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INTERNATIONAL
THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

REVELATION

1-11



PETER J. LEITHART

B L O O M S B U R Y

The International Theological Commentary on the Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments

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General Editors' Preface

The T&T Clark International Theological Commentary Series aims to offer interpretation of the Bible that addresses its theological subject matter, glean- ing from the best of the classical and the modern commentary traditions and showing the doctrinal development of scriptural truths. In so doing, it seeks to reconnect to the ecclesial tradition of biblical commentary as an effort in *ressourcement*, though not slavish repetition. Alert to tendencies toward atomism, historicism, and skepticism, the series seeks to offer a corrective to the widespread pathologies of academic study of the Bible in the modern era.

In contrast to modern study of the Bible as a collection of witnesses (frag- mented and diverse) to ancient religious beliefs and practices, this series reflects upon Holy Scripture as a common witness from and of the triune God of the gospel. These interpretations will give priority to analysis of the scriptural text as such, reading any given passage not only in its most imme- diate context but also according to its canonical location, in light of what has historically been termed the *analogia scripturae*. In so doing, however, the series does not mandate any uniform approach to modern critical methods or to the appropriation of classical reading practices; the manner in which canonical reading occurs will follow the textual form and subject matter of the text rather than dictate them.

Whereas much modern biblical criticism has operated on the presump- tion that the doctrinal resources of the church are a hindrance to the exe- getical and historical task, commentaries in this series will demonstrate a posture of dependence upon the creedal and confessional heritage of the church. As Zacharius Ursinus noted centuries ago, the catechetical and doc- trinal resources of the church are meant to flow from and lead back unto a cogent reading of the biblical canon. In so doing, the reception history of the text will be viewed as a help and not merely an obstacle to understand- ing portions of Holy Scripture. Without mandating a particular confessional position (whether Eastern or Western, Roman or Protestant), the volumes will be marked by a creedal and confessional alertness.

Finally, commentary serves to illumine the text to readers and, thus, does well to attend not only to the original horizon of the text but also to its tar- get audience(s). Unfortunately, much biblical interpretation in the modern academy (from both its more liberal and conservative wings) operates as if a sharp divide should be drawn between the source horizon and the receptive horizon. This series, however, gestures toward contextual concerns regarding

how the biblical literature impinges upon, comes into confrontation with, or aligns with contemporary questions. While the series does not do the work of homiletics, the commentator ought to exposit with an eye to that end and an ear to those concerns.

In seeking to honor these canonical, creedal, and contextual commitments, then, the T&T Clark International Theological Commentary Series will include sequential commentary on the totality of scriptural books, though the format of volumes will be shaped by the specific demands of the various biblical texts being expounded. Commentators will provide English translations or make use of widely known contemporary translations of varying sorts, but their exposition will be based ultimately upon the original language(s). Commentators will be selected for their capabilities as both exegetical and dogmatic theologians, demonstrated in linguistic and literary facility, creedal and confessional clarity, and an ability to relate the two analytic exercises of dogmatic reasoning and exegetical reasoning. Through its principles, format, and selective criteria for commentators, the series intends to further sketch and, in so doing, show the significance of a theological reading of Holy Scripture in the modern era.

Michael Allen and Scott Swain

Acknowledgments and Dedication

By the time I submitted the final draft of this commentary, it had been seven years since I signed a contract to write it. The book consists of seven major sections and fourteen chapters. After seven years of studying the Apocalypse, I have a perhaps unhealthy obsession with numerical sequences, but I suspect that even without that study I would be startled by the numerological symmetry of the book's production and format.

I have had many (probably a multiple of seven, or twelve) opportunities to present portions of this book over the past seven years. Naturally, I worked Revelation into as many different lectures and projects as I could get away with.

Long before I began this work, I had presented superficial overviews of Revelation for many years in my theology course at New St. Andrews College, Moscow, Idaho. During my last year of full time teaching in Moscow, I was allowed to offer a more detailed elective course on the book. Near the beginning of my study for the commentary, I delivered a series of lectures at Christ Covenant Church of Chicago. I am grateful to elders Leo Kou and David Rapp for the invitation and the opportunity to outline my initial thoughts.

I taught through the book in two different churches. I started in 2010 or so at Trinity Reformed Church in Moscow, Idaho, but was unable to complete the book before moving South. I started over at Trinity Presbyterian Church, Birmingham, making sure I worked fast enough to finish the whole thing. Thanks to the regulars in both classes, and especially to the pastors of those churches—Toby Sumpter, Joshua Appel, Rich Lusk, and Jimmy Gill—for giving me these venues. James Jordan and I taught a Theopolis Institute intensive course on Revelation in the spring of 2015; the concentrated format of that course clarified a number of key issues and, as always, I learned much from Jim's lectures.

Bits and pieces of this commentary have appeared in print elsewhere. *Modern Theology* (28:4, 2012) published my essay on John's initial vision of Jesus as "imperial Lover." *First Things* (January 2013) printed an essay on the politics of martyrdom that brought together my work on Constantine with my study of Revelation. In June 2013, I presented a lecture at Trinity School of Ministry, Ambridge, Pennsylvania, on Tyconius's *Rules* as applied to Revelation. It was a yawner, and I am grateful to Joel Scandrett and others at Trinity for their cheerful indulgence. That talk was later published in *Pro Ecclesia* (23:4, 2014), and I am grateful to editor Joseph Mangina for his

interest. When Gerald Hiestand invited me to give a talk at the first Center for Pastor Theologians conference in November 2015, I folded in some of my exegesis of Revelation 17. That lecture was published in *Becoming a Pastor Theologian*, edited by Gerald and Todd Wilson.

I was honored by Scott Swain and Mike Allen's invitation to make this early contribution to the International Theological Commentary Series, and I am grateful for their extensive and excellent feedback on the first draft of the commentary, and for their patience with the eccentricities and flaws of the book. Thanks too to Dominic Mattos at Bloomsbury for guiding the process and to Ken Bruce, Kalyani, Sarah Blake, and the rest of the efficient and talented production team. Ian Boxall served as an outside reader of the first draft, and his comments and questions were especially helpful as I made revisions.

* * *

For decades, my theological instincts and agenda have been profoundly shaped by the work of, as well as friendship and collaboration with, James Jordan. His work determined my approach to the Bible and to many theological questions. More specifically, his extensive studies in Revelation (more than two hundred lectures) left a deep impression, as will be evident from the numerous citations to his notes and essays scattered throughout this commentary. One of the treasures afforded by my move to Birmingham and the initiation of the Theopolis Institute has been the opportunity to work more closely with him. Jim has played the role of *Doktorvater* for a very long time, and I dedicate this commentary to him with affection and gratitude.

But Jim has to share the glory. I have made it a custom to dedicate books to my children and, having outwritten my children, to my grandchildren, who keep coming at just the right times, which is to say, in sync with book deadlines. My ninth grandchild, Phoebe Christian Leithart, was born between submitting my second draft and final corrections, and I dedicate this book to her: Though you may never read a word of this commentary, I trust that you will live the life it describes—a life of faithful, courageous witness; a life of worship and non-worship, devotion to God, and resolute resistance to all idols; a life of fruitful membership in the body that is the Bride of Jesus, the woman who is the glory of the Lamb. I trust that you will shine forever like a star in the city of light. I love you already, and cannot wait to meet you.

Beth-Elim
Gardendale, Alabama
Lent 2017

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I. Introduction

At the beginning of *The Simpsons* “Treehouse of Horror VIII,” a censor sits at a desk looking at the camera. He solemnly informs the audience that he has edited the episode to make sure that it is TV-G. As he speaks, a disembodied hand holding a sword appears and begins to stab him in the back. With each stab, the rating rises, and when he falls dead, the rating is “TV-666.”

For centuries, Revelation has infiltrated the public imagination, perhaps more than any book of the Bible. It has inspired paintings and woodcuts, church architecture and music, high drama and cartoon comedies. Apocalyptic agitation seems to have increased over the past several decades. Every summer brings another lineup of apocalyptic blockbusters. Godzilla rises from the sea. A meteor smashes into earth. Volcanoes threaten towns, viruses spread like wildfire, aliens invade. Robots take over, evolving into dominating *ex machinas*. Terrorists storm the White House. Superheroes do their superheroics against the backdrop of inky Gotham cityscapes. Many of these films draw directly on the imagery of the Apocalypse: A beast or “Antichrist,” plagues, floods, fires, and disasters. There are enough films and TV shows with 666 in them that people rank their top ten favorites. It is as if every Hollywood studio has hired *Left Behind* creators, the late Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, as script consultants.

If we can trust the signals coming from pop culture, we live in a world charged with what one film critic, following Kierkegaard, calls “apocalyptic dread” (Thompson 2007).

Dystopian film is hardly new. *Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, a 1921 film about the First World War, made Rudolph Valentino a star. Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* was released in 1926, the Cold War haunted Hollywood for decades, and the 1970s produced formulaic disaster films. What is new is the scale of threat, and the frequency of apocalyptic drama. Nuclear families are still the focus of many stories: Tom Cruise wants to reunite his already broken family when Martians invade in Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds*, but the family is trying to survive a *global* catastrophe, not a burning building or a crashed airliner. Film scholar Kristen Thompson (2007: 12) writes, “[T]wenty-five

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disaster movies appeared throughout the eighties. But in the nineties fifty-six disaster movies were released, with fourteen films released in the peak year 1997.” Wikipedia lists over sixty “apocalyptic” films and television shows from the period 2000–2009, and nearly as many for the period 2010–16.

Elite culture in the United States betrays a similar level of anxiety. Cormac McCarthy’s *The Road* took the dark foreboding of his *No Country for Old Men* several leagues further. Serious analyses of contemporary civilization employ the word “end” with unsettling frequency. Francis Fukuyama got ahead of the pack with his pre-9/11 *The End of History*. One of Rene Girard’s last books was *Battling to the End*, and David Goldman, writing under the pseudonym Spengler, warns about coming demographic disaster in his faux reassuringly titled *It’s Not the End of the World, It’s Just the End of You*. Survivalists and investment advisors explain how to survive and profit from the end of the world as we know it. Political writers speak of the “end of the nation state,” and Canadian theologian Douglas Farrow warns of the “end of marriage.” Writers who do not use overtly apocalyptic language still warn of catastrophic change. Zygmunt Bauman has argued in several books that we live in a “liquid” society in which all sure ground has become unstable. Distinctions apparently rooted in the nature of things—male and female—are deconstructed, and moral principles once thought to be inescapable are flouted. All that’s solid melts into air, into thin air.

Threats come from every direction at once. Depending on your politics, you might spend your sleepless nights worrying over Islamic terror or over global warming. Depending on whom you talk to, either (or both) threaten TEOTWAWKI—“the end of the world as we know it.” For some, declining birthrates pose a quieter, but more decisive threat (cf. Landes 2011: 467–76). The surge of immigration has sharpened questions about the fate of Europe: In a generation, will Europe be populated by Europeans? The recession of 2008 has added to our doomsday fears. The prospect that our greatest achievements will lead to our downfall fills us with nightmares of robots taking over the world, of our brains becoming nodes in a Google network, of inescapable surveillance and the “end of privacy.” (I found five books on Google with that title.) A tiny minority are energized by all this, because the end of humanity cracks open the door for trans-humanism. Most people find it deeply disturbing.

In Europe and North America, contemporary apocalyptic is purely *secular*. “The End” that is coming is not the result of the wrath of God, nor is there any hope that a God will save us. We have made the mess ourselves, and we have to clean it up. That is a daunting prospect (Joustra and Wilkinson 2016), and only intensifies the anxieties of what is already an anxious age.

Elsewhere, *religious* millennial movements have long erupted and disrupted. The Xhosa cattle-slaughter in the mid-nineteenth century drew on

local beliefs spiced by biblical apocalyptic (Landes 2011: 91–121). During the late 1980s, the millenarian Holy Spirit Movement in Uganda, led by the prophet Alice Lakwena, won surprising victories against government forces before being crushed in a battle in the Begembe Forest (countrystudies.us/uganda/32.htm). Resistance movements in the Philippines during the late nineteenth century were inspired by apocalyptic hopes, as the Taiping movement in China fused traditional spirituality with Christian millennialism (Landes 2011: 185–211). In the present, popular new Christian movements in the Third World long for an apocalyptic overturning of world order. Theologians in Latin America and Africa find Revelation to be a resource for resistance to racist and exploitative regimes (e.g., Boesak 1987; Richard 1995).

Reading Revelation is difficult enough. Reading Revelation responsibly in such a highly charged atmosphere brings peculiar challenges. The perennial temptation to assume that John is *talking about us* becomes nearly overwhelming. Christians have often succumbed to the temptation, pinning apocalyptic labels on the characters and crises of their own times.

This is no modern phenomenon. Nicholas of Lyra took 666 as the number of Mohammed, based on chronological calculations: “[F]rom the year of the Incarnation of the Lord to the end of the reign of Heraclius 643 years passed ... Muhammed lived for sixty-three years ... together these numbers make 706 years, from which it is necessary to subtract the years in which he flourished with Heraclius ... These years can probably be estimated to be forty.” Hence, 666 “was from the year of the Lord’s incarnation to the end of the life of Muhammed” (Krey 1997: 157–8). Nicholas’s commentary is replete with long-forgotten historical actors and events (182).

A note on notes: I have made sparing use of footnotes. Citations are included parenthetically in the text, and substantive notes are included in Barth-like small print within the text. Those small print sections play a variety of roles: They provide supporting evidence for a line of exegetical argument, offer more detailed analysis of the text than any reasonable person would care to have, propose extended theological riffs on (or off) the text, elaborate speculative biblical-theological excursions that have a more tenuous connection to the text but that hold literary or theological interest. A hurried reader—that may be you!—can follow my overall interpretation of the book without reading a single small-print note.

It is easy to mock, because so many Christians have so often gotten so much wrong. To date, none of the hundreds of identifications of the Antichrist (a term that never appears in Revelation) have proven correct. Yet the instinct is sound in some way. Christians *should* use the Scriptures as a lens through which to sort out and evaluate the world around them. Scripture *does* name the world. If we sometimes—often—misapply the text, that does not mean we should stop applying it.

Readers, Christian and non-Christian, misread Revelation, often badly, because they bring false expectations to the book. They expect

mysteries—weird, exotic, strange, and impenetrable. They *expect* the book to be about the end of the world. They expect it to be a mystery, and neglect Mike Bull's (2016: 210) insight: "The Revelation is a mystery, yet it is also a book composed almost entirely of clues." At the outset, it is crucial to remind ourselves of simple facts: Revelation is a book of the Christian canon, the last book of the NT, and was written sometime in the late first or second century by someone named John (on authorship, →1:1-8). How might those undeniable facts set limits to our reading?

A book of the Bible

The Bible is a book of books, with the emphasis here being on the singular *book*. For all its complexity and diversity, it is a unified text with a single overall plot, an internally coherent pattern of imagery, a worldview of symbols and beliefs and teachings and demands. Revelation is a book of the Bible, and that means it operates within the world and history described in the OT and NT. Creation, fall, flood, Babel, Abraham, Sodom, Egypt, plagues, exodus, conquest, temple, tabernacle, kingdom, exile, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, return, rebuilding: These books, people, and events provided the coordinates of John's imagination, long before he was swept up by the Spirit to see visions of God. He *did* have an ecstatic visionary experience, but what he saw reflected the events and institutions of the Bible, and when he recorded them he naturally recorded them in the vernacular he knew, the vernacular of the Scriptures.

Some recent commentators have traced connections between Revelation and Greco-Roman politics, thought-patterns, institutions, and imagery. Bruce Malina (2000: 4) has pointed out that "all spoken and written patterns of language derive their meaning from some social system. Those spoken and written patterns are often quaintly called 'literary forms,' although they have nothing directly to do with literature or anything literary. They are types of language patterns used for realizing meanings from a social system in speech or in writing." Thus Malina examines Revelation as a sky vision, employing astronomical patterns that would have been common knowledge among certain ancient elites, the prophets to whom Malina thinks John addresses the book (Malina 2000, 1995; Malina and Pilch 2000). Aune has studied the Apocalypse in the context of Roman imperial court rituals and ideology (e.g., Aune 1990). These are illuminating threads of research, and I make limited use of these insights at various points in this commentary. Yet this commentary is based on the conviction that the Bible is the primary context for any particular book of the Bible.

Revelation alludes to or echoes to virtually every book of the OT. It is the NT's "OTest" book. To be sure, there are very few direct quotations in Revelation, and John never does what Jesus and Paul do—cite Scripture in

order to expound it. John does not use OT “expositionally” but “compositionally” (Paulien 1995; cf. Douglas 1915). He writes *with* Scripture rather than *about* it. John paints an apocalypse, and the OT is his pallet. A *far*-from-complete list of OT allusions will demonstrate the obvious:

OT Book	Theme	Revelation
Genesis	Creation, 1	Sequences of seven, 2-3; 6:1-8:4; 8:6-11:18; 16:1-21
	Adam and Eve, 2	Son of man and bride, 1:13; 21:1-8
	Garden, 2:8	Paradise of God, 2:7
	Tree of life, 2:9	Tree of life, 2:7
	Serpent (and Eve), 3:1-7	Dragon (and woman), 12:1-5; 20:2
	Rainbow, 9:13-16	Rainbow, 4:3; 10:1
	Babel, 11:1-8	Babylon, 14:8; 17-18
	Abraham from beyond river, 11-12	Army from Euphrates, 9:14; cf. 16:12
	Sodom, 18-19	Sodom, 11:8
	Judah a lion, 49:9	Lion of Judah, 5:5
Exodus	I am, 3:14	I am, 1:8, 17; 22:13, 16
	Plagues, 5-11	Plagues, 15:1
	River to blood, 7:19	Water to blood, 8:8-9; 11:6; 16:3-4
	Frogs, 8:1-13	Frogs, 16:13
	Hail, 9:18-35	Hail, 8:7; 16:21
	Locusts, 10:1-20	Locusts, 9:1-11
	Passover Lamb, 12	Lamb, 5:6
	Bitter water, 15:23-25	Poison water, 8:10-11
	Sea dried up, 14:21-22	River dried, 16:12
	Song of Moses, 15:1-18	Song of Moses, 15:1-4
	Manna, 16:1-36	Manna, 2:17
	Eagle wings, 19:4	Eagle wings, 12:14
	Kingdom of priests, 19:6	Kingdom and priests, 1:6; 5:10; 20:6
	Thunder and lightning, 19:16	Thunder and lightning, 4:5; 8:5; 16:18
	God the Creator, 20:11	God the Creator, 10:6
	Tabernacle, 25-31	Spread tabernacle, 7:15; 21:3
	Ark of the covenant, 25:10-22	Ark of the covenant, 11:19
	Bronze altar, 27:1-8	Altar, 6:9
	Golden altar, 30:1-10	Golden altar, 8:3
	Lampstand, 25:31-35	Seven lampstands, 1:12
	Priestly robes, 28	Jasper, 4:3
		Name on forehead, 7:3
		Gemstones, 21:19-20
	Golden calf, 32	Image of the Beast, 13
	Tabernacle filled with glory, 40:34-35	Temple filled with smoke, 15:8

OT Book	Theme	Revelation
Leviticus	Blood of sin offering, 4:18, 25 Coals and incense, 16:12 Burning of priest's harlot daughter, 21:9 Lamb with first sheaf, 23:9-12 Priests trim lampstands, 24:1-9	Souls beneath altar, 6:9-11 Coals and incense, 8:5 Burning of Babylon, 17:16 Lamb ascended, 5:5 Jesus among lampstands, 1:13
Numbers	Balaam and Balak, 22–25 Numbering of tribes, 1; 26 Jealousy test, 5:1-31	Balaam and Balak, 2:14 Numbering of 144,000, 7:1-8 Eating the book, 10:8-11
Deuteronomy	Curses, 28 City of palms, 34:3 Avenge servants, 32:43	Trumpets and bowls, 8–11; 16 Palm branches, 7:9 Avenge saints, 19:2
Joshua	Joshua with book, 1:8 Fall of Jericho, 6	Lamb with book, 5:6-7 Fall of Babylon, 17–18
Judges	Megiddo, 5:19	Har-Magedon, 16:16
Samuel	David	Lion of Judah, 5:5
Kings	Pillars in the temple, 1 Kgs 7:15-22 666, 1 Kgs 10:14 Jezebel, 1 Kgs 16–2 Kgs 9 Shut up sky, 1 Kgs 17:1 7000, 1 Kgs 19:18 Fall of Jerusalem, 2 Kgs 25	Pillar in temple, 3:12 666, 13:18 Jezebel, 2:20 Shut up sky, 11:6 7000, 11:13 Fall of Babylon, 17–18
Chronicles	24 chief priests, 1 Chr 24–25 Levitical choir, 1 Chr 25:1-31 Temple filled with glory, 2 Chr 5:14	24 Ancient Ones, 4:4 Heavenly choir, 4–5; 15:1-4 Temple filled with smoke, 15:8
Esther	Feast with gifts, 9:22	Feast with gift giving, 11:10
Job	Satan the accuser, 1–2	Satan, 12:9
Psalms	Rule with rod, 2:9 Nations enraged, 2:1-3 “How long?” 13:1-2; etc. Shepherd, 23:1 Firstborn, ruler, 89:27 New song, 96:1; etc. Idols, 115; 135 Incense and prayer, 141:2 Hallelujahs, Pss. 146–150	Rule with rod of iron, 2:27; 12:5 Nations enraged, 11:17 How long? 6:10 Shepherd, 7:17; 19:15 Firstborn, ruler, 1:5 New song, 14:3 Idols, 9:20 Incense and prayer, 8:3 Hallelujah, 19:1-6
Proverbs	Lady wisdom and folly, 7–9	Harlot and Bride, 17, 21
Song of Songs	W ^{asf} of the bridegroom, 5:10-16 Knocking to enter, 5:2 W ^{asf} of bride, 4:1–6; 7:1–9 Come to me, 8:14	Unveiling of Jesus, 1:12-17 Invitation to Laodicea, 3:20-21 False bride, 9:1-11; true bride, 21:9–22:5 Come, Lord Jesus, 22:20

OT Book	Theme	Revelation
Isaiah	Pilgrimage of nations, 2:2-4	Kings bring treasures, 21:24
	Holy, Holy, Holy, 6:3	Holy, Holy, Holy, 4:8
	Seven gifts of Spirit, 11:2	Seven spirits, 4:5; 5:6
	Rod of mouth, 11:4	Rod, 19:15
	Sun darkened, 13:10	Sun black as sackcloth, 6:12; 8:12
	Fallen star of Babylon, 14:12	Falling stars, 8:10-11; 9:1-11
	Fallen is Babylon, 21:9	Fallen is Babylon, 14:8; 18:2
	Keys, 22:22	Keys, 1:18
	Wipe tears, 25:8	Wipe tears, 21:4
	Dragon, 27:1	Dragon, 12:3
	Sky rolled like scroll, 34:4	Sky rolled like scroll, 6:14
	Smoke forever, 34:10	Smoke forever, 14:11; 19:3
	First and last, 41:4; 44:6; 48:12	First and last, 1:17; 2:8
	Do something new, 43:19	Make all things new, 21:5
	Queen forever, 47:5	Queen forever, 18:7
	No hunger, thirst, heat, 49:10	No hunger, thirst, heat, 7:16
	Second exodus, 40-48	Come out, 18:4
	Nations walk by Zion's light, 60:3	Nations walk by city's light, 21:24
Jeremiah	Wine press, 63:2	Wine press, 19:15
	New heaven and earth, 65:17	New heaven and earth, 21:1
Jeremiah	Fire from mouth, 5:14	Fire from mouth, 9:18; 11:5
	Wine of wrath, 25:15	Wine of wrath, 14:10
	Golden cup, 51:7	Golden cup, 17:4
Lamentations	Treading wine press, 1:15	Treading wine press, 14:19-20
	Mourning over fallen city, 1:1-22	Mourning over fallen city, 18
Ezekiel	Vision of glory, 1-3	Heavenly liturgy, Rev 4
	Cherubim, 1:10	Living creatures, 4:7
	Rainbow, 1:28	Rainbow, 4:3
	Eat scroll, 3:1	Eat book, 10:8-10
	Marking those who mourn, 9	Sealing the 144,000, 7:1-7
	Harlot Jerusalem, 16; 23	Harlot Babylon, 17-18
	Tyre's goods, 27	Goods of Babylon, 18:11-13
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	Resurrection, 37:1-14	First resurrection, 20:4-5
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	Imperial statue, 2:36-45	Jesus's bronze feet, 1:15
	King of kings, 2:37	King of kings, 17:14; 19:16
Daniel	Head and hair white, 7:9	Head and hair white, 1:14
	Coming on clouds, 7:13-14	Coming on clouds, 1:8
	Son of Man, 7:13	Son of Man, 1:12; 14:14

OT Book	Theme	Revelation
	Beasts from sea, 7:1-8	Composite beast from sea, 13:1-2
	Glory, dominion, kingdom, 7:14	Honor, glory, dominion, 5:13
	Stars fall, 8:10	Stars fall, 6:13
	Michael, 10:13, 21; 12:1	Michael, 12:7
	Sealed book, 12:4	Sealed book, 5:1; 10:4
Hosea	Courting wayward bride, 1–3	Wayward bride in wilderness, 17–18
	Mountains fall, 10:8	Mountains fall, 6:16
Joel	Locusts, 1–2	Locorpions, 9:1–11
	Moon to blood, 2:31	Moon to blood, 6:12
Jonah	Sea monster, 2	Beast from the sea, 13:1–2
Habakkuk	Lord rides out with bow, 3:8–15	White horse rider with bow, 6:1–2
Zephaniah	Day of Yahweh, 1:14–18	Great day of God almighty, 16:14
Haggai	Shaking heaven and earth, 2:6–7	Earthquakes, 6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18
Zechariah	Horses, 1:8–11; 6:1–8	Four horsemen, 6:1–6
	Woman wickedness, 5:5–11	Harlot city, 17–18
	Joshua and Satan, 3	Satan and woman, 12:1–6
	Lampstands and trees, 4:1–14	Two witnesses as lampstands, trees, 11:4
	Conversation with angel, 4:5, 13	Conversation with angel, 7:13–14
	Tribes mourn, 12:10	Tribes mourn, 1:7
	Megiddo, 12:11	Har-Magedon, 16:16
	Holy city, 14:1–21	Holy city, 21–22

As Augustine said, we take delight in the shock of recognition when we spy one text cleverly submerged within another. Literary criticism is an adult version of the children's game of "hidden pictures." In no way do I despise that delight; it is one ventricle of the burning heart that inspires any Spiritual study of the Bible. Still, noting and compiling allusions, references, and echoes is only the *first* step in reading Revelation. We want to know what *use* John makes of them, and how the OT background helps explain what is going on in the book we happen to be reading. To understand John's use, we need to pay attention to the original contexts of the texts he echoes, and, just as importantly, we need to pay attention to how John *layers* OT references. Much of the grunt work of interpreting Revelation consists of peeling back allusions and attempting to describe the alchemical reaction that results when John combines them.

John's use of the OT sometimes seems fairly straightforward. In the opening Christophany, Jesus is as "one like a son of man," a clear allusion to Jesus's

Gospel title and, behind that, to Daniel 7. In Daniel's prophecy, the son of man is the beast-tamer who takes dominion and the kingdom from the monsters of the sea. As Son of Man, Jesus is the head of the fifth monarchy, the *human* kingdom. He is Son of *Man*, a Last Adam, not another beast. Dizzying complications arise immediately. The "one like a Son of Man" stands among golden lampstands, which makes him an Aaronic priest, trimming the lamps of the churches to keep them burning as lights in a dark world. Okay, then: He is the beast-taming, imperial Son of man, *and also* a priest. We can work with that. We know, even if the original readers did not, that Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7), who was king of Salem and priest of the Most High God.

John is not done. As soon as he starts in on Jesus's personal appearance, there is another wrinkle in the fabric—Jesus's head and hair are sparkling-white like white wool, like snow. That too comes from Daniel 7, but it is *not* part of the description of the Son of man who receives the kingdom. It is a description of the Ancient of Days who *confers* the kingdom (Dan. 7:9-14). Which is it? Is Jesus the Son of Man who ascends to receive a kingdom, or the Ancient of Days who gives away the kingdom? This being John's first glimpse of Jesus, we suspect that the book's trajectory is being set by this initial unveiling. Deciding whether he is Son of Man or Ancient of Days will shape what kind of action we expect over the following twenty chapters. If we have a feel for the density of John's OT allusions, we should have divided expectations: We expect not only a grant of the kingdom *to* Jesus, but Jesus's grant of the kingdom *to someone else*. But then, to *whom*? And *how*? Which are *exactly* the questions John's description is designed to elicit, the very questions the Apocalypse is written to answer.

