imagery has the effect of transposing events into, or mapping events onto, frameworks offered by such things as the Temple and its sacrifices, by the Festal Calendar and the great events of redemptive history, or by the fundamental patterns of the created order, sun, moon, stars, sea, land, etc.

In this way, the imagery does a lot more than communicate events that are going to occur. It communicates their deeper meaning and significance. It reveals the connection between heaven and earth, presenting seemingly chaotic events in history in terms of a profoundly ordered process of worship in heaven.

By revealing these processes behind the events of history, we are instructed in deep mysteries, not merely concerning events in the 1st century AD, but also concerning events throughout history, down to our present day. By mapping these events of history onto the feasts and the worship of the Temple, something about their covenant significance is also disclosed. These are the events that bring the age of the old covenant to its close, an age that overlapped with the new covenant for about 40 years, but which is finally to be dismantled.

While many think of the events recorded in Revelation primarily in terms of events that make a huge splash in human history, Revelation teaches us to view things from a different perspective. From a human vantage point, the rejection of the early church's message and persecution by the Jews in the Diaspora may be felt to be a discouraging setback. From a heavenly perspective, however, it is a great burning mountain being cast into the sea, turning a third of the sea to blood, killing a third of the living creatures and destroying a third of the ships.

Whatever it might seem like from an earthly vantage point, the events occurring are truly of cosmic importance, an epoch defining significance. This is not code, but it grants struggling and persecuted Christians a very different vantage point upon their situations. In Revelation chapter 10, we are still in the sixth trumpet part of the book.

As in the case of the open seals, a number of preparatory events must occur before the blowing of the climactic seventh trumpet. Remarking upon the description of the mighty angel descending from heaven, a number of commentators argue that it seems to be a divine figure. Greg Beale claims, for instance, that he is given attributes that are given only to God in the Old Testament, or to God or Christ in Revelation.

Furthermore, this would not be the first or the only time in Scripture more generally, or in Revelation in particular, that the figure of the One like a Son of Man is presented as an angelic one. We see a similar association in Revelation chapter 14 verses 14-16 and also in the book of Daniel, where the One like a Son of Man is closely related to, or even identified with the figure of the Archangel Michael. The mighty angel comes wrapped in a cloud, like God himself, and the figure of the One like a Son of Man.

The rainbow over his head and the description of the mighty angel's feet also recall the rainbow of chapter 4 verse 3, in addition to the vision of Ezekiel chapter 1, especially the description of verses 27-28. And upward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were gleaming metal, like the appearance of fire enclosed all around. And downward from what had the appearance of his waist I saw as it were the appearance of fire, and there was brightness around him.

Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness all around. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. And when I saw it, I fell on my face, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

The background of Ezekiel's vision in chapters 1-3 of the book of Ezekiel will continue to be important in what follows. The mighty angel's face, shining like the sun, recalls the description of Christ, both at the transfiguration on the mount and also in the vision at the beginning of the book. Matthew chapter 17 verse 2 And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

And Revelation chapter 1 verse 16 In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength. The description of Jesus' legs in Revelation chapter 1 was as of burnished bronze refined in a furnace. Now they are described as like pillars of fire, recalling the means by which the Lord led Israel in the wilderness, as if the pillar of cloud and fire by which the Lord went before his people were vast legs by which he walked with them.

He calls out with a loud voice like that of a lion, by which we are reminded that Jesus is the Lion of Judah. Peter Lighthouse presents all of the parallels between the angel and Jesus, but does not directly identify the two. Rather he reminds us of the first verse of the book, the revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place.

He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. The mighty angel is not Jesus himself but his angel, and the angel or the messenger of Christ is the Holy Spirit whom Jesus sends to his people. Perhaps a clue to this identity can be seen in the glory phenomena of the cloud, fire and rainbow involved.

In this figure in chapter 10 we are finally told about the angel that Jesus Christ sent to John that is mentioned in the first verse of the book. With the delivery of this book to John we are also finally reaching the point of the revelation of what is going to take place. What has been revealed to this point has largely related to events from the ascension onwards, all leading up to the opening, heralding and delivery of the prophetic book.

The angel stands with his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land. The sea, as we have already seen, is associated with the Gentiles and the land with the Jews. In the

descent of the spirit angel, heaven and earth are connected and land and sea are connected as the kingdom of Christ is stretching out beyond the land.

Seven thunders sound when the spirit angel calls out and John is about to write down their contents. However, rather than having their word dictated to him, John will bear the word in a very different way. He is instructed not to write down the words of the seven thunders, which, we should presume, are the contents of the book that are open in the angel's hand.

The identity of the book in the spirit angel's hand should be considered. The book is open and would most naturally be related to the book or the scroll that has been at the heart of the prophecy to this point, the book that was opened with the opening of the seven seals and that is being heralded in the seven trumpets. The book, which is now opened, can be delivered.

The fact that it is described as a little book need not imply that it is a different book, although it might be an earthly book that is a counterpart to the heavenly book that the Lamb opened. As usual, the keys to the meaning of the book of Revelation are largely found in the rest of the scripture. Recognising those passages that provide the backdrop enables us to unpack the meaning of what is taking place.

Without great familiarity with the keys that the scripture provides, however, we will be baffled by much within the text. Here, the end of the book of Daniel is the key background. Daniel's Revelation was sealed up in a book, which wouldn't be open until the time of the end, Daniel chapter 12 verses 4-9.

But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase. Then I, Daniel, looked, and behold, two others stood, one on this bank of the stream, and one on that bank of the stream.

And someone said to the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, How long shall it be till the end of these wonders? And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream, He raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven, and swore by him who lives forever, that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end, all these things would be finished. I heard, but did not understand. Then I said, O my Lord, what shall be the outcome of these things? He said, Go your way, Daniel, for the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end.

The man clothed in linen was earlier described in Daniel chapter 10 verses 5-6. I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Euphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

This description closely resembles the vision of Christ in Revelation chapter 1, and of the mighty spirit angel in this chapter. In Daniel, this figure swears by him who lives forever, that the opening of the book and the fulfillment of its prophecies awaited the time of the end, a time that will come after a time, times, and half a time. Now a similar figure makes a similar oath, but the oath now is that the time of the end has come.

The time is up, and the mystery of God would finally be fulfilled. The long-awaited kingdom would finally be established. John is instructed by the voice from heaven, presumably the voice of Christ, to take the open scroll from the angel.

Rather than having the contents of the book dictated to him, John is instructed to take the book and to eat it, so it will become part of him. There is a similar account in the book of Ezekiel chapter 3, verses 1-3. And he said to me, Son of man, eat whatever you find here, eat this scroll, and go speak to the house of Israel.

So I opened my mouth, and he gave me this scroll to eat. And he said to me, Son of man, feed your belly with the scroll that I give you, and fill your stomach with it. Then I ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet as honey.

The description of the book given to Ezekiel is found in chapter 2, verses 9-10 of the book. And when I looked, behold, a hand was stretched out to me, and behold, a scroll of a book was in it. And he spread it out before me, and it had writing on the front and on the back, and there were written on it words of lamentation, and mourning, and woe.

The sealed book was described in a similar way in Revelation chapter 5, verse 1. The bitterness of the words of the book might recall the test of jealousy in Numbers chapter 5, where curses were written down in a book, scraped off into a drink of bitter water, which had to be drunk by the woman accused of adultery. If she were indeed unfaithful, the ingested words would poison her. The words of the prophecy given to John is just such a test of jealousy, as we will see with the judgment upon the whore of Babylon later in the book.

The loud voice of the spirit angel, connected with the seven thunders, will now be expressed through the prophetic ministry of John and the church. A question to consider, how might John's eating of the book help us as we think about our relationship with the word of God as the people of God? In Revelation chapter 11, the little book has been given to John by the mighty angel, and he has been commissioned to prophesy, and now finally the seventh trumpet will be blown. The thunders commission John to measure the temple.

The measuring of the temple marks it out as holy space. The dimensions of the tabernacle and the temple, and of their furniture, is given to us in the Old Testament, as they are holy items. Generally, things are not measured out as these things are.

We are still in the period of time after the blowing of the sixth trumpet here, and before the blowing of the seventh. We should recognise parallels between the extended period of time before the final trumpet, and the extended period of time before the opening of the seventh seal a few chapters earlier, during that period, as the second vision of the sixth seal, the 144,000 were marked out upon their foreheads, protected from the judgment that was about to come. Here, in the second vision of the sixth trumpet, there is a comparable action in the measuring of the temple, the altar, and its worshippers.

In the preceding chapter, the book of Ezekiel was clearly in the background, in the book being given to John to eat. Ezekiel is once again in the background in this chapter, more specifically, the latter part of that book, from Ezekiel chapter 40 to 48. The vision is introduced in Ezekiel chapter 40 verses 2 to 4. In visions of God, He brought me to the land of Israel, and set me down on a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south.

When He brought me there, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand, and he was standing in the gateway. And the man said to me, Son of man, look with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I shall show you. For you were brought here in order that I might show it to you.

Declare all that you see to the house of Israel. The measuring of the temple continues up to Ezekiel chapter 43, where Ezekiel is told in verses 10 and 11. As for you, Son of man, describe to the house of Israel the temple, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities, and they shall measure the plan.

And if they are ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the design of the temple, its arrangement, its exits, and its entrances, that is, its whole design. And make known to them as well all its statutes, and its whole design, and all its laws, and write it down in their sight, so that they may observe all its laws, and all its statutes, and carry them out. John's measuring task is a task of division.

He is called to measure certain realms, and pointedly instructed not to measure others, as they will be trampled by the nations. The effect of the measuring is to mark certain places for protection, and give others over. As a symbolic action, it might be related to his act of prophecy.

He is given a reed for the task, which is also a writing instrument, perhaps because it will be through his speaking and writing that he brings about the division. The numbering of the 144,000, and the measuring of the temple, both involve the numbering or measuring of that which is holy. Much as the Holy of Holies is a square, so the Holy Company from the twelve tribes is a square.

Later the Holy City of the New Jerusalem will be measured in chapter 21, and will again

be a square, or a cube. This measuring seems to anticipate that later measuring. The court outside of the temple is excluded from the measuring, or perhaps more strongly, it is cast out, not being measured by John.

There are various interpretations of the identity of the temple, the altar, and the court. Some relate them to various parts of the church. The church is exposed to persecution in its bodily aspect, but not in its spiritual dimensions, for instance.

However, this does not seem to me to be the true reading. Given the first century context, where there was still a temple standing in Jerusalem, and the reference to the temple here is another argument in favour of a pre-70AD dating of the book, it would be natural to relate the court to the unbelieving Jews. They relate to the temple, but are profane, excluded, and cast out on account of their unbelief.

The statement that they are given over to the nations, and that the nations will trample the Holy City for 42 months, recalls Luke 21-24 in Jesus' Olivet Discourse. They will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led captive among all nations, and Jerusalem will be trampled underfoot by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled. The outer court of the Jews is given over to the nations.

However, the true worshippers of the temple, the faithful Jews, are marked out. The question of who is trampled is unclear. Lighthouse argues that it is the church that is trampled, suggesting that this is a reference to the period of persecution by Nero, which lasted approximately 42 months.

It is the Holy City that is trampled, and the Holy City is the measured portion, not the profane part that is excluded. The rest that is excluded will be given over to the Gentiles, but the holy part will be trampled underfoot, too, but only for a limited period of time. The 42 months is the same length of time as 1,260 days.

42 months is also three and a half years, or a time, times, and half a time. It is a broken week of years. The same period of time is referenced in relation to the drought that came upon Israel in the ministry of John the Baptist in Luke 4, 25, and in James 5, 17.

We also find references to a time, times, and half a time, and related periods, in days and also half a week, in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 9, in the prophecy of the 70 weeks of years, the final week, for instance, is divided into two half-weeks. Here we are introduced to the two witnesses who are given authority and will prophesy for 1,260 days.

Why the difference between the 42 months and the 1,260 days? James Jordan suggests that it is the difference between measuring by the moon and measuring by the sun. The former is a time of persecution, but the second is a time of authority. In the following chapter, in chapter 12, verse 6, the woman is nourished for 1,260 days, while in chapter

13, verse 5, the beast is given to exercise authority for 42 months.

The two witnesses are described in ways that remind the hearer of characters and accounts from the Old Testament. Working with the background of Zechariah chapter 4, they are the two olive trees and a seven-fold lampstand that stand before the Lord. In that passage, the olive trees are distinguished from the lampstands that they sustain with their oil.

The olive trees there seem to be angelic guardians of the lampstand, powering it with their anointing. Here the olive trees and the lampstands are associated in the witnesses. The witnesses have angel-like authority.

As we saw earlier in the book, for instance, the angels of the seven churches or lampstands are likely human pastors rather than angels. The two witnesses clearly resemble Moses and Elijah. Like Elijah, the witnesses have power over fire.

They can shut up the sky, preventing rain. Like Moses, they can turn waters into blood and strike the earth with plagues. As two witnesses, they are like the two angelic witnesses sent to Sodom, Moses and Aaron sent to Egypt, or the two spies sent to Jericho.

They are to inspect the city prior to its final destruction. The two witnesses breathe fire, like the creatures released from the Euphrates in chapter 9. Their tongues have been set aflame, like the church was given tongues of fire at Pentecost. As Lighthouse observes, in their striking of the heavens, the waters and the earth, they demonstrate the authority that they have over every level of the world.

The two witnesses are related both to the 144,000 and to the woman of the following chapter. A beast rises from the bottomless pit to attack them. Once again, there is clear Old Testament background for this in Daniel chapter 7, where four beasts arise from the sea and one of the horns of the fourth beast makes war upon the saints and prevails over them.

We will see more of the beast mentioned here in the following chapters. We shall connect him with the fourth beast of Daniel's vision. The beast seems successfully to prevail over the witnesses, killing them.

The bodies of the slain witnesses are left lying in the street of the great city, the identity of which is given symbolically as Sodom and Egypt and identified with the place where their lord was crucified. As Sodom, it is associated with great wickedness and abomination and also with inhospitality. As Egypt, it is a site of oppression, bondage and persecution.

The final identification, the place where their lord was crucified, suggests that the city was Jerusalem, although many commentators argue that this is another symbolic

identification, presenting the site of the witnesses' martyrdom as the symbolic human city of violent hostility to Christ, the city of man, as it were. However, Jerusalem is the natural identification. It is the city renowned for killing the prophets, the city upon whom the blood of all the saints from Abel to Zechariah would come.

These faithful witnesses live out the pattern of Christ's own life. They are killed in the city where their lord was crucified. They are raised from the dead after three and a half days.

They ascend into heaven in a cloud. The three and a half days connects with the 42 months and 1,260 days earlier in the chapter. While the wider body of the nations gaze on the bodies of the witnesses, the people of the land, the Jews, rejoice over them and celebrate their apparent demise.

However, soon after the witnesses are raised and vindicated, it seems as though the witness of the church had perished in its persecution, but it rises up again and is vindicated by God. Much as there was an earthquake at Jesus' resurrection, there was an earthquake killing 7,000 people, perhaps a number associated with the remnant in the days of Elijah. One might also wonder whether this group repents.

The rest, in fear at the power and justice of God, give glory to him. This should not be read as conversion. Rather, it is the acknowledgement, quite likely involuntary, that the Lord is God and that he rules in history.

This is the second woe, and now the third takes place with the blowing of the trumpet. The angel takes his trumpet and blows it, and the celebration of heaven follows. The Lord and the Messiah have achieved their great victory.

The kingdom of the world has become their kingdom, ushering in the time of judgment upon the dead, the rewarding of the righteous, and the destroying of those who have ravaged the earth. As Lighthart puts it, each movement of Revelation pre-echoes its final crescendo. We have here an anticipation of the final end.

Also, as the witnesses finally share in the death of Christ, the heavenly temple is opened up. A question to consider, what are some examples of the righteous sharing in the pattern of Christ's life and death in the book of Revelation? In Revelation chapter 12, the temple of God in heaven has just been opened, and two signs appear in heaven following this. This isn't an interruption of the flow of the prophecy, but rather an unfolding of the seventh trumpet.

It reveals how the kingdom of this world becomes the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ. It is about the coming of the Son who will rule with the rod of iron. The end of Revelation chapter 11 alluded to Psalm 2, and the allusions continue into Revelation chapter 12.

Revelation chapter 11 verse 18 reads, Behind this, it isn't difficult to hear the opening

words of Psalm 2. The rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against his anointed. Psalm 2 comes more to the foreground in chapter 12, as the Son born to the woman is described as one who is to rule all the nations with the rod of iron. This is a reference to Psalm 2 verses 8 to 9. Throughout the book of Revelation, the hearer is presented with the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies in events of the first century.

The hearer is presumed to be highly familiar with the prophecies of Ezekiel, Daniel and Zechariah in particular, and to hear their prophecies constantly being alluded to within John's prophecy. Explicit quotation or reference is very rare, but if you do not know the prophecies of these Old Testament prophets extremely well, you are highly unlikely to make much progress in understanding the book of Revelation. The book of Revelation is a book that seems to require a kind of reading that is difficult to find.

Its readers are expected to be profoundly literate in Old Testament scripture, with a very sharp ear for biblical allusion, typology, symbolism and complex literary structure. This book is probably not one that the average Christian in the first century, even a Jewish Christian who knew the scriptures well, could understand unaided. Rather, the sort of reading that such a text seems to require is close and sustained communal reading, guided by persons peculiarly skilled in the scriptures.

While reading with the aid of commentaries and pastors is a contemporary approximation of this, our typical attitudes and approaches to reading, which privilege the individual with little presumed background understanding of the scriptures, may not be sufficient to the task of understanding such a book. It is important to remember that the scriptures were not written for detached individual readers, but for communities of faithful readers in sustained communal engagement with the scriptures over the course of centuries. If you and I struggle to understand this book, we should bear in mind that it wasn't written for us as detached modern readers, but for principally Jewish communities who were skilled readers in conversation, centuries of accumulated scriptural insight and instinct for scriptural texts, and for practices of reading and hearing that cultivated a much greater attentiveness than those of modern readers, who are accustomed to reading countless thousands, easily digested texts, without any need for deeper reflection and meditation.

If we want to stand a chance of understanding this text, we need to pursue habits of reading that may be strange and deeply challenging for us. Revelation chapter 12 is yet another instance of a text that requires skills, practices and communities of reading that will stretch us as modern hearers of the text. Back at the very beginning of the scriptural story, in Genesis chapter 3 verse 15, the serpent was cursed after the fall, and the Lord declared that he would put enmity between the woman and her seed, and the serpent and his seed.