OT structures, characters, themes, scenes, symbols already are formed by layer after layer of sedimentation. The harlot city that appears toward the end of Revelation is called Babylon (17:5; 18:2), a name with a long OT reach: The city and tower of Babel, the Babylon of Nebuchadnezzar, which is also the Babylon of Daniel and the three friends, the Babylon overthrown by Cyrus, the Babylon from which captives go free. The fall of Babylon is described in detail in the later chapters in Jeremiah, and the quotation in Rev. 18:7 is from Isaiah's lament for Babylon (Isa. 47:7). Even before we flip the first page of Revelation, the Bible has painted a complex, intricate portrait of Babylon. Babylon strikes a chord, not a single note. The same goes for Sodom and Egypt, two other OT civilizations that make their appearance in Revelation (11:8). With Sodom and Egypt, though, another layer is added, because the prophets describe unfaithful Judah and Jerusalem as Sodom (Isa. 1:9-10; Ezek. 16:46-53) and Judea under Herod the Great is an Egypt that

slaughters Hebrew boys (Matt. 2:1–12). John’s description of Babylon’s fall draws on Ezekiel’s (26–28) descriptions of the fall of Tyre, the great city of commerce and merchandizing. Whatever the *referent* of John’s “Babylon,” it is Babel, Babylon, Tyre, Egypt, and Jerusalem rolled into one. John does not invent this density: “Babylon” already carried many of those connotations before John writes a word.

To illustrate further: Samuel is a new Moses, and Jeremiah, a new Moses, is a new Samuel. Saul’s career looks like that of one of the judges, and David’s life is modeled on Jacob’s, even as it sets the model for Hezekiah and others kings. The garden is translated into tabernacle, which, ruined and restored, becomes the temple, which, ruined once again, is transfigured into Ezekiel’s vision. John often makes use of the *pre-layered* symbolism of the OT. When he writes “temple,” the word echoes back and forth across the OT canon. We need to beware about hearing things, of course. But with a text like Revelation the far *greater* danger is that we lack ears sufficiently tuned to the Scriptures to discern even a fraction of John’s symphony. Not for nothing Jesus says, repeatedly, “He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

Allusions to OT events, persons, patterns, and structures are not poetic window dressing. They are *determinative* for the theology of Revelation. An illustration will clarify. When the Lamb breaks the fifth seal, we see the souls of martyrs under the altar (→6:9–11). Many commentators rightly recognize a reference to the distribution of blood in the rite of the purification offering (Lev. 4). Noting the allusion is only the beginning. We must draw *inferences*. Blood from the purification offering is poured at the base of the bronze altar in the courtyard of the sanctuary. If the souls of the martyrs are at the base of the altar, the altar must be the bronze altar, and therefore different from the golden altar that appears later (8:3). That distinction will be important as we try to determine what the angel is up to (8:1–5). No blood is poured at the base of the altar *except* the blood of a purification offering. The martyrs have not “sacrificed themselves” in a generic sense. They have offered themselves *as purification offerings*, and purification offerings have a specific function within the Levitical system. The location of the martyrs’ blood holds enormous implications for the Apocalypse’s theology of martyrdom, but we can see these implications *only* if we allow OT sacrificial rites and theology to guide us.

This hallucinogenic density is one reason why the Apocalypse is a popular book in the churches of the global South. As Philip Jenkins (2008: 30) puts it, Revelation “betrays its oral or neoliterate sources, and represents an anthropology of hymns, oracles, and visions. The work’s attitude to written texts—those awesome but cryptic things—is very much that of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. Nor, of course, are oral cultures troubled by what seem to be the laborious and repetitive style of storytelling that sometimes characterises biblical

account ... That is just what storytellers do.” Jenkins quotes an Anglican convert whose clergy nudged him away from difficult dream texts like Daniel and Revelation, which only increased his eagerness to understand. As Jenkins drily puts it, “[T]he dismissive phrase ‘only dreams’ is peculiarly unconvincing in an African context, as is any attempt to minimize the power of the book of Revelation. Prophecy is presumed to be a normal element in the life of the church, and something must be wrong with any Christian communities that do not evince this kind of prophetic activity” (57).

These brief examples lead to two larger hermeneutical hints. First, biblical (perhaps *all*) literary symbolism has a literal-figurative quality. The harlot city of Revelation is *named* Egypt, Sodom, and Babylon. She is described as a πόρνη, and her fall looks like Tyre’s. She has qualities of all these cities: She has enslaved Israel, like Egypt; she is sexually perverse and oppresses strangers, like Sodom; she revels in luxury and sharp dealing, like Tyre; she has prostituted herself, turning from Lord, like Jerusalem. Babylon is not identical in every respect to *any* of these OT cities. It is not located on the plains of Shinar or on the Mediterranean coast or in the vicinity of the Dead Sea. It has no hanging gardens or pyramids. Like the OT prophets, John picks out certain features of each of these cities and pastes them on the harlot city Babylon.

All this complex imagery has a *referent*. It is not a free-floating symbol, full of sound and fury signifying nothing. Resonant as the descriptions are, they *land*. John does not trade in airy nothings; each symbol has a location habitation and name. And those real-world referents have features that merit John’s descriptions. Even the metaphors refer to some real-world reality. A city cannot literally be a harlot, but “harlotry” names a set of practices, beliefs, attitudes, and habits that characterize a real community of real people. The name “harlot” is descriptive, and also carries a judgment about the community’s practices. It names a real-world referent and real-world events and persons under an *evaluative* description.

Think of a gangster movie. Make it an old-fashioned one, lest I endanger my PG-13 rating. James Cagney points a gun at a locked door and tells the “dirty yellow-bellied rat” on the other side to come out. There is a real referent to the phrase, a person on the other side of the door. In what sense is he a rat? Is he slimy, sharp-toothed, slick-tailed, a rodent? No; he is a man in fedora and suit. Is he yellow-bellied? Not so far as we can tell, but—who knows?—he is fully clothed. Is he dirty? Cagney thinks he is, anyway, and that should be good enough for us. Does Cagney use a literal or figurative insult? There is a real-world referent, and he must have certain rat-like qualities. The metaphor would not work if it did not have an actual referent; it would not work if the referent were entirely lacking in ratty attributes. On the other hand, the metaphor would not work if it were wholly literal, for a dirty yellow-bellied rat might take Cagney’s insult as a compliment.

The referent of “Babylon” *might* be a recurring social, political, or ecclesial form, something like “empire” or “false church” or “city of man.” Even if we take this “idealist” option, we should be prepared to say that there are, in history, *actual* political entities that fit the description, false churches or blood-thirsty empires or indulgent cities. And when we find one of them, we should be willing to say that it is Sodom, Egypt, Babylon, Tyre, a πόρνη purveying her πορνεία. This is what Christians have always done, and they should continue to do it.

“Idealism” is a coherent, plausible, and venerable method for interpreting the symbols and types of Revelation. It is *not*, however, consistent with the way biblical poetry works. Isaiah describes *Jerusalem*, not some generic city of man, as Sodom, and so does Ezekiel. Daniel sees beasts coming from the sea, and the beasts are *identifiable* kingdoms (with some qualifications, Babylon, Persia, Greece, Rome). Daniel sees a goat racing over the land without touching the ground. It crashes into a ram with two horns and shatters the ram’s horns (Dan. 8:5–8). That is not a generic portrait of “conquest.” It is *Alexander’s* conquest of the *Persians*. We can tease out generalized abstracted types from the historical referents: The goat is Alexander, but other fast-moving empires have appeared in history (e.g., Hitler the speeding goat who shatters the horns of Poland and France), and we can and must extend the biblical imagery to assess and evaluate them. There will be other cities like the Babylon of Revelation, and they will display some of the same features that John sees in the city and, importantly, meet the same fate. But John is not *referring* to those other cities, nor to some transcendent concept or class of “harlot-city” of which there are many specific instances. He *refers* to a real harlot city, one that existed in his own time, and *that* harlot city becomes a type of future cities.

All this is a way of saying that John is a typologist rather than an allegorist. It is an admittedly crude distinction, rightly disputed by many scholars. Whether or not the terms are felicitous, there is a genuine difference between a mode of reading that moves from text to an abstract, generalized concept (what I am calling allegory) as opposed to one that moves from text to real-life referent, while leaving open the prospect that mimics of the real-world referent will emerge, non-identically, in other times and places (typology). There are allegorical passages in Revelation (e.g., →12:1–6), but even these do not refer to concepts but to persons and events. And then these meaningful events foreshadow later events, not in every respect but in general. Thomas Aquinas was on the right track: The words on the pages of Scripture have a literal meaning, referring in the main to people who actually existed and events that actually took place; the spiritual, typological meanings of Scripture arise from the events to which the words refer. God can write with

events and people and things as well as words, and the pattern of history *itself* is meaningful, full of foreshadowings, ironies, repetitions, analogies. These are not literary devices imposed on history, but the very *fabric* of history. Abstraction is not the *first* moment of interpretation, but a later one; or, if we can be permitted another crude distinction, abstraction is part of the process of application, rather than part of the process of interpretation.

A more extended example from Revelation will illustrate further. What is the first trumpet about (8:7)? “Historicist” interpreters believe that the book lays out an allegory of church history. For many historicists, “the first four trumpets represent the four great blows that fell upon the Western Empire from the beginning of the fifth century to its fall in 476.” Others suggest that the images of hail, fire, and blood “symbolize war and the bloodshed and destruction of vegetation that accompany it.” Specifically, most who read the Apocalypse in this mode “identify this first trumpet with the military conflicts between the Western Roman Empire and hordes of Goths and Vandals under Alaric . . . The Goths attacked Gaul, Spain, and Italy from the north, burning or destroying everything in their path.” In the first decade of the fifth century, they besieged Rome itself three times (Gregg 2013: 148–9).

Preterists interpret Revelation as a prediction of events that lie in the *near* future for John and his first readers, typically the conflict between Rome and Jerusalem that led to Jerusalem’s destruction in 70 AD. Preterists often connect the trumpets with events leading up to the outbreak of the Jewish War in 66 AD. One claims that the images “probably predict the several years of ravage and pillage prior to the destruction of Jerusalem itself. In this period, the land suffered terribly. The plagues are reminiscent of those in Egypt, at the birth of the Hebrew nation. Here they mark both the latter’s cessation, and the birth of a new nation, the kingdom of God” (quoted in Gregg 2013: 148–9).

Futurists believe that Revelation prophesies events that were in the *distant* future for John and his readers. The visions are understood as prophecies of events just preceding the final judgment and consummation of the new creation. Many futurists take the judgments described in the trumpets literally: The physical events described will someday actually take place. Others, while viewing the judgments as future judgments that anticipate the end of the world, interpret the specifics symbolically. One “interprets the third part of the world to be the western confederation of nations, the trees to be great men and leaders, and the grass to be ordinary people” (Gregg 2013: 148–9).

For idealist or spiritualist interpreters, who believe Revelation unveils recurring principles and patterns of history, the trumpets are interpreted in the light of OT uses of trumpets—to call Israel to worship, to announce a triumph, at the coronation of a new king, as a summons to battle. For one, the

judgments “indicate series of happenings, that is, calamities that will occur again and again throughout this dispensation. They do not symbolize single and separate events, but refer to woes that may be seen any day of the year in any part of the globe” (Gregg 2013: 148–9).

These varied readings can seem so divergent that it is difficult to recognize that everyone is reading the same book. Yet the different approaches can be harmonized by the typological preterist reading adopted in this commentary; or, to use a more traditional designation, by application of the quadriga. The medieval quadriga posited that there are four senses in the biblical text: the literal sense, the allegorical or Christological sense, the tropological or moral sense, and the anagogical or eschatological sense (cf. Leithart 2010: 110–25). Applying this to Revelation: Literally, the book predicts a specific set of historical events that (mostly) take place soon after the book was written (preterist). Because God is consistent, these historical events are patterned by earlier events and pattern later historical sequences (idealist, historicist). Revelation depicts a double replay of exodus in *first-century* events, but *later* events might also qualify as exodus. As allegories and tropologies arise from the literal sense, so historicist and idealist readings arise from a preterist interpretation. Something *like* the trumpet sequence took place during the collapse of the Western Roman Empire, or in the later middle ages. John is not seeing or writing about those events directly, but they represent legitimate allegorical applications. John is *not* talking about us, but we may, will, and ought to seek analogies between what he is talking about and our own times. The better we learn the melody of the text, the more attuned we will be to contemporary (alternative rock?) renditions of that melody.

Futurist approaches are not as easy to fit into a preterist framework, but if we follow the quadriga, we can tease out some anagogies. Revelation does *not* predict the end of the physical universe; it uses the imagery of cosmic collapse to unveil the end of the old creation. But it is plausible to assume that the end of the old world foreshadows in some respects the end of the new. Besides, part of Revelation is *literally* about the final, postmillennial judgment (→20:11–21:8), and we will see that Revelation itself indicates that the end of the first age foreshadows the end of the last.

With Revelation, as with much of the Bible, hermeneutical confusion results when the quad of the quadriga splits apart. Sanity returns when we glue the shattered pieces back together again.

Though he does not refer to the quadriga or take a preterist view of Revelation, Mounce (1997: 27) makes a similar point: “The author himself could without contradiction be preterist, historicist, futurist, and idealist. He wrote out of his own immediate situation, his prophecies would have a historical fulfillment, he anticipated a future consummation, and he revealed principles that operated beneath the course of history.” He adds,

[E]ach approach has some important contribution to a full understanding of Revelation and that no single approach is sufficient in itself. It is vitally important to see with the preterist that the book must be interpreted in light of the immediate historical crisis in which the first-century church found itself. The author employs a literary genre that grew out of his own cultural and linguistic milieu. His figures of speech and imagery are to be interpreted in the context of his own historical setting. They are not esoteric and enigmatic references to some future culture totally foreign to first-century readers (e.g., hydrogen bombs, satellite television, and the European Common Market). With the historicist it is important to notice that the philosophy of history revealed in the Apocalypse has found specific fulfillment in all the major crises of human history up to the present day. With the futurist we must agree that the central message of the book is eschatological, and to whatever extent the End has been anticipated in the course of history, it yet remains as the one great climactic point toward which all history moves. This age will come to an end. Satan and his hosts will be destroyed and the righteous will be vindicated.

Preterism first arose among Roman Catholics who disputed Protestant interpreters who saw the book as a pre-view of church history and claimed the beast and the harlot as figures of Rome. That cannot be, said writers like Ribeira and Alcasar, because the book was not about church history but about events that took place shortly after the book was written (cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 20; Koester 2015: 56–7; Mounce 1997: 26). Older Protestant readers like Grotius also understood the book within a preterist framework (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 25).

A small number of preterists—calling themselves “consistent” or “full” preterists but labeled “hyperpreterists” by their opponents—take the view that everything in Revelation was fulfilled before or in AD 70 (cf. King 1987, 2016). Even the millennium and final judgment are squeezed into this time frame. That position not only rejects the near-universal confession of the church (“He will come again to judge the quick and the dead”) but it causes havoc to other teachings of Scripture. Some argue, for instance, that the resurrection described in 1 Corinthians 15 has already happened; if that is the case, “resurrection of the body” no longer means what it has meant in historic Christianity, with massive implications not only for eschatology but anthropology and the doctrine of creation. I do not devote much attention to this position, briefly interacting with it only toward the end of this commentary (→20:7–15). At the outset, though, I want to distinguish my position from that of “consistent preterists.” I believe that Revelation reaches ahead to a distant future judgment, a final arrival of a new heavens and earth, a future resurrection and eternal punishment in the “second death” of the lake of fire. Other NT texts predict this distant future as well.

John’s imagination is less metaphoric than metonymic. “Babylon” names an actual ancient city, civilization, and empire, and the name conjures all the OT episodes and characteristics associated with Babylon. To take it as *metaphor* is to verge toward allegory; “Babylon” stands for “arrogant and abusive imperial power.” To take it as *metonymy* is to stay within the confines of typology; “Babylon” refers to an actual city, but the name applies a complex of associations to that actual city, which is *not* Babylon.

And this brings us to our second main hermeneutical hint: Speaking of the “density” of John’s imagery misleadingly suggests that it is stolid, static, lumbering. It suggests that interpretation takes the form of mining, digging deeper and deeper until we get to the vein of precious metal that runs through

John's apocalyptic poetry. John's poetry is not static, though, nor stolid; if there is metal here, it is mercury. The text is *music*, not a mountain; it is to be *heard*, or danced to, not mined. The more attuned we are, the more layers of melody, harmony, and rhythm we pick up. And if we are not attuned, we do best to rely on those who are (as I have done throughout this commentary). Reading requires a light step, openness to ecstasy, a dash of whimsy. Heavy machinery drowns out the music.

In part, this means that John's imagery sets *trajectories*. He plays a few bars from an earlier melody, and expects his readers/hearers to pick up the tune and hum it through to the end. To name the harlot "Babylon" is not simply to bring all the OT associations of Babylon to the fore. The name is *predictive*. Every Babel/Babylon in the OT eventually falls, the residents of the first scattered to the winds and the empire of the latter conquered by Cyrus. Fittingly, Babylon is first mentioned in Revelation in an announcement of her fall (14:8). But the trajectory is more expansive than that: Once we hear "Babylon," we expect an exile, and a Daniel, and a second exodus, and a Cyrus, and a new conquest led by someone resembling Joshua (Jesus?!) and Zerubbabel. Similarly, if the city is Egypt, we expect plagues, a crossing of the sea, a destruction of Pharaoh, wilderness and manna, a Sinai, a conquest under someone resembling Joshua (Jesus!?). If the city is Sodom, we expect visiting angels—let us say, two of them; and sexual perversion—let us say, intercourse between a harlot and a beast; and fire from heaven. On nearly all of these points, Revelation obliges, giving us not isolated pictures drawn from the OT, but OT *storylines*, melodies played out, intertwined fugally with other melodies, themed and varied, set to new rhythms.

The notes are layered, their overtones expanding chordally; Revelation's *melodies* are layered too. This is most obvious in the multiple variations on seven-day creation week. From the start, grasping the sevens of Revelation "typologically" rather than "allegorically," metonymically rather than metaphorically, means that "seven" does not suggest an abstract quality like "completeness" or "wholeness." It is, in the first instance, a pointer to the creation account in Genesis 1. The sevens do not symbolize a concept. They riff on a melody, the first melody of all, the melody of creation.

Revelation is self-evidently organized in a series of sevens: Seven messages to seven churches, seven seals on the scroll, seven trumpets, seven bowls. We hope that a sequence of seven will follow the creation week in detail, and we are not disappointed. On the first four days of creation, God makes light, seas, sky, and heavenly bodies. Just so, the judgments of the first four trumpets fall on the land, sea, waters, and heavenly bodies, and the first four vials more or less follow suit, with judgments on beast-worshippers, the sea, rivers and springs, and the sun. After the fourth, things seem to go a bit

haywire. The fifth seal reveals martyrs, the fifth trumpet gives us locusts with power like scorpions (creatures I call “locorpions” or “scorpusts”), and the fifth vial darkens the throne of the beast. Martyrs, scorpions, thrones? Are we still in Genesis 1, or not?

We make headway when we realize that the creation sequence is already multilayered within the OT. Genesis 2 is the first improvisation of Genesis 1 (cf. Jordan 1999c):

Day	Genesis 1	Genesis 2	Import
1	Light created Light/dark separated Day and Night	Adam	Human beings are lights.
2	Separation of waters Firmament	Garden	Garden is liminal space between God and man, heaven and earth. A sanctuary.
3	Separation of waters Fruit trees Grain plants	Trees in garden Rivers	Rivers are associated with Day 3; rivers flow to outlying lands.
4	Lights in firmament	Man in garden	Adam is the ruling light in the earthly firmament.
5	Birds, fish, swarms First command: Be fruitful.	Command not to eat from tree	Commands and orders. Swarming creatures.
6	Human beings Land animals Command	Eve	Eve as climax of creation, glorification of Adam.
7	Yahweh rests	Naked and unashamed Fall Judgment	Adam and Eve enter Sabbath. Sabbath is Judgment day.

In Revelation, both the third trumpet and the third bowl pollute rivers and springs. If we work from Genesis 1 alone, this is puzzling. We might observe that springs and rivers are *land*-based water, as opposed to the landless sea; rivers are water within land, as islands are land within the sea. When we put Genesis 1 and 2 together, though, the connection of rivers to “Day 3” snaps to clarity. The rivers and springs are not merely the rivers and springs of the land, but specifically the rivers of *Eden*. And since Eden is a sanctuary (as the parallel of Day 2 and the garden indicates), we surmise that a poisoning or pollution of spring water portrays a pollution of the streams of life that flow from a temple. Listening simultaneously to *both* heptamorous melodies—Genesis 1 *and* Genesis 2—sets a plausible, potentially fruitful trajectory for our reading of those passages. Determining

whether or not it is fruitful will have to wait until we get to those passages (my tone suggests, of course, that I think this works like a dream).

We need to add at least a few more layers. It is widely acknowledged that Exodus portrays the tabernacle as a cosmic house, an image of the creation itself, its furnishings as artistic depictions of cosmic (seven lamps as planets) and earthly (altar as holy mountain; curtain as cloud) realities (see Morales 2012; Jordan 1987; Beale 2004). Building the tabernacle was a human act of new creation, obedient to the speech of Yahweh. The Creator who spoke the world by his unmediated Word now speaks a new world into being through the mediation of Moses and Israel. The structure of the tabernacle texts underscores that theology. Exodus 25–31 is organized into seven speeches of Yahweh, each beginning with some variation of “Yahweh spoke to Moses” (Kearney 1977: 375–86). Within that large sequence, chapters 25–27 and chapter 28 also divide into seven sections, though the divisions are less clearly marked. We can chart the parallels:

Genesis 1	Exodus 25–31	Exodus 25–27	Exodus 28
Light/darkness	Tabernacle, 25:1	Contribution, 25:1	Garments, 28:1
Firmament	Atonement payment, 30:11	Ark, 25:10	Ephod, 28:6
Water and land	Laver, 30:17	Table, 25:23	Onyx stones, 28:9
Heavenly lights	Oil, 30:22	Lamp, 25:31	Breastplate, 28:15
Swarming things	Incense, 30:34	Tabernacle curtains, 26:1	Robe, 28:31
Adam and Eve	Bezalel and Oholiab, 31:1	Altar, 27:1	Crown, 28:36
Sabbath	Sabbath, 31:12	Court, 27:9	Linen tunics, 28:40

We can discern the logic of some of these parallels without much reflection. The repetition of the Sabbath command in Exod. 31:12–17 is the clearest link between Genesis 1 and the tabernacle texts, especially as it is immediately followed by a great fall of Israel, the idolatry of the golden calf (parallel to the fall of Genesis 3). The Spirit-anointed craftsmen, Bezalel and Oholiab, make a suitable counterpart to Adam and Eve, caretakers of the original sanctuary. (Bezalel and Oholiab do not maintain an existing sanctuary, but *construct* one, an advance in human prowess and vocation.) That the high priest wears a crown also fits into the Day 6 position (28:36–39): The priest in the tabernacle is a new Adam (or a new Eve), crowned with glory and honor. The connection between Adam and Eve and the altar (Exod. 27:1) is less obvious, but is rooted in the common notion that altars represent human beings, and vice versa: At Pentecost, the apostles burned with the fiery Spirit that burst

out from the heavenly throne, and in their good works the apostles turn their enemies into altars, raining burning coals on their heads. The Day 4 connections also make intuitive sense. Sun, moon, and stars are represented by the seven lamps of the lampstand (= the seven planets of the ancient solar system), which makes light by virtue of a regular supply of oil. In the light (!) of this, the breastplate (Exod. 28:15) may be understood as a sartorial lampstand, flecked with gold thread and adorned with twelve burning gemstones that represent the tribes of Israel.

In Exodus 25–31, the fifth speech of Yahweh contains a recipe for holy incense. The connection with creation week is visual: Incense creates a cloud of smoke, resembling creatures of sea and air that form swarming clouds. The parallel with the tabernacle curtains and the robe of the high priest is based on the same visual similarity. At the golden altar, a priest is enveloped in a cloud of incense, but he is “censed” every time he puts on his priestly robe. Priests are clothed in the incense of prayer, and the entire tent of God is a billowy cloud of fabric, a house *made of* prayer not merely *for* prayer. That line of thought opens up multiple associations stretching across the OT: Yahweh appears in a cloud, and the tabernacle and the priest, made in his image, are also surrounded by cloud; Yahweh’s cloud consists of winged creatures, connecting his glory-presence to the fifth day of creation, and the priests wear “winged” garments as human angels in Yahweh’s house; when the high priest removes his robe on the day of atonement, he replaces it with a wrapping of incense smoke.

With these layered septets in mind, we return to Revelation. When the fifth seal is opened, John sees souls at the base of the altar, a swarm of martyrs offering the incense of their prayers. They are promised robes, a fifth-day theme from Exodus. At the fifth trumpet, the abyss opens to release a swarm of anti-martyrs that form a cloud so dense it blots the sun and thickens the air. From the cloud emerge monstrous locust-scorpions, part human, part lion, a cloud of infernal cherubim, an inglorious Shekinah of demonic incense. The fifth vial is an anomaly, yet we can make sense of it if we recognize that Revelation is adding layers to the OT’s layers and read Revelation’s fifths in sequence. The darkness that envelops the throne of the beast links with the darkness of the cloud from the abyss in the fifth trumpet. As the locorpions of the fifth trumpet cause torment, so the darkness of the fifth bowl adds to the torment of those plagued with sores. My goal here is not to give a full account of any of these portions of the Apocalypse. It is simply to point out how *layers* of OT imagery illuminate the text.

One last sequence of seven needs to be taken into consideration, a sequence that provides one of the main structures for the entire book of Revelation. These are seven feasts in Leviticus 23, which again recapitulate the seven days of creation:

Genesis 1	Leviticus 23	Revelation
Light/darkness	Sabbath	“On the Lord’s Day,” 1:10
Firmament	Passover and unleavened bread	Seven messages, 2–3
Waters and land; plants	First sheaf	Ascension of the Lamb, 4–5
Heavenly lights	Pentecost	Opening of book, 6–7 Fire from heaven, 8:3–5
Swarming things	Trumpets	Trumpets, 8–15
Adam and Eve	Atonement	Blood, 16–18
Sabbath	Tabernacles	Marriage feast and gathering of nations, 19–22

While the links between Genesis 1 and Leviticus 23 are worth a few moments’ meditation, my interest is in the two columns on the right. John begins on the Christian fulfillment of the “Sabbath,” the Lord’s Day, and delivers seven messages that call for the church to separate from the Egypt of idolatry and πορνεία (→2–3; cf. Paulien 1995). The Lamb’s appearance in Revelation 5 recapitulates the festival of the first sheaf, when the first sprouts of harvest were offered along with an ascension offering (Heb. *’olah*) of a year-old lamb. Jesus is both the first life rising from the dead ground and the ascended Lamb. The Lamb opens the seals of the book, delivering a Torah, like Yahweh on Sinai (celebrated at Pentecost), and at the end of the section, an angel throws burning coals to earth (reminiscent of the Pentecostal fall of the Spirit). In Israel’s calendar, the feast of trumpets was a one-day feast at the beginning of the seventh month; in Revelation, it occupies the largest portion of the book. The outpouring of seven vials is a Day of Atonement with a twist, an atonement that defiles and destroys instead of renewing. That leads into the joy of the full harvest in the marriage supper of the Lamb, the new feast of tabernacles, the feast of ingathering when the nations are harvested into the kingdom of God. (Some of these connections may be obscure, but will be explained more fully in the commentary.)

A book of the New Testament

Revelation is a book of the NT, *completely* at home within the concerns and obsessions of NT theology generally. The early Luther to the contrary, Revelation *is* the gospel, full of Christ to overflowing. In wild symbolism, Revelation depicts events recounted in the straightforward prose of Acts, as well as events that occur shortly after John writes. The issues raised in Revelation are those that Jesus focuses on and that are discussed, in a very different idiom,

in the letters of Paul. Revelation's battles are the *same* apostolic battles, though described very differently. To come to the Apocalypse with any other expectation is to open a canyon between Matthew-Jude and the last book of the NT. Once we dig that chasm, the Apocalypse can mean just about anything at all.

Revelation does not allude to the rest of the NT as often as to the OT. It may be that Revelation never *alludes* to the NT, but only shares phrasing, themes, teachings, and terms. But there *is* common language and imagery, and it is plausible (in my view) that John has read parts of what we know as the NT and has it consciously in mind as he writes. Regardless of how the parallels came to be, it is important to note that they exist.

I am deeply suspicious of modern scholarship's dating of the books of the NT. On the face of it, it beggars belief that *Jews*, who recorded Yahweh's works in writing for centuries, waited decades before publishing an account of the events of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. I suspect that the earliest Gospels (Matthew and Mark, according to patristic tradition) were completed within a decade and a half after the resurrection. The *Messiah has come*: Why wait? (John Wenham (1992) defends the more modest claim that the synoptics were all completed before AD 62/64). John and his readers may well have been familiar with the Gospels. Paul's letters circulated in Greece and Asia Minor from at least the 40s. If, as I argue (→1:1-8), John is the author of the Fourth Gospel, he was also familiar with that book, *if* it was written before Revelation.

Again a very partial list will suffice to make my point:

Matthew	Jesus's face like sun, 17:8 Millstone into sea, 18:6 Mountain into sea, 21:21 Blood of saints, 23:30 Great tribulation, 24:21 Stars fall, 24:29	Face like sun, 1:16; 10:1 Millstone into sea, 18:21 Mountain into sea, 8:8 Blood of prophets and saints, 18:24 Great tribulation, 7:14 Stars fall, 6:13
John	Word of God, 1:1-14 Word tabernacled, 1:14 John the Baptist, 1:6-8 "I am," 6:35; 8:12; 8:58; etc. Ruler of this world cast out, 12:31-32 Woman in travail, 16:21 It is finished, 19:28-30	Word of God, 19:13 God tabernacled, 21:3 Witnessed ... witness, 1:2 "I am," 1:8, 17; 22:13, 16 Satan cast out, 12:9 Woman in travail, 12:1-2 Mystery finished, 10:7
Acts	Into heaven in cloud, 1:9	Ascend in cloud, 11:12
1-2 Corinthians	Meat sacrificed to idols, 8, 10	Meat sacrificed to idols, 2:20
1-2 Thessalonians	Like a thief, 1 Thess. 5:2	Like a thief, 16:15
Hebrews	Sword of Spirit, 4:12	Sword, 1:16; 2:12
1-2 Peter	Like a thief, 2 Pet. 3:10	Like a thief, 16:15
James	Crown of life, 1:12	Crown of life, 2:10
Jude	Michael, 1:9	Michael, 12:7

More specifically, the book of Revelation is thoroughly interwoven with the Gospel of John. Many modern scholars deny that John the seer of Revelation is the same man as John the evangelist and often deny that John the Evangelist, or the “Fourth Evangelist,” was a disciple of Jesus. I address the question of authorship later (→1:1-8). For now, I wish to stress that, regardless of whether the two books have the same author, they form a structural and thematic unity. John and Revelation are a two-volume work.

As in Luke-Acts, certain themes introduced in John’s Gospel are not completed until the book of Revelation. Jesus performs his first sign at a wedding, and John the Baptist identifies Jesus as the bridegroom (Jn 3:29). A bridegroom needs a bride, and the Gospel of John is a quest for the Bride. There is a wedding, but Jesus is not the bridegroom. There is a woman at the well and Jesus talks with her about marriage, but there is no wedding. Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene in the garden after his resurrection, but he has to leave. These are all types and traces of the bride, but the Bride does not arrive until she descends from heaven, clothed in white, prepared for the feast of the Lamb. If you stopped at the end of John, you would not see the whole gospel romance. Reading the Gospel by itself, it is reasonable to wonder: Is Jesus a *jilted* Bridegroom? The romantic story line is completed over *two* books.

Warren Gage and Fowler White (2003) have shown that the books of John and Revelation are structurally parallel (as seen in the chart by Gage and White (2003) below). On the one hand, the books can be set end-to-end to form a single long two-volume work, framed by an *inclusio*:

John	Revelation
1:1 “In the beginning was <i>the Word</i> ”	22:13 “ <i>I am</i> ... the beginning and the end”
1:3 “ all things came into being by Him”	21:5 “behold, <i>I make</i> all things new”
1:5, 9 “the light shines in <i>darkness</i> ... He (Jesus) was the true light which gives light to every man”	22:5 “there shall be no <i>night</i> there; they need no lamp nor light , for the Lord God gives them light ”
1:14 “the <i>Word</i> became flesh, and tabernacled among us”	21:3 “the tabernacle of God is among mankind and He will tabernacle among them”
1:17 “ grace and truth came by Jesus Christ ”	22:21 “ grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you”
1:28, 48 “these things took place ... beyond <i>the Jordan</i> ... ‘when you were under <i>the fig tree</i> , I saw you’”	22:1-2 “And he showed me <i>the river of the water of life</i> ... and <i>the tree of life</i> ”
1:29 “ the Lamb of God who <i>takes away the sin of the world</i> ”	22:3 “there is <i>no more curse</i> ; the throne of God and the Lamb is there”

Beyond the *inclusio* (often noted by commentators), other episodes match, forming a large chiasmic structure crossing the two books. The wedding at Cana near the beginning of the Gospel parallels the wedding feast of the Lamb near the end of the Apocalypse. In the first, Jesus takes the role of Bridegroom; in the second, Bridegroom and Bride are finally joined.

The Wedding in Cana	The Wedding of the Lamb
2:2 "Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding "	19:9 "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding "
2:3 Jesus makes wine. "When they ran out of wine , the mother of Jesus said to Him, 'They have no wine '"	19:15 Jesus makes wine. "He treads the winepress of the wine of the rage of the wrath of Almighty God"
2:4 "My hour has not yet come "	18:8, 10 "For in one day her plagues will come ... in one hour your judgment has <i>come</i> "
2:4, 7, 10 "' Woman , what do I have to do with you? ... Fill the waterpots with water ' ... they have become drunk with the <i>worse wine</i> "	17:1-2, 4, 6 "and the woman (who sat on many waters) ... had in her hand a golden cup filled with abominations ... they have drunk the <i>wine of her fornication</i> ... the woman (was) drunk with the blood of the saints"
3:29 "he (John the Baptist) rejoices because he hears the voice of the Bridegroom " who is the one who "has the bride "	18:23 "the voice of the bridegroom and the bride is heard no longer," "let us rejoice ... for the wedding of the Lamb has come"

The cleansing of the temple in John 2 is linked with the condemnation of the merchandizing of the city in Revelation 17-18. This not only helps to identify the city that is called Babylon (I argue it is Jerusalem; →17:1-7), but also pinpoints the sort of trade Revelation condemns (trade centered in the temple).

Moreover, when the two books are laid side by side, we can discern a similar movement and chiasmic shape. The Gospel begins with the announcement of a Bridegroom and, near the end, Jesus appears in a garden with Mary Magdalene. Revelation begins with the unveiling of Jesus and ends with the revelation of the Bride. The parallels between the books help to illumine passages in both the Gospel and the Apocalypse. As Gage and White (2003) observe, the word "zeal" appears only in Jn 2:17 and Rev. 3:19 in the Johannine corpus. In both cases, zeal is passion for the cleansing of God's house—the temple in Jerusalem in one case and the church in the other. In John 4, Jesus answers the Samaritan woman's question about the place of worship by saying that worship will take

place in Spirit and truth; in Revelation 4 John is “in the Spirit” and enters into the true worship of heaven. Lazarus’s death and resurrection matches the death and exaltation of the two witnesses (Jn 11:48; Rev. 11:9–10). The vine image of John 15 connects with the grape harvest of Revelation 14.

Gage claims that Revelation 14 describes judgment “upon the wild grapes, the apostate Israel.” Here I think he is mistaken, and the typology works against his reading. The only branches that bear fruit in John 15 are those that abide in the vine. If John’s imagery guides our understanding of Revelation 14, then Revelation must refer to a harvest of the faithful rather than the apostate. Thus, the parallels of John and Revelation support the interpretation of the Revelation 14 grape harvest offered below (→14:17–20).

At the center of both John and Revelation is a declaration of Jesus’s triumph over the ruler of this world, the slanderer of the brothers. In John 12:31, Jesus says, “Now is the judgment of this world; now is the ruler of this world cast out.” In Revelation 12, the dragon is cast out of heaven when the child ascends and Michael makes war against the accuser.

Judas Iscariot is structurally likened to a beast. Judas controls the buying and selling for the disciples (Jn 13:29), and the beast controls the buying and selling through his mark (Rev. 13:17). Judas is a son of perdition (Jn 17:12), and that word is used elsewhere in John’s writing only at Rev. 17:8, 11, to describe where the beast is headed. In Jn 19:13, Pilate sits upon his throne of judgment to pass judgment, matching the great white throne judgment in Rev. 20:11–13. This takes on additional significance when we recognize the pun in Jn 19:13: The verb could mean either “Pilate sat” or “Pilate caused [Jesus] to sit.” The ambiguity raises the question of who is really in charge of this trial. Revelation 20 provides the answer: Even in the Praetorium, Pilate is on trial before a greater Judge.

NT eschatology

The Simpsons and the blockbuster movies and the popular movements that agitate Global South churches have this much right: Revelation *is* about an end. It is not about the end of *the* world. It does, however, predict the end of *a* world. And it says it will happen *soon*. Revelation begins and ends with references to the imminence of the events it describes. God gave the apocalypse of Jesus to his Son to show the bond-servants “things which must shortly take place” (1:1) because “the time is near” (1:3). Nearly the same phrase is repeated in 22:6: The faithful and true words are shown to the bond-servants so they can see “the things which must shortly take place” (22:6). “I am coming quickly,” Jesus says (22:7) and again in the next to last verse (22:20).

Stress on an imminent catastrophe is not unique to the book of Revelation. In this respect too, Revelation is fully a book of the NT. In Matthew and Mark, summary statements about Jesus's preaching emphasize that he comes preaching that the "king of heaven/God" is near (Matt. 4:17; Mk 14–15). Throughout his ministry, he speaks of an imminent event that is coming to Israel. It will happen in "this generation" (Matt. 11:20–24; 23:32–36; 24:34; Lk. 11:29–32, 51; and see below), the generation that witnessed the ministry of John and Jesus (Matt. 11:16; 12:41–42). Jesus's entire ministry is *based* on his warning that Israel's doom is just over the horizon (cf. Wright 1997: 32–6). "Repent" has force because "the time is fulfilled" and "the kingdom of God is at hand."

Even after Jesus dies and rises, the apostles, *all* of them, eagerly expect something to happen, something big, something *soon*.

Rom. 13:11 warns that it is time to wake up from sleep, since "salvation is nearer (ἐγγύτερον) to us than when we believed," and Paul adds in the following verse that the day is "near" or "at hand" (ἤγγικεν).

Rom. 16:20 says that the God of peace will bruise Satan under the feet of the Roman Christians "shortly" (ἐν τάχει: the same phrase used in Rev. 1:1 and 22:6).

Phil. 4:5 tells us that the "Lord is near."

We should not withdraw from assembling together, but exhort one another daily since "the day draws near" (Heb. 10:25; ἐγγιζουσιν).

James exhorts his readers to be patient and establish their hearts, since the coming of the Lord "is near" (5:8; ἤγγικεν). The Judge is ready to enter the courtroom: He is "standing right at the door" (v. 9; ὁ κριτὴς πρὸ τῶν θυρῶν ἑστηκεν).

Peter warns his readers to be sober and watchful in prayer, since "the end of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. 4:7; ἤγγικεν).

In 1 Jn 2:18, John claims that it is the "last hour," and points to the rise of the Antichrist as evidence that it is the last hour.

In addition to these explicit statements that something is "near"—the Lord, salvation, end of all things, the last hour—the NT says, repeatedly and excitedly, that *Jesus* is coming back. Though the time frame is not always specified, the texts suggest that it will happen soon.

Paul thanks God that the testimony of Jesus is confirmed in the Corinthians, who are therefore not lacking in any gift. They are "eagerly awaiting" something—the revelation of the Lord Jesus, and this revelation of the Lord Jesus is also a "day" on which they will be proven blameless (1 Cor. 1:7–8).

Phil. 3:20 uses the same verb to describe our waiting for the Savior, the Lord Jesus.

1 Thessalonians is largely about the coming of the Lord. In chapter 4, Paul gives details about the Lord's descent from heaven, the ascent of the saints, and ends with the exhortation to comfort and encourage with this assurance that the Lord is coming (vv. 15–18).

To Titus, Paul speaks of looking to the “blessed hope,” which is the “appearance (ἐπιφάνειαν) of our God and Savior Jesus” (2:13).

Jude is “waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 21).

Heb. 9:26–28 also speaks of a second appearance of Jesus, for which the writer and his readers wait.

Faced with this mass of evidence, we have several options in reading Revelation. We might fudge the time frame: God's arrival is *always* near. Common as it is, that option is exegetically irresponsible. We cannot eliminate the claims about timing, or the agitation it creates, without excising much of the NT. We might *project* the time frame into the future: The kingdom is near, but the prophetic clock does not start ticking until much later, perhaps in the thirteenth, or the nineteenth, or the twenty-first century. Once the clock gets all wound up, *then* it is all imminence all the time. Until then, we are in a holding pattern. That too is exegetically irresponsible, the result of digging that chasm between Jude and Revelation I mentioned above. If the Apocalypse is part of the NT, we expect it to have some connection with the concerns of those living in NT times. We might, alternatively, take the time references seriously, and conclude that Jesus, Paul, James, Peter, and all the rest were *wrong*. Christianity bursts into the Greco-Roman world full of apocalyptic vim, but it soon sobers up, and (like every fervent religious movement?) becomes routinized, regularized, bourgeois, Catholic. That option has the virtue of taking the NT at face value. It has the vice of implying that all the NT writers—Jesus included—are deluded or liars.

There is another option: The apostles *mean* what they say when they say the end is near; John *means* that the events of the Apocalypse are going to happen *soon*. And *they did happen*. That has the virtue of taking the time references seriously, but seems to have the vice of forcing us to fudge everything else. I think not, and this is where our discussion of the OT background of Revelation comes helpfully into play. When the Lamb opens the sixth seal, the sun goes black, the moon turns red, and stars are shaken from the firmament (→6:12–17). The universe collapsing? Not if we read Revelation within the imaginative framework of the OT. Heavenly lights rule the sky and earthly times (Gen. 1:14–16) and symbolize rulers (cf. Isaiah 13–14). The sixth seal describes the “eclipse” of political powers, the “fall” of kings and

princes from their “high places.” The poison springs and rivers flow from the temple, the well-watered place that is supposed to supply living water for Israel. To say that the springs of the land are poisoned is to say that the temple produces something deadly rather than something healthful and life-giving. And to say *that* is just to say what Jesus had already said: “This house shall be a house of prayer; but you have made it a den of thieves.”

At *no* point does this line of interpretation move from “literal” to “mere figure.” A universe *really does* collapse when the sixth seal is opened—not the celestial universe, but a political one. The temple *really does* poison people. The imagery is, *always*, literal-figurative, nourishment to the metonymic imagination and typological encouragement to faithful discipleship.

What events might Revelation be predicting? We have already set some parameters. It has to be a series of events that happened soon after John wrote. The event must be of world-historical proportions, events that warrant the excited rhetoric John uses and the lurid visions he sees. Is there such an event? Yes: the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. To make that suggestion remotely plausible, I have to convince the reader of three things: First, that early Christians in fact expected the temple to be destroyed; second, that this qualifies as an epochal event in history, truly the end of a world or an age of history; and, third, that it occurred *after* John wrote. We take the first two issues together, beginning with a look at Jesus’s primary prophecy, the Olivet Discourse, as recorded in Matthew 24 (parallels in Mark 13 and Luke 21).

Not one stone

Before Jesus predicts, he denounces, and denunciation sets the context for the prediction. In eight severe woes, he rebukes the scribes, Pharisees, and lawyers for their hypocrisy and abuse of the law. They have attended to minutiae while ignoring the weighty matters of justice, mercy, and truth. For all their devotion to the Sabbath, they have not lived Sabbath: They have not lifted burdens, but piled them up; they have not relieved and given rest but prevented rest. Jesus’s curses against the scribes and Pharisees come to a head in a lament over the doomed city of Jerusalem. He has tried to gather her to himself, but she refused. Like Yahweh in the days of Ezekiel (8–11), Jesus leaves the temple (Matt. 24:1), never to return. Under the law, a house could become leprous, stained with mildew. When a priest discovers that mold is spreading and cannot be stopped, the house has to be torn down (Lev. 14:33–53, esp. v. 45). Jesus is an inspecting priest, and discerns that Pharisees, scribes, elders, and priests contaminate the house. There is no choice: The house must be dismantled until not one stone is left on another (Matt. 24:2).

In context, the catastrophe Jesus predicts in chapter 24 is a catastrophe that is about to fall on *Jerusalem*.

Above all, Jerusalem will be charged with all the blood from Abel to Zechariah, from A to Z, Genesis to Chronicles. Even that is not the end of it. Jesus will send prophets and wise men and scribes to challenge the false prophets and scribes of Judaism, but the Jewish leaders will do what their fathers did: They will scourge and crucify Jesus's messengers (23:34). By killing the prophets Jesus sends, they will "fill up the measure of the guilt of their fathers" (v. 30). In the time of Jesus, that chalice is not yet full, but it soon will be. When the blood of the martyrs is mingled with the blood of Jesus, then the city will get drunk, totter, and fall. In speaking of "filling up" guilt, Jesus alludes to Gen. 15:16, where Yahweh promises the land to Abraham, but tells him that his seed will inherit the land many centuries later, since the "sin of the Amorites is not yet full." Yahweh gives the Amorites time to fill up their guilt, waiting until their guilt is full and obvious. The same is happening to Jerusalem in Jesus's time. Having become Canaanites, the sons are filling up the sin of their fathers until the cup overflows. They are like their father the devil, murderous Satans, vipers who spread their poison and kill. Blood is going to return on their own heads. Blood will have blood.

The fall of Jerusalem is, in short, God's great answer to the problem of unavenged evil. For the Bible, the question of evil is not about God's existence but about his *justice* and his *attention*. Why are you far off, O Lord? Where are you in time of trouble? How can you stand by, silent, when the wicked prosper, and when they get drunk off the blood of the saints? Are you asleep? How long, O Lord, will you refrain from avenging our blood? The destruction of Jerusalem is Yahweh's answer to that question.

Following Jesus's indictment of Israel's teachers, the disciples ask for signs about when the martyrs' blood will be avenged, which they link with the *παρουσία* of Jesus and the end of the age (24:3). In context, the question concerns the timing of the destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus's coming to avenge the blood of his prophets and sages and all the other martyrs' blood shed on the earth. A question about the "second coming" is entirely out of place. The disciples want to know about the arrival of Jesus as emperor, in his triumphant coming to his capital city to inspect, pass judgment, and set things in order.

Jesus answers their question about timing. "When will these things be?" (πότε ταῦτα ἔσται; v. 3), they ask, and Jesus replies: "Truly I say to you, *this generation will not pass* until all these things take place" (v. 34; πάντα ταῦτα γένηται). Within a generation, Jesus will avenge martyr blood, destroy the bloodthirsty city of Jerusalem, and throw down the temple as a polluted house, not one stone on another. And it all happened, just as Jesus said it

would: Within forty years of his ascension, the Romans suppressed the Jewish rebellion, conquered Jerusalem, and destroyed Herod's temple.

Jesus also answers questions about signs, though most of his answers are negative. Wars and rumors of wars will come; but, despite what false prophets and false Christs may say, these do *not* signify the end (24:5-6). Nation will rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom, famines and earthquakes will occur: These are not signs of the end either, but of the beginning, the birth-pangs of a world after the temple (24:7-8). Tribulation, persecution, apostasy, the spread of the gospel to the entire οἰκουμένη—these get closer to the end, but are not yet signs of the end (24:9-14). Only when the disciples see the abomination of desolation standing in the holy place should they conclude that the city is about to fall. Then it is time for a new exodus, from a Jerusalem that has become as bloodthirsty as ancient Egypt (24:15-20).

As we will see (→17:5), “abomination” refers to Israel’s idolatry, shedding of innocent blood, and sexual perversions, evils that pollute Israel’s land so that it expels the inhabitants. Solomon is tempted by his many wives to worship “detestable” or “abominable” idols like Milcom, Chemosh, Molech (1 Kgs 11:5, 7; 2 Kgs 23:13, 24). Isaiah (66:3) condemns the people of Judah because their worship has become corrupted, and they “delight in their abominations.” Jeremiah (4:1) calls on Israel to return to Yahweh by putting away their “detestable” or “abominable” idols, and in his temple sermon he condemns the Jews for the “detestable things” that have been put into the house (7:30). Israel, the bride of Yahweh, has become a harlot, and the Lord sees their “abominations” (13:27), and the Lord complains that Israel has put “abominable things” in his house. Ezekiel (5:11) takes a visionary tour of the temple in Jerusalem and sees the sanctuary defiled by “detestable idols” that have turned the beauty of the Lord’s ornaments into “detestable things” (7:20). Because of their “detestable things,” the Lord threatens to “bring their conduct down on their heads” (11:21). In all these cases, abominations are connected with idolatry, idolatry committed *by Israel*. Israel commits abominations when *they* set up idols in God’s own house, when *they* desecrate and defile his holy place.

The destruction of Herod’s temple is the last in a string of temple destructions, and each is preceded by “abominations.” Eli’s sons steal the Lord’s portion of the sacrifices, eat their portion before serving at the Lord’s table, and have sex with the holy women, the virgins, who serve as deaconesses at the tabernacle (1 Sam. 2–6). Yahweh is so provoked that he abandons his house. Israel fills the temple with abominable idols (Ezek. 5:9, 11; 6:9, 11; 7:3-9; 8:6-17) so Yahweh leaves the house to be desolated by Babylonians.

Jesus refers specifically to the “abomination of desolation” spoken of by Daniel (11:30-34). The Hellenized Syrian ruler Antiochus Epiphanes rules Syria in the early second century BC, and commits atrocities against the temple and the Jews. According to Daniel, he becomes enraged against the holy covenant, but shows favor to those Jews who loosen the marriage bonds that tie them to Yahweh. Antiochus encourages Jews to adopt Hellenic customs, and these Hellenized Jews vie for the priesthood. Daniel calls these apostate

Jews the “arms” of Antiochus, since they do a Gentile ruler’s bidding to gain and retain power. In Dan. 11:31, the arms do *everything*—defile the sanctuary, remove daily sacrifices, give the abomination of desolation (all the verbs are plural). We know from other sources that Antiochus enters and plunders the temple; but Daniel does not refer to that act. Antiochus sets up an altar to Olympian Zeus, but Daniel does not refer to that incident either. Rather, he charges the “arms” of Antiochus with committing abominations that desolate the sanctuary. And those arms are Jewish allies of Antiochus.

So too for Jesus, the abomination of desolation is an idolatrous, abominable act committed by apostate Jews, who defile the Lord’s house. As a result, the Lord abandons his house and leaves it to the Romans to devastate and destroy. Jesus has been talking about the bloodshed in the city (Matt. 23:34–35) and Jerusalem’s hostility toward prophets (v. 37). When persecution of Christians becomes frenzied (24: 9–10, 21), when the city of Jerusalem drinks down the martyrs’ blood in abundance, *then* the city is about to fall. Shedding holy blood is the great defilement of the city. *That* is the abomination that brings desolation.

Jesus’s prophecy provides the basic framework of the apostles’ eschatological expectations. Within a generation, they know, the temple will be destroyed. The initiating cause will be the shedding of innocent blood, blood of Christian martyrs added to the blood of all the righteous from Abel on. That abomination defiles the holy city, and leaves it desolate. That is the catastrophe that Paul, James, Peter, and John all write about in their letters.

It is also the catastrophe at the center of Revelation. I will offer evidence in support of this claim throughout the commentary. For now, we can note the shared details between the Olivet Discourse and Revelation.

Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24)	Revelation
Deception (24:4–5, 11, 24; πλανᾶω)	Deception (2:20; 12:9; 13:14; 18:23; 20:7–10; πλανᾶω)
War (24:6–7a)	War (9:7–9; 11:7; 12:7, 17; 13:7; 16:14)
Famine (24:7)	Famine (6:8; 18:8)
Earthquake (24:7)	Earthquake (6:12; 8:5; 11:13, 19; 16:18)
Tribulation (24:9, 21, 29)	Tribulation (1:9; 2:10, 22; 7:14)
Believers killed (24:9)	Believers killed (11:7; 13:7)
Love grown cold (24:12)	Left first love (2:4)
Endurance (24:13; ὑπομένω)	Endurance (1:9; 2:2–3, 19; 3:10; 13:10; 14:12; ὑπομονή)

Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24)	Revelation
Gospel preached to <i>oikoumene</i> (24:14)	Gospel preached to all tribes and nations (14:6)
Witness to nations (24:14 μαρτύριον)	Witness (1:2-3, 9; 6:9; etc.; μαρτύριον)
Abomination of desolation (24:15)	Mother of abominations (17:4-5; 21:27)
Great tribulation (24:21)	Great tribulation (2:22; 7:14)
False prophets (24:24)	False prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10)
Coming of Son of Man (24:27, 30)	Coming of Son of Man (1:7; 14:14)
Sun and moon darkened (24:29)	Sun and moon eclipsed (6:12)
Stars fall (24:29)	Stars fall (6:13)
Fig tree (24:32)	Fig tree (6:13)
Jesus at door (24:33)	Jesus at door (3:20)

Some of these are common themes throughout the NT. Some, though, appear only in the Olivet Discourse and Revelation. Only these texts speak of a “great tribulation,” and refer to a desolating “abomination.” More significantly, the two texts *move* together. Jesus describes political turmoil that is not a sign of the end, and natural disasters that are only the beginning of birthpangs; the turning point comes when the saints are persecuted and the city of Jerusalem begins to consume holy blood. Revelation moves through cycles of escalating judgments, as seals are opened, trumpets blow, and blood is poured out. After Babylon drinks martyr blood, *then* the city falls in a great heap, burned with smoke that rises forever and ever.

Given these parallels, given the fact that Jesus’s prophecy lays out in detail a sequence of events that will take place within “this generation”—the generation of the apostles—we conclude that Revelation is about the very same series of events, the judgment of Jerusalem that is the destruction of the entire world-system of the pre-Christian age. Jesus told his apostles ahead of time: The harlot city Babylon, called Egypt and Sodom and compared to Tyre, is *Jerusalem*. *That* is the referent to which all of those highly charged labels are affixed. Jerusalem is never called “Jerusalem” in Revelation. By the time John writes, she has lost the right to that venerable name, since she is no longer the city of peace and righteousness (Bull 2016). What Revelation adds is the prediction that *Rome* will support Jerusalem’s assault on the saints, and that bestial Rome, like Jerusalem, will be undone by shedding martyr blood.

I believe that this line of interpretation is most consistent with the internal indications of Revelation itself. Babylon dresses, after all, like a priest, her garments dyed with priestly colors and her head adorned with a name of the god to whom she is devoted (→17:4-5). OT harlot imagery *invariably*

attaches to Judah, Jerusalem, Zion or Israel, or to some Gentile city that has entered and then abandoned covenant with God. Harlot imagery is *never* used of a pagan city in the OT. Babylon falls, and a fresh city shows up from heaven, an Esther to replace fallen Vashti, a new Jerusalem coming in place of the old. What comes from heaven is not new Rome but new Jerusalem, a strong indication that the fallen city is *old* Jerusalem.

The *oikoumene*

To say that the city is Jerusalem is not to eliminate all reference to Rome or the empire from the Apocalypse. Revelation describes an alliance of enemies against the saints, an alliance of brothers (Cains and Esaus) with Gentile strangers.

To see the full scope of the fall of Jerusalem, we have to examine the world system in the period after the exile in Babylon. At creation, God establishes three zones on the earth: The garden, east in the land of Eden; the land of Eden; and other lands downstream from the garden. The garden is the original sanctuary, where Yahweh meets with Adam and Eve; the garden is not “home” but a place of communion with God. The land of Eden is the homeland, and outside Eden there are other lands to explore, enjoy, and rule. After the exodus, the Lord again organizes the world into three zones, with variations: At the center is the tabernacle, Yahweh’s dwelling place on earth, a restored Eden; surrounding the tabernacle are the twelve tribes, three in each direction; and outside the camp is the wilderness. When the tabernacle is pitched at Shiloh after the conquest, this map is modified again. At the center of the world is the tabernacle, God’s house; it is nestled in the land of Israel; and beyond Israel are the nations of the world. With the building of the temple and palace of Solomon, the world is remapped again. The temple is a (semi-)permanent center; for the first time a capital city surrounds the temple; the land of Israel surrounds that; and at the perimeter are the Gentile nations.