In Revelation chapter 12, this enmity is played out as the great conflict between the

woman and the dragon. At the heart of this conflict is clearly the struggle between Satan and Christ. The more exact identity of the dragon and the woman remain to be considered, though.

Revelation employs astrological symbolism. This is based upon signs in the heavens. The woman and the dragon are symbols that would have been familiar to many from the Zodiac and from mythology.

The woman is clothed with the sun, she has the moon under her feet and is crowned with twelve stars. The celestial woman is Virgo or the Virgin. Being clothed with the sun means that the sun is passing through her in the daytime.

The moon under her feet refers to the positioning of the moon relative to the feet of the sign of Virgo in the heavens. Austin Farris suggests that the point may be that she is the reigning sign, with the moon beneath her feet representing her reigning over that specific month. This positioning might also identify a more exact time at which an important event occurs.

The stars that form the woman's crown might be like the eleven stars that bow down in Joseph's vision, a reference to signs of the Zodiac, not individual stars. The point of the crowning, according to Farris, is that Virgo is the one among the twelve constellations that is ruling at that time. The twelve stars also connect the figure of the woman with Israel.

Israel is subtly related to the Zodiac at various points in scripture, an identification that was developed in various ways by Jews over history, not only in scriptural and theological reflection but also in art, albeit not without controversy, given the pagan superstitions and idolatrous beliefs that could attend astrology. This is definitely not the only place in the book of Revelation that we encounter imagery associated with the Zodiac. Farris notes that the faces of the four cherubim relate to the middle of the four seasons in anti-calendrical order.

So we begin with the lion, for Leo, moving to the bull, for Taurus, moving to the man, for Aquarius the water-bearer, with the eagle, for Scorpio, last in order. Scorpio formerly was related more closely with the sign of Libra, which intervened between the woman, Virgo, and the scorpion, eagle or dragon of Scorpio, as Libra was seen as Scorpio's claws. G.B. Caird argues for the extensive commonalities between this scene and stories from pagan mythologies.

He writes, The prince is miraculously snatched from his clutches and hidden away, until he is old enough to kill the usurper and claim his inheritance. The same theme is found in many forms in the mythology of the ancient world. In Greece it is the dragon Python who attempts to kill the newborn son of Zeus and is foiled by the escape of the mother Leto to the island of Delos.

There Apollo is born and he subsequently returns to Parnassus and kills the dragon in its Delphic cave. In Egypt it is Set, the red dragon, who pursues Isis and is later killed by her son Horus. These two stories were forms of the solar myth.

The dragon of darkness tries to kill the sun god, only to be killed by him when the new day dawns. This passage does not merely share commonalities with stories from pagan myths. As Caird argues, the emperor, who typically would be identified with the son of the goddess, is now one of the lesser minions of the dragon.

There is a profound challenge to pagan mythology taking place here. The heavenly woman is pregnant and in agony to give birth. Zion is represented elsewhere in scripture as a pregnant woman, at various points in the book of Isaiah for instance.

In Isaiah chapter 66 verses 7-9 we read, Before she was in labour she gave birth, before her pain came upon her she delivered her son. Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things? Shall a land be born in one day? Shall a nation be brought forth in one moment? For as soon as Zion was in labour she brought forth her children. Shall I bring to the point of birth and not cause to bring forth, says the Lord? Shall I, who cause to bring forth, shut the womb, says your God? The representation of Israel as a woman struggling to give birth should also recall the story of the Exodus, where the story begins with women struggling in birth, the Hebrew midwives, the women of Israel, Jochebed, with the dragon Pharaoh seeking to kill her sons.

At the beginning of the story of the Exodus, Israel herself is in birth pangs, needing to be delivered from the dragon. The story of the Exodus is associated with the opening of the womb, which is why the law concerning the opening of the womb is central to the instructions given in its context. In Exodus 13, verses 1-2 and 11-16 we have this law given.

Israel is God's firstborn son, but Israel is also the woman to whom God grants birth. Pharaoh and the Egyptians are represented as the sea monster Rahab and also called a dragon in later scriptures. They seek to kill the offspring of the woman Israel as soon as she gives birth.

The dragon and his minions pursue the woman into the wilderness, seeking to drown Israel in the Red Sea, from which Israel is rescued and is reborn as a nation as they pass through the narrow passage into a new life. In Revelation, the symbolic Exodus narrative of the woman, the dragon and the firstborn son is played out on a grander scale. Here we see, behind figures such as Egypt, behind the other great antagonists of Israel's history, and even behind the celestial signs of the zodiac themselves, we see Satan.

The dragon has seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his horns, all signs of power and authority. That the dragon has seven heads might remind us of the beasts of Daniel. They have seven heads between them.

The sea beast in the following chapter will also have similar features. The dragon is the archetypal monster, the monster behind all of the other monsters. The dragon here brings down a third of the stars of heaven with his tail, casting them to earth.

We might recall the scorpion locusts of chapter 9, whose stings were in their tails. The dragon is attended by his hellish servants. In chapter 9, it is the star fallen from heaven to earth with the key of the bottomless pit who releases the scorpion locusts.

That a third of the stars are brought down might remind us of the first four trumpets, within which a third of several things are struck. Now in the dragon's descent, a third of the stars are struck. The story of Israel is the story of the archetypal woman struggling to give birth to the seed who will rule, assaulted by the great serpent of old.

This story is seen in the story of Sarah and Pharaoh and Abimelech, in whom the dragon seeks to devour Isaac before his birth, for instance. It is seen in the story of Jochebed, Moses and Pharaoh. It is seen in the story of Mary, Jesus and Herod.

The woman here is not simply to be identified as Mary, as some commentators have done. Rather, Mary is arguably the most important of her historical faces. The woman herself is Israel though.

Her child is Christ himself. The birth of the child can be connected not merely to Christ's incarnation, but also to his resurrection, which is his birth from the dead. Jesus describes his resurrection in such terms in John 16, verse 21.

Peter Lighthouse suggests that this vision of Mother Israel needs to be considered in terms of the allusions to Zechariah that are ongoing in the book. The woman is like the high priest Joshua, with his dirty robes in Zechariah chapter 3. There the high priest is opposed by the accuser, Satan, with the angel of the Lord coming to Joshua's aid. Here Israel is the bride before the throne of God in the now open temple, opposed by the serpent, Satan.

She is vindicated by giving birth to her child. The child is destined to be the great Davidic ruler of Psalm 2, the one to rule the nations with a rod of iron. As he is lifted up through his cross, his resurrection and ascension, Satan will be cast down.

This is referred to by Christ in John chapter 12, verses 31-32. Mother Israel is not only giving birth to one son, but as in the case of Isaiah chapter 66, the one son is the firstborn of many children. The woman flees into the wilderness, where she is protected and nourished by God.

Much as Hagar fled from Sarah, Israel went into the wilderness from Pharaoh, or Elijah went from Ahab and Jezebel. She remains there for 1260 days, incidentally the same period of time of Elijah's drought. This 1260 days is likely related to the 42 months that we read of elsewhere.

In verses 7-12 we read of a heavenly war. This occurs after the male child born of the woman is caught up to God and to his throne. It is easy to forget the cosmic and heavenly dimensions of the Gospel, and the book of Revelation, and particularly this chapter, bring these dimensions into clearer focus.

We might wonder who the character of Michael is. His name means, who is like God, or he who is like God. As a figure we encounter him earlier in the scripture, in Daniel chapter 10, verses 4-14.

There he is described as one of the chief princes, who comes to aid against the kings of Persia. In Daniel chapter 10, verse 21 we read, But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth. There is none who contends by my side against these, except Michael your prince.

And then in Daniel chapter 12, verse 1, At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book.

Michael seems to be a sort of angelic guardian of Israel, who will play a crucial role in the last days. In Jude chapter 1, verse 9, But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, The Lord rebuke you. That description of Michael recalls Zachariah chapter 3 and the angel of the Lord rebuking Satan.

We have already seen Zachariah chapter 3 in the background of this chapter. Many have identified Michael with Christ himself, much as the angel of the Lord is often so identified. Others have regarded Michael as a powerful angel, or perhaps a powerful angel who is closely associated with the Son, his personal assistant perhaps, maybe like Joshua is to Moses.

In Daniel chapter 10, verses 5-6, we see the man of Beryl who seems to be Michael himself. I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Euphaz around his waist. His body was like Beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

This matches very closely with the description of Christ in Revelation chapter 1, verses 12-15. Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, clothed with a long robe, and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow.

His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a

furnace, and his voice was like the roar of many waters. If we are, as I believe we ought, to identify this character of Michael with Christ, we face a problem in the shift from the child to Michael. This does represent a shift of perspective.

However, there are many shifts in imagery in the book, for instance from the child to the lamb or the lamb to the lion. The kingdom of the male child is contested, and Michael and the angels have to fight against the dragon to secure it. The dragon is situated in heaven.

He is a most powerful serpent, with power over the nations, suggested by his offering of the nations to Christ at his temptation. They are under his dominion. His power has a number of different forms.

As James Jordan suggests, he is the destroyer, he is the one who ruins God's creation and brings death. He is the deceiver, the one who misleads and outwits. He is also the accuser, whose power comes from the law and the condemnation that he can bring.

He is the adversary, who opposes the great enemy. He has been active from the beginning. He is the serpent from of old.

The victory over him is won by the blood of the lamb. It is won as the sacrifice of Christ overcomes his work, opening up a living way to God, an eternal life in fellowship with him, to defeat the power of Satan that is exercised through death. It is won as the truth of Christ is spread abroad by the illumination of the spirit, overcoming the deception and darkness of the serpent.

It is won as Christ's intercession as our eternal High Priest overcomes the accuser's condemnation, justifying God's people. It is won as one stronger than the adversary arises and binds his power and his tyranny. It is won as the serpent is cast down from the heavens, losing much of his former authority.

The victory in heaven is also attributed to the martyrs, who conquered the dragon with the blood of the lamb and their faithful testimony to death. The victory in heaven has to be played out on earth too. The devil is cast down to earth.

He has lost the definitive battle, but he can still inflict considerable damage. The dragon now pursues the woman, to whom he still has access. The woman, we might note, is no longer crowned in heaven.

The woman, Mother Israel, was crowned in heaven when she gave birth to her son, the one who was destined to rule the nations. But now that the time of performing that mission has passed, she is one of the other nations upon the earth. She is vulnerable to the assaults of the dragon in many ways.

This is halfway through the final week of Daniel's 70-week vision of Daniel 9, verses 24-

27. The time, times and half a time are a symbolic three and a half years. It's a broken week, which is the same length of time as 1260 days and 42 months.

The water that the serpent pours from his mouth might remind us of the Red Sea, from which Israel is delivered. It might also be a reference to the speech of the serpent, the way that he seeks to destroy and corrupt through false teaching. Wormwood turned the waters bitter, and now the dragon is doing the same thing.

The woman is given the wings of the great eagle to fly from the serpent into the wilderness, much as the Lord describes his deliverance of Israel in Exodus 19, verse 4. You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. The eagle Cherubim, perhaps also the eagle who announced the three great woes, now gives wings to the woman so that she can escape the dragon. The dragon, furious that the woman has escaped him, seeks to attack the rest of her offspring, the faithful ones who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus.

He stands on the sand of the sea. In the following chapter he will call up the beast of the sea, in order to assault the woman's children on both the land and the sea, attacking Christians both in the land of Israel and also within the sea of the Gentiles. A question to consider.

Where in Scripture might we see examples of the assault of the dragon upon the woman? In Revelation chapter 12 there were two signs in heaven, the woman and the dragon. The dragon sought to destroy the woman's son when he was born, but the son was caught up to God and his throne. The dragon was then cast down to earth, where he pursued the woman, who had given birth to the child, making war upon her and the rest of her children.

As he failed in this, at the conclusion of the chapter he was standing on the sand of the sea and we were left waiting to see what he would do next. In chapter 13 a sea beast and a land beast arrive on the scene. Peter Lighthouse observes the very close parallels within the two halves of this chapter, the description of the sea beast and the description of the land beast.

They can be mapped on to each other. These resemblances help us to get a clearer sense of the relationship between these two figures and between both of them and the dragon who lies behind them. The land is Israel and its inhabitants, the sea is the realm of the Gentiles, and the dragon begins by trying to attack the woman and her offspring on the land, but he fails, and so he seeks to raise up an enemy for the woman from the sea.

Beasts rising up from the sea recalls the book of Daniel, which once again lies behind a lot of this chapter of Revelation. Daniel chapter 7 verses 2-8 reads, Daniel declared, I

saw in my vision by night, and behold the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea, and four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from each other. The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings.

Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. And behold another beast, a second one like a bear, it was raised up on one side, it had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth, and it was told, arise, devour much flesh. After this I looked, and behold another, like a leopard, with four wings of a bird on its back, and the beast had four heads, and dominion was given to it.

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, terrifying and dreadful and exceedingly strong. It had great iron teeth, it devoured and broke in pieces and stamped what was left with its feet. It was different from all the other beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns.

I considered the horns, and behold there came up among them another horn, a little one, before which three of the first horns were plucked up by the roots. And behold in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things. The description of the sea beast at the beginning of Revelation chapter 13 is drawn from Daniel chapter 7, but it is a composite of the four sea beasts mentioned there.

The first beast of Daniel is like a lion with eagle's wings, the second beast is like a bear, the third beast is like a leopard and has four heads, the fourth beast has ten horns and a mouth speaking great things in one of the horns. If we combine the features of these four beasts into a monstrous hybrid of them all, we get the sea beast of Revelation chapter 13. It has features of a lion, leopard and bear, like the first three beasts combined.

It has seven heads, the number of the heads of the four beasts of Daniel combined. It has ten horns, like the fourth beast of Daniel. We should not presume that the beasts of the sea are necessarily bad.

Israel had long functioned in a world of larger empires, especially in its exilic and post-exilic history. These empires had various characters to them. At points they protected Israel from other powers, whereas at other times they were like dangerous predators, turning against the people of the land.

The beasts in Daniel's vision and order are Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. The sea beast of Revelation also has features of the dragon himself. The dragon was described back in chapter 12 verse 3, and another sign appeared in heaven.

Behold a great red dragon with seven heads and ten horns, and on his head seven diadems. The sea beast resembles the dragon in having ten horns and seven heads. The

sea beast is an image or reflection of the dragon himself.

He functions as a sort of mini-me for the dragon. The ten diadems presumably connect with kings, and the blasphemous names on the heads contrast both with the seal upon the foreheads of the righteous, and parody the plate on the high priest's forehead, the plate that declares him to be holy to the Lord. The dragon grants the sea beast his power, his throne and great authority.

In his temptation of Christ in the Gospels, Satan declares that he has the authority and the glory of all the kingdoms of the world, and that he can grant those things to whomever he wills. Here the dragon grants this authority and power to the monstrous sea beast, which then turns satanic. The beast, as Austin Farrer notes, is the anointed of the dragon.

He's a parodic Christ. The father gives his power, throne and authority to the lamb, and the beast is the satanic counterpart of the lamb. One of the heads of the sea beast receives a mortal wound, a wound from which he later recovers.

This serves as a wonder that leads the whole earth to marvel as they follow the beast. The earth here may refer to the Jews in particular. The mortal wound of the sea beast from which it recovers presents it also as a parody of Christ in that respect.

This is the beast's death and resurrection. We should also recall the prophecy that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head in Genesis 3.15. Here the dragon's seed, the sea beast, has its head ominously wounded. The prophecy of Genesis 3.15 has been very much in the background throughout this and the preceding chapter, with the woman, her appointed seed, the rest of her offspring, the serpent and his seed, all the way throughout the story.

What the mortal wound could be is not entirely clear. Both Lightheart and Farris suggest that the head that is mortally wounded could be understood to be the first head of the beast. Many commentators see the figure of Nero in the mortally wounded head.

Nero's death is followed by a period in which it might seem that the beast of Rome has been mortally wounded, yet the beast goes on to recover and to gain worship for it. Whatever event is in view here, it seems to involve an apparently fatal blow to Rome, from which it then recovers. Lightheart suggests that the mortally wounded head is the first head of Julius Caesar himself.

The heads aren't individual kings, but kingdoms. After the death of Julius Caesar, it might have seemed that it was the end for Imperial Rome, before it had fully established itself, perhaps even the end for Rome itself. The seeming resurrection of the beast leads people to worship it, asking who is like the beast, and perhaps there's a subtle play here on the name Michael, which means who is like God.

In the worship of the beast, we are seeing Israel in thrall to the beast of Rome, and perhaps also something of Emperor worship playing out over the wider empire. The beast utters blasphemies and exercises authority for 42 months. This is connected with the 42 months, the time, times, and half a time, and the 1,260 days mentioned elsewhere in the book.

This is the period of the two witnesses, and of the trampling of the holy city. It's the period of time as a period of persecution, likely during Nero's reign. The sea beast is granted authority during this period.

The speaking of blasphemy should also remind us of Daniel chapter 7 again. The dragon brought up the sea beast from the waters of the sea, and now we meet, at the end of the chapter, a corresponding beast on the land. If the sea beast is a Gentile beast, associated with Rome, this is a Jewish beast that corresponds to, and is related to it.

It's a beast allied with the sea beast, a beast that acts on the sea beast's behalf. This beast has two horns, perhaps these are related to the king and the priest, the two key figures of power within Israel. If this were the case, perhaps we should see a reference to Herod and his people, and to the high priest and those around him.

This beast is also like a lamb, and it makes an image for the sea beast. Once again we see elements of this beast that serve as a parody of Christ. This is an anti-Christ type figure.

The land beast functions as a sort of prophetic figure, and he will later be identified as the false prophet in chapter 19 verse 20. At first glance he seems to exercise the power of Elijah, calling down fire from heaven. Yet he is a false prophet.

Although he looks like a lamb, his voice is that of the dragon. Once again, behind this figure, this land beast, is the great dragon himself. This figure is ultimately satanically controlled.

And a fourth thing comes into view here, the image of the beast. Whatever the image of the beast is, this land beast gives breath to it. Here we can see a sort of parodic trinity.

The father is the dragon figure, the son is the sea beast, who is given a throne, authority and power, and the land beast is like the spirit. This false spirit type character is one that is a false prophet, and also a figure that gives false breath. The image here might remind us of Ezekiel chapter 37, where Ezekiel prophesied the dry bones, and the breath comes into them and they rise up.

This, however, is a sort of false Pentecost, a false giving of the spirit and breath, a false people that's being formed as a sort of inverse of the church. Here then, with the land beast, there is a false Israel being formed, a counterfeit church that is being formed not in loyalty to God, but in loyalty to the sea beast, to Rome that is persecuting the saints.