After the exile, the Jews rebuilds the temple and the walls of the city, but they do not simply restore the pre-exilic order. Ezekiel envisions a renewed temple, but also measures out the whole city and the land. Measuring marks holy space (→11:1-2), and the whole city is being designated as holy space. Nehemiah’s work on the city walls is consistent with this new mapping of Israel, since he devotes attention to repairing and dedicating the walls of Jerusalem, treating the whole city as “house of god.” Zechariah envisions a Jerusalem no longer confined to its ancient location. It is surrounded not by walls of stone but by a wall of divine fire, and it spreads throughout the empire. The entire Jewish diaspora is holy, measured, protected space, nestled within the glory of Yahweh (Zech. 2:1-13). Holiness extends beyond the walls of Jerusalem: At the time of

the conquest, tribal areas are marked but not “measured”; in Ezekiel the entire land is measured, becoming “holy land” in a way it has not been before.

Gentiles get an upgrade too, at least some Gentiles. Gentiles always play some role in Israel’s life. Melchizedek brings bread and wine to Abram, Jethro advises Moses, and Hiram assists Solomon in building the temple. Before and after exile, however, Gentiles take a more prominent place in Yahweh’s purposes. He selects Nebuchadnezzar as his servant, gives him dominion as a new Adam over all lands, including birds and beasts (Jer. 28:1-17). Isa. 44:26–45:7 describes Cyrus as an “anointed one,” like the anointed kings of Israel. He is a new Solomon, and Cyrus and his successors are Jerusalem’s new temple-builders. One of the tasks of the Davidic kings is delegated to Gentile emperors.

This formation of a Jew-Gentile world is the last remapping of the world in the OT. The Bible calls it the *oikoumene* (Perriman 2010). It is the world order of the “latter days” described in Daniel 2. According to Daniel’s interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of a great statue made of four different metals, the metals represent different empires: Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon are the head of gold, Persia the chest of silver, Greece the belly and thighs of bronze, and Rome the legs of iron. A stone cut without hands strikes the statue and the statue collapses into dust, while the stone grows up into a mountain that fills the earth. The growing stone is the next empire, the kingdom of God. Daniel 7 presents the same history as a sequence of four beasts, eventually tamed by a New Adam, the Son of Man, who ascends to the ancient of days to receive authority and dominion. From Nebuchadnezzar on, Jerusalem is, by God’s design, set within an imperial structure. The kings of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome are called to sponsor, support, and protect God’s people (Jordan 2007). Like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, rulers of Greece and Rome are incorporated into God’s world-system.

In much of the NT, *oikoumene* does not mean “inhabited earth” in some general way which includes ancient China, India, and the Inca Empire. It refers to the imperial system that Yahweh establishes during Israel’s Babylonian exile, a world system that, for the Bible, centers in Jerusalem. In the first century, it refers to the Roman world. Caesar Augustus decrees that “all the world (*oikoumene*) should be taxed” (Lk. 2:1). In Acts, Agabus prophesies that there will be a famine throughout all the *οικουμένην* in the days of Claudius (11:28), and the apostles are accused of turning the “world” upside down, at a time when they have traveled no further than Asia Minor and Greece (Acts 17:6). Paul is accused of being a leader of Jewish sedition throughout the “world” (Acts 24:5). When Jesus speaks in the Olivet Discourse about the gospel preached to the end of the *οικουμένην*, this is what he has in view. Before the end comes, the end of Jerusalem within the generation of the apostles, Jesus’s kingdom will be preached from one end of the

Mediterranean to another. And it happens. By the end of the apostolic generation, the gospel is preached throughout Judea, it has gone down to Roman Africa, spread west to Asia Minor, Greece, finally to Rome, and Paul was scheming to get to the very end of the world, to Spain.

The fall of Jerusalem was the collapse of this entire world-system. For the Bible, Jerusalem—not Babylon, Susa, Athens, or Rome—was the world’s chief city, and when judgment strikes the center, the whole structure fractures and falls. Around the same time, there were reverberations throughout the empire. It is no accident that the city of Rome experienced a shake-up during the years leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem. The Julio-Claudian dynasty ended with the suicide of Nero (68 AD), after which Rome was engulfed in the chaos of the “Year of the Four Emperors” (69 AD). Peace was restored when the Senate made Vespasian emperor in 69. The Roman Empire, of course, continued for centuries to dominate the Mediterranean, but its role as protector of Judaism ended. After Jerusalem had been thrown down, the *oikoumene* was over.

The years 67–70 were confusing and chaotic in Rome as well as in Judea (Marshall 2001: 111, fn 28):

Vespasian dispatched to Jerusalem	February 67
Death of Nero/ascension of Galba	9 June 68
Cessation of Hostilities/siege of Jerusalem	June 68
Death of Galba/ascension of Otho	15 January 69
Death of Otho/ascension of Vitellius	16, 19 April 69
Declaration by Vespasian at Alexandria	1 July 69
Death of Vitellius/ascension of Vespasian	c. 21 December 69
Vespasian in Rome/Titus at Jerusalem	70

This seismic series of events is what Jesus predicts in the Olivet Discourse, and what the rest of the NT writers are agitated about. Their world is about to end in great tribulation, and that tribulation will involve, among other things, terrible persecution of believers. Jesus says it will happen within a generation, and the generation is passing. By the time John takes up his pen, it is going to happen *very* soon. It is, as John says in his epistle, “the last hour.” This is the same event that Revelation describes in great, apocalyptic detail.

The apocalypse goes deeper. Revelation describes not only the end of the *oikoumene* of Israel-and-empire, but the end of the entire old covenant order. When the temple falls and is not rebuilt, an entire order of worship and life collapses with it, an order focused on concerns of purity, holiness, sacrifice and priesthood, an order that goes back to Moses and even, in some ways, to Eden. Those institutions and practices organize the lives of Jews and Gentiles

for millennia. Already in the exile, Israel learns to worship without a temple, and Christianity is the post-temple order par excellence. The fall of the temple brings an end to life under the elements of this world (cf. Leithart 2016).

Elementary life is life under angels, and the old covenant is an angelic covenant. Yahweh's Angel guides Israel through the wilderness to the land and the law is given through angels (Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19). For a time, human beings are a little lower than angels (Heb. 2:7, 9). In Christ, humanity is exalted above angels. Now a *man* sits on the throne of heaven, and men and women who are in him share that throne. The epochal shift depicted in Revelation is a transition from the rule of angels to the cosmic rule of the martyrs, witnesses of Jesus who shed their blood for the Lamb who shed his blood for them.

One small hint will have to suffice here: When John first enters heaven, he sees twenty-four crowned Ancient Ones—angelic priests—sitting on thrones around the Enthronement (→4:2). As he watches, they prostrate themselves and throw their crowns before God. They never take their crowns or their thrones again, and it is some time before we discover who takes their place. Finally in chapter 20, we again see thrones, *with occupants*, but the enthroned are no longer Ancient Ones. They are witnesses beheaded for their witness to Jesus. Throughout Revelation, Jesus's witnesses gradually ascend, until finally they join the heavenly liturgy and sing with the choirs of angels. Their witness to death is their rule on earth, and their song is their rule in heaven. If there is a political theology in Revelation, it is about rule by witness and song (cf. Hansen 2014).

Revelation focuses not on the enthronement of Jesus, but on the enthronement of the saints. Jesus the Son of Man proves himself Jesus the Ancient of Days, conferring and not merely receiving a kingdom. Contrary to the popular summary, the message of Revelation is *not*: Jesus wins. When Revelation begins, Jesus *has* won. He is already glorified; he has already received the kingdom. The message is: *We* win, by faithful witness and song; and, in triumphing through Jesus, we receive the kingdom. Revelation is not good news about the death and resurrection of Jesus for the sins of the world. It is the good news that sacrificial deaths and vindication of martyrs bring the collapse of the old creation and initiate the new.

Though patristic writers do not read Revelation as a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem, many recognize the epochal importance of AD 70. Athanasius writes,

When did prophet and vision cease from Israel? Was it not when Christ came, the Holy One of holies? It is, in fact, a sign and notable proof of the coming of the Word that Jerusalem no longer stands, neither is prophet raised up nor vision revealed among them. And it is natural that it should be so, for when he that was signified had come, what need was there any longer of any to signify him? And when the Truth had come, what further need was there of the shadow? On his account only they prophesied continually, until such time as Essential Righteousness has come, Who was made the Ransom for the sins of all. For the same reason Jerusalem stood until the same time, in order that there men might premeditate the types before the

Truth was known. So, of course, once the Holy One of holies had come, both vision and prophecy were sealed. And the kingdom of Jerusalem ceased at the same time, because kings were to be anointed among them only until the Holy of holies had been anointed. (*On the Incarnation*, 6)

Cyprian connects the fall of the city to Jesus's lament in Matthew 23:

That the Jews should lose Jerusalem, and should leave the land which they had received. Also in the Gospel the Lord says: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and thou wouldst not! Behold, your house shall be left unto you desolate." (*Three Books of Testimonies against the Jews*, 6)

Hippolytus sees the event as a fulfillment of Isaiah:

Come, then, O blessed Isaiah; arise, tell us clearly what thou didst prophesy with respect to the mighty Babylon. For thou didst speak also of Jerusalem, and thy word is accomplished. For thou didst speak boldly and openly: "Your country is desolate, your cities are burned with fire; your land, strangers devour it in your presence, and it is desolate as overthrown by many strangers. The daughter of Sion shall be left as a cottage in a vineyard, and as a lodge in a garden of cucumbers, as a besieged city." What then? Are not these things come to pass? Are not the things announced by thee fulfilled? Is not their country, Judea, desolate? Is not the holy place burned with fire? Are not their walls cast down? Are not their cities destroyed? Their land, do not strangers devour it? Do not the Romans rule the country? And indeed these impious people hated thee, and did saw thee asunder, and they crucified Christ. Thou art dead in the world, but thou livest in Christ. (*Fragments*)

Irenaeus addresses skeptics who said Jerusalem would still be standing if it were the city of the king: Once Jerusalem produces its spoiled fruit, it "was deservedly forsaken" (*Against Heresies* 6.1). Lactantius cites a prophecy that

after a short time God would send against them a king who would subdue the Jews, and level their cities to the ground, and besiege the people themselves, worn out with hunger and thirst. Then it should come to pass that they should feed on the bodies of their own children, and consume one another. Lastly, that they should be taken captive, and come into the hands of their enemies, and should see their wives most cruelly harassed before their eyes, their virgins ravished and polluted, their sons torn in pieces, their little ones dashed to the ground; and lastly, everything laid waste with fire and sword, the captives banished for ever from their own lands, because they had exulted over the well-beloved and most approved Son of God. And so, after their decease, when Nero had put them to death, Vespasian destroyed the name and nation of the Jews, and did all things which they had foretold as about to come to pass. (*Divine Institutes* 4)

Tertullian links the destruction of Jerusalem to the prophecy of Daniel 9, which predicts that the holy city and holy place will be exterminated at the coming of Christ the Leader (*An Answer to the Jews*, 8).

Dating Revelation

It all works very neatly. One small problem: According to many students of Revelation, both today and in the past, Revelation was written some two decades *after* the fall of Jerusalem, during the reign of Domitian (AD 81–96). One might take it for a prophecy *ex eventu*, but that rather diminishes the

rhetorical force of taking the chronological markers seriously. Can I rescue my interpretation from the dating problem?

The key early testimony about Revelation's date comes from Irenaeus. In a passage about the identity of the Antichrist in *Against Heresies*, he cautions against identifying the Antichrist too quickly and comments in passing that John would have revealed the name distinctly if it had been necessary, since "that was seen no very long time since, but almost in our day, towards the end of Domitian's reign" (5.30.3; cf. Gentry 2010). It is ambiguous testimony to say the least, since the most natural antecedent of "that" is not the book but "him who beheld the apocalyptic vision," that is, John. Irenaeus's point is apparently that John could have revealed the identity of Antichrist *in person* if it had been important, since he was still alive into the latter part of the century. This primary testimony to the date of Revelation may not be about the date of Revelation at all.

Other patristic writers repeat Irenaeus, and thus do not qualify as independent witnesses (e.g., Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.18, quotes Irenaeus). Confident, not to say bombastic, conclusions are often drawn from patristic witnesses, with questionable argumentative twists along the way. Hengstenberg claims that that "all antiquity agrees in the opinion of Domitian's being the author of John's banishment." Listing Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Eusebius, and Victorinus, he concludes, "These are all the testimonies on the time of the composition of the Apocalypse belonging to the age of living tradition. They declare with perfect unanimity that John was banished by Domitian to Patmos, and there wrote the Apocalypse." Yet Hengstenberg knows that *some* early writers assert a different date and setting for Revelation. He dismisses these as "deviant" writers "of inferior rank"—people like Epiphanius, who is not only second class but "extremely credulous." The "deviators" vary among themselves—some place the book in the age of Nero, others in the time of Claudius, and another says that John was banished by Trajan. Behind all these proposals Hengstenberg (1852–53: 1–10) sees the same motivation that impels modern critics to give the book an early date: The effort to tie the book to the destruction of Jerusalem. The sleight of hand here is breathtaking. Hengstenberg constructs a fragile "tradition" from ambiguous, repetitive, often derivative materials. That tradition becomes the standard, and anyone who strays from it is "deviant." But the "tradition" is only "standard" because he has excluded the "deviants" from the outset. That saves him from the admission that the "tradition" itself was never unanimous, which is self-evidently the case.

Earlier dates were proposed already in antiquity. Epiphanius claimed that the book was written during the reign of Claudius, emperor from AD 41 to 54 (*Haer.* 51.12). According to Wilson (1993), "[T]he prefaces of both the Old Syriac versions and also in Theophylact . . . ascribe the banishment of John to the reign of Nero." Modern scholars have defended early dates, mostly in the 60s (Gentry 2010; Douglas (1915) defends Epiphanius). Most English and German scholars in the nineteenth century adopt an early date, including the formidable Cambridge triumvirate of Westcott, Hort, and Lightfoot (Mounce 1997: 21), either during the reign of Nero or of his successor Galba. At the

beginning of the twentieth century, a handful of English commentators used J. B. Lightfoot's evidence of a Domitianic persecution to support the Irenaeus dating (81–96). Lightfoot himself retained an early date for Revelation, but English and German scholars soon adopted the late date, often without consideration of alternatives. This twentieth-century majority opinion is now considered the “traditional view” or even the “unanimous tradition” of the church (Wilson 1993: 587).

For recent comprehensive discussions of the date, see Aune (1997: lvi–lxx), Mounce (1997: 13–21), and Koester (2015: 71–9). Smalley (2005: 3) argues for the earlier date.

Internal evidence is difficult to square with the reign of Domitian. Many interpreters take the seven heads of the beast in chapter 17 as seven Roman emperors (I dissent; →17:9–10). John states explicitly that the sixth head “now is” (17:10). Scholars crush and mold the sequence of emperors to make Domitian come out in the sixth slot (cf. Aune 1997: lxii–lxiii), but the efforts are forced. More generally, it is questionable that the circumstances implied by the book fit the reign of Domitian. Revelation was written when the threat of persecution is real.

That Revelation was written to a persecuted church has been doubted, on slight grounds. More plausibly, some have argued that Revelation depicts persecution as a *past* experience (especially in 6:9–11). But the martyrs under the altar arguably include OT martyrs, and, besides, the cry of “how long?” arises from the Psalmist even when there has been no long passage of time.

The entire prophecy is an assurance to martyrs and a call to persevering witness. Antipas has already given his life in Pergamum (2:13). Martyrs cry out from the altar for vengeance (6:9–11), and are told that they will be avenged *shortly*, after more martyrs are made. A total of 144,000 Jews are sealed for martyrdom (7:1–8). In the near future, John warns, witnesses will be killed in the “great city” where Jesus was crucified (11:1–13). The beast attacks the Lamb and his followers (13:7–8), and the 144,000 who are with the Lamb on Mount Zion are harvested in death (14:14–20). Riding her infernal steed, Babylon drinks the blood of the saints (17:6). When the harlot falls, heaven praises God for avenging the blood of the martyrs (19:2) in answer to their prayers. Martyrs are elevated to sit on thrones during the millennium (20:4–6). Martyrdom is a huge theme in the book. So the question is: Are Christians under threat during the reign of Domitian? Are Christians under threat *from Rome* during the *imperium* of Domitian?

Many have claimed as much, including Eusebius, but the evidence of persecution under Domitian is meager. No one doubts that Nero launched the “first organized Roman persecution of Christians.” Christians were set on fire to illumine the streets of Rome, and Christian writers claim that Peter and Paul were executed during the wave of violence (Wilson 1993: 589; cf. Aune (1997: lxvi–lxvix) for case against Domitian date; Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44). By contrast, *no* Roman historian records that Domitian persecuted Christians, nor does any Christian historian prior to Eusebius (Wilson 1993: 589). Writing in defense of the Antonine Dynasty (96–192), Suetonius naturally makes the Flavians (69–96, following the fall of the Julio-Claudian dynasty) look bad. He has nothing good to say about Domitian, yet *never* asserts that Domitian persecuted Christians or expanded the imperial cult. Writers closer to the time give a more positive portrait of Domitian. There is no evidence that he demanded that people address him as *Dominus et deus noster*. The title appears once in Martial, never on coins or imperial documents. There is no evidence that Domitian pressed the claims of imperial cult more than his predecessors (596).

Revelation is addressed to the churches of Asia, and there is no evidence that Asia in particular suffered under Domitian. On the contrary, Thompson (1997: 147) says, “Under Domitian the provinces flourished.” Not only is there no evidence of a *crisis* in Asia Minor during Domitian’s reign; there is no evidence of even a “perceived” crisis. A *real* crisis deserves to be considered as the setting for the book—for example, the kind that “existed in the aftermath of the Neronian persecution” (Wilson 1993: 597).

Thompson (1997) doubts there was a persecution under Domitian, but retains a Domitian date for Revelation. That requires a significant shift in the interpretation of the book. For Thompson, the crisis is not persecution but accommodation. He distinguishes between “public knowledge” that is the common currency of a culture, and the “deviant knowledge” possessed by minority groups. Revelation is deviant knowledge with regard to its source (“apocalypses provide knowledge through private, esoteric means apart from larger communal, institutional validation”) and in its evaluation of Roman society (“it is deviant in its assessment of the larger social order: apocalyptic knowledge devalues, rather than supports, the cognitive structures, identities, roles, and norms in the order of society. And it is deviant in its cosmology. In the public order, cosmicizing assures that ‘the way we do things’ reflects ‘the way that the world really is.’ ... in the cosmicizing of apocalyptic, ironic reversals abound. Kings and emperors are disestablished by means of metaphorical links to satanic and evil forces, while the transcendent knowledge transmitted through apocalypses appears in the here and now to be disconfirmed”; Thompson 1997: 181). By offering this alternative knowledge, Revelation draws boundaries where there have been none. In conditions where believers have become too comfortable and too accommodated, Revelation undermines the “public knowledge” in favor of its deviant revealed knowledge. I agree that Revelation does function to draw or reinforce boundaries (→11:1-2), but the book is addressed to Christians who face persecution and not merely temptations to bourgeois conformity.

Adela Yarbro Collins (1984: 85) likewise accepts the conclusion that Domitian did not persecute Christians, but still dates the book to Domitian's reign. Revelation is not occasioned by "an objectively intense and extensive crisis." Studies in psycho-sociology have shown that "*relative*, not absolute or objective, deprivation is a common precondition of millenarian movements ... the crucial element is not so much whether one is actually oppressed as whether one *feels* oppressed" (emphasis in the original).

So far, the evidence has been entirely negative. The positive evidence of dating is scattered throughout this commentary. In sum, I propose that the book was written in the 60s AD, that the persecution in the book is, first, persecution from Jews such as occurred during the early decades of the church, and, second, persecution from Rome during the reign of Nero. For John's readers, Jewish persecution is past and present (→2:9); Jewish persecution is old news, but Roman persecution is about to begin. The big new threat is the *alliance* of Romans and Jews, sea beast and land beast, against the church. That is unprecedented, and it represents the last gasp of the ecumenical order that is ready to collapse. On my reading, then, Revelation was written shortly before the outbreak of Neronian persecution, which began in AD 64 and lasted until Nero's death in AD 68. As will become clear as the commentary proceeds, questions of historical context are not esoteric or expendable. We cannot accurately or fully grasp the theology of Revelation (e.g., its theology of martyrdom and atonement) or its ethics unless we get the date right.

This raises the question of whether we should be trying to draw theology from an allegorical text like Revelation in the first place. The question is often framed in confusing ways. If doctrine is to arise from the literal *sense*, may it arise from the literal sense of an allegorical or symbolic text? If not, why not? Or, is doctrine to be drawn only from texts that are themselves "doctrinal" (in practice, the NT epistles)? May doctrine be drawn from narrative—from the gospels, for instance? And what, finally, does "doctrine" mean? Etymologically, it simply means "teaching," and certainly we can draw edifying "teaching" from every text of Scripture. Warnings against drawing doctrine from allegory or symbol use "doctrine" in a narrower sense to refer to authoritatively or systematically formulated teaching on central truths of the Christian faith.

I cannot deal with the intricacies of this methodological question here, but allow me a few observations that serve to complicate the question. First, even the most straightforwardly "systematic" or "doctrinal" portions of the NT are replete with typology. Hebrews is not a symbolic text, but most of its "teaching" relies on Christological interpretation of the Levitical system of sacrifice and priesthood. Second, the whole of NT "doctrine"—Christology, ecclesiology, soteriology—is typology. Jesus is "last Adam" and "son of David" (and so a Solomon) and "son of Abraham" (and so an Isaac). The church is the new Israel, and we are delivered from sin and death by the "sacrifice" of Jesus. It is impossible to disentangle the typology from the doctrine (in the narrow sense), and we should not try. And then: If the NT writers draw their fundamental teachings from typologies of the OT, should we not follow their example?

Finally, Scripture as a whole and Revelation in particular is fundamentally an authoritative interpretation of God's history with humanity. It discloses truth about God, humanity, and the world that we inhabit, offering pastoral guidance on our way through time.

“Doctrine” is, on this view, less about systematizing the literal sense or didactic texts of Scripture than about learning the tune so that we can hear it and dance along. Revelation is *thoroughly* suited to that task because it draws back the veil to reveal the inner workings of heaven and the invisible dynamics of history. In this sense, it is “doctrinal” from beginning to end.

An obvious question presents itself: If the focus of the book is on Jerusalem and the surroundings, why does John send messages to the churches of *Asia* (cf. 1:4)? In the first century, Jews were scattered throughout the Roman Empire. When war broke out in the mid-60s in Judea and Jerusalem, Jews began fighting Romans all over the *oikoumene*. If we reckon with the likelihood that some, perhaps *many*, of the “Jews” of Asia Minor were Jewish followers of Jesus, converted during the ministry of Paul and others, the historical situation of the seven churches clicks into place. Asian Christians were attacked by Jews who considered them apostate; as the war began, they came under suspicion from Romans officials, as well as local authorities and mobs, for their Jewishness. They were a community adrift, unmoored from Judaism, which was already in some tension with Greco-Roman mores and religion. Some were tempted to revert to Judaism, to stave off pressure from Jews; others were intimidated by Romans into proving their loyalty through acts of religious devotion. Squeezed from both sides, tempted to harlotry and idolatry, pressured by the sea beast of Rome and the land beast of Judaism, Christ-following Jews and Gentiles in Asia knew that martyrdom was a real threat. Short of martyrdom, many were tempted to compromise or conceal their identity as Jesus’s disciples. (This characterization of the situation of John’s first readers raises questions about Johannine anti-Semitism and supersessionism; on these issues, see →2:9).

Just before the Roman emperor began to persecute Christians and a few years before conflict broke out in Judea, John sent a prophecy in the form of a pastoral letter, or a pastoral letter in the form of a prophecy. It warns complacent churches to wake up, encourages the faithful to remain faithful, warns that the worst crisis is coming, and prophesies that God will turn the suffering of the martyrs to victory, just as he did in the cross of Jesus. Some accept the warning and others reject it, and so John’s book sharpens and clarifies the very divisions it describes, and moves the situation forward to a great crisis that will bring TEOTWAWKI.

We can make that more concrete with help from John Marshall’s (2001) eccentric but illuminating *Parables of War*. Marshall interprets Revelation as a book addressed to Jews and a Jewish situation. I disagree with Marshall’s dating and setting, but he captures the dynamics of Christianity, Judaism, and Roman power in Asia. Revelation, Marshall argues, is John’s attempt “to make sense of the situation for himself and his community,” a community squeezed between the Jewish War and the upheavals in Rome. He wants Christians to

understand the dangers of their situation, and urges them in his visions to stand fast against the adversity and adversary, as God, through the Lamb, “would save of even extend his people and punish their adversaries” (2).

The situation of Jews in the empire was tenuous. According to Josephus, the Jews of Jerusalem “hoped that all their fellow-countrymen beyond the Euphrates would join them in revolt” (quoted from Josephus, *Jewish War*, 1.6, quoted in Marshall 2001: 101). This hope went unfulfilled, but it was not implausible: “By straddling the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire, the Jewish Diaspora formed at least a straw threat to the Greco-Roman sense of security” (Marshall 2001: 101). Josephus’s account hints at but elides the possibility that some Jews saw the war as an opportunity to revolt against Rome (cf. Agrippa’s speech in *Jewish War* 2.398–9, quoted in Marshall 2001: 102). Once the war broke out in Judea, “active conflict in support of compatriots in Judea” is a possible response throughout the Diaspora (Marshall 2001: 105).

It actually happened in a number of locations. In Caesarea, Jews fought a three-sided battle with Greek citizens and Roman rulers. According to Josephus, “the inhabitants of Caesarea massacred the Jews who resided in their city: within one hour more than twenty thousand were slaughtered, and Caesarea was completely emptied of Jews.” The massacre was followed by “rampages by Jews in all the towns of Syria, with the result that there is conflict in every city of Syria.” At the end of Book 2 of the *Jewish War*, Josephus “describes conflicts in the Diaspora that resulted from the tensions brought on by war in Judea.” Though he does not mention Asia Minor, “the problems he details in Damascus and Alexandria are of a sort that could have occurred almost anywhere in the Empire. Following the rampage by Jews in Syria, Josephus describes another cycle of retaliation in the cities of Syria.” By Josephus’s reckoning, “only Antioch, Sidon, and Apamea spared the residents and refused either to kill or imprison a single Jew” (Marshall 2001: 106, 108). In Egypt, local Jews “out of fear of being branded by the Greek population as supporters of the rebellion in Judea, turned the refugees over to the authorities . . . In addition to torturing and executing the remnants of the Sicarii in Egypt, the governor, acting under imperial orders, closed down and later destroyed the Jewish temple at Leontopolis . . . Given the way in which the temple in Jerusalem served as a point of convergence for rebellion in Judea, the temple in Leontopolis also had the potential to focus unrest among Jews in Egypt” (109).

Once turmoil engulfed Rome, news traveled to Asia Minor. Jews likely knew that Jerusalem was under siege and that it was holding firm. In the early summer of 69, according to Tacitus, “a Neronian pretender arose in Achaia and gathered armies in Asia Minor” (Marshall 2001: 113). Around the same time, the governor of Syria “marched from Syria toward Rome through Asia Minor,” leading 15,000 troops. Jews asked, “Was the Empire consuming itself? Was this the end of the ruler of the world? Was the blood on the streets of the great city a sign of the end of the age, of the new Jerusalem soon to be released from its bondage and lifted to a resplendent glory?” (114). It was incumbent on all Jews to throw themselves into this last great battle, and Christians who balked were forced to join in or pay the price.