The land beast requires people to have the mark of the sea beast on their right hand and their forehead.

Marks on the right hand and forehead would remind us of the placement of the law in phylacteries. This is also an alternative to the marking out of the servants of God upon their foreheads. The land beast, the false prophet that speaks with the voice of the dragon, is a false Israel that's being formed around the powers within the land.

The demand of this mark, if people are to buy and sell, seems to be a reference to the sacrificial economy of the worship of the temple. That becomes bound up with a commitment to the land beast, to the sea beast, and behind them both to the dragon. The chapter ends with one of the most debated verses in the whole book, concerning the number of the beast.

The number of the beast is not, as some have supposed, 666, but 666. It's the number of a man, and many people have seen the solution here to lie in some sort of gematria, which assigns numbers to different letters of the alphabet. This can apply both in Greek and also in Hebrew.

Many different suggestions have been put forward by different interpreters of the book. A popular suggestion is that this is a reference to Nero. Yet, as in a number of other cases, identifying this number as the number of Nero requires a very particular way of writing Nero's name, which perhaps weakens the claim to a connection.

That said, an alternative reading of this text, as 616, might strengthen the connection with Nero, as an alternative rendering of his name would have that as the numerical value. Stepping back and looking at some of the numerical qualities of the number reveals some further possibilities. First of all, the Greek gematria for Jesus' name is 888.

In 666, we might see a parody of that. 888 might make us think of the 8th day, which is the day of new creation. 666 is more associated with the 6th day, the day of the creation of man.

It is also the 36th triangular number. This might contrast with the square and cubic numbers used elsewhere in the book for more holy things. 666 is also two thirds of a thousand.

One thousand is a cubic number, ten by ten by ten, and communicates completeness. But 666 is that complete number minus a third. In both the blowing of the trumpets and the dragon's descent from heaven taking down a third of the stars with him, there has been the removal of a third from a whole number.

Maybe this is some allusion to that. Finally, in scripture, the number 666 is associated with a critical moment within the narrative. In 1 Kings 10, verse 14, it is 666 talents of gold that Solomon brings in in a single year.

This might seem a very strange connection to draw, but this verse is a very important one within the story of 1 Kings. In the story of 1 Kings up to that point, Solomon has been experiencing this meteoric rise of his kingdom. At the very height of his kingdom, the Queen of Sheba has just visited.

In the preceding verse, she had just gone back to her own people. In verse 14, however, everything starts to curdle. First we see Solomon accumulating too much gold.

Then we see Solomon going to Egypt to get chariots and horses. And then he multiplies wives and turns away from the Lord. There were three laws that were given to the king in Deuteronomy.

Three things that the king was not supposed to do. And in these verses, Solomon breaks each one of these laws in succession. His heart turns away from the Lord.

And from what is arguably the greatest point in its history, Israel descends into a new sort of captivity. Not long after, the kingdom is divided. And from the glories of Solomon's reign, it descends in a most lamentable way.

In that number, 666, we have the first indication of the fall of Solomon. And now in this beast, there is another indication of fallen kingship. The meaning of the number 666, then, is likely a combination of these different things.

As in a great number of the symbols and images of the Book of Revelation, the heroes are expected to observe a great many different correlations and connotations of the images that are presented. A question to consider. How might the parodic trinity and church of the dragon, the sea beast, the land beast, and the image of the beast help us better to understand the nature of the dragon's kingdom? Revelation chapter 14 in many ways parallels with chapter 13.

It views the events of that chapter from a differing perspective. The sea beast here is no longer the chief active party. Rather, it is the lamb.

Whereas those who would not take on the mark of the beast were killed by the land beast, here they are a faithful army of martyrs, harvested by the lamb. Revelation chapter 14 opens with the lamb upon Mount Zion, surrounded by the community of the 144,000. Immediately before the chapter break, there was another company of worshippers.

The worshippers of the sea beast marked on their right hand and forehead with the name of the sea beast or with the number of his name. And here, in contrast to the worshippers of the beast, the lamb's followers are marked by his name and his father's name on their foreheads. Seeing the lamb and the 144,000 immediately after the beast and those marked with his number or name underlines the parodic character of the latter.

The dragon, the sea beast, the land beast, and the image of the beast are a parody of the trinity and the church. The land beast is a parody of the lamb and the worshippers of the sea beast in the land parody the 144,000. The lamb was formerly in the throne scene in heaven, but now he stands upon Mount Zion in fulfillment of Psalm 2 verses 5-6.

Then he will speak to them in his wrath and terrify them in his fury, saying, As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill. As Austin Farrow points out, the lamb connects the scenes in heaven with the scenes on earth. There seems to be a fusion of Mount Zion and the throne scene here.

Beyond the fact that Psalm 2 continues to be in the background here, there is also the background of Daniel chapter 7 and the establishment of the Son of Man who will deal with the beasts. In verses 13-18 of that chapter, And the visions of my head alarmed me. I approached one of those who stood there and asked him the truth concerning all this.

So he told me and made known to me the interpretation of the things. These four great beasts are four kings who shall arise out of the earth, but the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom and possess the kingdom forever, forever and ever. Earlier we saw the lamb by himself, the one like the Son of Man, but now he stands in the midst of a company of the saints who will be raised up with him.

They will inherit the kingdom too. They also, as we will see, have the character of sacrificial lambs. There is a roaring sound of worship from heaven above them, a song that they alone are taught.

This is connected with their dedicated character and their martyrdom. They are described in a five-fold way. They are described in a number of different ways.

They are not defiled, they are virgins, they follow the lamb everywhere, they are redeemed as first fruits, there is no lie in their mouth, and they are blameless. This brings together an array of different images. First of all, they are like holy warriors, while engaged in holy warfare when the Lord was in the camp.

Israelite warriors were not to have relationships with women. They were dedicated servants for that period of time and had to remain in a state of cleanness. This company is also like holy warriors, they have been set apart for the Lord.

They follow the lamb everywhere, like a military company, but there are also elements of a bridal company here. The image of a company of virgins would be far more likely to be associated with women, and women in a bridal party. We see such an image, for instance, in the parable of the wise and the foolish virgins in the Gospel of Matthew.

This company of male virgins not defiled by women is not to be taken literally. Rather, it is a reference to those who have not been defiled by intercourse with the whore of Babylon. We might also here recall the character of Jezebel, about whom the church in

Thyatira is warned.

These are people who have avoided idolatry with the beast. They are also a sacrificial company. Here we might think of Isaiah chapter 53 verses 7-9.

These 144,000 are in the company of the lamb, the sacrificial lamb. They also have no deceit in their mouth, they are blameless, they are without blemish, as the sacrifice was supposed to be. The fact that there is no lie in their mouth is a reference also to the fact that they are faithful witnesses, and they are those who have not compromised with the beast.

In these respects, they are faithful companions to the lamb, persons who have been formed into the image of the lamb. Back at the end of chapter 8, the eagle flew overhead, announcing the coming of three woes. Now the angel flies overhead, calls with a loud voice, and it is a similar description.

The declarations of the woes provided the structure of chapters 8-12, and the angels who fly overhead and call out with a loud voice do the same here. Peter Lighthouse observes the pattern. The first angel anticipates chapters 15-16.

In chapter 15 verse 4, This is anticipated in the statement of the first angel here. That angel also announced the advent of the hour of judgment, which is what happens next as the bowls are initiated. He also declares God's sovereignty over heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water, and judgment begins and falls upon the sites that are mentioned there.

The second angel declares that Babylon the Great is fallen. This expression is found once again in chapter 18 verse 2, and chapters 17-18 are being summarized in this statement. This is the first reference to Babylon, before she is properly introduced to us at the beginning of chapter 17.

There is also reference to the wine of her immorality and the wine of God's wrath, which come together in various ways. It is the wine of the blood of the saints that will first of all be drunk by her, and then poured out upon her in judgment. The Lord will prepare this wine for her at the end of the chapter.

The third angel cry refers to the events of chapters 19-21 verse 8. In chapter 19 verse 20 we read, And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast, and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. After this third angel there is a voice from heaven, presumably the voice of the Lamb, declaring, Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.

This voice is answered by the antiphonal voice of the Spirit, Blessed indeed that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them. In these firstfruits who are made

like the Lamb, and enter into his sufferings, the church begins to enter fully into the life of its Lord. As he was raised up through his sufferings, they will be raised up through their sufferings.

The bride will be joined to the bridegroom. And at this point the state of the people of God changes. In Hebrews chapter 11 verses 39 to 40 we read, And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

As the church fills up the suffering of Christ, all the people of God from all ages can be made perfect together, and from that point on the fuller union between Christ and his bride that is made possible by these firstfruits will be something enjoyed by all of the saints. The chapter ends with a harvest scene. There is a harvest of grain followed by a harvest of grapes.

The harvest is of the 144,000. They have earlier been described as the firstfruits, and here they are actually reaped. The symbolic use of the growing and reaping of grain is common within the scripture.

We might think back to the Old Testament and the way that the great feasts of Israel were often connected both with agricultural events of harvest and with specific events within redemptive history. Jesus also uses the language of harvest on many occasions. Harvest can be seen as the time of judgment when things are divided and things are brought in.

After the harvest of the grain there is a second harvest which is the harvest of the wine, and here the harvested wine is trodden underfoot in the winepress outside of the city. Being outside of the city, they are associated with Christ's own crucifixion. The 144,000 are trampled underfoot as we saw earlier, but where as we saw earlier they are being trampled underfoot was a sign of the dominance of their enemies.

Here they are being trampled underfoot in order to be made into wine. What seems from one vantage point to be a power given to their adversaries is here presented as the means by which their enemies are unwittingly rendering them effective agents of God's wrath to themselves. They are making wine and they will have to drink this wine at some point in the future, wine that will bring the wrath of God down upon them.

The church, symbolically suffering in the same place where Christ suffered, outside of the city, is being conformed to Christ and his sufferings. Thinking back to the images that we have of the beasts and also of the lamb, we should think of their composite character. They include many different things.

They have horns that represent different powers and kings. They can have a number of heads and diadems. They are composite creatures that hold together many different

things within themselves.

They represent a number of different rulers. They represent empires stretched over time. They represent a large company of people.

And the lamb is the same. Christ gathers many peoples within himself. And once we recognise this it will become clearer that the gathering of the people within Christ is part of the means by which Christ himself is raised up.

Christ can't fully be glorified if his body, the church, is not fully glorified. Israel is God's field of grain. Israel is also God's vine or vineyard as we see in Psalm 80 or Isaiah chapter 5. And now the blood flows from the winepress for 1600 stadia.

This is the entire length of Israel from north to south and is flowing up to the height of a horse's bridle. That might be an allusion back to Zechariah chapter 14 verse 20. Images of wine pressing can be used as images of judgement in places like Joel chapter 3. Here however the image seems to be used in a more complicated way.

It is an image that seems to be one of judgement. The people of God are being trampled underfoot but yet they are being prepared to be made into wine. And in the chapters that follow it will be the wine of the blood of the saints that brings down God's wrath upon the whore and those who are associated with her.

1600 stadia, besides being roughly the length of the land of Israel, is also a square number. It is the number 40 squared. As a square number it should recall the number 144,000 which is itself connected with the square of 12 as 144.

A question to consider. Within this chapter we see events that we have seen earlier from one perspective presented to us from another perspective. Where else can we see this happening in the book of Revelation? How might these differing perspectives upon the same situation help us better to understand the situations within which we find ourselves? In Revelation chapter 12 we saw two great signs in heaven, the woman and the dragon.

Now at the beginning of chapter 15 we encounter another, seven angels with seven plagues. We are reaching a climax here. In the first verse we are told that the seven plagues that the angels will bring will complete the wrath of God.

As heavenly signs the woman and the dragon had connections with the zodiac, with the woman being Virgo and the dragon being Scorpio and the claws, which we know as Libra. Now with the seven angels with plagues we have further signs. We have seen sets of seven angels on a number of occasions before, for instance in the angels of the seven churches and in the trumpet blowing angels.

The angels here will be given bowls and should probably be connected with the seven

planets of the ancient solar system and also with comets, which as Peter Lighthouse notes were referred to as bowls. Austin Farrer suggests that we might see a descent through heavenly hierarchies here, as Christ himself opens the seven seals, the archangels or angels of the presence blow the trumpets and seven angels pour out the bowls. Perhaps with the bowls we should also, as Farrer argues, see a connection with the cherubim like a man, which relates to the sign of Aquarius, the water bearer.

The ordering of the final seven plagues here is interesting as they will fall after the 144,000 of Israel have passed through the sea. This company seems to precede the greater company of the redeemed. There is a threefold exodus here as Lighthouse observes.

The Lamb, the Bridegroom, precedes everyone else, then the 144,000 of the core bridal company, the first fruits of the earth, and then the wider multitude that follow after them. At the heart of chapter 15 is rich and subtle exodus imagery. Themes of the exodus pervade the book of Revelation, but here they are especially dense.

There are the great plagues, and then there is a scene reminiscent of the Red Sea crossing, on the other side of which a great company of Jews sing the song of Moses, much as Israel, led by Moses, sang the song of the sea in Exodus chapter 15, after their deliverance from Pharaoh, the great sea monster, of the story of the exodus. There the waters through which the Israelites were saved destroyed their enemies. And here the 144,000 are brought through a new sea of glass mingled with fire, which will be a means of destroying their enemies.

They have passed through the sea of blood that was described at the end of chapter 14, and are now safe on the other side. The fiery character of the sea of glass here is one that connects it with the stream of fire that came out from God's throne in Daniel chapter 7. Yet the sea that they passed through was not so much a boundary on a horizontal plane than it was a boundary on a vertical plane. They have passed through the firmament, and now stand above it by the sea of glass before the throne of God, the same sea that we saw back in chapter 4 verse 6. This fiery firmament sea will come down upon their pursuers in the bowls in devastating judgment, but they themselves are now entirely safe on the other side.

They have been harvested from the earth and are now in God's presence. Earlier in chapter 14 verses 1 to 3 we read, Then I looked, and behold, on Mount Zion stood the Lamb, and with Him 144,000 who had His name and the Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, like the roar of many waters, and like the sound of loud thunder.

The voice I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps, and they were singing a new song before the throne, and before the four living creatures, and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed

from the earth. They were taught a new song back then, and now they are singing it.

The preceding throne scenes were characterized by great companies joined together in song, and the same is the case here. They are now being included into the liturgy. Earlier in chapter 5 verse 9 a new song was introduced as the Lamb ascended to the heavenly company.

Now the renewing of the song of heaven continues with the inclusion of the company of the 144,000. The redemption is the formation of a choir. The company are described as singing the song of Moses, connecting them with the Israelites in Exodus chapter 15.

Some have also seen an allusion to the song of Moses that he sung at the end of his life, which Joshua helped with in Deuteronomy chapter 32. However, allusions to that are much weaker. The reference to the song of Moses here is strange and somewhat surprising.

Apart from its setting after a great Exodus-like crossing of a sea, the song of the 144,000 does not seem to be that closely related to the song of Moses in Exodus chapter 15 at all. Rather, the Old Testament background of the song seems to lie more in Psalms 86 and 98 and the book of Jeremiah chapter 10. Psalm 86 verses 8 to 10 read, There is none like you among the gods, O Lord, nor are there any works like yours.

All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name. For you are great and do wondrous things. You alone are God.

Psalm 98 verse 2, The Lord has made known his salvation. He has revealed his righteousness in the sight of the nations. In his treatment of this passage, Richard Baucham reminds his readers of Isaiah chapter 11 verse 15 to chapter 12 verse 6, which presents its readers with a reframing of the Red Sea crossing deliverance and subsequent song in the context of a new deliverance.

And the Lord will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt, and will wave his hand over the river with his scorching breath, and strike it into seven channels, and he will lead people across in sandals. And there will be a highway from Assyria for the remnant that remains of his people, as there was for Israel when they came up from the land of Egypt. You will say in that day, I will give thanks to you, O Lord, for though you were angry with me, your anger turned away, that you might comfort me.

Behold, God is my salvation I will trust, and will not be afraid, for the Lord God is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. With joy you will draw waters from the wells of salvation, and you will say on that day, give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted, sing praises to the Lord, for he has done gloriously. Let this be made known in all the earth, shout and sing for joy, O inhabitant of Zion, for great in your midst is the

Holy One of Israel.

Balkan observes that this song in Isaiah chapter 12 is clearly playing off the song of Moses from Exodus chapter 15. It is not an entirely novel composition. It picks up the words of the opening verses of Moses' song in that chapter in verses 1 to 2. Then Moses and the people of Israel sang this song to the Lord, saying, I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.

The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation. This is my God, and I will praise him, my Father's God, and I will exalt him. However, the stronger background for the songs of Isaiah chapter 12 is found in Psalm 105.

In verses 1 to 2 of that psalm we read, O give thanks to the Lord, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, sing to him, sing praises to him, tell of all his wondrous works. Balkan observes the way that Psalm 105 was verbally linked with Exodus chapter 15, albeit principally in places other than those in which its language is adopted by Isaiah chapter 12. In its sharing of key terminology with Exodus 15, Psalm 105 was seen to function as a sort of an interpretation of the earlier song.

Isaiah chapter 12 is using the interpretation of the psalm to develop its own resetting of the Song of the Sea. Revelation does much the same thing. Balkan identifies a number of key elements of the message of the original Song of Moses that Revelation is taking up.

He writes, In John's reading of the Song in Exodus 15, the following points are likely to have been of significance. 1. God's mighty act of judgment on his enemies, which was also the deliverance of his people. Exodus 15 1-10, 12 2. God's mighty act of judgment demonstrated his incomparable superiority to the pagan gods.

3. Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders? Exodus 15, 11 3. God's mighty act of judgment filled the pagan nations with fear. Exodus 15, 14-16 4. It brought his people into his temple. Exodus 15, 13, 17 5. The Song concludes, The Lord shall reign forever and ever.

Exodus 15, 18 The words with which the Song ends, the fifth point, clearly connect with Revelation's overall theme of the establishment of God's eschatological kingdom, and so they have already been quoted at chapter 11, verse 15. The significance of the new Exodus for John is ultimately that it leads to God's eternal kingdom. John's vision doesn't directly allude to the original Song of Moses so much as it indirectly alludes to it.

The introduction of the Song as the Song of Moses alerts the hearer to the fact that the Song of Moses is in the background, but without making clear how. When the hearer hears the Song that follows, their initial reaction will be confusion at the lack of apparent relation between the original Song of Moses and the Song recorded here, when they were led to believe that one existed. However, then they start to recognise other Old

Testament scriptures in the background, which tips them off to the fact that something very similar to what occurs in Isaiah chapter 12 is occurring here.