Marshall makes a plausible circumstantial case that fills out the details in Christopher Rowland’s (2002: 410–11) speculation: “Even if Jews in Asia Minor showed no sympathy for the revolt, it is difficult to see how they could have avoided the suspicion of the inhabitants of the city in which they dwelt, for the simple reason that they were linked by ties of religion with the rebels of Palestine.” Rowland speculates that Roman authorities in Asia Minor might have forced a test of allegiance on Jews by requiring a sacrifice to the emperor and suggests that it is likely that “Jewish privileges, however long standing, may have come under threat at this time” (411). Under the circumstances, “there was a likelihood that Jews and Jewish sympathizers would have been under great pressure in the

Diaspora to dissociate themselves from the position of their co-religionists in Palestine. In this situation it would not be surprising to find many Jews apostatizing, and, on occasion, the imperial cult may have been used as a device whereby Jewish loyalty to Rome could be tested.” In fact, “the latter possibility is more likely to have been true of Asia Minor than any other part of the empire, for it was in that province particularly that the imperial cult was so firmly rooted and linked with the indigenous religious practices through the *commune Asiae*” (412).

Other scholars have described the effect of the Jewish war on Jews outside of Palestine (see Madden 2008: 273; Borgen 1998: 92–3).

It is easy to get bogged in the details of first-century history. The decisive argument above is the one that is internal to the NT, which can be summarized as:

1. Jesus says that Jerusalem will be destroyed within the apostolic generation.
2. This is vengeance for the innocent blood shed in Jerusalem for many centuries, including the blood of Christian prophets and witnesses whom Jesus sends after his resurrection and ascension.
3. Jerusalem is the chief temple-city of a divinely established *oikoumene*, the postexilic imperial structure. The fall of Jerusalem is the central event in the demolition of the world-system; during the same few years, Rome experiences an upheaval that disrupts the Roman *pax* and leaves a new dynasty wearing the imperial purple.
4. This is the imminent event that the NT writers are expecting.
5. John sees visions about that event, and writes the Apocalypse shortly before it occurs.

Structure

Revelation is framed with an epistolary introduction and a concluding blessing. Within the overall epistolary frame, chapters 2–3 contain seven messages to the angels of the churches of Asia Minor, and the rest of the book is an eighth letter to another church, the church in the city that John describes as “Babylon.” It is a prophetic pastoral letter.

As noted, the book is framed by repeated phrases and statements. In 22:6, we see that the Lord sent his angel to show the bond-servant what must take place, using almost identical terminology to 1:1. “I am coming” in 22:7 picks up the promise that “He is coming” in 1:7. A blessing is pronounced on those who guard the prophecy in 1:3 and 22:7. “I am Alpha and Omega” appears in both 1:8 and 22:13. Jesus the Bridegroom appears in chapter 1, and the Bride

appears at the end when she has been glorified to resemble the Bridegroom. This is the plotline of the Song of Songs as well, where the bride, initially nameless, becomes the Shulammite, taking the feminine form of the name “Solomon.” The Song is about the Solomonification of the Beloved; Revelation is the Christofication of the Bride. At the same time, the Apocalypse describes the glorification of the Adamic *Bridegroom* by the reception of the Bride who is his glory: for the woman is the glory of the man, also for the Son of Man. Revelation is one of the greatest romantic poems ever written.

To get our initial bearings, a simple outline is best. Four times John says he was “in Spirit” (Rusten 2010; Douglas 1915; the passages are 1:10; 4:1; 17:1–3; 21:9–10). The first two describe “a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,” while the latter two refer to “one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls. Apart from the first vision, each vision begins with “come here, I shall show you” (4:1; 17:1; 21:9–10). This gives us four basic divisions of the book: The first vision is from 1:10 to 3:22, a vision from Patmos. The second runs from 4:1 to 16:21, a vision in heaven. The third goes from 17:1 to 21:8; it is a vision from the wilderness. The final vision is from 21:9 to 22:21, a vision from the mountain.

That is a neat outline, but highly asymmetrical. The second vision covers more than half the book. That second vision is obviously subdivided by three series of seven episodes. The Lamb opens the seven seals on the scroll, then angels sound seven trumpets, and finally angels come out with seven bowls of wine-wrath, blood poured out on the harlot and the beast. Each of these heptamorous sequences ends with thunder, voices, lightnings, earthquakes (8:5; 11:19; 16:18). Each of the sevens also includes some reference to the end of a time period: 7:14 refers to those who have come from the great tribulation, 10:7 says time itself has ended, and 16:17 says “it is done.” Between the trumpets and bowls is a lengthy section (chapters 12–15), a prophecy from John himself that constitutes the heart of the book.

Schematically, the outline of the book is this:

- I. Epistolary introduction, 1:1–8.
- II. Apocalypse of Jesus Christ --Rev. 1:1–8
- III. In Spirit on Patmos, 1:9–3:21.
 - A. One like the Son of Man, 1:9–20.
 - B. Messages to angels of seven churches, 2:1–3:21.
- IV. In Spirit in heaven, 4:1–16:21.
 - A. Temple, Book, and Lamb, 4:1–5:14.
 - B. Seven seals, 6:1–8:5.
 - C. Seven trumpets, 6:2–11:19.
 - D. Dragon, woman, beasts, 12:1–15:4.
 - E. Seven bowls, 15:1–16:21.

- V. In Spirit in the wilderness, 17:1–21:8.
- VI. In Spirit on the mountain, 21:8–22:5.
- VII. Epistolary conclusion, 22:6–21.

The overall movement is from male to female, from Jesus through the Harlot to the Bride, from Adam to the Eve who is built through the deep surgery of tribulation. The book is structured by a double exodus, recapitulating the two exodus events in Israel's history. After a series of plagues, martyrs are gathered up to the heavenly promised land, where they sing the song of Moses (15:1–4). Then another exodus cycle begins, this a "second exodus" of survivors from the doomed city Babylon. John's own movements track with this double exodus. He begins on Patmos, suffering with other witnesses, then is caught up to heaven. That traces the first exodus, the exodus of the martyrs, who suffer in the land and are swept up to the sky to join the angel choir. John is then carried to the wilderness, before being swept up to a mountain, following the path of the exodus from Egypt. In the context of Revelation, this wilderness-to-mountain is a movement from exile in "Babylon" into the Promised Land of the holy city that descends from heaven. That is the movement of the non-martyr saints. They "come out" from ruined Babylon to move into the new city.

The book is a liturgy (cf. Shepherd 1960: 77–97). John begins "in Spirit" on the "Lord's Day" (1:10). Jesus appears to him and tells him to write to seven churches, words of encouragement and rebuke, with exhortations to repentance included throughout. This corresponds with a call to worship and an exhortation to confession. At the beginning of chapter 4, John ascends from Patmos into the heavenly temple where he observes the worship of angels. Seals are broken to open a book for preaching. Trumpets sound, like the trumpets that announced the Lord's coming on Sinai, like the trumpet sound that called Israel to worship (Numbers 10). John eats the book and prophesies. Chalices are poured out, chalices of wine-wrath, sacramental chalices, and the saints are invited to share the marriage supper of the Lamb. At the end, the saints are enthroned and sent out on a mission.

Commentators frequently deny that Revelation lays out a coherent, unified plot (notable exceptions include Charles 1920; Resseguie 2009; Barr 1998), frequently arguing for a cyclical arrangement in which the same or similar events are told and retold several times (Kovacs and Rowland (2004: 22) mention the seventeenth-century commentator Joseph Mede as an early example). There are recapitulative moments in the Apocalypse, but to get this right, we need to distinguish two layers of plot in Revelation.

On the one hand, there is the text itself, with characters like Ancient Ones, the Lamb, a star named Wormwood, a sea beast, a land beast, and a

harlot, and events like the Lamb opening the book, angels blowing trumpets, horses rushing from heaven, stars falling to the abyss, rivers drying, cities collapsing, armies marching in a parade of triumph. At *that* level, the apocalypse almost entirely follows a progressive story line from start to finish. At a few points (→7:9-17), John reaches ahead to give us a glimpse of the end of the story; at other times, he focuses in detail on events that he has already mentioned (→17-18). Otherwise, the apocalyptic drama moves forward in a single, coherent sequence of cause and effect, event and consequence. The Lamb receives a book and opens the seals. Horses charge from heaven and souls under the altar cry out; it makes literary and psychological sense for the four horsemen to be followed by the cry of the martyrs. The locorpions from the abyss meet their match in the angelic army from the Euphrates. Once he is introduced, the dragon's actions and experiences follow one another in a lock-step narrative sequence, and the same is true of other characters in the drama.

Armed with this assumption, we can trace the fates of specific characters or sets of characters. Martyrs ascend from beneath the altar (6:9-11) to enthronement (20:4-6). We can trace the history of a specific group of martyrs. A total of 144,000 Jews are marked in chapter 7. They do not appear again until chapter 14, where they are with the Lamb on Zion, first-fruits ready for harvest. They are harvested at the end of chapter 14, and they are the multitude standing on the firmament in 15:2, singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. They are also among the beheaded raised in the first resurrection to reign for a thousand years (20:4-6). The dragon waits in the sky to devour the woman's child. He fails, and is cast from heaven. He chases the woman, but cannot catch her, and the earth opens to receive the flood he spews from his mouth. So he goes to the water's edge and summons a beast from the sea to carry on his war with the woman and her children. That all is fairly straightforward, but many lose the thread at the end of chapter 13. The 144,000 who appear in 14:1 are the saints that the beasts are attacking, and their harvest *is* their martyrdom. God turns the violence of persecutors against them, pouring out martyr blood on the beast's throne and plunging it into darkness, pouring out martyr blood on the air, so that the whole world collapses.

It is possible to deny that the same group of witnesses appears all the way through, but then we are left with insoluble problems: What *happened* to the 144,000 after 14:1-5? Who *are* the saints standing on top of the firmament? Where *did* those beheaded kings come from? Unless we assume that the book tells us a connected, coherent story, characters pop in and out at random, events are juxtaposed without cause or effect, and we are left with a hodgepodge of more or less pious symbols. We turn the plot of Revelation into the apparently random chaos of the *Fairie Queene*. It is a problem of our

own making. If we read beginning-to-end, the way the book is written, it makes sense. From 1:1 to 22:21, the books, for all their complexity, are coherent and unified.

Once we have recognized that overall trajectory, other things begin to fall into place. John quotes Zechariah's prediction that those who pierced the Shepherd will mourn (→1:7); once we assume a narrative coherence, we are forced to ask, *When* is that promise fulfilled? When we think to ask, we find an answer. We wonder what happens to the child after he ascends to heaven (→12:5); and we discover that Revelation answers our question. What happens to the woman fleeing from the dragon into the wilderness (→12:13-16)? The answer is chilling. (Stay tuned!)

On the other level: These apocalyptic characters and events refer to real-world persons, institutions, and events, which are *not* depicted in straight chronological order, though the overall movement is chronologically progressive. My full case for this claim is found in the commentary, but let me call attention to a few shards of the mosaic. One of the clearest indications that the cycles are not *simply* repetitive is the increasing intensity of judgment. The fourth horseman, astride his green horse, is authorized to afflict *one-fourth* of the land (6:7). When the first trumpet blows, flaming hail falls from the sky, and burns up *a third* of the earth, trees, and grass (8:7), and the fourth trumpet affects one-third of the sun, moon, and stars, darkening one-third of the day (8:12). We have moved ahead, from a quarter-judgment to a third-judgment. The bowls are *total* judgments. Only one-third of the rivers are bloodied by the third trumpet (8:10-11), but *all* the springs and rivers turn to blood with the third bowl (16:5-6). Hail starts falling at the end of the trumpets (11:19), but nothing like the giant hailstones that crash down at the seventh bowl, which weigh a talent each (16:21). I argue below that the seals, trumpets, and bowls are describing quite different sequences of events, different in kind as well as in timing and specific detail. For now, it is enough to note a progression.

Overall, the actions to which these apocalyptic characters refer are laid out in a linear temporal progression. The events depicted in the seals take place before the events symbolized by the trumpets, which take place before the beasts emerge and the city falls. The millennium comes before the judgment, which comes before the descent of the new heavens and new earth. Along the way, there is back-tracking, stutter-stepping, and stopping and starting, but these temporal shifts are typically marked by fairly obvious clues. We know where the seals start because John has just seen the Lamb's ascension (→5:1-6) and the seals depict things that occur after that. It is not difficult to see that chapter 12 reaches back to the birth and ascension of Jesus (→12:1-5) before moving rapidly ahead to events that are still in John's future.

I will not spoil the fun by giving the whole story at the beginning. John writes in an eschatological style that forces us to read ahead, and veils understanding until the final unveiling. I will follow his lead. Still, as part guide, part teaser, I lay out the main plot of the apocalyptic drama, *sans* introduction and conclusion, also *sans* referents, which I explain in the many pages that follow.

1. On Patmos on the Lord's Day, John hears a voice, turns, and sees one like the Son of Man who commissions him to write messages to the angels of seven churches.
2. John records letters of warning and encouragement to the angels of the churches of Asia. A crisis is coming, coming *soon*, and the churches need to be prepared if they are to remain faithful to the end.
3. What sort of crisis? John begins to find out when he is swept up by the Spirit through a door in the sky, into the heavenly temple. A liturgy is in progress.
4. John sees a book on the right hand of God, sealed and unopened. No one can open the book, until the Lamb ascends into heaven.
5. Having ascended, the Lamb begins to open the book. As he does, he sends out his horsemen to carry out his business. The world is not as it should be, but the Lamb's cavalry begins to make it right.
6. Martyrs hear rumors of the Lamb's ascent and the deployment of his army, believe that the time of their vindication is at hand, and cry for justice. They are told to wait until more martyrs are made.
7. When the Lamb opens the sixth seal, the world begins to unravel: Sun and moon go out, stars fall, the earth shakes. Everyone runs for cover.
8. The end is arrested, mid-Apocalypse. The winds of heaven will *not* sweep away the earth or the sea. More martyrs have to be made, and 144,000, a symbolic "all Israel" taken from the tribes of Israel, are sealed for martyrdom. Their blood will be added to that of the other martyrs, and then the end will rev up again.
9. When the Lamb breaks the seventh seal, an angel takes the prayers of the martyrs to heaven, before God. He throws coals to the earth, and trumpets begin to blow. The process of making the 144,000 into martyrs has begun.
10. Trumpets fling judgments on the land, sea, rivers, and heavenly bodies.
11. A star falls into the abyss and releases demonic locusts who sting like scorpions.
12. An angel cavalry beats back the locorpions and provides the relief of death to those who were stung.

13. An angel descends from heaven to feed John the opened book and commission him to prophesy. He enters a new phase of his ministry, speaking the book, which will bring the story of the martyrs to a climax.
14. John's prophesying marks and clarifies the boundaries between holy and profane. Those who hear his message are part of the holy city; those who do not are cast out. The holy city, though, will be trampled.
15. The division caused by his prophesying comes to a head in the story of the two witnesses. They prophesy in the great city where the Lord is crucified, and the inhabitants of the city kill them. God raises and vindicates them. This foreshadows what will happen to the 144,000 marked out for death.
16. Heaven opens and John sees a woman in labor, threatened by Satan. She gives birth, and the Messiah, still a child, is snatched to heaven.
17. War breaks out in heaven and Michael casts Satan down to earth. Enraged, he attacks the woman, and fails. He tries to drown the woman, and fails. He goes to the edge of the sea for reinforcements.
18. The dragon calls up a beast from the sea, a composite of beasts from Daniel 7.
19. Another beast appears from the land and forms an alliance with the sea beast. The land beast propagandizes for the sea beast, enforces worship of his image, and makes everyone wear the badge of the beast. Together, sea beast and land beast form a counterfeit new covenant.
20. The beasts attack the saints—that is, the 144,000—but these martyrs are actually the first fruits of God's harvest, caught up by the Son of Man and brought into God's storehouses.
21. The saints are grapes, trampled down by their enemies. That trampling produces the blood that will be poured out on their enemies to call up God's vengeance against them.
22. The martyrs are brought safely above the firmament, where they sing the song of Moses and the Lamb. The exodus of the martyrs has taken place.
23. Seven angels pour out martyr blood on the sea, rivers, throne of Satan, and air, which tears the world apart. The end that was arrested earlier has come. A fresh set of plagues prepares for another exodus.
24. The harlot Babylon is seduced into supporting the sea beast's war against the saints. She drinks holy blood, but that holy blood will be her downfall.
25. Babylon falls, as the horns of the sea beast turn on her and tear her to shreds.

26. The remaining saints flee the city. Martyrs have been rescued to heaven; the rest go on an exodus out of Babylon toward a promised land.
27. Kings of the land, merchants, and sailors join in lamenting the fall of Babylon. They pronounce God's woes against her, agreeing that she has been judged justly.
28. While heaven rejoices, a Rider rides out on a white horse, followed by his martyr army, in triumphal procession. The beasts are thrown into the lake of fire, and the rest of the dead are given to the birds who feast on their flesh.
29. Babylon is fallen, and the counterfeit new covenant has been shattered. Thus begins the millennium, during which Satan is confined to the abyss and prevented from deceiving the nations to assemble against the saints.
30. The martyrs—those from under the altar, and the additional 144,000—are seated on thrones to rule for a thousand years. So long as truth-tellers rule, the deceiving serpent cannot deceive all the nations.
31. At the end of the millennium, God releases Satan for one final battle, one final defeat.
32. God sits on a throne judging the nations, sending some to the lake of fire and inviting the others into the city that descends from heaven. It is a city without death, tears, mourning, or pain.
33. The final vision is also of the heavenly city, as holy city, a light to the nations, a guide to kings, the city the martyrs rule. Kings and nations honor the holy city, and the city provides living water and healing leaves for the nations.

It is, as I say, complex. But it is a connected story about the end of a world and the establishment of a new world, about martyrs who witness, die, and come to rule.

Final notes

Before we begin in earnest, let me call attention to a few other matters. First, translation: I have provided a full translation, based on the 2010 edition of the *SBL Greek New Testament*, edited by Michael Holmes. I have given very limited attention to textual issues, mainly taking Holmes's text as my basis. The translation itself is eccentric. I am impressed with the OT translations of Everett Fox (2000; 2014) and have attempted, lamely, to imitate his procedure. Insofar as I am able, without doing undue violence to the English sense, I follow Greek word order. I have translated words consistently throughout

the book, in an effort to draw attention to literary connections that would be missed if I translated more idiomatically. Thus, for instance, I translate *πορν*- words with variations of “harlot,” since that English word lends itself to function as noun (harlot, harlotry) and verb (the archaic “play the harlot”). These translations defamiliarize the text to some degree, but to my mind that is a healthy result. Too smooth a translation may bewitch us into thinking we are dealing with an easy text.

Fox apart, I have made certain translation choices for thematic reasons. When *γῆ* is used by itself or in conjunction with “sea,” I have translated it as “land,” to emphasize that the “land of Israel” is in view (Carrington 1931: 131–2). This has some important results at various points: Babylon (Jerusalem) is not called (implausibly) queen of the “kings of the *earth*” but (naturally) queen of “kings of the *land*.” When *γῆ* is contrasted with *οὐρανός*, I have translated it as “earth.” *Οὐρανός* I have rendered with the cumbersome “sky-heaven,” an effort to maintain the concreteness of the visions and to make some room for astronomical speculations.

A word on the limits of this commentary, which are legion. Many commentators have delved more deeply into the cultural setting than I have done (cf. Aune 1997; 1998a,b; Malina and Pilch 2000). This commentary does not explore OT background as exhaustively as Beale (1999), nor discuss the fascinating astronomical imagery of the book with as much assurance as Malina (1995) or as much creativity as Farrer (1970) or Douglas (1938; 1915). I aspired to close the gap between John’s Gospel and Revelation, but in the end make only passing gestures in that direction, relying on the brilliant work of Warren Gage (2001). I barely scratch the surface of the reception history of the book, either in art and literature (cf. O’Hear 2011; O’Hear and O’Hear 2015; Kovacs and Rowland 2004) or in theology (cf. Wainwright 2001). My commentary is surely not as concise as Boxall’s (2006) outstanding work. I have benefitted from Weinrich’s (2005; 2011a,b) translations of patristic texts, and have dabbled here and there in the later stages of the history of interpretation. I have not examined each clause and word of Revelation with the care it deserves, and my treatment is everywhere uneven. This is a woefully parochial commentary, taking sources and examples mostly from my own American setting and my own little slice of the church and world, though I attempt to point to the book’s relevance in other settings.

I have unfortunately devoted little attention to what seems to have been the most popular American approach to the Apocalypse over the past century—dispensational premillennialism. I fear that my neglect will be taken as contempt. It is not, but arises from my almost complete lack of feel for how the dispensational system looks from the inside and my consequent fear that I could not do it justice. Further, my conviction that the book must

be read within the frame of first-century concerns makes it difficult to begin to engage arguments of dispensationalist commentators. In spite of appearances, I share a good deal with dispensationalist interpretation. Like them, I think John describes actual historical events and characters under the veil of symbols, the primary divergence being the time period that he has in view.

Mea culpa, mea culpa. So many oversights and flaws and apologies. Does this commentary have *any* virtues that make it worth the considerable time it will take you to read it? Can I bring myself to *commend* it? Yes. As noted above, I offer a *unified* reading of the Apocalypse, as a coherent prophecy of events that were (mostly) about to happen to John and his original readers. Others—many—have taken this “preterist” approach to the book, but I believe that I have been able to demonstrate a coherence that others have missed. Whether or not I have in fact done so is a judgment others will have to make. I leave many questions unanswered, and at some points raise more questions. I hope I have at least provided a framework within which questions can be asked and answered in marginally new ways.

Coherent unity *and* theological substance. Revelation is consistent with the rest of biblical theology, but it also offers insights not found elsewhere. Its Trinitarian formulae are richly suggestive. It presents a stunning *totus Christus* nuptial-political Christology-ecclesiology, in which the glorification of the Christ continues beyond his ascension and is fulfilled in the formation of a Bride who is the glory of the Last Adam, without whom the Last Adam would be less than fully glorious. Alongside this Christology is an atonement theology that incorporates the early martyrs into the founding work of the new covenant. As a theological interpretation of history, Revelation unveils a counterfeit *μυστήριον* that arises simultaneously with the revelation of the evangelical mystery, a counterfeit church that encompasses Jew and Gentile in one new fallen Adam. As political theology, Revelation presents a church-as-*polis* ecclesiology but without a whiff of the sectarianism that sometimes infects such ecclesiological politics. Of course, Revelation is also about last things—about the last of the first things, and about the end of the world, about ultimate destinies in the celestial city or the lake of fire. It is a strongly *earth*-oriented eschatology, an eschatology in which things happen first in heaven, so that they can be replicated nonidentically on earth.

It is a truism that commentary is an art not a science. It is less a truism yet still true: Science is an art not a science. No one *really* interprets a text by building up an edifice from all the little pieces of the text. A commentary proposes a *Gestalt*, an overall vision or reading into which details (hopefully, *most* of them) find a suitable place. This is partly an explanation of what I think this commentary does, partly a plea to the reader: I do not propose an explanation for every detail of the text, and even when I do I get details

wrong. Like every commentary, this is more a house of cards than a house. Each bit supports every other bit, and my plea to the reader is to evaluate the beauty and elegance and explanatory power of the whole.

Finally, Revelation is a worship service and a call to worship. Twice at the end of the book, an angel reiterates the central command of the book: “Worship God” (with its implied corollary, “Do *not* worship beasts”). As a small indication that I have tried to take that exhortation seriously, each chapter ends with a collect or prayer and a poetic fragment, sometimes of my own composition, based on the chapter’s contents. It is a happy providence that this book self-organized into fourteen sections, permitting me to write a double-Sabbath of collects.

Bring me my Bow of burning gold;
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

I will not cease from Mental Fight
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land.

Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets.
—William Blake, “Jerusalem” (1998: 213)

Almighty, our Father, you sent your Son to join heaven and earth: Illumine our minds with the light of your Spirit, that we may see and know those things that will be for our eternal good. For the sake of Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the Spirit, unto ages of ages. Amen.

II. Apocalypse of Jesus Christ—Rev. 1:1–8

Ἀποκάλυψις is the first word of Revelation. In popular English, “apocalypse” connotes “end of the world” or “disaster.” In an apocalyptic movie, buildings burn, overturned cars clutter the streets, zombies or aliens roam the wasteland hungry for their next meal. In popular religion, apocalyptic preachers gesticulate on street corners, preaching lurid sermons of judgment to come.

Despite the prominence of apocalyptic in the Bible, ancient Jewish writing, and Christian history, academic interest in the subject appeared to fade in modern thought. Apocalyptic represents everything that Enlightened moderns think the human race has outgrown, or should outgrow. Apocalyptic writing is full of angels and demons, sky journeys and future-telling, fire from heaven and the fires of hell. People who believe such nonsense are dangerous, potential fanatics, or at least inferior to Europeans on whom the light has dawned. Things are, of course, never so simple, and even when rejected apocalypticism haunts modernity as “a problematic ‘other’ ... the shadow in opposition to which philosophers outlined their concepts of modernity, science, and reason” (Fabisiak 2016: 319). Today the pretense of indifference or hostility to apocalyptic has softened, if not entirely disappeared. Interest in biblical apocalyptic is no longer confined to wild-eyed longhairs who hold up signs on street corners or rant on YouTube. It is a regular topic among serious theologians, biblical scholars, sociologists, and philosophers. Perhaps the reason is simple: The longhairs and ranters have gotten tenure.

In theology, the term has a variety of meanings, some no less exotic than the summer blockbusters. Some scholars, focusing on *texts*, think of apocalyptic as a genre defined by stylistic habits or subject-matter; others speak of “apocalyptic” *beliefs* that may be expressed in various forms of writing; still others focus on the social and political conditions within which such texts and beliefs normally arise and thus on apocalyptic *communities*.

Among biblical scholars, “apocalypse” is often considered a genre of Jewish, early Christian, and other religious literature. Most of the works now called “apocalypses” were not so called when they were written. Revelation was the first book to use the word to describe its content, though it is not clear whether or not John intended “apocalypse” or “apocalypse of Jesus Christ” to

function as a title. By the late first or early second century, it became fashionable to produce books titled as apocalypses, and in later centuries even pagans produced apocalyptic works. Scholars retroactively apply the term to texts similar to Revelation but written prior to it.

In a 1979 issue of *Semeia*, a group of scholars presented what has become a touchstone definition of “apocalyptic” literature: It is “a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world” (Collins 1979; quoted in Collins 1998: 5). The research group distinguished two main types of apocalypse: Those focused on a heavenly *journey* and those that provided a review of *history* and, often but not always, a prediction of the end of time (Murphy 2012: 6–7). Some apocalypses explore unseen spaces, others probe the hidden realities of time. Among the apocalyptic texts are 1 Enoch, Daniel, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, the Apocalypse of Abraham, 3 Baruch, 2 Enoch, Testament of Levi 2–5, the Apocalypse of Zephaniah, and some portions of Jubilees and Testament of Abraham.

“Apocalyptic” also describes a literary style and use of imagery found in texts classified as apocalyptic, and sometimes in texts classified as other genres. According to Murphy, apocalyptic language makes use of mythological creatures and events, which may allegorize historical events to evoke an unseen spiritual dimension of reality, in a highly emotive fashion (Murphy 2012: 11–13; Collins 1998: 14–21). According to some scholars, apocalyptic imagery uses natural and cosmic catastrophe as a metonym for epochal historical events. The “cosmic catastrophe” depicted in Jesus’s Olivet Discourse does not, on N. T. Wright’s (1997: 17–22) reading, describe the end of the physical world, but historical events that lead to a catastrophic collapse of a world-order. Others, while acknowledging that apocalyptic imagery is *imagery*, argue that the imagery implies the dissolution of the physical cosmos (Adams 2007). As argued above (→introduction) and throughout this commentary, I think Wright has the better of this argument.

For some scholars, apocalyptic is more about *beliefs* than texts, the fundamental apocalyptic belief being that the world will end in the very near future. When Ernst Käsemann (1969: 102) famously claimed that apocalyptic is the “mother” of Christian theology, he meant that early Christian belief in the imminent return of Jesus shaped their outlook on everything. The world is not yet subjected to God’s will, yet God has begun to subdue the recalcitrant world, a beginning that is visible to the eyes of apocalyptic faith. This is the perspective of Paul, Käsemann said, and “no perspective could be more apocalyptic.” Collins (1998: 11) denies that imminence

is the preeminent feature of apocalyptic eschatology, emphasizing instead that “[a]ll apocalypses ... involve a transcendent eschatology that looks for retribution beyond the bounds of history.” Final judgment, rather than an imminent end, is the key.