The principal background texts are Psalm 86, verses 8-10, Psalm 98, verse 2, both of these I have already mentioned, and then Jeremiah chapter 10, verses 6-7. There is none like you, O Lord, you are great, and your name is great in might. Who would not fear you, O King of the nations? For this is your due, for among all the wise ones of the nations, and in all their kingdoms, there is none like you.

The hearer of Revelation chapter 15 should recognise a number of things. First, that somehow or other the words of the Song connect with the original Song of Moses in Exodus chapter 15, while also being the new Song described in Revelation chapter 14, verse 3. Second, that other Old Testament texts are being alluded to, most notably Jeremiah chapter 10, Psalm 86, and Psalm 98. Third, that these Old Testament texts are themselves explorations and developments of Exodus chapter 15, more especially verse 11.

Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders? This verse of the original Song of Moses, Exodus chapter 15, verse 11, is the key to the whole thing. As Borkham expresses it, it is the common denominator which links the passages to which the Song in Revelation chapter 15 alludes. Its focus is upon the incomparability of God in His redemption.

It also makes it more apparent that the Song of the 144,000 is being juxtaposed with the false worship described in chapter 13, verse 4. And they worshipped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it? Once we recognise the way that Revelation chapter 15 is working with the original Song of Moses, the theological message of the Song becomes quite apparent. Borkham concludes, This has a most important bearing on the significance of the whole of the New Exodus symbolism, which is so prominent throughout Revelation. It shifts the emphasis in the significance of the New Exodus from an event by which God delivers His people by judging their enemies, to an event which brings the nations to acknowledge the true God.

In chapter 15, verses 2-4, the martyrs celebrate the victory God has won through their death and vindication, not by praising Him for their own deliverance, but by celebrating its effect on the nations in bringing them to worship God. This gives a fresh significance to the earlier use of New Exodus imagery with reference to the Lamb's victory, in which by His death He ransomed a people from all nations to be a kingdom and priests for God. In chapter 5, verses 9-10, we now see that this redemption of a special people from all the peoples is not an end in itself, but has a further purpose, to bring all the peoples to acknowledge and worship God.

The Red Sea crossing ultimately led Israel to the encounter with the Lord at Sinai, to the

tabernacle, and to the gift of the law. Much the same movement occurs here, as we now see the sanctuary of the heavenly tent of the testimony opened up. This also recalls the earlier scene at the end of chapter 11.

This will initiate a new Pentecost-like event, as Lighthouse observes. The pouring out of the bowls is the flip side of the pouring out of the Spirit. Christ entered into the heavenly place, and then the Spirit was poured out in blessing.

The 144,000 martyrs passed through the firmament into the heavens, and now the Spirit has poured out in devastating bowls of judgment. Ideally, bowls of incense and wine ascend to God and are received by Him, but now bowls of incense are tipped over with fiery coals descending, and bowls filled with the wine of the blood of the saints, mixed with the fire of God's wrath, are poured down upon those who filled them with their murders. A question to consider, how much Revelation's resetting of the Song of Moses changed the way that we read the original? In Revelation chapter 16, the bowls are poured out upon the earth.

In contrast to the seals and the trumpets, these proceed relatively directly, without the long, drawn-out sixth and seventh judgments. The bowls have a finality to them, as Revelation chapter 15 verse 1 said, With them the wrath of God is finished. The number 7 repeatedly appears in the book of Revelation, drawing the minds of its hearers back to the original creation.

The events of the book are both a de-creation and a new creation, so it is fitting that there should be so many allusions to the themes of Genesis chapters 1-3. Here, as Peter Lighthouse maintains, a loose parallel can be seen between the days of creation and the bowl judgments. The bowls also closely parallel the trumpet judgments.

Bowl 1 is poured out on the earth. Perhaps this connects with the undifferentiated creation that existed on the first day. It also connects with the hail and fire mixed with blood that were thrown to earth in the first trumpet judgment.

Bowl 2 is poured out on the sea, perhaps connecting with the below waters of the second day of creation. Bowl 2 also resembles the second trumpet, where the great burning mountain was cast into the sea. Bowl 3 is poured out on the rivers and the springs of water, the land waters associated with the division of the land from the sea on the third day of the creation.

It is similar to the fall of wormwood, which made the land waters bitter in the third trumpet. Bowl 4 is poured out on the sun, connected with the creation of the sun, moon and stars on the fourth day of creation. Trumpet 4 struck the sun, moon and a third of the stars.

Bowl 5 is poured out on the throne of the beast. As the beast is a sea beast, this

connects with the fifth day, in which the great sea monsters were formed. The fifth trumpet concerned the fallen star, who was given the key and the authority of the abyss, the bottomless pit.

Bowl 6 is poured out on the river Euphrates, opening the way for a heavenly army to enter the land. Trumpet 6 released the four angels at the river Euphrates. Bowl 7 is the bowl of completion, the Sabbath bowl, with which the voice from the temple declared that it is finished.

Following the blowing of trumpet 7 in Revelation 11, verse 19 we read, Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and the ark of his covenant was seen within his temple. There were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and heavy hail. Here in chapter 16 we read of similar details, in verse 18, And there were flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and a great earthquake such as there had never been since man was on the earth, so great was that earthquake.

And in verse 21, And great hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, fell from heaven on people, and they cursed God for the plague of the hail, because the plague was so severe. All of these pronounced similarities invite reflection. Some readers of the book have suggested that we are cycling through the same events from different perspectives.

However, while at points we do see the same event from different perspectives, more generally there is a clear progression occurring in the visions. Perhaps we ought to think of a progression similar to that of ascending a spiral staircase, where at each point you are going up, while also going through a spiral that can be mapped onto a lower spiral. The angels received their bowls from one of the four living creatures, as we saw back in chapter 15, verse 7. Perhaps the human-faced cherubim is the living creature in view here, associated with Aquarius as the water-bearer.

The bowls contain the wrath of God to be poured out upon the earth. The bowls come from the very throne of God, by means of one of the four living creatures and the seven angels. They should be connected with both the blood of the martyrs and the fire before the throne of God.

The first bowl produces painful sores, which might recall the sixth plague, the plague of boils, in Exodus chapter 9. This judgment falls upon the bearers of the mark of the beast and his image especially. The plague of boils in Exodus was, among other things, a defiling plague. It came from the ashes of the kilns and defiled flesh.

It is similar in its impact to being struck with leprosy, which would drive one out from worship. This judgment falls upon the land, upon people in Israel. And there is an inversion that occurs here.

Whereas bearing the mark of the beast and worshipping its image were required to be a worshipper, now they led to people being excluded. Prior to the civil war, the leadership of the Jews had prostituted themselves with the Roman beast and established the temple itself as a sort of perverse image of the beast, a den of thieves preserved through a commitment to appeasing the sea beast that eclipsed the fear of the Lord. However, after the outbreak of the war, such compromise, rather than being a prerequisite for participation in the worship of the temple, would exclude people from it.

The second bowl is poured out upon the Gentile sea, killing every living thing in it. The sea was formerly a realm that was hospitable to God-fearers and other forms of connection with the ships of the Jewish diaspora. These sources of life, however, are now removed or defiled.

The times of ignorance are now completely over, and people must turn to Christ. The third bowl is upon the rivers and springs. Earlier, in discussing the third trumpet and the poisoning of the waters by wormwood, we saw the connection between such land waters and the waters of the temple.

Elsewhere, at the end of the Book of Ezekiel, the temple is presented as the source of living water, which flows out from God's presence. With the rivers and springs of water, the source of life in the land is cut off. Blood is spilling out into all of the formerly habitable realms and rendering them uninhabitable and polluted.

The third bowl, the judgment upon the springs and the rivers, represents a development beyond the previous judgment on the waters in the third trumpet, where only a third of the waters were made into wormwood. The worship of the temple had been made bitter, but now it is utterly poisoned. In response to the third bowl, the water-bearing angel praises the justice of God in bringing the judgments.

There is a poetic justice to it all. They shed the blood of saints and prophets, and now they are given blood mixed with the fiery wrath of God to drink. If they reject the new waters flowing from God's presence, the rivers of living water flowing from Christ, this blood is what they must drink.

There is a response from the altar, perhaps here the golden incense altar. In chapter 6 verse 9, the martyrs were like blood beneath the altar, calling for vindication and vengeance upon those who took their lives. In chapter 8 verse 3, an angel, possibly the spirit himself, brought the prayers of the saints from the bronze altar in the land to the golden altar in the heavens, presenting them an incense before the Lord.

Now, in the voice from the golden altar of incense, we hear the response of the martyrs to the Lord's answer to their prayers and his avenging of their blood upon the people of the earth. Perhaps we should see in the second and third bowls a sort of expansion of the first Egyptian plague, where the Nile and its waters were turned into blood. The

fourth bowl strikes the sun, which scorches people with fire.

Whereas in the fourth trumpet the sun, moon and stars were dimmed, now the sun is turned up to an unbearable heat. Previously powers and authorities had been weakened within the land. However, now the sun, perhaps the sun of Roman authority, becomes scorching in the land, causing life to wither before its blazing heat.

Roman authority turns upon the land in devastating power as the Jewish war heats up. The response of the people is not to repent, but to reject God even more forcefully. The fifth angel pours out his bowl on the beast's throne in kingdom.

The beast here is the sea beast, and the judgment referred to here is likely that of AD 68-69, as after Nero's suicide, Rome was struck with civil war and went through four emperors in a single year. The Jews had not repented when Rome's heat had started to scorch their land, and now the Romans fail to repent when their kingdom is plunged into darkness. The sixth bowl brings two great forces into conflict.

Here we should think back to the fifth and the sixth trumpets, with the scorpion locusts and the corresponding army restrained by the angels at the river Euphrates. Revelation 9-13-17 read, Then the sixth angel blew his trumpet, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar before God, saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, Release the four angels who abound at the great river Euphrates. So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour, the day, the month, and the year, were released to kill a third of mankind.

The number of mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number. And this is how I saw the horses in my vision, and those who rode them.

They wore breastplates the color of fire, and of sapphire, and of sulfur, and the heads of the horses were like lion's heads, and fire and smoke and sulfur came out of their mouths. The kings of verse 12 are literally from the rising of the sun, perhaps associated with Jesus himself, who declares that he is coming like a thief. The water of the boundary of the land is dried up, so that a heavenly invasion force can pass over into the land.

We might think back to Israel crossing the Jordan under Joshua. As the Jews become corrupt like Canaanites, a new river crossing occurs. It is a new conquest.

It is perhaps also a new exodus, associated with the promises in Isaiah chapter 44 verses 27 to 28. The God who says to the deep, Be dry, I will dry up your rivers, will prepare the path for Cyrus. Cyrus was the king from the east who diverted the Euphrates, crossing over and defeating Babylon, releasing the Jews.

A similar thing is occurring here. A new Babylon is about to be defeated, and the Lord is preparing the way. The triad of dragon, sea beast and land beast are here described as the dragon, beast and false prophet.

The description of the land beast as the false prophet connects to the way that his speech was important, and the way that the signs that he performed that misled people was also part of his power. They produce demonic frogs from their mouths, reminiscent of the second plague of the exodus, when the frogs came up from the Nile. The frogs go everywhere, spreading more direct demonic conflict to all parts of the empire, doing battle with the heavenly army that has been released against them.

They all gather together at Armageddon, the mountain of Megiddo. This reference is complicated by the fact that Megiddo does not have a mountain. Megiddo was the site where King Josiah was killed by the Egyptians in battle, an event that extinguished much of the hope of the southern kingdom prior to its exile in Babylon.

This event is reversing that. It is also placing the church more directly in conflict with the powers of the Gentiles, as the Jews are no longer the prominent adversaries of the church after this. Lighthouse notes another possibility, an allusion back to Zechariah chapter 12, which refers to the mourning of the nation after the death of Josiah, and connects this with the mourning that will occur for the messianic shepherd figure.

Revelation already alluded to this passage in chapter 1 verse 7. Zechariah chapter 12 verses 8 to 11 The plain of Megiddo is, in Revelation, spoken of as a mountain. This does not reflect the actual geography. However, as in other places in scripture, the point is likely that of communicating the spiritual geography.

This is Mount Sinai. It is like Mount Carmel as well with the showdown with the priests of Baal. The showdown with the armies of the nations will occur at a place of communion with God.

With the seventh angel's bowls, the great judgement is completed. The bowl is poured out on the air so that every element and realm has been struck. The waters, the earth, the fire in the sky of the sun, are now also the air.

The entire old world order has been judged. The result is an immense earthquake shaking up the entire cosmos, but focusing on the great city of Babylon. We see similar descriptions of an earthquake that entirely transforms the geography in Zechariah chapter 14.

The city is here described as being split into three parts. Perhaps this can be seen as an allusion back to Ezekiel chapter 5 verses 1 to 8. And you, O son of man, take a sharp sword, use it as a barber's razor, and pass it over your head and your beard. Then take balances for weighing, and divide the hair.

A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after

them.

And you shall take from these a small number and bind them in the skirts of your robe. And of these again you shall take some and cast them into the midst of the fire, and burn them in the fire. From there a fire will come out into all the house of Israel.

Thus says the Lord God, This is Jerusalem. I have set her in the center of the nations, with countries all around her. And she has rebelled against my rules by doing wickedness more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries all around her.

For they have rejected my rules, and have not walked in my statutes. Therefore thus says the Lord God, Because you are more turbulent than the nations that are all around you, and have not walked in my statutes or obeyed my rules, and have not even acted according to the rules of the nations that are all around you. Therefore thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, am against you, and I will execute judgments in your midst in the sight of the nations.

It might also refer to the extreme factionalism into which the city of Jerusalem fell. Josephus writes in Book 5 of the Jewish War about the division of Jerusalem into rival factions in its last days. The cities of the nations fell.

The shake-up of this period, civil war in Rome, and the destruction of Jerusalem, leads to a more general collapse of the old order, most keenly experienced by Jews in the land and in the diaspora. The islands flee away as the diaspora outposts suffer from the consequences of the fall of the great city of Babylon, which is Jerusalem. The mountains are nowhere to be found as great powers and rulers are swept from the land.

Babylon the Great will be made to drink the cup of the wine of God's fury. David Chilton suggests that the plague of the hail might be a reference to the great stones that Josephus describes as being hurled against the city by the Roman army in Jewish War, Book 5, Chapter 6. The stone missiles weighed a talent and travelled two furlongs or more, and their impact not only on those who were hit first, but also on those behind them, was enormous. At first the Jews kept watch for the stone, for it was white, and its approach was intimated to the eye by its shining surface as well as to the ear by its whizzing sound.

Watchmen posted on the towers gave the warnings whenever the engine was fired, and the stone came hurtling toward them, shouting in their native tongue, The sun is coming! Those in the line of fire made way and fell prone, a precaution that resulted in the stones passing harmlessly through and falling in their rear. To frustrate this, it occurred to the Romans to blacken the stones, so that they could not be seen so easily beforehand. Then they hit their target and destroyed many with a single shot.

Nevertheless, even when faced with all of these great judgments, the people still failed

to repent. A question to consider. There are multiple allusions to several past instances of great judgment upon a land or city in the Book of Revelation.

How many of these can you identify? Babylon the Great has been explicitly mentioned at a few points in the Book of Revelation already. In chapter 14 verse 8 and chapter 16 verse 19. In neither place did we have an extended description or discussion of the city.

Now in chapter 17, Babylon the Great and its fall, already mentioned in chapters 14 and 16, is described in more detail. The identity of Babylon the Great is a matter to which we should give some careful thought. To many commentators, that Babylon the Great is a depiction of Rome is fairly obvious.

Austen Farrow writes, We might see further juxtapositions between the harlot and the scarlet beast and the rider and the white horse. As usual, to understand the meaning of John's prophecies in this book, it is important that we pay very close attention both to the literary structures and connections within the Book of Revelation itself, and also to the Old Testament texts that lie in the background. Without a deep familiarity with such Old Testament scriptures, especially in prophetic books such as Daniel, Ezekiel and Zechariah, we would stand little chance of understanding Revelation.

The background provided by these prophetic books will definitely prove illuminating for our understanding of this chapter. Peter Lighthouse observes the way that Revelation alludes to or connects with Ezekiel at many points in his earlier chapters, but tracks with Ezekiel ever more closely in its concluding chapters. He writes, The interaction of Ezekiel and Revelation becomes even stronger after chapter 17, and the two books run in close parallel to their respective ends.

Revelation 20-22 The Valley of Dry Bones, Ezekiel 37, links to the First Resurrection, Revelation 20-5 Battle of Gog and Magog, Ezekiel 38-39, Revelation 20-8 Birds gorging on corpses, Ezekiel 39, Revelation 19-21 A high mountain, Ezekiel 40-2, Revelation 21-10 Measurement of Temple and City, Ezekiel 40-5, Revelation 21-15 A temple is full of Yahweh's glory, Ezekiel 43-2, Revelation 21-11-23 A river of life flowing from a sanctuary, Ezekiel 47-12, Revelation 22-2 Revelation chapter 17 offers the hearer a closer view of the events connected with the seventh bowl, the fall of Babylon the Great. To see the harlot, John will be relocated to the wilderness by one of the seven bowl angels. Behind the image of the wicked woman in the wilderness, connected with Babylon, some hearers might hear Zechariah chapter 5 verses 5-11.

Then the angel who talked with me came forward and said to me, Lift your eyes and see what this is that is going out. And I said, What is it? He said, This is the basket that is going out. And he said, This is their iniquity in all the land.

And behold, the leaden cover was lifted, and there was a woman sitting in the basket. And he said, This is wickedness. And he thrust her back into the basket and thrust down

the leaden weight on its opening.

And I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, two women coming forward. The wind was in their wings. They had wings like the wings of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between earth and heaven.

Then I said to the angel who talked with me, Where are they taking the basket? He said to me, To the land of Shinar to build a house for it, and when this is prepared, they will set the basket down there on its base. The woman called wickedness which moves out of Israel to the land of Shinar, the land of Babylonia, sits in a basket carried by two women with stork wings. There it waits until a house or temple will be built for it.

Thinking about this visually, we might see here a parodic arc, with women with the wings of unclean birds playing the role of cherubim, a basket with a leaden cover playing the role of the golden ark of the covenant over which the cherubim were placed, and the woman wickedness sitting in the site corresponding to the site of greatest holiness in the very holy of holies. One might notice resemblances between this and the image of the woman here in Revelation chapter 17. The woman here is depicted as possessing a perverse form of priestly characteristics.

Her clothing, with purple and scarlet adorned with gold and jewels, has characteristics most associated with the clothing of the high priest in the book of Exodus. On the high priest's forehead was a plate of pure gold with the engraving, Holy to the Lord. The harlot in Revelation also has a name written on her forehead, Babylon the Great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations, where the high priest was supposed to be characterized by extreme cleanness and holiness.

The harlot is characterized by blasphemy, abomination and impurity. The priests were never to drink alcohol prior to or in the context of their duties, but the harlot is intoxicated with the blood of the saints. The woman is clearly incredibly important, so important that the kings of the earth have committed sexual immorality with her.

As we see in this and the following chapter, she stands at the heart of an entire world system, as it were. She is the mother of prostitutes and of the earth's abominations. Such grand statements present a challenge for those who would claim that the woman is Jerusalem, as Jerusalem, while doubtless not unimportant, seems to be a relatively small city in the east, in comparison with the might and centrality of the great city of Rome.

The harlot is seated on many waters, riding upon a scarlet beast, described as full of blasphemous names, with seven heads and ten horns. The description of the beast resembles the sea beast of Revelation chapter 13 verse 1, and I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns, and blasphemous names on its heads. In chapter 17, the beast is described as being scarlet, much as the dragon was described as being scarlet in Revelation chapter 12.

The woman is associated with the beast. However, as we move further in the chapter, it becomes clearer that the two figures are distinct from each other. The beast and the ten horns will later turn upon the woman and destroy her.

As we try to identify the harlot, this distinction is important to consider. Taking this distinction seriously gives some support to the identification of the woman as Jerusalem. When the beast and the ten horns, which seem more clearly to be associated with Rome, hate the harlot and turn upon her in verse 16, rendering her desolate and naked, devouring her flesh and burning her up with fire, understanding the harlot to be the polity represented by unfaithful Jerusalem, destroyed by Rome, upon whom she had once rested, makes quite a lot more sense of that particular verse, even if we are still left with many other questions about other parts of the passage.

Further evidence in favour of identifying the harlot as Jerusalem comes from other considerations. Of all cities, it is Jerusalem that is uniquely situated to be an adulterous harlot, as she is the city that is supposed to be holy to the Lord. She is the city that can be the most perverse, as she is the city that has been especially sanctified.

Jerusalem is described as a harlot on several occasions in the Old Testament, for instance in Isaiah 1, verse 21, how the faithful city has become a whore, she who was full of justice, righteousness lodged in her, but now murderers. However, by far the most illuminating background is found in Ezekiel, chapter 16, which is an extended prophetic condemnation of Jerusalem for its unfaithfulness and its whorings. Within this passage, many of the features of the picture of Revelation 17-18 are evident.

It describes the ways in which the Lord adorned and glorified Jerusalem, setting it apart, and then how Jerusalem perverted these gifts, the marks of its covenant bond with the Lord, using them for adulterous relations. Ezekiel, chapter 16, verses 10-15 I clothed you also with embroidered cloth, and shod you with fine leather. I wrapped you in fine linen, and covered you with silk.

And I adorned you with ornaments, and put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. And I put a ring on your nose, and earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. Thus you were adorned with gold and silver, and your clothing was of fine linen and silk, and embroidered cloth.

You ate fine flour, and honey, and oil. You grew exceedingly beautiful and advanced to royalty. And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor that I had bestowed on you, declares the Lord God.

But you trusted in your beauty, and played the whore because of your renown, and lavished your whorings on any passer-by. Your beauty became his. Ezekiel lists the various foreign nations with which Israel played the harlot.

The Egyptians, the Philistines, the Assyrians, Chaldea, and others. Jerusalem, as depicted in Ezekiel 16 and 23, definitely fits the description of the harlot in Revelation chapter 17, who committed sexual immorality with the kings of the earth. The judgment that Ezekiel declares upon Jerusalem also resembles the judgment faced by the harlot city in Revelation chapters 17 and 18, Ezekiel chapter 16, verses 35 to 39.

Therefore, O prostitute, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God, because your lust was poured out, and your nakedness uncovered in your whorings with your lovers, and with all your abominable idols, and because of the blood of your children that you gave to them. Therefore, behold, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved and all those you hated, I will gather them against you from every side, and will uncover your nakedness to them, that they may see all your nakedness.

And I will judge you as women who commit adultery and shed blood are judged, and bring upon you the blood of wrath and jealousy. And I will give you into their hands, and they shall throw down your vaulted chamber, and break down your lofty places. They shall strip you of your clothes, and take your beautiful jewels, and leave you naked and bare.

The description here really fits the description at the end of Revelation 17. However, no matter how strong such connections might appear, there are clearly problems and challenges for those who would identify the city as Jerusalem. The city is consistently described in Revelation 17-18 in ways that seem much too grand for Jerusalem, a second tier city in the east of the empire.

Perhaps the most pronounced example of this in chapter 17 is the description with which the chapter concludes, the great city that has dominion over the kings of the earth. Lighthouse suggests that the kings in question refer to rulers and priests in the land of Israel. There is also the way that she is described as Babylon, which might seem to suggest that the city in question is a Gentile city, rather than Jerusalem.

This claim is not as strong as it initially appears, when you consider the way that Jerusalem is addressed as the rulers of Sodom and the people of Gomorrah in Isaiah 1-10. Furthermore, the way that Jesus describes the downfall of the city of Jerusalem in the Olivet Discourse clearly draws upon language used concerning the downfall of Babylon in the book of Isaiah. The point being made in such statements is that, in its unfaithfulness, Jerusalem has become its antithesis.

Considering the designation of the city as Babylon, we might also recall the woman of Zechariah 5, which represented the perversion of Israel, removed to the land of Babylon. The whole city is seated on many waters, later identified as peoples and multitudes and nations and languages. While the city is Jerusalem, she should not be narrowly identified with the city.

Like Rome, Jerusalem is much more than a single city. She is at the heart of a great world or network that reaches to all corners of the empire. There were millions of Jews throughout the Roman Empire.

Indeed, there were far more outside of the land than within it. And Jerusalem was the great city to which they all looked. It was like Mecca, but more so.

It was a city whose influence was felt everywhere throughout the empire. It was the capital that set the pattern for everywhere else. The immense diaspora population, greatly exceeding the number of Jews within the land itself, were all under Jerusalem's influence and sway.

The perverted priestess, Babylon the Great, is drinking, which is bad enough. However, she is drinking the blood of the saints, which is much, much worse. Drinking blood was a gross abomination, prohibited at several points in scripture.

Babylon the Great also, as Revelation chapter 14 verse 8 claims, made all nations drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality. In her bloodthirstiness, she instigated violent persecution of Christians throughout the empire and exported her unfaithfulness throughout the diaspora. Jerusalem's thirst for the blood of the saints and prophets is apparent throughout the New Testament.

Jesus speaks of it in Matthew chapter 23 verses 34 to 38. Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barakiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing. See, your house is left to you desolate. It was from Jerusalem that missions of violent persecution, such as that which Saul of Tarsus undertook prior to his conversion, set out.

Jesus taught that the blood of all the righteous would come upon Jerusalem in that generation, which is much as Revelation describes. We might also recognise the way in which the harlot is characterised by abomination, when Daniel and Jesus both spoke of the abomination of desolation that would herald the end. Lighthouse makes the case for a connection between the woman of chapter 12, who fled into the wilderness, and the harlot in the wilderness of chapter 17.

The beast was brought up from the sea by the dragon, and he seduces mother Israel who fled from him, perverting her into the harlot. The beast in this chapter has the

characteristics of the sea beast, but seems to be a more developed form of it, not least in his being scarlet. He has become more like the satanic dragon behind him.

The harlot is also turned scarlet, like the beast that she rides, and the dragon that called him up from the abyss. The beast was and is not, and is about to rise from the bottomless pit and go to destruction. There is a sort of a twisted parody, both of the way that God is described as the one who was, who is, and who is to come, and of Christ's death and resurrection here.

There might perhaps be a reference here to the seeming death of the beast with the suicide of Nero, and the civil war that followed, and its later revival. Alternatively, it might be pointing back to the seeming death and revival of the Roman Empire at the beginning, after the assassination of Julius Caesar. The beast receives worship from those whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.

The book in question is the book of the righteous, likely best thought of not as a book completed in the far distant past, but as a book of life whose contents stretch back to time immemorial, containing, as if in a vast record of continuing ancestry, the names of all of the righteous. The beast has seven heads, interpreted here as seven mountains, which given the identification of Rome with its seven hills and antiquity, seems to make the identification of the beast fairly straightforward. The seven heads are also identified as kings, or possibly kingdoms, as kings can stand for the kingdoms that they rule, albeit in a yet uncompleted line of succession.

We might recall that the sea beast of Revelation is a composite or monstrous hybrid of the four beasts of Daniel. Its heads then might relate to the heads of the preceding beasts. Lighthouse argues for this reading, seeing that the current head is that of the Hellenistic kingdom established by Alexander, with the final head or kingdom being the final nightmarish form of Rome, which will only last for a brief period.

The sea beast described earlier is the beast with the seventh head. The eighth, the beast that was and is not, is the short-lasting form of Rome under Nero, which ends, albeit without destroying the beast itself. Others have tried to count the heads in order, identifying them not with kingdoms, but with specific Roman kings or emperors.

Given the background in Daniel, Lighthouse's suggestion makes more sense to me. However, if they aren't associated with the heads, the specific kings or emperors might be associated with the horns. These kings are viewed as acting simultaneously, even though the preceding emperors had died by the time that the beast enjoyed its brief hour of granted authority.

Another possibility, however, is that the ten horns are the ten provinces of Rome. To that point, they had been restrained. They will make war upon the Lamb, but will be

conquered by him.

When they are granted authority, they destroy the harlot, in much the way that the destruction of Jerusalem is described in Ezekiel, chapters 16 and 23. The harlot will be burned with fire, like the adulterous woman of a priestly house. It is important that we recognise the significance of the downfall of Jerusalem.

The destruction of Jerusalem and its temple is the tearing down of the Old Covenant, for which Israel, no matter how she was viewed by the other nations, really was the centre of the world. Now she is the great queen of the nations no longer, and in her place will rise a new Jerusalem. A question to consider, how might we fill out the meaning of the image of the prostitute from elsewhere in scripture? In Revelation, chapter 18, the fall of Babylon the Great is declared, and the people of the Lord are called out from her, in words that remind the reader of Jeremiah, chapter 51, verses 6-8.

Flee from the midst of Babylon. Let everyone save his life. Be not cut off in her punishment, for this is the time of the Lord's vengeance, the repayment he is rendering her.

Babylon was a golden cup in the Lord's hand, making all the earth drunken. The nations drank of her wine, therefore the nations went mad. Suddenly Babylon has fallen and been broken.

Wail for her, take balm for her pain. Perhaps she may be healed. The chapter depicts the lamentations that different groups take up over the fallen city, and describes the significance of her overthrow.

Babylon the Great, presented here and in the preceding chapter, is Jerusalem and the entire world system that surrounds her, the world of the Diaspora that looks to the Temple there, for instance. Back in chapter 17 we saw that Revelation speaks of the city of Jerusalem in ways that may seem startling to us in the significance that it is prepared to grant it. The chapter opens with a descending angel or messenger, possessing great authority, who formally declares the fall of the city of Babylon and the sentence carried out upon her.

In bringing Babylon down, it has been emptied of its population, to be handed over to a new population of demons, unclean spirits, and unclean birds and beasts. The language here might remind us of passages such as Isaiah 34 verses 8-15, the judgment declared in Zephaniah chapter 2 verses 13-15, or perhaps most of all, Isaiah chapter 13 verses 19-22. Their ostriches will dwell, and their wild goats will dance, hyenas will cry in its towers, and jackals in the pleasant palaces.

Its time is close at hand, and its days will not be prolonged. The wild animals here are demons and unclean spirits, spirits that defile and render impure. The whole system of

worship and religion centered upon the Temple in Jerusalem has been rendered desolate and defiled.

Christians will need to leave it behind, not merely in the city of Jerusalem itself, but wherever it continues to operate and exert its influence in the world. To this point in time, the early church was still largely Jewish, and in many places still retained extensive ties with the wider world of Judaism that had rejected Christ. The fall of Jerusalem and its Temple rendered the breach between Christianity and Judaism much more complete.

Once Jerusalem and its Temple had been destroyed, the period of the overlap between the Old Covenant and the New had come to an end. What remains is the system of apostate Judaism, condemned and the possession of unclean spirits, rather than as an expression of the Holy Spirit. As Jerusalem and the vast religious system built around her are judged, the faithful people need to forsake her and escape from her, lest they share in her desolate and defiled state.

Babylon the Great had caused all the nations to drink the wine of the passion of her sexual immorality. Jerusalem was the mother city, the city to which millions of Jews across the empire looked. She set the pattern that others followed.

She crucified Christ, rejected and persecuted the church, and exported the hostility to the faithful everywhere in the empire. The rulers of the land of Israel were complicit in the sins of Jerusalem at their heart, and the merchants of the earth, the missionaries and teachers that went out into the wider world with her influence, all were made rich and powerful through her. Even after the head of Jerusalem was crushed, the power of the body of the Jewish adversaries of the early Christians throughout the world continued to be immense.

The Book of Revelation, while presenting its judgments as possessing a final and decisive force, is often presenting judgments that have more of a definitive character, whose full significance will take many centuries fully to work out. A couple of centuries later, Judaism throughout the empire will continue to be a powerful adversary of the church. The Roman beast will continue to be a persecuting one.

However, both suffer a judgment in the Book of Revelation, the greater repercussions of which will prove devastating for both. In the Lord's judgment, Babylon the Great is paid back as she has paid others, double for her deeds. What she has inflicted upon others, she experiences herself, and not only must she restore what she has stolen, as it were, in a single payment, she must make a double payment, as she suffers the same loss that she sought to place upon others.

Babylon the Great is marked by complacency, a decadent self-confidence in which she thinks herself immune to any reckoning, but her judgment comes upon her suddenly and decisively. In verses 9-20, various groups take up their lamentation for the city. In these

verses we see figures representing the wider system of which Jerusalem served as the centre.

The figures in question are the kings of the land, the merchants of the land, and shipmasters, seafarers and sailors whose trade is on the sea. To understand these figures, we need to recall that the land generally represents Israel, and the sea represents the nations of the Gentiles. The kings of the land are powerful figures in the land of Israel most probably, figures both within and outside of Jerusalem itself, figures like the Sanhedrin, Herod, and other leading priests and rulers.

These kings are distinct from the kings that attacked the harlot in 17-16. The merchants are the people who move out from the land with the wares of the land, missionaries and teachers who go out from Jerusalem and Israel onto the waters of the Gentiles. The seafarers, shipmasters and sailors are the millions of Jews and Gentile adherents of Judaism who operate upon the Gentile sea, in the Diaspora and in the wider empire.

Each of these groups, in their own way, depends upon Jerusalem and profits from and extends her sins. Peter Lighthouse observes a triple cycle of judgment involving each of the three groups. It begins with the group in question, describes the group's relationship with the harlot, speaks of them standing at a distance, relates their statement, alas, alas, followed by their description of the former glories of the city in a lamentation, wondering at the fact that in a single hour all of its glories were laid waste.

Babylon the Great, as depicted in Revelation, is a mighty trading city, a seafaring city that sustains a vast empire of merchants and traders. Of course, Jerusalem is an inland city and, speaking literally, it is not a powerful trading port at all. However, represented symbolically, this is exactly what Jerusalem is.

It is the centre of an immense religious economy. It is like the Mecca of its world, to which and from which everything flows. Its fall impacts everywhere else.

The description of the trade of the city is reminiscent of Ezekiel chapter 27, verses 12-25 and the judgment upon Tyre. Revelation works with the background of Ezekiel extensively in these concluding chapters, so it wouldn't be at all surprising to see allusions here. One of the things that the list of goods traded from Babylon the Great does is to present the city as lying at the heart of and sustaining an immense world, with all of its riches and treasures.

It is a whole world system. In the Gospels and the Book of Acts, one of the things that is brought into focus is the economic power and impulses of the religion centred upon the Temple. Jerusalem and its Temple were big business, drawing in immense wealth and making many people incredibly rich.

Jesus condemns the Temple as a robber's den and a place of economic exploitation, the

devouring of widows' houses and the perversion of true faith for material gain. Near the heart of Jesus' condemnation of the Temple was the claim that it had been perverted into a system of merchandise and exploitation, rather than functioning as the house of prayer for the nations that it was supposed to be. The priests had become an immense, financially corrupt operation, a system of violence, extortion and exploitation.

The list of items of trade ends with and emphasises the trade of slaves, which is immediately described as a trade in human lives. The system of the Judaism ordered around the Temple is not merely an economically exploitative system. It is a system of slavery and cruel spiritual bondage.

The Apostle Paul describes what he calls the present Jerusalem as being in slavery with her children, and as bearing children for slavery. Jesus condemns the scribes and the Pharisees as bringing people into captivity in Matthew 23, verse 15. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.

Behind this scene is also the mourning described in Revelation 1, verse 7. Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him. Even so, Amen. This mourning takes up Zechariah 12, verses 10-14, with its description of various groups of mourners.

As one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn. On that day the mourning in Jerusalem will be as great as the mourning for Hadad-Rimon in the plain of Megiddo. The land shall mourn, each family by itself, the family of the house of David by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the house of Nathan by itself, and their wives by themselves, the family of the Shimeites by itself, and their wives by themselves, and all the families that are left, each by itself, and their wives by themselves.

The mourning in Revelation seems to have more of a negative flavour to it. It is the mourning of loss from the tribes of the earth and desolation, not necessarily the mourning of repentance. However, the verse that immediately follows this passage from Zechariah, in chapter 13, verse 1, raises the possibility that repentance might also be in view.

On that day there shall be a fountain opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and uncleanness. The righteous are called out of Babylon the Great, but there is also an opening for repentance here. Seeing the downfall of the city of Jerusalem, people connected with the vast religious system stretching out from her are offered the possibility of repentance.

The judgment upon the city is a cause for rejoicing for the righteous. Back in chapter 6,

verse 10, the martyrs cried out from beneath the altar, O sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth? Now, in the fall of Babylon the Great, this prayer has finally been answered. The chapter ends with a mighty angel casting a stone like a great millstone and throwing it into the sea.