Belief in an imminent end to creation is typically embedded in a larger pattern of belief, an “apocalyptic worldview” (cf. Rowland 2002: 26), which includes:

- Belief in an unseen world populated by invisible personal or quasi-personal spiritual beings, angels and demons who are active in the human world.
- Dualistic cosmology, linked to a dualistic assessment of the social and political world. The apocalyptic worldview “sees things in terms of polar opposites. Socially, this means that humanity consists of the righteous and the wicked, with no middle group. Temporally, it means that there are two worlds, present and future. Cosmically, it means that there are forces arrayed on God’s side and forces against him—angels against demons, or good angels against bad angels. In terms of belief, it means that the in-group has the truth, and no one else does. Behaviorally, it means strict regulation of behavior as either compatible or incompatible with the community rules and norms” (Murphy 2012: 9; this tendency to “demonize” social opponents is one feature of apocalyptic that modern thinkers regard as dangerous).
- Dissatisfaction with the world as it is. Things are not as they should be, but apocalypticism is ultimately hopeful because God is both sovereign and interested. He will rescue the righteous and punish the wicked.
- Tribulation and suffering for the faithful. The tribulation of the righteous is often the means by which the promised end comes. Even when the righteous are not expected to suffer, the end is thought to come in a catastrophic fashion.

In much of this, it is difficult to distinguish the “apocalyptic” worldview from a general biblical or prophetic worldview.

Rowland has mounted a more fundamental challenge to scholarly treatments of apocalyptic, arguing that the role of eschatology in apocalyptic literature has been exaggerated and that apocalypses are not necessarily concerned with time at all. Whether or not they are concerned with the end of the world, apocalypses purport to reveal secrets and mysteries that otherwise remain unknown. Isaiah (64:1) calls on God to “rend the heavens,” come down, and “solve the many riddles of existence which presented themselves.” Apocalyptic is the answer to that prayer: “The unveiling of the counsels of

God directly to the seer and thence to his readers meant that the latter were being offered an answer directly from the mouth of God himself, apparently without any risk of contradiction" (Rowland 2002: 11). What Rowland calls the "two biblical apocalypses, Daniel and Revelation" are "above all disclosures of the divine mysteries" (11), united by the conviction that "man is able to know about the divine mysteries by means of revelation, so that God's eternal purposes may be disclosed and man, as a result, may see history in a totally new light. . . . Apocalyptic seems essentially to be about the revelation of divine mysteries through visions or some other form of immediate disclosure of heavenly truths" (70). For Rowland, apocalyptic is not a genre and does not refer to specific subject matter but to the "belief that God's will can be discerned by means of a mode of revelation which unfolds directly the hidden things of God" (14). The inspiration behind apocalyptic texts is summarized by Dan. 2:28: "There is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (13–14).

"Apocalyptic" sometimes designates social movements that supposedly provide the setting for apocalyptic beliefs and the production of apocalyptic texts. Apocalyptic beliefs and writings are likely to emerge, it is argued, among disaffected groups who are distressed, alienated from power, economically beleaguered, marginalized, and persecuted. Apocalyptic writings are social fantasies about brutal punishment of enemies and the vindication of the oppressed. Intriguing and insightful as they are, these sociological analyses are often speculative. It is often impossible to link apocalyptic texts with any particular social group, and scholars often draw assumptions and paradigms from studies of later, more richly documented millennial groups like the medieval movements covered in Norman Cohn's classic study, *Pursuit of the Millennium* (1970).

Theologians who are not biblical scholars typically use "apocalyptic" in Käsemann's sense to describe a belief in a catastrophic, imminent end of the physical universe that will lead to the dawning of a new heavens and new earth. Using the word in this sense, Cyril O'Regan (2009: 15) has written that "the history of theology seems largely to be the history of the marginalization of apocalyptic." Stress should be placed on "*seems*." It has been common to claim that apocalyptic fervor cooled after Jesus failed to return, and that later theology was an effort to rationalize that failure and explain the ongoingness of history. Constantine (as usual) is blamed, as he seduced Christians to settle into a lazy accommodation to *this* world.

As O'Regan points out, however, apocalyptic has always been an indispensable element of the mainstream Christian tradition. There are apocalyptic elements in Irenaeus and Lactantius, and even Augustine is not as non-apocalyptic as some suggest. Aquinas and Bonaventure enlisted Augustine as a weapon against Joachimite enthusiasm, but in doing so they constructed him,

anachronistically, as “an ecclesiastical theologian” (O’Regan 2009: 20) rather than an apocalyptic one. Augustine *does* believe the end is out in the distance, but that does not disqualify him as an apocalyptic theologian. As O’Regan argues, it is an error to assume that “expectation of imminent end trumps all the other features that are generally found in apocalyptic texts.” Augustine, in any case, shares many of the convictions of earlier apocalyptic writers. *City of God* was written by a “reader of the signs of the times, who is obedient to the words of scripture (apocalyptic in the hermeneutical mode), who not only speaks against persecution and expresses the hope for peace, but also speaks out against the parade of the similitudes of truth in history” (20). Augustine is the great Christian *unveiler* of paganism; *City of God* is an apocalyptic project that opened up the possibility of a world *after* the world’s end. Rather than contrast the apocalyptic Irenaeus to the non-apocalyptic Augustine, O’Regan argues that it is preferable to recognize “two related but distinct apocalyptic strands” in theology,

the Irenaean and the Augustinian, neither of which eschew the Trinity as the ultimate horizon for the enactment of salvation, but which vary somewhat with regard to emphasis on the economy, on the dramatic quality of redemption figured in the sacrifice of Christ, on the level of distinction between the pre-eschatological and the eschatological state of human being in relation to God, and on the calibration of the ratios between justice and compassion in the sovereign God. (22)

Recently, theologians and biblical scholars have converged on a common interest in apocalyptic, updating the dialectical theology of Bultmann and the early Barth for deployment under postmodern conditions. Joshua Davis has written that since 1914, “young, brilliant, brash, and no doubt highly ambitious” theologians have brandished apocalyptic as a two-edged sword to purge the evils of modern culture and theology: “Developing the critique of bourgeois, liberal religion in Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, and Overbeck, they transformed the Protestant rejection of the *theologia gloriae* into a virtual mysticism, profoundly resistant to every positive objectification of God” (Davis and Harink 2012: 3). Apocalyptic theology disturbs settled opinion, resists fixities of all sorts, demands existential response. It is an enemy of accommodation, a friend to radical critique. It attacks dogma, often seen as an illegitimate attempt to tame a God who is too lively to be confined in categories, a God who bursts free from every conceptualization. God breaks in to shatter every pathetic little intellectual and cultural structure we feebly erect.

Davis traces the fundamental tensions of modern theology to the baleful influence of Kant’s rigorous distinction between knowledge (*Wissen*) and

belief (*Glaube*; Davis and Harink 2012: 6). Theologians have attempted to overcome this dualism, but even at their most apocalyptic they remained firmly in Kant's grip. In the theology of Johannes Weiss, apocalyptic is not a mere form, but the very content of Christian belief. As an apocalyptic message, the gospel forced early Christians to a radical choice between Christ and the world, in effect, a Kantian choice between faith and knowledge. As Davis argues, Weiss's version "takes the knowledge of primitive Christian apocalyptic to be the dissolution of the possibility of any modern Christian belief, and a rigorous eschatology takes fidelity to the apocalyptic order of Christian belief to be the dissolution of modern knowledge" (23). Ironically, this choice was discovered by "scientific" scholarship, which uncovered the apocalyptic form of the "kerygma" (23).

In Davis's reading, the early apocalyptic Barth does not overcome Kant either, since for Barth (in Davis's words) "[b]elief simply is the embrace of the contradiction between knowledge and belief" (Davis and Harink 2012: 29). Barth later recognized that this opposition makes theology impossible, but even the later Barth did not entirely elude Kant. Davis sees Barth's "Marburg neo-Kantianism" in "forms of contemporary theology that retain a sharp distinction between knowledge and belief" (39). (I cannot resist pointing out that this residual Kantianism is precisely what Cornelius van Til (2004) saw, and attacked, in Barth.)

From the side of NT scholarship, J. Louis Martyn and Douglas Campbell have presented an "apocalyptic" reading of Paul and, through Paul, advocated an apocalyptic revision of theology as a whole. Martyn provides an apocalyptic interpretation of justification, rendered in his work as "rectification." Rectification is not merely a change in the subjective experience or status of a person, but an objective "transformation of conditions of existence under creation's true *kurios*." Prior to Jesus, the world was dominated by Sin and Sin's associates, but "rectification is an invasion of these hostile forces to liberate their prisoners and end their insurrection" (Davis and Harink 2012: 38). Following Richard Hays, Martyn takes the phrase *πίστις Χριστοῦ* as a subjective genitive, and so sees "God's agency in overcoming Sin and the Flesh, the very character of God's invasion, simply is the faith of Jesus" (Davis and Harink 2012: 40). From this perspective, redemption is not a continuation of the past but a "fissure" in time created by God's intervention at the cross. This intervention demolishes the binary antinomies that once structured human life (Jew/Gentile, slave/free, male/female), dualities that constitute the "elementary principles of the world" that, according to Paul, are abolished by the faith of Jesus. Dualism is overcome on the cross, and, Davis argues, this means that Martyn is able to achieve what earlier apocalyptic theologians could not. His "apocalyptic rejection of dualism entirely transforms

the relation of belief and knowledge as it has developed in modern theology.” Martyn’s apocalypticism is “a cataclysm of the frame, the overturning of the totality of conditions that render dialectical negation possible,” and so he “makes possible a renewed recognition of *faith*—as opposed to belief—as the proper form of all knowledge throughout the whole of distinct but mutually interpenetrating sensual, conceptual, and practical dimensions of life” (44; emphasis in the original). Apocalypticism, the “problematic ‘other’” of modernity (Fabisiak 2016: 319), breaks in to save modernity from itself.

In his typology of “spaces” of apocalyptic, O’Regan (2009) stresses that the recent turn toward apocalyptic is “not monolithic.” Each apocalyptic “space” forms “a constellation of discourses that bear close family resemblances to each other” (26). He maps out three such spaces. First is the *maximalist* position: “A visionary form of apocalyptic theology which discloses a great deal about God’s intention for the world and what God has done, is doing, and is going to do for it, and unveils our place in the movement of history and its destination. In and through this vast conspectus God discloses his justice and mercy.” “Cross and resurrection” are interpretive keys for the whole of history, and the “theocentric horizon is often . . . defined by reference to God not only as self-sacrificial but as triune” (27). Second is a *minimalist* view that eschews knowledge of the content of God’s ways in favor of a *formal* emphasis on eruption. Minimalism “tends toward emphasizing a complete interruption or tear in standard modes of knowing, practice, and form of life, without fully specifying the alternatives.” Theologians in this space are “characterized by a conspicuous lack of content,” their discourses “marked by vehement critique of the discourses, traditions, and structures of religions as well as society at large, and sometimes take particular aim at both the reception of apocalyptic within the Christian tradition and its pivotal text . . . the book of Revelation” (27–8). The third space is similar to maximalism “to the extent to which the self-gift of the divine and the corresponding elevation of the human being is at its core.” It overlaps with minimalism “to the extent to which (a) it hesitates with respect to description of . . . a God who fundamentally transcends history, (b) in some measure it embraces the rhetoric of the radically new, and (c) it demonstrates neither disinterest in nor hostility towards institutional Christianity and towards doctrine as the fruit of interpretation of Christian faith and witness” (28–9). Moltmann, Balthasar, and Bulgakov belong in the first space; Walter Benjamin and Derrida in the second; Catherine Keller and Thomas J. J. Altizer, along Johann Baptist Metz, in the last.

Altizer—he of “death of God” fame—argues for an “apocalyptic” understanding of the Trinity. This is not your grandma’s “primordial Trinity,” the “the subject of all established doctrines of the Trinity.” Belief in that old-fashioned primordial Trinity implies “a total closure to apocalypse, even if

there is an actual potency for an apocalyptic destiny” (Altizer 2012: 5). That old primordial Trinity underwrites the status quo as “the deepest ground of all established authority.” By contrast “the apocalyptic Trinity [is] the deepest challenge to that authority” (6). Radicals cannot do with a front-loaded Trinity, a “backward moving Trinity, or the Trinity whose movement is the movement of eternal return” (4). Radicals need a back-loaded, futurist Trinity, an apocalyptic one, a “totally forward moving Trinity” (4).

To arrive at this futurist Trinity, Altizer rehabilitates the Joachimite Trinitarianism that comes to modern expression in Hegel and Marx. It is “an evolving Trinity, one whose destiny is an absolute apocalypse, an actual destiny only made possible by an actual beginning or an actual origin.” Radical theology and radical politics need to recover the insights of Blake and Eckhart, a vision of “God evolving out of primordial Godhead. Only this evolution makes possible an actual apocalypse, an apocalypse in which God will be all in all.” God can be all in all only “by ceasing to be the absolutely transcendent God,” and if God’s transcendence comes to an end, it must have had an “actual beginning or origin” (Altizer 2014: 3). An apocalyptic Trinity emerges into transcendence from “primordial Godhead” and will eventually evolve *out of* transcendence until (apparently) there is nothing but God.

Against Altizer, God’s transcendence is not dialectically in opposition with his immanence. Each is rather the condition for the other: He is absolutely immanent *because* he is absolutely transcendent; he is near in every time and place because he is not confined by place and time. If this is so, then transcendence of transcendence would involve the destruction of immanence as well. It is not clear in any case how Altizer’s position underwrites a radical politics; the emergence of plurality from undifferentiated Godhead leading to the reabsorption of plurality into undifferentiated Godhead is hardly an ontology of ultimate difference. Altizer would do well to read some Derrida: Altizer’s primordial Godhead appears to be the impossible, a source without a supplement.

Catherine Keller offers a subtle account of how apocalyptic modes of thought have underwritten political agendas at odds with the Apocalypse itself. Drawing on categories developed by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, she observes that the apocalyptic vision turned “a local, territorializing Israelite faith” into a global one. Apocalyptic “formed first as a response to the imperial aggression of Babylon, which had traumatically deterritorialized Israel; then the Babylon of Isaianic apocalyptic became code for Rome.” In Christian hands, the territorial homeland of Jerusalem “morphed into the transcendent Christian (non)space,” which “deterritorialized Jerusalem” and then reterritorialized it with settlement by Crusaders (Keller 2005: 41). Apocalyptic thus inspires an imperialist form of Christianity.

Imperialist, and *masculinist*. The Apocalypse, Keller (2005: 59) says, trades in antifeminist, antifeminine gender dualisms: “Apocalyptic has promoted an ascetic, heroic, and dominating masculinity that energizes resistance to a perceived (and often real) oppression and that fuels revolutionary flames. It can declare the New Woman, or feminism, or for that matter any opponent ... the Whore of Babylon, and it can do so with a purity of rage unavailable to the compromised Christian mainstream.” Ultimately, Keller thinks, Revelation runs counter to both of these trajectories. It is fundamentally an anti-imperial book: “The biblical Messiah comes to beat the empire, not to join it! The empire in the Book of Revelation *is* the evil” (ix). And the very nature of “apocalypse” “runs counter to the idolatry of invulnerable hypermasculinity,” with its myths of macho steeliness. Neither the Beast nor the Lamb is solidly masculine. Rather, both “display their gynomorphic openings, their wounds. They expose an inevitable mutuality of wounding. In their mimicry they nearly sabotage the dream of superpower, the dream of impassionability.” The very notion of “apocalypse” has feminine connotations: “*Apocalypso*: to reveal, to disclose, to open—it opens up its bodies, even the divine body, in the hope of a world without violence. It displays the unmaking of the world—and its remaking. But its remaking takes place through unmaking, its redemption through destruction” (49). The Apocalypse can put to work in service of radical, anti-imperial, feminist theology.

Keller has a point, both in her description of the ways Revelation has been used and in the ways it resists those uses. She is right to stress the difference between hardy *Romanitas* and Revelation’s vision of *suffering* masculinity; the heroes of the Apocalypse are described as maidens (→14:1–5), embarrassing to pagan men. In the end, though, Keller does not think that John has the courage of his convictions. If he were sufficiently anti-masculinist, he would never declare, “There will be no more death.” That announcement means “terminating all mourning, all indeterminacy, all vulnerability,” and thus reinscribes the masculine “dream of absolute omnipotence” (Keller 2005: 49). But that “dream” of omnipotence is pretty integral to the Apocalypse, as is the dream of deliverance from pain and death. Since the omnipotence is the power of the Almighty *Lamb* who was slain, and since the deliverance comes through participating in his sufferings, the Apocalypse does not do what Keller fears—it does not underwrite oppression of women or colonial brutality. On the contrary, as we shall see, the unveiling in Revelation is an unveiling of the glory of the Son of Man *in and as* his bride.

Outside Euro-American theology, the Apocalypse has been deployed as a text of liberation. Taking “apocalypse” in its original sense as “unveiling,” Richard argues that “apocalypse seeks to make visible the reality of the saints and to legitimize their cause, their resistance, and their struggle.” To do this, apocalypse opposes ideology, as ideology’s opposite: “ideology is what

conceals reality and *legitimizes* domination. The function of ideology is to hide oppression and legitimize domination” (emphases in the original). By contrast, “Apocalypse unveils the reality of the poor and legitimizes their liberation.” Revelation is thus “liberating and is good news for the poor” who are trampled down by powers (Richard 1995: 26). This unmasking occurs when witnesses speak truth and die at the hands of monsters, for once the monsters bare their teeth ideology can no longer cover them. In many parts of the global South, Revelation is taken as an anti-imperial text (Jenkins 2008: 133). As Jenkins (2002: 219) writes,

In the South, Revelation simply makes sense, in its description of a world ruled by monstrous demonic powers. These forces might be literal servants of Satan, or symbols for evil social forces, but in either case, they are indisputably real. To quote one Latin American liberation theologian, Néstor Míguez, “The repulsive spirits of violence, racial hatred, mutilation, and exploitation roam the streets of our Babylons in Latin America (and the globe); their presence is clear once one looks behind the glimmering lights of the neon signs.”

Revelation makes intuitive sense because “the evils described in Revelation are distinctively urban. Then as now, evil sets up its throne in cities.” In the rapidly urbanizing Third World, Revelation’s tale of two cities is directly relevant.

O’Regan’s references to Benjamin and Derrida indicate that apocalyptic styles of thought are found outside of theology. This is nothing new. Apocalyptic has popped up regularly in modern history, often as an echo of Joachim of Fiore’s Trinitarian scheme for history. Heterodox apocalyptic can be found in Milton and Blake and the English and German Romantics, among Hegelians, especially those on the left, as well as in contemporary thinkers like Alain Badiou, Giorgio Agamben, and Slavoj Žižek (cf. Leithart 2015a). These contemporary secular thinkers are attracted to apocalyptic for the same reasons that theologians are: their desire to use apocalyptic to unsettle orthodoxies and closed systems, their fascination with the jagged temporality of apocalyptic, and their eagerness to exploit apocalyptic’s historical links with radical social critique and political practice. What O’Regan describes as “formalist” and minimalist apocalyptic adds brio to critiques of contemporary society and politics, without the need to propose concrete alternatives. It is apocalyptic all the way down, unending revolution, every stopping-point simply another system ready for dissolution.

Derrida’s entire project can be understood as a systematization of Christless eschatology or a secularization of Jewish hope (Benson 2002). For Derrida, all thought is set within a structure of “not yet but still to come,” in which

closure is forever deferred. Meaning, for instance, is context-dependent, but the context in which things or words mean is never stable. It is always shifting and changing and expanding. The context of this page is different from when I wrote it, because it was yesterday when I wrote it and you are reading it today. Meaning thus defers; every time we think we have arrived at a final interpretation, the sun rises again to disrupt our certainty. Deferral is a real phenomenon, and should leave us chastened, recognizing that we have not arrived, and will never arrive, at a God's-eye view of things. But Derrida does not believe in an eschaton. His is apocalyptic *sans* apocalypse, deferral and *differance* unto the ages of ages. There is *never* a moment of unveiling. If, on the other hand, there *is* an eschaton, then meaning is *deferred* (as is judgment), but not *forever*. There will be a day of accounting, a closure that establishes a final context in which every word and act may be judged. Add to this the NT notion that the eschaton has *already* arrived in the resurrection of Jesus, and you have some of the building blocks for philosophy of meaning that takes account of deferral without collapsing into permanent drift.

Derrida's politics are also apocalyptic *sans* apocalypse. In *Specters of Marxism*, Derrida advocates a strongly eschatological Marxism without committing himself to the specifics of a Marxist analysis of capitalism (much as he presents a "messianism without messiah"). As in his writings on language, he presents a formal structure without content, *deliberately*, because "content is always deconstructible." Once you put flesh on dem bones, one has to make *choices*, which means *excluding* options. And this, Derrida thinks, violates the fundamental principle of ethics, which demands unconditional, infinite hospitality and welcome. To remain open to the alterity of the future *requires* that we renounce every presentence of "particular, determinate horizon of expectation" (Smith 2005: 87). As Smith notes, Derrida offers a horizontal Platonism, the abstract and contentless form of the Good found not in the intelligible realm above but in the realm of justice that is always coming but never arriving, forever just beyond the horizon.

Benjamin's apocalypticism is ostensibly Jewish as well, but despite his claim that he is settled in the tradition of Kabbalah, O'Regan says, he shows no textual interest of Kabbalah. He "neither leaves intact the interpretive steps of classical Kabbalah, nor acknowledges the sacredness of the texts submitted to speculative exegesis, nor rests easy with its speculative content." When Benjamin is done, all that is left of apocalyptic is the notion that intuition comes in a shattering glimpse, a "lightning flash," an *Augenblick*. Carnage is everywhere, but the messianic blasts in as a flicker in the darkness (O'Regan 2009: 64). As O'Regan says, this is "antithetical to Torah Judaism," and also "highly eccentric with respect to the Jewish mystical tradition," which remains Jewish in its hope for a real Messiah who redeems the world (67).

It is the passionate commitment found in apocalyptic movements that attracts Žizek, and the same interest leaves him contemptuous of the mild deconstructive theology of John Caputo. Caputo, Žizek claims, destroys the very foundations of Christianity as he opens up an unbridgeable gap between the “spectral unconditional Event” and the “contingent instantiations,” which renders incarnation an impossibility. For Caputo, truth sets free because it sets us free from Truth, which may be possessed in unequal portions and lead to mastery of one over another (Žizek and Milbank 2011: 257–8). Žizek argues, on the contrary, that the excess of Event over its embodiment in language does *not* free us to choose our own bliss. That can only end up justifying bourgeois complacency and conformity—the last thing an apocalyptic theologian would want. Instead, the Event erupts as promise and obligation, as opportunity and demand.

In Žizek’s view, Caputo offers a “death of God” theology without trauma and tragedy, a death of God in which the only thing that dies is the false “envelope of Divinity,” our misleading conceptions of God as Lord, King, Authority, Mighty Other (Žizek and Milbank 2011: 260). Žizek prefers the more radical, and in certain respects more *orthodox*, apocalyptic theology of Altizer. For Altizer, as for Christian orthodoxy, *God himself* dies on the cross, though Altizer formulates that claim in a way that most earlier theologians would reject. Altizer’s apocalypse is an apocalypse for God himself, and this end of the world is the very heart of Christian faith, though usually covered over with a polite patina of dogma. Žizek finds such apocalypticism attractive for its revolutionary power. It inspired the English and Russian Revolutions, fueled early Islam, came to expression in Marxism (Žizek and Milbank 2011: 261). Apocalyptic is the “perverse core” of Christianity that Žizek wants to restore, albeit without the bother of believing in God.

In the struggle against the powers and principalities of global capitalism, Badiou’s adherence to the Event is fundamental, Žizek (2011: xv) claims:

To engage in this struggle means to endorse Badiou’s formula *mieux vaut un & metre qu’un disetre*: better to take the risk and engage in fidelity to a Truth-Event, even if it ends in catastrophe, than to vegetate in the eventless utilitarian-hedonist survival of what Nietzsche called the “last men.” What Badiou rejects is thus the liberal ideology of victimhood, with its reduction of politics to a program of avoiding the worst, to renouncing all positive projects and pursuing the least bad option.

Yet at the level of political analysis, Žizek departs from Badiou. Economy for Badiou is part of the “situation,” and thus it cannot be the site

of apocalyptic, explosive Event. Žizek wants the economy to be *the* site of apocalyptic eruption, which will finally break the back of global capitalism. By the same token, Žizek rejects Badiou's distinction between "politics as fidelity to an event and policing as 'servicing the goods' of a society." For Žizek, the only point of loyalty to the Event is hope that it will transform the character of policing itself. He pushes the question back to the origins of leftwing thought: "What if the 'original sin' of modern emancipatory movements can be traced back to the 'young Hegelian' rejection of the authority and alienation of the state?" (Žizek and Milbank 2011: 200).

Žizek is thus both more and less "apocalyptic" than Badiou: *More*, because he acknowledges the constant traumatic turmoil of political life, the fact that there is always already eruption; *less*, because he recognizes that the point of radical politics is to contribute to a new social formation, more just than the last. Žizek's dialectics are subtle enough to keep this more or less coherent, but he confronts some difficulties. He wants eruptions to settle out institutionally; Apocalypse should make the world better. Žizekian apocalypse, unlike its Badiouan counterpart, aims at *ends*. Yet in a world of violent dialectics, there is little room for the extraordinary *within* the ordinary, little room for an event like the incarnation in which the Son of God comes as a normal Jewish man of the first century (Milbank in Žizek and Milbank 2011: 211). If we cannot have apocalypse in ordinary, it is hard to see how Žizek escapes the charge he levels against left Hegelians. If Badiou describes apocalyptic bursts in a static surface, Žizek offers a percolating surface, but cannot explain how it is a surface at all.

Revelation offers insight into the political, epistemological, cultural dimensions of this multifaceted contemporary discussion. Though I do not often return explicitly to these questions, I intend this commentary to be a contribution to ongoing cultural conversation about ends and endings, disruptions and eruptions, fixities and the events that unfix them. What does the Apocalypse specifically have to say to today's agitation about apocalypticism?

The order of unveiling

An unveiling of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show to his slaves—things that must happen shortly—and he signified, having sent them through his Angel to his slave¹ John, who testified to the

¹ The common translation of δούλος as "bond-servant" is one of the leftovers of KJV, which subtly assimilates the social structure of the Bible to the social structure of seventeenth-century England.

**word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, whatever he saw.
Blessed be the reader and those who hear the words of the prophecy
and guard the things in them written, for the time is near.**

—Rev. 1:1-3

Revelation 1 breaks up neatly into two sections, verses 1–8 and 9–20. Verse 8 ends with the Lord God’s climactic ἐγώ εἰμι, and in verse 9 John reintroduces himself with ἐγώ. The two sections are arranged in parallel, each consisting of seven segments:

Verses 1–8	Verses 9–20
Revelation of Jesus Christ, v. 1	Jesus speaks and appears, v. 9
Word of God, testimony of Jesus, v. 2	Word of God, testimony of Jesus, v. 9
John, vv. 1, 4	John, v. 9
Seven churches, v. 4	Seven churches, v. 11
Blessings from Trinity, vv. 4–6	Revelation of Jesus, vv. 12b–16
Coming on clouds, v. 7	Son of Man, v. 13
I am Alpha and Omega, v. 8	I am first and last, v. 18

The parallels in the first four are self-evident. The structural link between the Trinitarian blessings (vv. 4–6) and the vision of Jesus (vv. 12b–16) highlights the fact that the revelation of Jesus is the unveiling of Triune life. Verse 7 alludes to Dan. 7:13, as does verse 13. The semantic similarity between “Alpha and Omega” and “first and last” is underscored by the structural parallel.

This is the first of many, *many* sevens in Revelation, which often follow the order of the days of creation. Several correlations with the creation week are apparent here. The seven churches are lampstands, their angels stars (→1:20). Stars are created on Day 4 and the reference to lampstands comes in the fourth section of the description. Adam is created son of God on Day 6, and Jesus is said to come on clouds as Son of Man (= son of Adam) in the sixth part in each panel. As Son of Man, Jesus comes on clouds to claim and disperse the dominion of bestial empires (Daniel 7). “I am Alpha and Omega” and “I am First and Last” are both Sabbatical declarations, drawn from Isaiah’s prophecies about Israel’s second exodus reentry into the land of rest (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12).