This recalls the words of our Lord in Matthew chapter 21, verse 21, likely concerning Jerusalem. And Jesus answered them, Truly I say to you, if you have faith and do not doubt, you will not only do what has been done to the fig tree, but even if you say to this mountain, Be taken up and thrown into the sea, it will happen. Jesus also warns those who abuse weak, vulnerable and dependent persons and lead them into sin, of their fate using imagery similar to this in Luke chapter 17, verse 2. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to sin.

Babylon the Great, with its exploitative trade in human lives, is just such a city. The downfall of the city is largely described in terms of silencing, of voices and sounds being removed, the hustle and bustle, the rich and evocative soundscape of a great city of trade, industry, learning, music and worship is struck silent. Perhaps we are intended to think of the city as like a great millstone, rumbling as it processes the people within it, grinding them down into flour for baking.

Then in a great act of judgment, the upper millstone, typically seen as the female stone, grinding upon a male stationary stone at its base, is taken up and thrown into the sea of the Gentiles. What is disclosed beneath the stone, as it were, is the blood upon which the city was built. Here once again we must remember Jesus' condemnation of Jerusalem in Matthew chapter 23, verses 29-38.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets. Thus you witness against yourselves that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers.

You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell? Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some of whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town, so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Barakaya, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it, how often would I have gathered your children together, as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing.

See, your house is left to you desolate. The description of Babylon the Great at the end of this chapter fulfills Jesus' condemnation of Jerusalem in Matthew, and in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth. A question to consider, where else in the New Testament do we see Jerusalem, the temple, its hierarchy, and the system to which they all belong condemned on account of their economic exploitation? Babylon the Great fell in chapter 17, and the kings of the earth, the merchants and the sailors, ship masters and seafarers lamented over it in chapter 18.

Chapter 18 contains lamentations over the great fallen city. Chapter 19 opens with rejoicing over it. If alas, alas was the dominating expression of chapter 18, hallelujah is that of chapter 19.

Chapter 19 opens with a rejoicing multitude in heaven, contrasting with the silenced multitude of the devastated city of Babylon the Great. The rejoicing is taken up by a number of heavenly voices. It starts out with the loud voice of the multitude in verses 1 and 2, followed by them crying out for a second time in verse 3. The 24 elders and the 4 living creatures add their voices in verse 4. In verse 5 there is a voice from the throne.

Then in verse 6 the voice of the multitude returns for a third time. The multitude are presumably those mentioned in chapter 15 verse 2. They now seem to be taking a lead in the worship of heaven. They praise the Lord for the truth and justice of his judgments and his faithful vindication of his servants by judging their adversaries.

Behind the worship here we might hear the words of the song of Moses prior to his death in Deuteronomy chapter 32 verse 43. Rejoice with him, O heavens! Bow down to him, all gods! For he avenges the blood of his children and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays those who hate him and cleanses his people's land.

Also of Psalm 79 verse 10. Why should the nations say, Where is their God? Let the avenging of the outpoured blood of your servants be known among the nations before our eyes. At a number of points in the book of Revelation we have seen the importance of the Lord's avenging of his people.

The saints cry out for their blood to be avenged upon those who took their lives. And here God is praised for his avenging of his servants. The judgment of Babylon has a finality to it.

Using language taken from Isaiah chapter 34 and the destruction of Edom, the worshipping multitudes speak of the smoke of the overthrown city going up forever, like a permanent testimony to its destruction. Isaiah chapter 34 verses 9 to 10 read, And the streams of Edom shall be turned into pitch, and her soil into sulfur. Her land shall become burning pitch.

Night and day it shall not be quenched. Its smoke shall go up forever. From generation to generation it shall lie waste.

None shall pass through it, forever and ever. The 24 elders and the 4 living creatures respond to the multitude, ratifying their praise with an Amen, Hallelujah. The voice from the throne that comes in verse 5 summons the entire company to join together in praise.

In verses 1 and 2 the reason for the praise was the overthrow of the harlot. In verses 6 and following the reason given is that the Lord has begun to reign and that the wedding of the Lamb has come. The claim that the Lord has begun to reign takes up language that we earlier heard at the blowing of the seventh trumpet in chapter 11 verses 15 to 18.

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet and there were loud voices in heaven saying, The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever. And the 24 elders who sit on their thrones before God fell on their faces and worshipped God, saying, We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, for you have taken your great power and begun to reign. The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged and for rewarding your servants.

The prophets and saints and those who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying the destroyers of the earth. With the wedding coming all must get ready. The motif of the eschatological wedding is a prominent one in the Johannine literature especially.

Revelation has used imagery from the Song of Songs at several points. Jesus in chapter 1 was presented as the heavenly bridegroom. In the Gospel of John themes of the eschatological wedding abound.

Christ is depicted as the bridegroom, and John the Baptist is the friend of the bridegroom. Jesus begins his ministry at a wedding feast. Like the patriarchs' first encounters with their wives, he meets a woman at a well.

Allusions to the Song of Songs are found in the washing of his feet at Bethany, and in his burial, and his meeting with Mary Magdalene in the garden. To get herself ready the bride, of whom we are first hearing, is given fine linen garments with which to clothe herself. There have been several instances of garment-related themes in the book to this point.

Garments have been washed in the blood of the Lamb, in chapter 7 verse 14 for instance. Here the garments are described as the righteous deeds of the saints, but also described as clothes that have been given. As Peter Lighthouse notes, in considering the way that the garments can be the saints' own righteous deeds, while also being given to

them and washed in the blood of the Lamb, we might begin to develop a richer understanding of the way that our good works can be integral to an account of salvation, without undermining either the priority or the sufficiency of grace.

The angel speaking to John expresses the blessedness of those invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb, to which John surprisingly responds by falling down at his feet to worship him, at which he is rebuked and charged to worship God alone. Angels, although they can be powerful and dazzling in their splendour, are not worthy of worship. They are not divine, rather they are fellow servants, and in the book of Revelation servants that will increasingly take a lower status as the bride is elevated to reign with Christ.

Angels have in common with faithful saints their holding to the testimony of Jesus, the witness that Jesus bore through his life and death. By holding to this testimony their lives are governed by the same principles and lived in continuity with his. This testimony is established by the spirit of prophecy, who establishes the continuing witness of Christ within his servants.

Heaven is opened and a rider on a white horse comes. The rider on the white horse picks up a number of the descriptors of Jesus from earlier in the book. For instance, he is the faithful and true, as Jesus was described as the faithful and true witness in chapter 3 verse 14.

His flaming eyes recall chapter 1 verse 14, and the sword coming from his mouth recalls that of chapter 1 verse 16. Many diadems are on his head. To this point the diadems that we saw belonged to the dragon and to the beast.

The diadems are crowns of authority which he has won from his foes. He is now the mighty and victorious emperor of the world as it were, the king of kings and lord of lords. This we should bear in mind is the child who was destined to rule in chapter 12, and now he will rule with his rod of iron.

He is followed by the armies of heaven, arrayed in the fine linen garments described earlier in this chapter. They are, as Peter Lighthouse notes, a bridal army, much as we saw with the 144 virgins earlier in the book. While the garments of the saints have been washed clean with the blood of Jesus, Jesus' garments are stained with blood.

G.B. Caird argues that the blood on Jesus' robes is not the blood of his enemies, nor even his own blood, but the blood of the faithful saints and martyrs. The victory of Jesus and his bride occur through the shedding of their blood in martyrdom. What seems like their complete destruction, as they are trodden like grapes outside of the city, is actually their preparation through harvest.

The rider on the white horse has a name written that no one knows but himself. This might remind us of chapter 2 verse 17, where the one who overcame in Pergamum was

promised a white stone with a new name written on it, that no one would know save the one receiving it. The name received by Jesus is the name above every other name, as Philippians 2 declares, a name expressive of his proven divinity.

He is also here referred to as the Word of God, the name by which he is spoken of in the first chapter of John's Gospel. The Word of God fights and strikes down the nations with the sharp sword of his mouth. The rider on the white horse also takes up the prophecy of Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1 to 4. There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his root shall bear fruit.

And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear.

But with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth. And he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. The rod then, by which Jesus rules, is probably like the sword, to be considered as a rod of his mouth.

The Word rules through his Word. The description here might be drawn in part from Isaiah chapter 63 verse 1 to 6, where we see the imagery of treading down the winepress again. Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimson garments from Basra, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.

Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me. I trod them in my anger, and trampled them in my wrath. Their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel.

For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and my year of redemption had come. I looked, but there was no one to help. I was appalled, but there was no one to uphold.

So my own arm brought me salvation, and my wrath upheld me. I trampled down the peoples in my anger, I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth. The rider on the white horse here treads down, most likely the martyrs, preparing the wine of God's furious wrath, with which he will make the nations drunk.

The chapter ends with the defeat of the beast and the kings of the earth, who gather together against the Lord and his armies. Here we should think back to the pouring out of the sixth bowl, the drying up of the Euphrates, and the gathering together of the two armies at the mountain of Megiddo, in Armageddon. An angel summons the birds of the air to join together to feast upon the dead bodies of the defeated foes of the rider on the

white horse.

Revelation has picked up the language of Ezekiel on many occasions, and this is the case here. This is from Ezekiel chapter 39, verses 17 and following. As for you, son of man, thus says the Lord God, Speak to the birds of every sort, and to all beasts of the field.

Assemble and come, gather from all around, to the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you, a great sacrificial feast on the mountains of Israel. And you shall eat flesh and drink blood. You shall eat the flesh of the mighty, and drink the blood of the princes of the earth, of rams, of lambs, and of he-goats, of bulls, all of them fat beasts of Bashan.

And you shall eat fat till you are filled, and drink blood till you are drunk, at the sacrificial feast that I am preparing for you. And you shall be filled at my table, with horses and charioteers, with mighty men, and all kinds of warriors, declares the Lord God. It should not be hard to see in this grisly feast a contrast with the other feast to which people are invited, the wedding supper of the Lamb.

All of these foes are defeated by the sword that comes from the rider on the white horse's mouth. Behind many of the events described here we should hear the words of Christ from the Olivet Discourse, places like Matthew chapter 24 verses 30 to 31. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory, and he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Then later on in chapter 25 verse 31 to 32, When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another, as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. Once apostate Jerusalem, which persecuted the church and killed the prophets, has been brought down, Christ's reign will be established over all of the nations.

His kingdom will go out to every part of the world. In Revelation, as in Matthew, the downfall of Jerusalem heralds the establishment of the kingdom of God, which then spreads over all of the world. The significance of this definitive victory is most seen in the heavens, but the pattern and reality of that victory in the heavens gradually spreads over all of the world.

Christ's rule will be seen in the bringing down of kingdoms and nations that oppose him, and the raising up and the vindication of his people. His kingdom will stretch from one end of heaven to another. No longer will it be restricted to, or narrowly focused upon one strip of land in the Middle East.

It will be found in every part of the world. Likewise, no longer will Satan be able to claim

that all the authority of the kingdoms of the earth belongs to him. Rather, all authority and power has been given to Christ, and now, having established the foundation of his kingdom through tearing down the old covenant order, his people, his body, his bride, his church can go out into all parts of the world, establishing his rule in places that were formerly under the sway of Satan.

A question to consider. Looking at the New Testament in contrast to the Old, what are some of the most striking changes that we can see in the way that the reign of God is expressed on the earth? How can this chapter help us to understand these? One of the great questions that preoccupies many interpreters of Revelation arises in chapter 20. What are we to make of the millennium? There are four major positions on the question, with a number of variants.

There are traditional and dispensational premillennial positions, postmillennialism and amillennialism. Premillennialism in its traditional form holds that a literal 1,000 year period, the millennium, or the messianic reign, will pass following Christ's return. Dispensational premillennialism is a more modern form of positions, relating to the theology of dispensationalism, which has a futuristic reading of the book of Revelation.

Postmillennialism believes that Christ will return following the millennium, a period of great success for the kingdom of Christ. There are, as in the case of the other positions, various forms of this belief. Many of the Puritans, for instance, awaited a glorious age of spiritual revival prior to the second coming of Christ.

Other postmillennials, who read the book of Revelation in a largely preterist manner, believe that the age of the millennium began in the first century and that we are currently living in it. Postmillennials do not necessarily believe in a literal 1,000 year millennium. Amillennialists typically regard the millennium as a symbolic period too, generally believing that it is a symbolic way of speaking about the age of the church.

Such amillennialism can be attractive to those who have an idealist reading of the book of Revelation. Despite their name, amillennial should not be regarded as denying the existence of the millennium. Or rather, the millennium that they deny is the millennium understood in the manner of the premillennials and certain of the postmillennials.

Amillennials generally believe that we are living in the millennium of Revelation chapter 20, and many postmillennials, especially those who relate Revelation 20 to events of the first century AD or shortly after, believe the same. The difference between these two groups is in many cases not an especially sharp one. One respect in which differences between various species of these positions can be seen is in the way that they conceive of the impact of the binding of Satan and the location of the reigning of the saints.

Postmillennial interpreters are more likely to conceive of the 1,000 year reign in a manner that emphasizes its impact upon the earth. Christ will reign until all enemies are

placed under his feet, the gospel will prosper throughout the world, and Christ's kingdom will advance and transform all nations and areas of life. This understanding of the 1,000 year reign also often suggests that it is one of increasing extent for the effective rule of Christ, not just an extended period of gospel success for a figurative 1,000 years, it is a figurative 1,000 years of advance.

Amillennial interpreters, by contrast, can be more inclined to regard the reign in ways that downplay its progressive character, its impact upon the earth, and they can locate it more within heaven. Revelation's teaching about the 1,000 year reign should be related to Jewish beliefs about the messianic reign, a few of which posited a 1,000 year period during which the Messiah would reign. As a period of time, it is the full flowering of the authority of Christ achieved through his death, resurrection, and ascension, the authority described in Matthew 28, verse 18.

As a period of time, 1,000 years should probably be understood figuratively. 1,000 is 10 cubed, 10 raised to the third power. 1,000 and multiples of 1,000 occur on several occasions in the book of Revelation.

For many, the question of the millennium is regarded as the most important question of Christian eschatology. However, this is to abstract a single interpretive question from the larger fabric of the book of Revelation and from the rest of the New Testament in a way that really courts misunderstanding. As any attentive study of the book of Revelation should reveal, so much depends upon reading each passage in the book, both in light of the rest of the book and in light of Old Testament prophecy that serves as the background for it.

The teaching on the millennium in Revelation chapter 20 is no exception in this regard. Maintaining Revelation chapter 20 in the big picture provided by the rest of the teaching of Revelation, the New Testament, and the entire scripture will help us a lot here. Chapter 20 opens with an angel coming down from heaven with a key to the bottomless pit and a chain.

He binds the dragon, here identified as the devil and Satan, confining him in the pit and preventing him from deceiving the nations any longer for the duration of 1,000 years. It should not be difficult to recognize parallels between this passage and earlier passages in Revelation. For instance, Revelation chapter 12 verses 7 to 12.

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent who was called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world.

He was thrown down to earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven saying, Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our

God and the authority of his Christ have come. For the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony. For they loved not their lives even unto death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them.

But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short. Also Revelation chapter 9 verses 1 to 3. And the fifth angel blew his trumpet, and I saw a star fallen from heaven to earth, and he was given the key to the shaft of the bottomless pit. He opened the shaft of the bottomless pit, and from the shaft rose smoke like the smoke of a great furnace.

And the sun and the air were darkened with the smoke from the shaft. Then from the smoke came locusts on the earth, and they were given power like the power of scorpions of the earth. Greg Beale identifies seven close points of parallel between chapter 12 and chapter 20.

While he goes too far in arguing that these two accounts depict the same events and mutually interpret each other, he is correct in recognising the closeness of their relationship. Together, these passages chart a process of descent. The dragon is first cast down from heaven in chapter 12.

This limits his authority while still giving him scope for his destructive and deceptive activity. In chapter 20 he is restricted further, being bound, cast into the pit and sealed there for a lengthy time. Babylon has fallen, and now the dragon will be further bound.

As in his earlier descent from heaven, on his descent the dragon is spoken of with a number of different titles. Here he is described as the dragon, the ancient serpent, the devil and Satan. Each of these titles captures something of Satan's character.

As the dragon he is the mighty monster, the destroyer. As the ancient serpent he is the wily, seductive and deceptive tempter of the Garden of Eden. As the devil he is the adversary and opponent.

As Satan he is the accuser. Here it is the power of Satan as the deceiver of the nations that is in the foreground. The fallen star of chapter 9 was given the key of the bottomless pit, but the angel of chapter 20 is not merely permitted to use the key, he is a rightful user of it.

The angel here is likely the Holy Spirit himself, the messenger of Christ. It is he who seizes the dragon, binds him and casts him into the pit. The binding of Satan has a specific purpose and effect, that of preventing him from deceiving the nations for its duration.

Satan had authority over all of the nations, able to keep them under his thrall, governing them by his lies and the fear of death. His power to deceive the nations made him like a great puppet master behind all of them, able to coordinate them through his deceptions for his own purposes. Earlier in the book we saw an example of Satan's power in the way that he was able to establish and manipulate the sea beast, the land beast and the image of the beast for his own designs.

After his binding, however, he will not enjoy such power again for the duration of the thousand year confinement. The figurative thousand year period will end, however, at which point he will enjoy a brief and final window of power during the period of the thousand years, a period of time in which I believe we find ourselves. The nations will be disciplined, Christ's kingdom will expand throughout the world and great satanically controlled powers that held the world in their thrall will be brought low.

Hearing this passage from our vantage point in history, we can really miss how truly remarkable the binding of Satan was. This passage was first written to beleaguered Christians in a situation of persecution, experiencing great satanic oppression and deception in their communities, who, within the coming years, would suffer an intensification of such persecution, often encouraged by Jewish opponents in their cities. These Christians were operating in a dark culture of paganism, superstition and demonic oppression and activity.

Within a few years, however, Jerusalem and its temple would fall, sending shockwaves throughout the empire. The Roman Empire itself would suffer a great blow and fall into a short civil war. At the time of John's writing, the Christians were a small and marginal minority in the empire.

Fast forward about 300 years and they are the established religion. Early church fathers described the remarkable power of the gospel displayed in dispelling the influence of Satan wherever it went, which we should understand to be a fulfillment of this passage in Revelation. The following lengthy description of this is found in the writings of Athanasius.

And whereas formerly every place was full of the deceit of the oracles, now, since Christ has begun to be preached everywhere, their madness also has ceased, and there is none among them to divine any more. And whereas formerly demons used to deceive men's fancy, occupying springs or rivers, trees or stones, and thus imposed upon the simple by their juggleries, now, after the divine visitation of the word, their deception has ceased. For by the sign of the cross, though a man but use it, he drives out their deceits.

And while formerly men held to be gods the Zeus and Kronos and Apollo and the heroes mentioned in the poets, and went astray in honoring them, now that the Saviour has appeared among men, those others have been exposed as mortal men, and Christ alone has been recognized among men as the true God, the Word of God. And what is one to

say of the magic esteemed among them? That before the word sojourned among us, this was strong and active among Egyptians and Chaldeans and Indians, and inspired awe in those who saw it. But that by the presence of the truth and the appearing of the word, it also has been thoroughly computed and brought holy to nought.

But as to Gentile wisdom and the sounding pretensions of the philosophers, I think none can need our argument, since the wonder is before the eyes of all, that while the wise among the Greeks had written so much, and were unable to persuade even a few from their own neighborhood concerning immortality and virtuous life, Christ alone, by ordinary language and by men not clever with the tongue, has throughout all the world persuaded whole churches full of men to despise death, and to mind the things of immortality, to overlook what is temporal, and to turn their eyes to what is eternal, to think nothing of earthly glory, and to strive only for the heavenly. We have seen the progressive descent of Satan over the course of the book of Revelation. In stark contrast to Satan's descent and binding is the ascent and the enthroning of the martyrs.

They were put to death and waited under the altar, calling out for vindication and vengeance in chapter 6. Over the chapters that followed, they were raised up to heaven, and now they are given thrones, which might be the thrones formerly occupied by the 24 elders. Satan is stripped of his dominion, and the martyrs are raised up into theirs. The thrones here should also be related to the vision of Daniel in Daniel chapter 7, where he describes thrones being set up, and the kingdom and dominion being granted to the saints of the Most High.

The group being elevated here has a number of distinguishing characteristics, being beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, being beheaded for the word of God, not worshipping the beast or the image of the beast, and not receiving the mark of the beast. At the heart of those sharing in this first resurrection are the 144,000 of the renewed Israel. Recognising the strong connections to the book of Ezekiel that move through the concluding chapters of Revelation, we should probably recognise Ezekiel chapter 37 and the vision of the valley of dry bones here.

That vision was one of a symbolic resurrection of Israel and Judah from the grave of exile. The first resurrection here has something of the same character. From the grave of martyrdom, this company is raised up to rule over nations.

The core group to which rule is granted is the 144,000 faithful witnesses or martyrs of Israel. In the blessing of verse 6, the impression however is given that others will share in this first resurrection, we might presume from throughout the age of the church. The 144,000 are at the head of the company of the church triumphant.

The impression can be given by some that the church triumphant are like those individuals who have finished the Christian race before us, they are milling around the finishing line as it were, enjoying refreshments. Yet this is not adequately to consider the

reality of their participation in the reign of Christ. Earlier in Revelation the dead martyrs prayed for vindication from beneath the altar.

Now they can pray for vindication from thrones before the very throne itself. We can easily fall into the error of limiting judgement to something that only occurs at the very end of history. However, if there is one thing that the book of Revelation makes apparent, it is that God judges in ongoing human history.

The judgement of Babylon the Great and the beasts that she rode upon is a final judgement for both of them, but by no means the final judgement of human history. The nations are gathered before the enthroned lamb and his enthroned martyrs and the vast company of the saints and angels. Before this ruling company, throughout human history, Christ is separating the nations as a shepherd separates sheep from goats.

The martyrs and the saints in heaven participate in this rule. After being bound for one thousand years, Satan is granted one final hurrah as he is released from the prison of the bottomless pit, permitted by God to deceive the nations once more. Revelation has been tracing the pattern of the book of Ezekiel in these concluding chapters and here we arrive at the battle against Gog and Magog in chapters 38 and 39 of that book.

Gog is the prince of Magog, one of the sons of Japheth mentioned in Genesis chapter 10 verse 2. Like Babylon the Great, Gog and Magog should not be taken literally. They are archetypal enemies of the people of God and the hearer of the prophecy is expected to be familiar with the prophecy of the book of Ezekiel in the background. Gog and Magog surround the camp of the saints and the beloved city, images that depict the people of God according to the pattern of Israel in the wilderness and as Mount Zion.

Forces aligned with Satan never ceased to exist during the millennial reign of the saints, but they were limited in their authority and power and never enjoyed the same degree of ascendancy that they had prior. After Satan is unleashed, suddenly they can enjoy considerable power and sweep much before them. However, just when the faithful people of God seem to be doomed to defeat, besieged and decisively surrounded, the fire of the Lord comes down and consumes their enemies.

The great gathering of Gog and Magog, numbering like the sand of the sea, ends up being a gathering for final destruction. The devil is then finally cast down into the lake of fire and sulfur with the beast and the false prophet. The beast and the false prophet are corporate entities, the monstrous and persecuting Rome and the perversion of the Jewish authorities respectively, but their destruction is one that implicates individual persons as well.

Satan's story has a symmetry to it and when he is unleashed from the bottomless pit in which he was bound and returns to his old ways, it will finally come to an end. As is the case in Christ's death, the moment of the devil's apparent triumph and unleashing is all

in order that he be utterly defeated. Revelation chapter 20 ends with a great and terrifying judgement scene.

After the final decisive victory of the Lamb, the defeat of the ancient dragon and the placing of all enemies under his feet, a comprehensive judgement of the dead occurs. Any hiding place is removed and all is laid bare before the judge of all. Multiple books are opened and then one specific other book is opened, the book of life.

Judgement occurs on the basis of what is written in these books, both the multiple books of works and the one book of life. Judgement is according to works, but the righteous are accorded by grace in God's book of life. Revelation has also expressed the subtle interplay between grace and works in its treatment of the garments of the saints.

The garments are given to them and washed in the blood of the Lamb, but they are also the righteous deeds of the saints themselves, without which they would not enjoy access to the wedding feast. The book of life is the book of the Lamb and one's name being in the book implies Christ's testimony in one's favour, as we see in chapter 3 verse 5. The one who conquers will be clothed thus in white garments and I will never blot his name out of the book of life. I will confess his name before my father and before his angels.

Various realms, the sea, death and Hades give up their dead. Determining what exactly is being referred to by these different realms is not easy and various suggestions concerning them could be given. I am inclined to take death and Hades as largely synonymous or at least as a related pairing of powers.

The sea I take as the literal sea. Death and Hades will be thrown into the lake of fire, robbed of their power. The lake of fire is described as the second death.

It is a realm of torment and exclusion. Everyone who does not belong to the Lamb, whose name is not written in his book, will be cast into it. A question to consider.

How might considering ourselves as living in the millennium of Revelation chapter 20 change the way that we view our situation as Christians? Revelation chapter 1 verses 1 to 28 concludes the third vision of the book which began at the start of chapter 17. Babylon has fallen. The rider on the white horse has come forth to conquer.

Satan has been bound for a thousand years, released for a brief window of time, defeated and then cast into the lake of fire. The final judgement has also occurred. Now at the beginning of Revelation chapter 21 we see the destiny of those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

A holy city descending from heaven. Peter Lighthouse makes the perceptive point that there are two descents of the holy city in this chapter. The first in verse 1 and the second in verse 9. The two cities also have different characteristics.

The city of the first eight verses seems to describe the final form of the city. Death has been destroyed. There is no sorrow nor pain.

And the wicked are in the lake that burns with fire. The city of the verses that follow, by contrast, has gates from which things come in and out. Impure things still exist but yet are excluded.

There are still treasures to be brought in. The city of these verses is not yet consummated. Recognizing such things we might observe the importance of the descent of the city.

The city does not come all at once. Rather it comes through a sort of gradual descent as the heavenly city slowly takes form on earth. The declaration of a new heaven and a new earth and other descriptions of these verses take up language familiar from the Old Testament in Isaiah chapter 65 verses 17 to 25.

I shall be glad in my people. No more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping and the cry of distress. No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days.

For the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them. They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

They shall not build and another inhabit. They shall not plant and another eat. For like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity. For they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the Lord and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer, while they are yet speaking I will hear.

The wolf and the lamb shall graze together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord. The new heavens and the new earth described in this prophecy of Isaiah is not the final completely restored creation awaited after the final resurrection.

Death is still present, as are sinners. Rather Isaiah's prophecy is primarily about the return from exile. As Lighthouse points out, we've seen the establishment of a new heaven and a new earth in history in the book of Revelation.

Heaven has changed as the lamb and the 144,000 have been raised up and enthroned and as the dragon has been cast down. The earth has changed as the power of the beasts has been broken and the reign of Christ established. The statement in verse 1 that there is no more sea may relate to the sea of the Gentiles.

With the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple and the end of the old covenant order, the Jew-Gentile polarity no longer operates in the same way. The sea, which symbolises the Gentiles, is no more. All humanity is now land.

We should notice that the city starts in heaven and descends to earth, rather than beginning on earth and being raised up into heaven. The heavenly pattern is being impressed upon the earth. The tabernacle and temples in scripture were constructed according to heavenly patterns.

God gave Moses the pattern for the tabernacle on the top of Mount Sinai. It was a heavenly pattern for that building. In the end of the book of Ezekiel, there is a vision of a heavenly temple, a heavenly temple that is never built, but which provides the pattern for the reordering of Israel's life after the period of the exile.

Later in the chapter, John will be placed on a very high mountain, much as Ezekiel was in chapter 40 of his prophecy. This vision is of a heavenly pattern that will be brought down to earth. God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

The city is prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. In scripture more generally, and also in the book of Revelation, cities are often described as women. And these feminine cities are described in marital terms.

They are either faithful or unfaithful. A few chapters earlier, we read about the downfall of Babylon the Great. She was the harlot city and the mother of prostitutes.

The faithful were called out of her, in order that they might not share in her ruin. Warren Gage has suggested the possibility that the bridal city of this chapter is related to the harlot city of a few chapters earlier. The bride is formed by people called out of the harlot.

Thinking about this typologically, this would not be unfitting. In the book of Joshua, Rahab the harlot is called out of a city that is destroyed with seven trumpets, as she is delivered from the ruin of Jericho. Gage also observes possible parallels between the story of John's gospel and the Samaritan woman at the well.

He writes, The gospel account begins with Jesus sitting upon the well, a posture that corresponds to the Whore of Revelation, who sits upon many waters. The Samaritan woman is thirsty and comes to the well with her water pot to draw. Similarly, the Babylonian Whore is depicted with a cup in her hand, satisfying her thirst with abominations of fornication.

When challenged by Jesus, the Samaritan woman lies about her marital status, claiming that she has no husband. In fact, Jesus tells her that she has had five husbands, and the one she is now living with is not her husband. But when the Samaritan woman and the villagers receive Jesus, he remains among them two days.

Similarly, John tells us that the Babylonian Whore also lies about her marital status, claiming, But in fact Babylon has known five kings who have fallen, and one is, and the other has not yet come. When he comes, however, he will remain with her a little while. Christ redeems the Samaritan woman, in spite of her impure past, and transforms her into a picture of the Bride of Christ.

Her thirst having been satisfied, she leaves the one she loves at the well, going back into the village to share with everyone the love she has found without cost. And so she calls for the people, any who thirst for living water, to come out of the city to meet Jesus, who gives so freely by the well waters. In this she conforms to the picture of the Bride in Revelation, who invites all who thirst to come out of the city and partake of the water of life without cost.

Gage's thesis is remarkable and surprising. Even though it is likely overstated, it most probably has some merit. Marital themes have been present to this point in the book.

The book begins with Christ being portrayed as the heavenly Bridegroom, with what is called a wassif describing him from his garments upwards. There have been anticipatory references to the wedding feast and also to wedding garments. As the Messiah and Bridegroom, Christ is fulfilling themes that we see in the Old Testament, not least in the book of Song of Songs.

The King is a husband of the people, and in places like the books of Samuel is described as a sort of romantic figure. The relationship between the people and their King has a sort of erotic flavour to it. The people desire and love their King.

This also returns us to the themes of Genesis chapter 1 to 3. In this and the chapter that follows, we see a garden city, a garden city that fulfils the garden sanctuary that we have in Genesis chapter 2. In Genesis chapter 2, the man and the woman were brought together. Now at the end of the scriptures, there will be another union, as the Lamb and his Bride are united. In Genesis chapter 2, we saw the riches of the surrounding lands, precious stones and gold.

Now those treasures of surrounding lands have been brought in to dress the city, and in verses 9 and following, we see a city that has pearls as gates, the riches of the sea, not just the riches of the land. Water flowed out from the Garden of Eden to water the surrounding lands, and here there are also waters that flow out, the river of life that quenches thirst and brings healing. These chapters at the end of Revelation also fulfil other biblical themes.

The tabernacle theme of God dwelling with his people is taken up here and fulfilled. God will dwell with his people. There will be a union of heaven and earth, no longer separated by the firmament.

There will be a marriage of the heavens above and the earth beneath. The statement that God will be their God and they will be his people is one that comes as a refrain throughout the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and it is taken up here again. This bridal city is a place where this promise will be fulfilled.

All things will be made new. John is instructed to write this message down. There is also the offer of the water of life to the thirsty.

This is reminiscent of Jesus' teaching in John's Gospel, especially in the conversation with the woman of Samaria at the well. It also harkens back to Isaiah chapter 55 verses 1 to 3. Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters, and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear and come to me, hear that your soul may live, and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. The promise to the one who overcomes is that God will be his God and that he will be God's son.

This might take up the language of the Davidic covenant. Isaiah chapter 55 verse 3 promised to establish the everlasting covenant of David with those who responded appropriately, and here those who overcome seem to be offered a Davidic status. After this vision of the descending holy city, there is another vision given to John.

He is taken by one of the seven angels with the seven bowls, and he is brought to a high mountain in the spirit. There he sees the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Once again we should see the book of Ezekiel in the background here.

This is like the great vision of the temple with which the book concludes. Like in Ezekiel chapter 40, John is brought to a high mountain. The fact that it is one of the bowl angels that takes him to see this vision may juxtapose it with the vision of the harlot back in chapter 17.

In that vision it was also one of the bowl angels that introduced it. The city described in these verses should probably be understood in an already, not yet fashion. This is a city that has already been inaugurated.

In Galatians chapter 4, Paul can talk about Jerusalem above being free and being the mother of us all. Hebrews chapter 12 verse 22 speaks of coming to Mount Zion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkle blood that speaks a better word than the blood of

Abel. The 144,000 were raised up above the firmament earlier in the book of Revelation, and others have joined them of the church.

The church is being formed in this heavenly realm, and this church being formed in heaven is also impacting upon the earth. In Ephesians chapter 2 verses 19 to 22, Paul describes the formation of this building, this new city that is being constructed by God. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. As in Ephesians chapter 2, the foundation stones here are set by the twelve apostles. We might also think here of the words of Christ to Peter, that he would be the rock on which he would build the church.

This is a new edifice that is being built, and the fact that the apostles play the role of foundation stones, raises the possibility that we are to think of these foundation stones as graves. It is in the laying down of lives in witness that the foundation of the church is built, whether by the apostles or by the 144,000. The city also has an Israel shape.

There are twelve gates, with the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel inscribed. As the ordering of these gates, East, North, South and West, helped us to understand the ordering of the tribes back in chapter 7, we should probably connect this with the 144,000 that are sealed at that point. A question to consider, in verse 8 we see a list of people who are excluded from the holy city.

These people are cast into the lake of fire, which is the second death. How can the teaching of this chapter inform our understanding of the doctrine of hell? In Revelation chapter 21, John is granted a vision of the new heaven and the new earth. Hearing this vision, our minds are drawn back to the original creation.

The spirit hovered over the waters of the deep in the first creation. Light was called into existence, a firmament was created, and land was brought up from the sea. Now, in the new heavens and the new earth, symbolically the deep has been removed.

The hovering spirit is now bringing down the holy city, the communion formed in him. The firmament dividing heaven and earth has been removed, as God now dwells with man. The vision relates both to the not yet, the final consummation of the new heavens and the new earth, which is in focus in chapter 21 verses 1 to 8, and also to the already of the new creation currently being formed by Christ, which is part of what is in view in the verses that follow.

Throughout the book of Revelation, there are countless echoes and allusions to Old

Testament scriptures and prophecies, although hardly any direct citations. These echoes and allusions are keys to the meaning of Revelation. But Revelation should also be understood to be a key to the meaning of these Old Testament texts.

Through the book of Revelation, we can greatly deepen our understanding of the prophecies of Daniel and Ezekiel, for instance, scripture teaching us how to read scripture. Daniel and Ezekiel are a specially prominent background for the meaning of Revelation, but texts like Zechariah, Song of Songs, Leviticus, and others are also significant at certain junctures. In these concluding chapters, Genesis and Song of Songs both come into greater focus, as the text brings together the yearning for marital consummation of the Song of Songs and returns us to the themes of the very beginning of the scripture, as the new creation recalls and fulfills the original creation.

The concluding chapters of Revelation track with the later chapters of Ezekiel especially closely, and John's vision of the Holy City harkens back to Ezekiel's vision of a new temple in several respects. In Ezekiel's vision, there is also a very high mountain and a figure who is measuring. Ezekiel 40 2-4 In visions of God he brought me to the land of Israel and set me down on a very high mountain, on which was a structure like a city to the south.

When he brought me there, behold, there was a man whose appearance was like bronze, with a linen cord and a measuring reed in his hand. And he was standing in the gateway. And the man said to me, Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears and set your heart upon all that I shall show you, for you were brought here in order that I might show it to you.

Declare all that you see to the house of Israel. Such measurements in scripture are not recorded indiscriminately. The objects and the edifices of which we are given the measurements are holy objects and edifices.

Noah's Ark, the tabernacle and its furniture, particularly things like the Ark of the Covenant, Solomon's Temple, Ezekiel's Temple and here the Holy City, all are objects or edifices whose dimensions are given to us. All are holy in some way. The measurements of such objects and edifices are meaningful and the hearer of scripture is supposed to discern something of the meaning of the measurements that are given to us.

In Ezekiel chapter 43 verse 10, the measurements given in Ezekiel's temple vision are intended to lead Israel to be ashamed of their iniquities, presumably recognizing the temple vision as a vision of holiness that exposes their own wickedness. In the measurements of the city here, the numbers 12 and 10 and squares and cubes are prominent throughout. In verse 12, the city was said to have 12 gates with 12 angels at the gates and with each gate having the name of the tribe.

In verse 14, there were 12 foundations, each with a name of one of the 12 apostles. The

city itself is 12,000 stadia, 12 times 10 to the power of 3, in length, width and height. The city itself is cubed.