The chapter also has a chiastic structure:

- A. Unveiling of Jesus Christ, vv. 1–3
 - B. John to churches, v. 4a
 - C. Grace from God who is, was, is coming, v. 4b
 - D. From Jesus, vv. 5–6a
 - E. Doxology, vv. 6b–c

D'. Jesus coming on clouds, pierced, v. 7

C'. Alpha/Omega; is, was, coming, v. 8

B'. John to churches, vv. 9–11

A' Jesus's initial unveiling, vv. 12–20 [12–16]

ἀποκαλύπτω means “uncover” or “unveil.” In the LXX, ἀποκάλυψις typically refers to a literal uncovering, the sexual uncovering of nakedness prohibited in Leviticus 18 and 20 or the uncovering of a woman's head as she stands before the priest in the rite of jealousy (Num. 5:18). In Revelation, this erotic connotation is very much in play, as the unveiling of Jesus occurs through the unveiling of his bridal city. In the NT (cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 40), the word is used metaphorically, describing the uncovering of some reality that could not be discerned before unveiled. The coming judgment will unveil God's righteousness (Rom. 2:5), clarifying the obscure operations of his justice. Paul eagerly awaits the unveiling of the sons of God (Rom. 8:19), the revelation of the true Israel. Jesus discloses God's secret about the inclusion of the Gentiles to Paul (Eph. 3:3). Unveiling comes through an abrupt intervention—in judgment, to transform creation, to show himself to Paul—as God intrudes “perpendicularly” into the “linear” sequence of history. This notion of apocalypse as “unveiling” will be a source of rich reflection not only about the gospel and the God of the gospel, but about the cultural, political, and philosophical issues that surround apocalypticism.

To offer, briefly, a few illustrations: Family systems often revolve around a secret, which may be known but suppressed or completely hidden from the majority of family members. Every family member takes up a role in relation, for instance, to the veiled alcoholism of one parent. Perverse systems such as this can be healed only by disruption, by an apocalyptic intrusion, which takes the form of an “unveiling” of the controlling secret (cf. Friedman 1985). Rene Girard has argued that pre-Christian paganism was likewise organized around veiled secrets. Unveiled by the cross of Jesus, the “scapegoat mechanism” could no longer function. The hidden indignities of Jim Crow laws were brought to visibility by the Civil Rights movement, an apocalyptic unveiling that reordered race relations in the United States (in still-complicated ways). Alexander Solzhenitsyn's exposure of the Soviet system of prison camps resulted in a shattering cognitive dissonance among Soviet sympathizers and apologists in the West and began to undo the Soviet system. Oscar Romero witnessed against the oppressions of the Salvadorean government, giving voice to torture victims whose shrieks of pain were unheard. Romero was killed celebrating Mass. What is crucial in all these contexts is not merely disruption but *unveiling* that takes the form of witness, often of martyrdom, as the unveiler is eliminated by the keepers of secrets. Apocalypse thus resonates with postmodern concerns about suspicion, masks, and unmasking.

The genitive of ἀποκάλυψις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is ambiguous: Is this an unveiling that Jesus *gives*, or is Jesus Christ the *object* of the unveiling? In the immediate context, Jesus is the one who unveils or reveals; when we consider the entire book, he is also the Unveiled. Jesus is first unveiled in chapter 1, but

unveiled fully only in the unveiling of his Bride (→21:1–22:5). The woman is the glory of the man, and Jesus's glory is his bride, the church, with whom he is one body. In this way, and in this way *only*, is the Son fully revealed. It is not good for the Last Adam to be alone, any more than the first. Revelation is a Genesis 2 story in which the Father constructs a Bride for his Son. The opening line of Revelation is the first hint of a profound *totus Christus* theology with ramifications for soteriology and ecclesiology as well as Christology.

The unveiling of Jesus includes unveiling of “things which must shortly take place.” The future is normally veiled. The past is no longer immediately in front of us, but we can pull the past into the present by memory, artifacts, and traces. We cannot recall the future, and the future has not as yet left its scars on the world. (Things are in fact more complicated than this; anticipated futures *do* affect the present. We will have the opportunity to return to this point.) We know the future as we know God, only by revelation, apocalyptic unveiling. Any knowledge of the future is apocalyptic in the literal sense of the word. This future can be unveiled to us only by a God who “is and was and is coming,” by a God who is both “Alpha and Omega” (1:4, 8), who embraces past and future. As noted (→Introduction), Revelation is organized in four sections by references to the Spirit. Each time John finds himself ἐν πνεύματι, something is unveiled: first Jesus, then the Father and his heavenly court, then the harlot, finally the bride. All this is incorporated into the “unveiling” of Jesus Christ in the unveiling of his imminent acts. In Jesus all things cohere. When he is unveiled, the hidden truth of *everything* is disclosed. The Spirit is the agent of unveiling; he searches the deep things of God in order to communicate them to the church. Through the Spirit, John unmask the powers to expose their bestiality.

John is not speaking of the future in general, or the distant future. What will be unveiled in the unveiling of Jesus are *specific* things that must take place ἐν τάχει.

As argued above (→Introduction), the NT is full of predictions of an imminent catastrophe. Weakening the time reference misrepresents Revelation, leads to contradictory and non-sensical readings, and makes it impossible for us to grasp the contribution the Apocalypse makes to our theology. Even among the best interpreters, the effort to sidestep this imminence ends in absurdities. Reddish (2001: 33) claims that John wrongly expected Rome's fall to happen soon, then adds that this *false* expectation “adds urgency” to his message—as a false code red adds spice to American public life. Mounce (1997: 41) claims that we should take “soon” straightforwardly, but immediately adds that “in the prophetic outlook the end is always imminent.” That is manifestly *not* straightforward; and it is also manifestly *untrue*. Daniel (12:4) is told to seal up prophecies until the end.

Deut. 11:17 and 28:20 both warn Israel that they will “perish quickly” (ἐν τάχει) from the land if they turn from Yahweh to other gods. John's use of

the phrase thus gives an early hint that Revelation will have regular recourse to Deuteronomy's thesaurus of cursing as it describes coming judgment and catastrophe. Both Deuteronomy passages describe curses that come "swiftly" against *Israel* in particular, curses of the covenant imposed on the covenant people, a clue that the curses unveiled in Revelation target the "land" and its inhabitants. Ps. 2:12 warns "kings" to do homage to the Son because his anger might kindle "quickly" (ἐν τάχει) and cause the kings to "perish." Psalm 2 employs the language of the Deuteronomic curses, but with significant variations. In the Psalm, the Son King rather than Yahweh himself carries out the punishment. "Turn" in Ps. 2:10–12 is addressed to *all* kings, whether Jew or Gentile, the kings of the nations who begin the Psalm in seething uproar. Yahweh's Son is "begotten" to be King of kings, a prophecy fulfilled in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (cf. Acts 13). From the opening verse, Psalm 2 sets the terms of the Apocalypse (as it will throughout, →11:15–18; →19:15–16). While focusing on judgments against the covenant people, Revelation issues a stern warning to *all* kings to "kiss the Son."

"What must take place" alludes to Dan. 2:28, but John reverses the sense of the original (Daniel 2 uses ἀποκαλύπτω five times [Aram. *gala*]; Beale 1999: 181). According to Daniel, "God has shown King Nebuchadnezzar what must take place in the last days." The crucial difference is the time reference. Daniel predicts the distant future; John sees and hears things that will happen "soon." What was sealed in the time of Daniel is unsealed for John. Making allowances for the change of time frame, Daniel's interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's vision sets the terms of John's visions. According to Daniel 2, God erects an imperial statue of various materials and then crushes it to powder when his own kingdom comes. The sequence of empires depicted in the dream starts with Nebuchadnezzar himself (Dan. 2:38), and the rest of the dream unfolds from the time of Daniel to the time of John. What is "about to happen" is the last stage of this vision. The kingdom of God has come, and it is about to demolish the order of ancient empire. Revelation is not merely about the fall of Jerusalem, but depicts the end of the imperial order of late antiquity, as that imperial order centers on Israel. Daniel interprets a dream about the latter days that end with the collapse of the imperial statue; John receives a vision about the same realities, but with the assurance that this catastrophe is *imminent*. The entire world system is about to collapse.

In Hebrew, *galah* ("uncover, unveil") is the normal word for exile (2 Kgs 15:29; 16:9; 17:6, 11, 23, 26–28; 24:14–15; 25:11, 21). Exile is an "uncovering" in several respects. The land is "uncovered." People are the glory-covering of a land; when they are removed, the land loses its glory and dress. When people are expelled, the land is left uncultivated, without plants, amber waves of grain, caretaking. The land returns to naked dust, clothed only with briars and thorns, inhabited by wild animals. Stripped of humans, the land is vulnerable to

desolation. Captured slaves are transported naked, or virtually so, and people are driven into exile stripped of their glory and treasures.

Theologically, exile strips off the covering of Yahweh's protection and covenant. Yahweh stretches the wing of his robe over his people but she does not obey him. She throws off her marital covering, exposing herself to her lovers, so Yahweh removes the covering completely. We may see this in sacrificial terms: Sacrifice covers, but only "inadvertencies" and confessed sins. High-handed sins are *uncovered* sins, shameful, exposed, unforgiven. When Israel covers herself by some other means than repentance and sacrifice, she is engaged in Adamic self-hiding and self-covering; she is hiding behind fig leaves, which only separates her from God and intensifies the very sin she seeks to hide (Kiuchi 2007: 204–209). When Israel goes into exile, the Lord removes the protection of sacrificial covering—literally, since he puts an end to sacrifice, and theologically because the Lord refuses to cover sin and shame. Exile comes when God determines to unveil Israel's sin in the sight of all.

In Revelation, the "apocalypse of Jesus Christ" includes not only his unveiling of his glory in his Bride, but also his exposure of Babylon's sins and the "uncovering" of the land in ultimate exile. Babylon is destroyed; she is also exposed (→18:24). The unveiling of Jesus is simultaneously the unveiling of wickedness. Light exposes the darkness, and the harlot is uncovered in the unveiling of Jesus in incarnate glory.

Verse 1 describes a *taxis* for the unveiling of all these hidden things—the hidden Christ, the hidden heaven, the hidden Bride, the hidden harlot, the hidden future. More precisely, it gives *two* descriptions, first a general structure and then a focused elaboration of one part of the general structure. The first arrangement is: From God to Jesus to the slaves. "God" means the Father, "him" must refer to the Son, and the slaves of Jesus are believers, followers, or disciples.

Revelation speaks a few times of those who "follow" Jesus (14:4; 19:14), but never of "disciples" or "believers." The word "saint" appears thirteen times, and the word "slave" is used fourteen (a double "Sabbath" of uses). In a few cases, "slave" occurs in passages where John is describing a judgment on all social classes, both "slave and free" (6:15; 19:18), or the fact that people from all social classes receive a mark from the beast (13:16). Usually, "slave" is a designation for a Christian, or for some special class within the church. Prophets are singled out as God's slaves (10:7; 11:18), and Moses the paradigmatic prophet is called a slave of God (15:3). John is a slave of God or of Christ (1:1). In the seven other instances, "slave" is a general designation of followers of Jesus, sometimes in the phrase "slaves of our God." They are marked on the forehead as a sign of protection and ownership. Slaves do not belong to themselves. Their time is not at their own disposal, and they are not free to do what they like. They do the work of their master. Their very breath and blood belong to him. "You are not your own," Paul says. "You were bought at a price." God's slaves fear and serve him (1:1; 2:20; 7:3; 19:2, 5; 22:3, 6). Slaves *worship*.

Revelation's use of "slave" is rooted in OT slavery rules. Jesus's blood releases us from our sins (1:5), a manumission that evokes the exodus. When Israel is delivered from slavery to Pharaoh, however, she becomes servants or slaves who do Yahweh's bidding and building. Through Jesus, the greater Moses who leads a new exodus, Yahweh incarnate employs his slaves on a new construction project.

On slaves, sacred slaves, and royal slaves in Greco-Roman civilization, see Aune (1997: 13, 16–17).

Jesus *receives* this apocalypse from the Father in order to “show” (δείξαι) it to the slaves. “Show” appears at the beginning of each of the last three visions (4:1; 17:1; 21:9-10): A showing in heaven, a showing of the harlot in the wilderness, a showing on the mountain of the bride descending from heaven. Slaves do not know what their master is doing, but Jesus the King discloses his works to the slaves, thereby treating slaves as King’s Friends (Jn 15:15).

The notion that the Son *receives* from the Father appears to put Jesus in a secondary, subordinate place in relation to the Father. But the notion that the Son receives from the Father is common in the NT and acknowledged by orthodox theologians throughout the centuries (e.g., Nicholas of Lyra in Krey 1997: 32). Because the Father has given all to his Son, the Son reveals himself and the Father, making known their mutual and exclusive knowledge of one another (Matt. 11:25-27). John the Baptist says that the Father gives all things into his Son’s hand out of his love (Jn 3:35), and Jesus says that the Father gives the Son to judge and to give life (John 5). At the end the Son will give all things to the Father, so that God may be all in all (1 Cor. 15:27-28; cf. Aune (1997: 12), on the Son’s receptiveness in the Gospel of John).

To say “the Son receives” is not an Arian “there was when the Son was not.” We should not infer that reception implies subordination; we should instead reason in the opposite direction: Receptivity exists within the eternal communion of the Triune God; receptivity is a mark of divine identity; and therefore receptivity is not itself a sign of ontological subordination. The Son *does* always already have all things in himself, but he has all things already in himself as *received* from the Father, because the gift from the Father to the Son is an *eternal* gift. The Son possesses *eternal* authority in the mode of reception, as the Father possesses it in the mode of conferral. Contrary to non-Christian assumptions about the “absolute,” Scripture teaches there is such a thing as *divine* receptivity. The life of the Trinity is a continuous circulation of gifts, of gifting and return gifting, a circulation that the Christian tradition describes in part under the heading of the eternal generation of the Son and the procession of the Spirit. Receptivity is a divine *attribute*, since the Father “receives” his Fatherhood from the Son whom he begets, and the Spirit receives his personal particularity as a gift of the Father and Son.

The Son receives “the unveiling” itself, apparently the capacity to unveil himself. The Father unveils himself in the Son; having received the capacity to unveil himself from the Father, the Son then unveils himself. The point is similar to Jesus’s claim in Matthew 11: The Father hands over all things to the Son, in particular the power to reveal himself to whomever he wills, the power to unveil himself as he pleases. The Son does only what he sees the Father doing (John 5). The Father unveils himself to and in the Son, and the

Son, seeing what the Father does, unveils himself to and in his slaves. The ultimate unveiling of the Son is the unveiling of the Bride. Both Father and Son unveil themselves in another. For the Son, the other in whom he unveils the fullness of his glory is a *created* other, but again the Son does what he sees the Father doing, since the Father unveils himself in the *incarnate* Son, in the uncreated Son who becomes a creature. As Eve is God's gift to Adam, so the Bride is the Father's gift to the Son, the bride that the Father promises to the Son, the Bride the Son wins by his love unto death. In giving the Bride, the Father also gives the unveiling, since it is in the Bride that the Son is revealed.

This may help us understand Matt. 24:36, where Jesus says that the Father alone knows the day and the hour of his parousia. When the Son is exalted, the Father gives the Son to show what must take place by giving the gift of the Spirit. When the Son enters into his glory, he is no longer a slave, and so the Father discloses to him what he is doing. In his exaltation, the Son receives the unveiling to show to the slaves when he receives the Spirit by whom he unveils himself.

Initially, John tells us that the unveiling is a gift of God to Jesus Christ, who shows it to his slaves. The next clause focuses on the second moment of gift-giving, unraveling it as a three-step process: Son→angel→John the slave. This elaborates *how* the Son who receives the unveiling from the Father delivers it to the slaves, inserting two additional mediators between Jesus and his slaves—"His angel" and "His slave, John." The whole scheme might be portrayed this way: Father→Son→angel→John→slaves.

"John" is the prophet who will see the visions and write them down, hear words and record them for the churches. Debate on the identity of John has gone on for centuries. I take the view that the prophet is John the apostle, the Beloved Disciple of Jesus, who wrote the Fourth Gospel and three epistles.

It seems highly speculative to go off, as scholars have long done, searching for alternatives. Many writers of the early church (Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, Hippolytus) state that the author of Revelation was John, the son of Zebedee, one of the Twelve and the Beloved Disciple of John's Gospel. Based on a somewhat obscure passage from Papias, Eusebius surmises that there were *two* Johns, one an Apostle and the other an "Elder," who split the Gospel and Apocalypse between them. Dionysius raised doubts about the identity of John the Seer, pointing to divergences of style and language between the Gospel and the Apocalypse. Dionysius's arguments were part of an a larger effort to deflate chiliasts by diminishing the prestige of the book (Mounce 1997: 13), but his arguments have enough persuasive power on their own to find acceptance among modern scholars (on the authorship question, see Aune (1997: xlvii–lvi)). To Dionysius's arguments, others have been added: John is never called an apostle, there is no indication that he knew Jesus, there is a tradition that John died early, and John speaks of the twelve apostles without identifying himself as a member of that group (Mounce 1997: 12–13).

These arguments do not, in my view, refute the identification of John the Evangelist with John the Seer. Stylistic comparisons are notoriously difficult, and scholars have sometimes downplayed the number and importance of shared words, phrases, and concepts between

John and the Apocalypse (Mounce 1997: 14). Claims to apostleship are stressed when they are challenged (as in 1–2 Corinthians), but John writes to his recipients with what appears to be undisputed authority. Aune (1997: liii) concludes that there's little evidence for the "traditional view," but only because he dismisses patristic tradition as evidence. The speculative character of the project is most evident in the opinion voiced by some scholars that "John" is an otherwise unknown prophet named John. It is a safe, because an irrefutable and unprovable, opinion.

At the very least, the case against John ben Zebedee is not decisive, and the identification is "entirely plausible" (Smalley 2013: 40; Mounce 1997: 15, agrees). The structural parallels between John and Revelation discussed in the introduction support this conclusion, as do specific allusions to the Gospel at the beginning of Revelation (see below).

Since the Apocalypse is structurally parallel to John's Gospel (→Introduction), John the Seer is linked with John the Baptist, who is prominent at the beginning of the Gospel (John 1:6, 15, 19, 26, 28, 32, 35, 40). Some have suggested that parts of Revelation emanate from John the Baptist and his "circle" (cf. Ford 1975). Though that is mistaken, the opening verses of Revelation *do* allude to John the Baptist. John comes from God (Jn 1:6), and John the Seer receives the unveiling from Jesus and his angel (1:1). John comes εἰς μαρτυρίαν in order to μαρτυρήσῃ (Jn 1:7), and John the seer is also said to witness the witness of Jesus (ἐμαρτύρησεν ... τὴν μαρτυρίαν). The Baptist comes to disclose the One who stands hidden among them through baptism (Jn 1:26–27), and John the Seer records the unveiling of Jesus. John the Baptist calls Jesus the Lamb of God (Jn 1:29, 36), and John the Seer sees a Lamb standing in heaven to receive the book from God (Revelation 5). John the Baptist calls Jesus the Bridegroom (Jn 3:27) and speaks of himself as a friend of the bridegroom; John the Seer sees the Bride. According to John the Baptist, belief in the Son leads to eternal life, but disbelief brings the wrath of God (Jn 3:36). John the Seer sees the wrath fall on enemies of the Lamb. John the Baptist was the forerunner to Jesus, preparing the way for the Word who unveils the Father. John the Seer begins in the "wilderness" of Patmos, the forerunner to a further advent, preparing the "Israel of God" for the coming of the Lord, raising valleys and lowering hills, recording Jesus's advent in his Bride.

The doubling of μαρτυρ- early in John's Gospel reappears twice at the end. The author insists he is a witness of the cross who gives true witness (Jn 19:35; ὁ ἑώρακὼς μεμαρτύρηκεν, καὶ ἀληθινὴ αὐτοῦ ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία), and later claims to be the one who "witnesses" the things he writes and therefore knows that his witness is true (Jn 21:24; Οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ μαθητὴς ὁ μαρτυρῶν ... καὶ οἶδαμεν ὅτι ἀληθὴς αὐτοῦ ἡ μαρτυρία ἐστίν). Within John's Gospel, this double phrase links back to the prologue; John the Baptist was the first witness, but by the end of the book the Beloved Disciple has taken over that role, a transfer of testimony from John to John.

Revelation too begins and ends with references to a witness named John. John “witnesses the witness of Jesus Christ” (1:2; Ἰωάννη, ὃς ἐμαρτύρησεν ... τὴν μαρτυρίαν). At the end, John again testifies to testimony by doubling the martyr language: John and Jesus both “witness” (22:16, 18). John’s Gospel begins with testimony to testimony, and ends with the same phrasing twice. Revelation begins with testimony to testimony, and ends with Jesus and John testifying to the truth of their witness. It is striking support for the notion that John and Revelation share the same basic structure.

More intriguingly still: John and Revelation form a single text, chiastically structured, with the end of the Gospel nestled in the center cheek-by-jowl with the beginning of Revelation. The Gospel’s closing references to John’s testimony feed structurally into the declaration of Rev. 1:2 that John is the one who *testifies* the *testimony* of Jesus. When we read John and Revelation sequentially, we go from “this disciple who witnesses these things ... and true is his witness” to “John, who witnesses ... the witness of Jesus Christ, everything that he saw.” The reference to “sight” in Rev. 1:2 reaches back to Jn 19:35, where John claims to have “seen and has testified.” That is a dramatic connection, and suggests the possibility that John the Seer *deliberately* introduces himself as the witness whose earlier testimony is found in the Fourth Gospel. The identifying clause of Rev. 1:2 (arguably) refers specifically to the Gospel itself. ἐμαρτύρησεν is aorist, odd if it refers to visions that John is *about* to show. And the phrase “the Word of God and the witness/testimony of Jesus” is a decent summary of the Gospel of John: John writes of the Word who was with and was God, and testifies to his faithful testimony. This John to whom the angel reveals things that must shortly take place is the *same* John who witnesses the Word of God who became flesh and the testimony of Jesus in life and death, who witnesses truthfully to everything that he sees—it is *that* John, *that* trustworthy witness, who receives and sends on the unveiling of Jesus. The John who sees the faithful and true witness of Jesus the Martyr is now given to see visions of the witnesses to Jesus, following in the way of the Lamb.

Bede (2011:114) connects “witness” in Revelation 1 to the Word made flesh in Jn 1:14. See also Smalley (2005: 30): John’s role in Revelation “echoes that of the beloved disciple” in the Gospel.

“Witness” is a common term and a large theme in the Gospel of John.

Barrett (1988: 159) observes,

The Baptist (1.7f, 15, 32, 34; 3:26; 5:33), the Samaritan woman (4.39), the works of Jesus (5.36; 10.25), the Old Testament (5.39), the multitude (12.17), the Holy Spirit and the apostles (15.26f.), God the Father himself (5.32, 37; 8.18), all bear witness to Jesus. Jesus himself ... bears witness to the truth (18.37; cf. 3.11), in conjunction with the Father (8.13–18) whose consistent testimony validates his own. Witnesses

in turn testify to the truth of the gospel record ... In 18.23 the accusers of Jesus are invited to bear witness regarding the evil he is alleged to have done, that is, to establish by their testimony the fact alleged. This is normal Greek usage, it corresponds to the use of the root *ʿwd* in the Old Testament (which also supplies the notion of God's testimony to, or against, his people), and is the common meaning of the words in John.

As in the OT, the witnesses in John's Gospel not only testify to *facts* but *advocate* for the truth. They do not pretend to offer neutral evidence. They aim to *persuade*. Jesus's witness and advocacy continues after he departs, with the apostles both serving as eye-witnesses of the things Jesus did *and* as advocates for him, inspired and assisted by the Spirit, who also "serves in the dual role of witness and advocate" (Trites 2004: 85).

In the Gospel and Revelation, "witness" involves more than verbal testimony. Jesus's entire life, trial, death, and resurrection are testimony. Likewise, in Rev. 2:13, Antipas is a faithful witness because he keeps faith to the death. *Μάρτυρία* does not yet have the connotation of "martyrdom" but in Revelation it has to do with testimony in the face of threats and with the potential of death. We may put it more strongly: Antipas witnesses *by* his death. In this, Jesus is the model witness. He speaks truth faithfully to death, and that is the witness that he calls the church to imitate (2:10, 13; 3:14). Already in John, *μάρτυς* begins to take on its later connotation of someone who dies for the faith. Revelation takes that further. It is a summons to the saints to witness in a context where witness may take the form of martyrdom.

As Richard Hays (2012) argues,

"[T]he testimony of Jesus" must include the memory or message of Jesus' own faithful suffering and death. This is suggested first of all by the interesting fact that the martyr Antipas in Pergamum is described as *ὁ μάρτυς μου, ὁ πιστός μου* (2:13)—precisely echoing Revelation's programmatic description of Jesus himself as *ὁ μάρτυς ὁ πιστός* (1:5). It is likewise noteworthy that the martyred souls in Revelation 6:9 are said to have been slaughtered (*ἐσφαγμένων*) on account of their testimony—precisely the same verb used to describe the identity of the slaughtered Lamb in 5:6, 9, 11 ... Here is an unmistakable statement that the 'testimony' that conquers evil is not merely a verbal message; instead, it is an embodied testimony, enacted through a confession that refuses the way of violence and undergoes death, just as Jesus did, at the hands of earthy powers.

Jesus conquers, as John's gospel says, by being lifted on the cross and drawing all men to himself (Jn 12:32–33; 16:33), and the saints follow him in his way of victory.

Citing Caird (1966: 17–18), Smalley (2005: 30) writes that the forensic setting of Revelation is even more realistic [than in the Gospel]. Jesus was on trial before Pilate the Roman governor: and the adherents of John's community may have to appear before a Roman judge, and certainly will do so if they are martyred. Their earthly Christian witness, however, will be evidence heard in the court of heaven, presided over by a God whose discrimination is true and just (Rev. 19.2).

The fact that Jesus predicts things that later come to pass is a witness in his favor. He predicts his death, and the manner of his death, his resurrection, Judas's treachery, Peter's denial, the gift of the Spirit, persecutions for his disciples. He does this "so that when it takes place you may believe" (14:29). Revelation is a witness to Jesus in the same way. Jesus shows John things about what must shortly take place; he testifies to what he has seen; when the things come to pass, it is proof that he was a prophet and that Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords.

To grasp the full scope of the testimony of Jesus and the witnesses of Revelation, we need to see it in the context of the "trial of nations" described in Isaiah 40–55. God takes the stand as the accused. He brings heaven and earth as witnesses to his faithfulness. Israel too is a witness, often in spite of herself: Her very unfaithfulness throws the utter faithfulness of Yahweh into high relief. As true Israel, Jesus comes as the ultimate witness in this cosmic trial, testifying verbally to the faithfulness of God, and just as importantly, giving testimony to the death-defying love of God by his subjection to suffering and death. His resurrection is the capstone of his testimony to the nations and their gods, since his resurrection demonstrates the justice of the Father who rescues the humble and righteous even from the grave. It is testimony to a Love that is stronger than death.

Trites (2004: 79–80) finds parallels between the use of witness in the Fourth Gospel and that found in Isaiah 40–55 (cf. Lincoln 2000):

There the controversy between Yahweh and the false gods turns out to be a lawsuit between God and the world. God is represented by Israel and the world by the pagan nations. Similarly, in the Fourth Gospel God incarnate has a lawsuit with the world. His witnesses include John the Baptist, the scriptures, the words and works of Christ, and later the witness of the apostles and the Holy Spirit. They are opposed by the world, represented by the unbelieving Jews. In Isaiah 40–55 the debate is over the claims of Yahweh as the Creator, the only true God and the Lord of history . . . ; in John it is over the Messiahship and divine Sonship of Jesus. . . John, like his Old Testament counterpart, has a case to present, and for this reason he advances his arguments, challenges his opponents and presents his witnesses after the fashion of the Old Testament legal assembly.

Trites (2004: 84) observes that the ultimate silence of the witnesses against Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is similar to the silence of the nations in Isaiah 40–55. The pagan gods or the nations that represent them are called to witness, but they say nothing. They "neither see nor know" (44:9) and thus present no testimony: "Accordingly, by their silence the nations, who function as the legal representatives of the false gods, acknowledge that Yahweh has won the lawsuit." By contrast, Israel is a garrulous witness on Yahweh's behalf (43:10, 12; 44:8), and this links to "Yahweh's own refusal elsewhere in the Old Testament to keep silent in court when acting as a witness or judge (Ps. 50:3–7; Mal. 3:5)." In John, Jesus is the Father's agent in "the cosmic lawsuit with the world."