This should instantly draw the hearer's mind back to two previously perfect cubes in scripture, the most holy place of the tabernacle, which was a cube of 10 cubits on all sides, and the related holy of holies of Solomon's temple, which was a cube of 20 cubits on each side. Through such connections, the holiness of the city is underlined. The wall is 144 cubits, likely in its thickness, which is 12 squared.

Some people might want to convert these dimensions into more familiar ones, perhaps observing, for instance, that 12,000 stadia are 1,500 miles, but this would be badly to miss the symbolic force of the measurements. This New Jerusalem has the dimensions of a perfect, complete and holy Israel. It has the dimensions of a magnified most holy place or sanctuary.

With the perfection suggested by its dimensions, it also recalls the number of the 144,000, whose number also played upon the numbers 12 and 10. Perhaps most important here is the fact that this is a city that has the most holy status of the holy of holies, yet has open gates. The most holy realm is no longer closed to the people of God.

In Hebrews chapter 9, the author of the book described the way that the first section of the tabernacle was symbolic of the age in which the way into the holy places had not yet been opened. In only one ritual per year could the high priest go into the holy of holies. All of the rest of the rituals took place in the courtyard or in the holy place.

All of those rituals, to some extent or other, fell short of entering into God's presence. The holy city of Revelation, however, is all holy place. There is no longer the antechamber that the tabernacle or the temple had or that they represented.

This is the bridal garden of Song of Songs as well. It is also the paradise of Eden, yet now glorified and magnified into a city of vast proportions, clothed with bridal jewels, with gold, with pearls, filled with fragrances and spices, choice fruits and with a fountain of living water in its midst. The city is bounded and walled, but also open to those who will enter by its twelve gates, which are never shut.

Solomon describes the bride in Song of Songs as like a walled garden of delights, containing fruit, fragrance and a fountain. The bride of Revelation has been opened up to the bridegroom and to the faithful also. This vision is of the people of God raised to their full stature, enjoying the fullness of fellowship with God and also blessing the world as they ought to.

Our eyes may glaze over when we see the list of jewels in the foundations of the walls of the city. However, this is not the first time that we have encountered such a list in scripture. The first such list is found in Exodus chapter 28 verses 15 to 21 in the

description of the high priest's breastplate.

You shall make a breastplate of judgment, in skilled work. In the style of the ephod you shall make it, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen shall you make it. It shall be square and doubled, a span its length and a span its breadth.

You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz and carbuncle shall be its first row, and the second row an emerald, a sapphire and a diamond, and the third row a jacinth, an agate and an amethyst, and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx and a jasper. They shall be set in gold filigree.

There shall be twelve stones with their names according to the names of the sons of Israel. They shall be like signets, each engraved with its name, for the twelve tribes. A second such list is found in Ezekiel chapter 28 verses 11 to 14.

Moreover the word of the Lord came to me. Son of man, raise a lamentation over the king of Tyre and say to him, Thus says the Lord God, you were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of God.

Every precious stone was your covering, sardius, topaz and diamond, beryl, onyx and jasper, sapphire, emerald and carbuncle, and crafted in gold were your settings and your engravings. On the day that you were created, they were prepared. You were an anointed guardian cherub.

I placed you. You were on the holy mountain of God, in the midst of the stones of fire you walked. There are challenges translating these lists, exacerbated by the inclusion of the Septuagint translation of these lists into the mix.

There are a few things to observe here. First, Jasper seems to be associated with Judah, and the walls of the city are Jasper, and the first of the jewels of the foundations is Jasper. The twelve jewels connect with the twelve apostles, who are the foundations of the city, but also with the high priest breastplate, which associates the twelve apostles with the twelve tribes, each that has their associated company.

There seems to be some logic in the ordering of the jewels. Peter Lighthouse writes, Even if we take John's list as his own rendition of the Exodus list, the order is not the same. As Caird notes, if we take the Septuagint list in Exodus as normative, John's list is 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 10, 11, 12, 7, 8, 9. Caird describes the effect this ways, The first and second rows are interchanged and reversed, the third and fourth interchanged but not reversed.

John's list is different, but the difference is not arbitrary. In each half of the list we have a gesture towards Jesus' first shall be last principle. The sixth stone, the last in the first half of the breastplate, has taken the first place.

The first stone has taken the last place. The last row has been elevated above the third

row. The pearls of the gates show that the city includes treasures of both land and sea.

The pure gold recalls the most holy items of furniture of the temple and the tabernacle, the items that belonged in the Holy of Holies. In Genesis chapter 2, the Garden of Eden was a realm of vegetation, but was surrounded by lands with precious stones and metals. The Garden of Eden in chapter 2 of Genesis still needed to be glorified, but the city here is a glorified garden, a garden city clothed with all of the treasures of the world.

It includes not just the treasures of the land, but also the treasures of the sea in the gates of Pearl. There is no temple in the city because God and the Lamb dwell there. The temple was always an antechamber.

The city is now the sanctuary. Almost all of the activity of the temple took place outside of the sanctuary proper. The temple was the threshold.

It wasn't actually the place where God dwelt. The claim being made here is put differently as well. The temple is now God himself and the Lamb.

The righteous dwell in God himself. Christ is the new temple, whom we indwell by the Spirit. The city is the source of light.

It dazzles with its glorious splendour. It illuminates so that people can see. It gives light to the nations.

It is in a manner reminiscent of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The city set on a mighty mountain that cannot be hidden is placed among the other nations to give light to them all. This is a fulfilment of Isaiah chapter 2 verses 1-4, the word that Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established at the highest of the mountains and shall be lifted up above the hills and all the nations shall flow to it. And many people shall come and say, Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

He shall judge between the nations and shall decide disputes for many peoples. And they shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

As a city among the nations, the holy city is a source of light going out, but also a site of gathering of riches in. It is guarded against the entrance of anything impure, but is also constantly open to receiving treasures from without, being glorified as a result. Leslie Newbigin describes something of the interchange between the church and the world in this passage.

The church is in the world as the place where Jesus, in whom the fullness of the Godhead dwells, is present. But it is not itself that fullness. It is the place where the filling is taking place.

It must therefore live always in dialogue with the world, bearing its witness to Christ, but always in such a way that it is open to receive the riches of God that belong properly to Christ, but have to be brought to him. This dialogue, this life of continuous exchange with the world, means that the church itself is changing. It must change if all that the Father has is to be given to it as Christ's own possession.

It does change. Very obviously the church of the Hellenic world in the 4th century was different from the church that met in the upper room in Jerusalem. It will continue to change as it meets ever new cultures and lives in faithful dialogue with them.

The church excludes that which is evil. It is also glorified through the treasures of the nations that are brought into it. In this passage, in many respects, we see the invisible church made visible.

With our natural eyes we might see the church like a great construction site, but this is what the church really is, a glorious edifice, perfect in its dimensions, pure in its contents. In chapter 22 the imagery shifts from the imagery of the construction of a city to imagery of a garden, reminding the reader of Eden. In particular there is the river of the water of life flowing from the throne of God and the tree of life.

This harks back to Genesis chapter 2 verses 9-10 And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

In Ezekiel's prophecy, after the vision of the new temple, there is a river flowing out. In Ezekiel chapter 47 verse 1 And he said to me, It will be a place for the spreading of nets, its fish will be of very many kinds, like the fish of the great sea. But its swamps and marshes will not become fresh, they are to be left for salt.

And on the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month. Because the water for them flows from the sanctuary, their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing.

The imagery of the life-giving river flowing out is also found in John's gospel. Jesus promises the water of life in John chapter 4 verses 13-14 Jesus said to her, Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring

of water welling up to eternal life.

In John chapter 7 verses 37-39 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. Now this he said about the spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Blood and water flow from Jesus' side when he is pierced on the cross. Later on, as it were, living water flows from the tomb of Christ as it has opened up in his resurrection. And in John chapter 21 there are allusions back to Ezekiel chapter 47 in the catch of many fish.

The tree of life connects with Eden. It was the tree of life from which Adam and Eve were barred when they were cast out of the garden. It has 12 kinds of fruit, with fruit each month.

12 months, 12 different kinds of fruit. In the light of the lamb, in the tree of life and in the water of life, we see light and food and water, connecting with elements of the tabernacle. The lampstand is like a tree that gives light.

The 12 kinds of food connects with the 12 loaves of the showbread. The waters that go out connect with the chariots of water that flow out in Solomon's temple. All of this offers illumination and glory, sustenance and healing, cleansing, refreshment and life.

The holy city exists among the nations for the sake of their transformation, a transformation achieved by these holy gifts. In the New Jerusalem people will see God's face. It is a place of communion with God.

God's name will be on people's foreheads. As Peter Lighthouse remarks, the people of this city aren't merely dressed as priests. They are priests.

They are marked out in their very bodies as holy. This is something that we see in the New Testament elsewhere. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

The reign of this holy city and those within it is not just for a thousand years. It is forever and ever. This is a city that in many respects is already in existence, that is giving life and light to the world around.

It is a place of holiness, a place of God's special presence. It is still descending. It is not fully here yet, but we already have some experience of it.

A question to consider. Where else in the New Testament can we find elements of this city described? We now arrive at the conclusion of the book of Revelation, and with it the conclusion of the entire New Testament, and the conclusion of the Bible as a whole. John

has just finished describing his vision of the new heaven and the new earth and the descending holy city and its glories.

The glory of the bridal city is consummation of the glory of Jesus in the Spirit, as the woman is the glory of the man, so the church formed by the Spirit is the glory of Jesus. Now we step back from the immediacy of the visions, and the character of John as the witness-bearer and the angel communicating the visions to him come into view. From immersion in its contents, the importance of the book itself, the book we are studying, is brought into focus, and with it our place and our responsibility as its readers.

By the time that we arrive at its conclusion, it might be easy to forget that Revelation began as a letter to Christians in the seven churches of the Roman province of Asia, and by extension to other Christians both in the first century and in later centuries that would read its words. When reading the New Testament, we can often read it as if its words were inert, perhaps as if they were dehydrated truths in plastic packaging that needed to be unwrapped, mixed with water and microwave to make it edifying for us, or maybe even processed and reconstituted into something rather different in order to be relevant and have application to our lives. Yet, like most of the rest of the New Testament, Revelation is not teaching abstract truths about theology in some detached fashion.

Rather, it is directly speaking to flesh and blood persons in their very concrete situations and difficulties, addressing them with trustworthy and true words by which they can live. Its words are addressed to us too. The words of the prophecy of Revelation are words that, according to these final verses, must be kept.

The fact that the words of the prophecy are described as faithful and true should also remind us of the use of that same language with reference to Jesus himself, and the fact that Jesus has also been spoken of as the Word and as the embodied testimony. The book is titled The Revelation of St. John. Many mistakenly call it Revelations, as if the book were a series of mysterious oracles about future world events.

But the book is the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is the unveiling of the exalted Son. To keep the prophecy of the book is to keep hold of him by a confident faith through the struggles of this life, whether of persecution or prosperity.

In chapter 19 verse 10, John fell down to worship the bowl angel, presumably because the angel spoke such divine things, and he was rebuked in an almost identical way to that in which he is rebuked in this passage. As Austin Farrer observes, in the former passage he was immediately directed to the one called faithful and true on the white horse coming from heaven. Here, however, the angel is not eclipsed by a Christophany, but Jesus speaks through him as his mouthpiece, much as he does through the apostles and prophets.

In concluding, the book of Revelation returns to the note on which it began. Revelation

opened with the statement, The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his servants the things that must soon take place. In verse 6 of the concluding chapter we read, And he said to me, These words are trustworthy and true, and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, has sent his angel to show his servants what must soon take place.

Reading the rest of the opening three verses of the book, further elements are recalled in the concluding chapter. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who bore witness to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw. Blessed is the one who reads aloud the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written in it, for the time is near.

In chapter 22, verses 7 to 10, John is once again presented as the witness and as the servant. A revealing messenger is once again present. There is another blessing declared, this time upon the person keeping the prophecy of the book.

The written words of the prophecy are once again focused upon. There is a testimony recorded in the book, which itself serves as a witness and as a word of address. Finally, we are once again reminded that the time is near.

There are other parallels between these two chapters, such as in the title of Christ, as the Alpha and the Omega. Indeed, the claim that Jesus is coming soon, rings as a refrain throughout this final passage of the book. Verse 7, And behold, I am coming soon.

Verse 12, Behold, I am coming soon. Verse 20, Surely I am coming soon. Back in Daniel chapter 12, verse 4, the prophet was instructed, But you, Daniel, shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end.

Revelation chapter 12, verse 10, strikes a sharply contrasting note. Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near. Studying the book of Revelation, the book of Daniel has always been in the near background.

Revelation is largely an account of the way that the prophecy of Daniel is fulfilled. Indeed, we have argued that the sealed book that the Lamb opened, is likely Daniel's prophecy concerning the last days. The contrast between the statement given to Daniel, and the statement given to John concerning the sealing of the prophecy, is instructive for us.

If it were the case that we still awaited the fulfillment of the prophecy of Daniel and John, the contrasting instruction given to the two, would not make much sense, as the great intervening time period would dwarf the period between their two prophecies. The shortness of the time is further confirmed in the statement of verse 11, which confirms evil doers, the filthy, the righteous and the holy, in their current state. The last grains are falling through the hourglass, and people's various courses have already been decided.

There is neither time nor opportunity remaining to reverse direction. For these and many other reasons, it makes much more sense to read the prophecy of Revelation, as referring to the dismantling of the old covenant structure, and the unveiling of the structure of the new covenant, through the ascension of Christ, Pentecost, the spread of the gospel through Israel, and the wider Roman Empire, and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Indeed, these are the events that are prominent in the rest of the New Testament, particularly in Jesus' Olivet Discourse.

Judgment is about to come, and everyone must brace for it. In the descending holy city, the awaited future's presence is already felt in the middle of history. This is the case for the reality of judgment too.

The shadow of the very final judgment hangs heavy over Jerusalem in AD 70, as people's final destinies are at stake in how they stand relative to what is happening at that juncture in history. While every one of us must stand before the judgment seat of Christ, there are moments in history when decisive judgment falls upon a civilization, a nation, or a larger body of people, and the gravity of a final end is felt most keenly. The judgment upon Jerusalem in AD 70, as presented by the Book of Revelation, is part of a larger transformation of the heavens and the earth, achieved through Christ's work, both on earth and in heaven.

The gravity of the future that we await can be experienced here and now in the life of the Church. We are invited to enter the holy city as we wash our robes in the blood of Christ. In the waters of baptism, for instance, God seals his promise of a free forgiveness of all of our sins on account of Jesus.

In the Lord's Supper, the gift of the true tree of life, the living Jesus, of whom those who eat will live forever, is graciously extended to us and received by faith. We are already enjoying a foretaste of the awaited new heaven and new earth in the present. However, the negative aspect of the future is also already felt.

The Church is a realm of participation, but is also a place that excludes. It excludes those who love and live by lies. It excludes the sexually immoral.

It excludes murderers and idolaters. It excludes all others who act contrary to Christ and to his gospel. Such people have not yet been consigned to the lake of fire that we read of at the beginning of chapter 21, but their exclusion from the life of the Church should be a serious advance warning.

The significance of the events described in Revelation, like many of the events recorded in the Scripture, is not chiefly visible to natural sight. Rather, their significance is only truly perceived when we are granted to see above the firmament, where a great heavenly liturgy is playing out. In the heavenly visions of John, we perceive what was really taking place in the middle decades of the first century AD, events that provide the

foundation of the reality that the Church is living out right now.

We are experiencing the binding of Satan, the thousand year reign of the saints, and the already but not yet descent of the Holy City to earth. In fulfilment of the prophecies of Daniel, we are witnessing the rock that is growing into a mountain that will fill the entire world. Looking at the messiness of our situations, this can all feel very strange and foreign to the reality that we inhabit.

But we are called to live by eyes of faith that perceive God's reality-filled promises of the awaited glories of the new creation already at work among those of us who believe. We are supposed to recognise that the truest and most determinative reality operates above the firmament, in heaven. One of the things that the book of Revelation does then, more than any other book of the New Testament, is to take us above the firmament to see Christ's heavenly work, completing and fulfilling what was begun in his earthly ministry.

Peter Lighthouse notes that this passage is structured in a fourfold parallelism, each of four sections with a speaker or speech with some form of he said, verses 6-9, 10-16, 17-19, and 20-21. Each of the four sections contains Jesus' claim that he is coming quickly, save for the third, which has the corresponding call of the Spirit and the Bride, and a faithful hearer of the prophecy to Jesus, come. This statement is followed by a blessing to the faithful.

The first three sections each end with a testifying statement, of John, of Jesus, and then of John again, alongside the testimony of the Spirit and the Bride. The book thus ends with an accumulation of witnesses and their testimony. With solemn testimony, witnesses, and blessings and curses, it is also clear that we are operating in the territory characteristic of covenant.

In verses 13 and 16, Jesus declares himself in a series of titles. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End, the Root and the Descendant of David. All is contained, summed up, and sustained in him.

He is the bright morning star, the one whose rising heralds the eternal day. The book ends with the voice of the Bridegroom and the Bride in conversation, the Bridegroom announcing his coming, and the Bride with the Spirit seeking to hasten it. The hearer might recall the closing words of the book of Song of Songs, O you who dwell in the gardens, with companions listening for your voice, let me hear it, make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices.

The Spirit stands with the Bride, addressing the Bridegroom. The Spirit forms the Bride, and the Bride is formed in the Spirit. The Spirit is the one by whom Christ dwells in his Bride.

We might also recognise a close affinity between the Bride and the Spirit in other

respects. The Spirit is the one by whom we are begotten again. The Spirit is the one who makes God's home with us.

The Spirit is the one who glorifies and brings life and communion. As the last Adam is awaited from heaven, the Spirit is present with the new Eve. In opening his Gospel, John echoed Genesis 1.1, speaking of Jesus as the Word who was in the beginning, the one through whom all things were created.

Here, at the end of Revelation, the final book of the Bible, Jesus is the awaited one, the one who comes at the consummation of all of history. Between its beginning and its end, the Bible bookends the entirety of cosmic history. And this entire history is bookended by, and upheld in, Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the root and the descendant, the chief cornerstone of the foundation and the glorious capstone of the entire edifice. He is the opening word and the final word. Everything that comes in between is grounded and secured in him.

He is the key to it all. This book has been the revelation of Jesus Christ. But not just this final book.

All of the books of the Bible contain a united, unified revelation, in many voices testifying to Jesus Christ. He is the subject matter of them all, the one who holds them all together. A question to consider.

John warns every hearer of the book against adding to the words of the book of his prophecy, in verse 18. Would it be appropriate to broaden John's warning to refer to the testimony of scripture more generally? If so, how might we make that case?