The Gospel of John is a series of episodes in a long trial. Jesus seems to be in the dock, but it gradually becomes clear that Israel and the Gentiles are accused and finally condemned. Revelation is even more obviously a trial. Jesus is the

model for the witness-judges of Revelation, sitting in judgment on Pilate even as Pilate interrogates and appears to judge him. Before it is all over, suffering witnesses have been made judges. Their testimony is persuasive, not only in word but in faithful action even to death. Because their testimony is utterly persuasive, they condemn their accusers by their witness (→20:4-6). John begins “in the beginning” and ends with an “It is finished!” as it moves from Gen. 1:1 to Gen. 1:2-4. But this new-creation story continues in Revelation, finally concluded when the martyrs sit, like Jesus, on thrones of judgment.

Jesus is Word and witness. He comes as the self-expression of God, and that Word is not a blank slate, indistinct white noise. The word takes flesh, and that flesh articulates a plot. What God says in his incarnate Word is not merely “I come,” but “I come to say and do *this*, and most especially to give faithful witness in My trial, crucifixion, and resurrection.” God discloses himself in what the Son *does* as well as in who the Son *is*. So too the witnesses to the Chief Witness: Jesus unveils himself not only in the words spoken by his witnesses, but in the cruciform shape of their lives and deaths. As much as Jesus, they are witnesses in life as much as in word.

So much for John, witness and seer. Who is the “angel” who mediates between Jesus and the slaves? The word “angel” is used over seventy times in Revelation. Seventy is the number of the nations in Scripture (Genesis 10), and the numerology suggests an association with the “angels of the nations.” Context aside, ἄγγελος simply means “messenger,” and can refer to either spiritual beings or humans. Sometimes, Revelation’s angels are clearly spirit angels, heavenly servants of God who blow trumpets, pour out bowls, and show John harlots and brides. Sometimes, I argue below (→1:20), “angels” are pastors and leaders of the saints who tabernacle in heaven. Angels are central to Revelation’s depiction of the transition from old to new. The old covenant is an angelic covenant. Torah is delivered through angels (Hebrews 1–2; Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:13), and Yahweh’s presence with Israel is mediated through the Angel of Yahweh. Revelation depicts the transition from an angelic to a new human covenant. Twenty-four Ancient Ones bow down and throw their crowns before the throne, by the end of the book the saints are on thrones, the glorified humanity of witnesses.

The angel of 1:1 is often understood as an apocalyptic “directing angel,” the angel who shows and reveals things to John, like the angels in Zechariah. In most of Revelation, however, John does *not* receive revelation from a directing angel (Aune 1997: 15–16). One of the Ancient Ones speaks to him in 5:5, and he has a brief exchange with an Ancient One in 7:13-14. He receives a

commission as prophet from an angel in in chapter 10, and then a bowl angel shows the final two visions (17:1; 21:9). If 1:1 refers to guiding angels, then the unveiling occurs only to these portions of the book. Yet 1:1 seems to be a statement about the entire book. In what sense is the Apocalypse as a whole revealed through an *angel*?

When we stare at the text, we see some breadcrumbs that seem to trace a path. First, this is one of two places in Revelation that use the phrase “*His angel*.” In Revelation 1, it is clearly *Jesus’s* angel. In 22:6, the antecedent of τὸν ἄγγελον αὐτοῦ is harder to determine. Who is the “Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets”? Maybe Jesus, maybe the Father. In either case, though, the angel is the angel *of God*. Here 22:16 is relevant, since Jesus claims to have sent “*My angel*” to witness (τὸν ἄγγελόν μου μαρτυρῆσαι), echoing Yahweh’s promise that ὁ ἄγγελός μου will go before Israel into the land (Exod. 23:23; 32:34). When the OT mentions “Yahweh’s Angel,” it refers to the Second Person of the Trinity, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Son who later became flesh (Gen. 24:7, 40; Dan. 3:28; 6:22). But if *Jesus* has an “angel,” then it seems that the Second Person has an angel, as well as the First.

Many early Christian writers identify the Angel of Yahweh with the Son, but Augustine famously leaves the question open: The angel of Yahweh might be any of the persons (*On the Trinity*). Yet there are exegetical and theological reasons to make the identification. Exegetically, the Angel appears as a man several times (Genesis 18; Ezekiel 1; Daniel), suggesting an identity with the One who will become man. The angel of Yahweh is clearly a divine figure (e.g., Gen. 21:17–20; 31:11–13; Judg. 13:3–23), yet he can engage Yahweh in conversation (Zech. 1:12–17). The OT, in short, points to a personal differentiation within Yahweh. How are we to reason Trinitarianly about this exegetical evidence? There is an eternal pattern to the Triune life. The Word is *always* the self-expression of the Father, always God with God as God. If God speaks in the OT, he speaks in the Son. That is the way God speaks. It would violate this theological pattern if the Father revealed himself in some *other*.

Human beings possess “angels.” When Peter appears at the door after being sprung from prison, the believers in the house think it is Peter’s “angel,” his ghost or spirit, the “messenger” that comes from Peter but is not Peter in the flesh (Acts 12:15). Jesus speaks of little ones whose angels “continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). That may refer to guardian angels, but it may also refer to the “souls” of little ones gathered before the Father. In any case, Acts 12 indicates that the spirit of a man can be described as an angel. We might hypothesize that Jesus’s angel is his Spirit, the messenger that comes from him but is not exactly identical to him, the messenger that is not Jesus in flesh yet *is* Jesus’s presence. That is, Jesus’s angel is *the* Spirit, the Holy Spirit. In the old covenant, the Son appeared as the Angel of Yahweh. With the coming of the new covenant, the Angel of Yahweh sends his own Angel, the Angel of Jesus, who is the Spirit of God. Even in

the new covenant, we are under “angelic” oversight, but the Angel who now governs the church is the Angel who is God himself.

ἀποστείλας (1:1) fits this hypothesis: The Son sends the Spirit (Jn 15:26), as he sends the angel; the Spirit testifies of Jesus, as John testifies concerning the word of God and the witness of Jesus. As noted above (→Introduction), the Spirit is the agent of the four main visionary sequences in Revelation, and that is anticipated by the reference to Jesus’s Angel-Spirit. Identifying the Angel as the Spirit completes the Trinitarian sequence of the unveiling. The unveiling originates from the Father, who gives to the Son, and Jesus communicates this unveiling through his Angel-Spirit who communicates to his slave John. The unveiling of Jesus Christ is *given* by the Father, *shown* and sent by the Son, *signified* through the Spirit (on pneumatology in the Apocalypse generally, see Bauckham 2000: 150–73; 1993: 109–25).

ἐσήμανεν is worth consideration. God communicates to John and to the other slaves in signs and symbols (Jordan 1999a: 15). The apocalypse is not “plain speech.” The verb again links the apocalypse to the Gospel of John, where Jesus’s miracles are “signs” like the signs that Moses performed in Egypt, the signs and wonders by which Israel was redeemed (cf. Smalley (2005: 27), who also links John and Revelation on this point). John’s Gospel records the signs that Jesus *began* to do. Revelation records the signs that Jesus *continued* to perform after his exaltation.

The distribution of signs is significant in both John and Revelation (Ford 1975: 374). All the enumerated signs in John’s gospel occur in the first half of the gospel. Σημεῖον is used seventeen times in the Gospel, but only once after chapter 12 (in 20:30). Revelation uses the word seven times, all of them *after* chapter 12 (12:1, 3; 13:13–14; 15:1; 16:14; 19:20). Hence the signs of John and Revelation fit together as follows:

Book of first signs, John 1–11

[No signs: John 12–Revelation 11]

Book of last signs, Revelation 12–22

The numerology of the usage is highly suggestive; 17 is the gematria of the Hebrew *kabod*, “glory” (Labuschagne 2000), and when we add the 17 uses in John to the 7 in Revelation, we arrive at 24, a “double Israel” of signs.

Before John introduces himself and gives his reason for writing, he pronounces a blessing (v. 3), the first of seven blessings or beatitudes in Revelation. A blessing is pronounced on those who die in the Lord from henceforth (14:13), another on those who watch for the Lord and keep their garments close so they will not be caught naked, or poorly dressed like Adam (16:15). The fourth is a blessing on those summoned to the marriage supper

of the Lamb (19:9), and the fifth on those who have a part in the first resurrection, which protects them against the power of the second death and makes them priests and kings. Then, 22:7 reverts to a blessing similar to the first one, a blessing on those who keep or guard the sayings of the prophecy in the book, and 22:14, finally, pronounces a blessing on those who keep their clothes clean. *Seven* suggests a connection with the days of creation: As Yahweh blessed the creation, so he blesses those who share in the new creation. That creation motif comes out explicitly in the final *makarism*, which promises the tree of life to those who have access to Jerusalem.

The first blessing is double, pronounced to those who read the prophecy *and* those who hear. John's blessing envisions a public reading and hearing, not a private one (cf. Luke 4:16; Acts 13:27; 15:21). It is a blessing on the "communication process itself" (Aune 1997: 11). There is no human guarantee that John's book will be received by hearers or readers. The text reaches its target only under the blessing of God. Hearing is fulfilled as hearing only when it is fulfilled in obedience: Not hearers alone but doers are blessed. John emphasizes that the ones who hear and "*keep*" (τηρέω) the words are blessed. Keep implies "to do" but also carries the connotation of guarding, treasuring, valuing. Those who receive John's message are to store it up and keep it safe.

John describes his book as a prophecy, a term he repeats seven times in Revelation. It refers to the written text that John produces (1:3; 22:7, 10, 18, 19), the prophetic activity of the two witnesses (11:6), and the testimony of Jesus as the Spirit of prophecy (19:10). Other forms of προφητ- are used another fourteen times in the book, referring to a prophetess (2:20), to the prophets of Jesus (10:7; 11:18), and the activity of John himself (10:11) or other prophets (11:3, 6, 10). Prophecy is "future-telling," but not only that. A prophet is a member of the Lord's council, an officer of the court who has the privilege of hearing Yahweh's pronouncements and delivering them to the people of God, and of bringing the people's complaints before God. The prophet has access to God's secret counsels, and so can be a witness to things uncovered because he has been behind the veil, before the throne (Heschel 2007).

John has said that things are going to happen soon (v. 1), and he reiterates that the "time is near" (v. 3). A καιρός (→10:6) is coming, an event of crisis (cf. Smalley 2005: 31; Koester 2015: 214; Aune 1997: 21), near to his own time. John *cannot* be talking about an apocalypse that is still future for us, who live 2,000 years after he writes. He brings a prophecy of the near future, announcing an end that is also a new beginning. He announces an unveiling that has taken place, the unveiling of a new world that began long ago, an apocalypse that is, for us, not future but past.

John to seven churches

Joannes to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from he who is and who was and who comes, and from the seven Spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, the witness faithful, the firstborn of the dead and the Arche of the kings of the land, To the one who loves us and loosed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests to God and his Father: To him be the glory and the power unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Behold he comes with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, even those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the land will mourn over Him. Yes, Amen.

I AM the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord, the God who is and who was and who comes, the Pantokrator.

—Rev. 1:4-7

John introduces himself and blesses his readers. He writes to the seven actual churches in Asia Minor to address challenges and dangers in those particular churches at that particular time. Revelation as a whole is a pastoral letter, incorporating pastoral letters. It is symbolically significant, of course, that there are *seven* churches. Seven is the number of creation. Jesus speaks a sevenfold word to the seven churches, a word that will bring them into the new creation. And of course, Revelation is relevant to the whole church of the first century and to the full church throughout the ages, but we accurately grasp its relevance to us if we first understand its relevance to first-century Asia.

Rarely mentioned in the OT, Asia comes to prominence in the NT. Asians oppose Stephen's preaching (Acts 6:9), Paul travels throughout Asia on various missionary trips (16:6; 19:10, 22), creating such mayhem that the Ephesians consider him a threat to the whole province (19:26-27). Paul greets the churches of Asia in various letters (Rom 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:19), but his ministry in Asia is troubled (2 Cor. 1:8). The gospel goes to the Jew first, and then to the Greek. That sequence is the geographic movement of the apostolic mission and of Paul's mission in particular. When traveling in Gentile territories, he first visits synagogues, and, if rejected, forms a break-off body of Jesus-followers. For Paul, Asia represents a liminal region between Judea/Jew and Rome/Gentile, the region where Jew and Gentile will first be knit together into one new man.

John's focus on Asia mimics Paul's: Paul wrote to seven Gentile cities (Rome, Corinth, Galatia, Ephesus, Philippi, Colossae, Thessaloniki), and then, according to patristic tradition, to the Hebrews. John delivers Jesus's messages to seven churches of Asia, then delivers a much longer message concerning Babylon, the great city where the Lord was crucified

(→11:7-8). The canonical ordering of Paul's letter is significant. Though he goes to the Jew first, then to the Greek, his letters are arranged in the opposite order: Asia →Hebrews. The collection of Pauline correspondence reflects the promise of Romans 11, which completes the progress of Jew→Gentile with the promise that the conversion of the Gentiles will circle back to bring in the Jews: Jew→Gentile→all Israel.

John's visions tell the same story: God's revelation to Israel is assumed; John writes to the seven churches of Asia, but the bulk of the book describes what is about to happen in the *land*, overshadowed by the promise of 1:7: "every eye will see him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the land will mourn." John depicts a judgment on Babylon/Jerusalem, the martyrdom of Jewish Christians (→7:1-8; →14:17-20), the lamentation of the rulers and merchants of the land (→18:9-20), and the dedication of the kings of the land to new Jerusalem (→21:24). Thus is all Israel saved.

There is a cosmological dimension to Asia as well. God creates heaven and earth in three zones: heaven, firmament, earth. In the first century, this order is replicated on earth with modifications: Judea is the heavenly land, Rome the capital of the earthly *oikoumene*, Asia Minor the firmament between. It is no accident that the "angels" of the churches are "stars" in the firmament of Asia (1:20). Alternatively, the original creation order is divided into firmament (a visible heaven), earth, and sea. Again, the order of the first century is mapped onto this order: Judea the heavenly land, Rome the surging Gentile sea, and Asia the earth between.

In Genesis, *earth* is divided into three zones as well: Garden, land, and world. In the garden, Adam communes with God in worship; in the land Cain works with and kills his brother Abel; and in the world the sons of God are seduced by the daughters of men. Again, there is a first-century variation: Judea is the Edenic garden, the place of worship in God's world; Asia Minor the land of brother-brother relations, where Cain struggles with Abel and Jacob with Esau; Rome the world where the people of God encounter strangers and are tempted to intermarry with them. Within Revelation, the churches of Asia Minor are also caught in the middle of a battle between Jew and Gentile (→Introduction). A beast arises from the sea (Rome) and another from the land (Judea), and in between are the endangered churches of Asia. When the harlot (Jerusalem) is destroyed and burned by the beast (Rome), the churches of Asia are left to begin anew. Asia becomes the site where the one new man constructed from Jew and Gentile takes form.

After the identification of the recipients of his letter, John pronounces a benediction that resembles the benedictions of the Pauline letters. Grace is favor that leads to peace, favor that produces the abundant life and harmony that is the biblical definition of peace. The blessing comes from God, but John's naming of God is complex. On the surface, it looks Trinitarian. Grace and peace come from a triple source, marked by three prepositional phrases: ἀπὸ ... ἀπὸ ... ἀπὸ. There are explicit references to the Spirit and

Jesus, and that implies that the first source of grace and peace, the “one who is, was, comes” must be the Father, “who encompasses in himself the beginning, the middle and the end of all things” (Andrew of Caesarea 2011: 115).

The blessing implicitly evokes the entire history of Jesus and the Spirit. The Father sent the Son as the incarnation of his eternal favor, as the incarnate Decree of God, and he sent his Son with a sword to war until he made peace. The Father and Son send the Spirit as the living and lively grace of God, the grace that comes from the exalted grace of Jesus. The Spirit too comes to bring peace to the earth, to bring order and harmony to the world. When the Spirit of the Son descends, the peace of God descends, but he makes peace by convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Filled out Trinitarianly, “grace and peace” mean this: To establish peace on earth, the Father gives the Son and together with the Son gives the Spirit.

Yet the name is unusual. For starters, though a Trinitarian formula, the order is odd: Father, Spirit, Son, not, as in the creeds, Father, Son, Spirit. “Father, Spirit, Son” is the order of incarnation, since the Son is conceived by the overshadowing Spirit (Luke 1). According to Luke, the entire ministry of Jesus is driven by the Spirit who descended on him at his baptism. Jesus was God the Son prior to his baptism, but the *declaration* of his Sonship occurs at his baptism (Lk. 3:21–22; cf. Psalm 2). The same Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness and empowers him to withstand the temptations of Satan. It is through the “finger” or “Spirit” of God that Jesus casts out demons. Jesus is the *obedient* Son by the power of the Spirit. In John’s Gospel (3:5–8), *Jesus* is the one “born of the Spirit,” whose voice is heard but whose origins and destiny are unknown. As Jesus comes to the cross, he tells the disciples that the Father is his “Abba,” a filial relation in the Spirit (cf. Gal. 4:4–8). Jesus is “declared Son of God according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead” (Rom. 1:4; 8:11). The Father raises the Son by the Spirit just as the Father sent the Son through the Spirit, and just as the Son lived faithfully before the Father by the Spirit, and just as the Son obeyed until death through the Spirit. The Spirit enables the Son to be the agent of the new creation, of resurrection life, of life after life after death. Throughout this history, the Father acts on and gives to the Son through the Spirit. Father, Spirit, Son.

Redemption follows the contours of this Trinitarian economy. We receive the Spirit so that we can be conformed to Christ the Son. Through Jesus, God has delivered us from the flesh and from death, so we may live in the Spirit (Rom. 8:9). The Father raises us through the Spirit to a new life in Christ (Rom. 7:6; 1 Thess. 4:7–8). The Spirit is the “spirit of Sonship” who enables us to join in Jesus’s address to his “Abba” (Gal. 4:4–8). Through the Spirit, we are made sons, and if sons, then heirs. Through the Spirit, we are brought into the Triune community as sons, or, to change the image, as the bride, one

body with the Son. We are new Adams created by the Spirit. We are new creations, over which the Spirit has hovered. We are the dry bones revived by the *voiced* word of the Father, by the Wind-empowered Word of the Father. The Father who eternally begets the Son through the Spirit now begets sons from sinners through the same Spirit. The advent of the Son comes by the Spirit by whom also is the advent of sons. Thus: Father, Spirit, sons.

This pattern is evident also in the OT. The Word that speaks the world into existence is the Word vocalized by the hovering Spirit. Adam is formed from the dust of the ground, and God breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and so the dust becomes the human son of God, God's image and likeness. By the Spirit, *adamah* becomes *adam*. When Israel, God's son, is a field of dry bones, the prophet prophesies to the bones, and the wind of God brings them to life. Yahweh, Spirit, Israel.

We may reason from the economy to the ontology. According to Scripture and the creeds, the Father eternally begets the Son; the Son is the “only-begotten of the Father” (Jn 1:14). If the incarnation reveals the relation of Father and Son, we may say that the Father eternally begets the Son *through the Spirit*. The Spirit is the Love by which the Father begets the Son, the Love through which the Son loves the Father. The Spirit is the breath by which the Father generates the Son who will become Last Adam. Since the Father is the Father only because he has a Son, the Spirit through whom the Father begets the Son makes the Father Father, even as, being the agent of begetting, he makes the Son Son. Through the Spirit who proceeds from Father and Son, Father and Son receive their personal properties and relations, as Father and Son. Father, Spirit, Son highlights the ontological Trinity as a communion of *mutually dependent* Persons.

Here I follow the arguments of Thomas Weinandy (2011), who claims that the Spirit is the person who “persons” the other two persons:

The Son is Son because, having been begotten by the Father in the Spirit of sonship, he loves the Father as the Son. This act of filial love, enacted in the Spirit of sonship, is what makes him the Son. This means that the Father is the Father not only because he begets the Son, but also because, in the begetting of the Son, the Son loves the Father, and so as Son helps constitute the Father as Father. The Father would not be Father unless he had a Son who loved him as Son. Now the cornerstone which holds together this fatherly act of lovingly begetting the Son and this filial act of the Son loving the Father is provided by the action of the Spirit. (73)

Weinandy argues, with Aquinas, that the relations distinguish the persons from one another, but he goes further to suggest that these relations are not merely “relations of opposition,” but also “complementary relations.” He roots this complementarity in the work of the Spirit. The Spirit, he concludes, does not have a distinct name because “he subsists precisely as the one in whom the Father and Son are named.” Only through the Spirit is the Father in complementary relation to the Son, and the Son subsists in relation to the Father only through the Spirit:

The Holy Spirit is the hidden or unnamed person or “who” because the very nature of his subjectivity as a subsistent relation is to illuminate or, more deeply, to substantiate or person the Father and the Son for one another. It could even be said that the Holy Spirit is the most personal of the Trinitarian persons, and thus the most relational in his subjectivity, because he is the most translucent and transparent. Through him the Father and Son eternally gaze upon one another in love.

The order of persons is not the only thing odd about John’s blessing. The names of the Persons are unusual. The whole blessing of Rev. 1:4–6 is triadic. In addition to the triad of the Father, Spirit, and Son, the Father is identified as a triad, and the Son by two triads, first of titles then of actions. More oddly still, the Spirit is not a triad but a septad.

Father	Trinity	Jesus’s titles	Jesus’s actions
Is	He who is	faithful witness	loves us
Was	seven Spirits	firstborn from dead	released from sins by blood
To come	Jesus Christ	ruler of kings	made us kingdom

Mangina (2010: 42–3) suggests that John’s blessing indicates that the Triune God is “fractal,” since each person displays the triunity of the whole divine being.

ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος is odd. The LXX names God with ὁ ὢν (Jer. 1:6; 4:10; 14:13), and variations of this triple name appear in pagan Greek texts, including magical papyri (Aune 1997: 30–2). Yet this specific form is used only in Revelation, where it appears several times in somewhat variant forms (1:4, 8; ➔11:17). Since it is a triadic formula, we might suspect that it is a name for the whole Trinity—the Father as source, the Son as agent, the Spirit as the coming one of the future. In Revelation 1, however, it names the Father alone, since it is followed by the Spirit and the Son. The Father is not three Persons, but the Father does have a triple identity as One present, Source of all past, and One who comes in judgment and welcome. He contains the chiasm of history in himself—source, center, and end. In the beginning, he spoke the world through his Word and Spirit; in the middle of history, he sent the Son by the Spirit, then gave the Son the Spirit to send; and at the end, all things will be delivered up to him, so that God may be all in all: The Father in the Son and Spirit who are in him; the Father through the Son and Spirit in all things that are in him.

The name is grammatically unusual. Normally the preposition ἀπό governs a genitive noun, but instead John writes a series of participial phrases in the nominative. Ungrammatically, but accurately, I have translated the phrase, “Grace and peace from he who is and who was and who comes.” The

Father is not placed into an “object” position; he is subject. He is never an object, but always the acting subject. He conjugates, but he does not decline (cf. Smalley 2005: 32).

The nominative case suggests that the title of the Father is a *name*. It also suggests an ontology, and a theology of God-and-time. As Beale (1999: 188) points out, it is a transformation of the covenant name “Yahweh” (Exod. 3:14), and also draws on triple designations of God is Isaiah (41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12). But God is not described as timeless but inhabiting, governing, and encompassing all time. As John takes it, in saying “I am,” God names himself by temporal reference. God is not bound to or subject to time. He is subject to *nothing* but himself. Yet by naming himself “He who is, was, and comes,” he indicates that time is the ectype of which the Triune life is the archetype. The God of the future here is not pictured as a God who is waiting immovably at the end, but a God who *comes*, the future God rushing constantly toward us. As Boring (1989) puts it, this shows that God’s activity is inherent in his being or name. He is not merely the one who “is, was, will be”; the verbs are not merely verbs of being and God is not “Being itself.” It is not as if God is, and then acts. For God, to be *is* to act, to be *is* to come. When God comes, he does not deny but *reveals* his essence as God. In advent and arrival, he is who he is, the God who comes. This is Jewish Trinitarian monotheism!

The heptamerous name of the Spirit is also odd.

Some doubt that “seven Spirits” are identical to the Holy Spirit. Aune (1997: 33–6) claims the arguments in favor of that identification as “artificial and unconvincing” (34), and Mounce (1997: 48) sees the seven spirits as a “part of a heavenly entourage” connected to the Lamb. Smalley (2005: 33) presents the evidence in favor of the identification. The most obvious argument is that “grace and peace” is a gift of God, and therefore the “seven Spirits” who, with the Father and Son, give grace and peace must be divine. Interpreting the seven Spirits as the Holy Spirit supports the designation of Jesus’s Angel as the Spirit. The order of unveiling is: God→Jesus→Angel/Spirit→John, and the order of blessing is: God→Spirit→Jesus.

There is OT precedence for the notion of “seven Spirits.” The hovering Spirit of Gen. 1:2 forms the formless void into a cosmos over the course of a week. He pulses in seven evenings-and-mornings, forming the sevenfold rhythm of the universe (Wilcock 1984: 62–3). In Zechariah 4, the seven lamps are the seven eyes of God, and Revelation 5:6 identifies the Lamb’s seven eyes with the seven Spirits. Zechariah’s vision hints at this identification of lambs and Spirits by emphasizing that the Spirit will enable Israel to rebuild the temple. Isa. 11:2 describes the sevenfold gift the Spirit will bestow on the Messiah—the Spirit of Yahweh, wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, and the fear of Yahweh (Victorinus 2011: 1; Apringius 2011: 24). The seven Spirits is the Spirit of creation, the eyes of God, the Spirit who empowers the Messiah and the Messianic people.

We must not conclude that the Father is a triple personality simply because he is given this triple name, and the Spirit is not seven *Persons*. But the Spirit *is* a seven, and he works in rhythms of seven. At the creation, the Spirit formed the world in a sevenfold sequence; he filled Bezalel to construct the tabernacle, a sevenfold tent; he gives seven gifts to the Messiah, who carries out the work of decreation and new creation in heptamorous sequences of seals, trumpets, and bowls. Seven is the number of Sabbath, the number of rest, completion, and rule, so the sevenfold Spirit is the one who drives things toward their Sabbatical fulfillment.

Ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων is used three other times in Revelation, and these uses are complexly intertwined with descriptions of the Lamb, the church, and her leaders. According to 4:5, the seven Spirits are lamps that burn before the throne of God, and 5:6 tells us that the Lamb has seven horns and seven eyes, which are the “seven Spirits of God.” Revelation 1:20 identifies the seven stars with the seven angels of the churches, and the lampstands with the seven churches. Though Revelation does not explicitly identify the lights of the lamps with the seven stars, it would be a plausible inference from the OT depictions of lampstands, whose lamps symbolize the sun, moon, and five known planets (→4:1–11). The *menorah* is a solar system, and the lamps/stars are identified with the angels of the churches. Revelation associates, even if it does not identify, the seven Spirits with seven lamps with seven stars with seven angels. That suggests that it is possible to speak of the sevenfold Spirit as the angel of Jesus, the Spirit who indwells the seven angels so they can burn bright on the lampstands of the churches. We will return to this complex of overlapping sevens later (→1:20).

The most elaborate part of this blessing is the identification of Jesus. John gives Jesus a triple title, followed by a triadic description of Jesus’s work. John is playing with sevens. Apart from articles, the triple title of Jesus contains seven words: witness, faithful, firstborn, dead, ruler, kings, earth. After the titles are three descriptions of Jesus’s actions on our behalf, and then a doxology. Three titles, plus three actions, plus doxology is another 7. The Spirit is a sevenfold Spirit, and Jesus is also a seven.

John borrows three titles from Psalm 89 (LXX 88; Beale 1999: 190–2; cf. Aune 1997: 37–8). Yahweh makes David his “firstborn” (πρωτότοκον) and the “highest of the kings of the earth” (ὕψηλὸν παρὰ τοῖς βασιλεῦσιν τῆς γῆς), both similar to the phrases of Rev. 1:5 (ὁ πρωτότοκος τῶν νεκρῶν καὶ ὁ ἄρχηγος τῶν βασιλέων τῆς γῆς). Psalm 89 also refers to the faithful witness of the sky (ὁ μάρτυς ἐν οὐρανῷ τιστός διάψαλμα) to underscore the certainty of the Lord’s commitment to give David an everlasting dynasty. David’s throne will be like the sun before Yahweh, and the dynasty will be established like the moon, the faithful witness in the heavens. These allusions identify

Jesus as the final Davidic king, the fulfillment of the oath that Yahweh swore to David.

Revelation 1:5 includes the first reference to “kings of the land.” Given the parallel with Psalm 89, we infer that Jesus reigns over all rulers throughout the world. The benediction points to a counter-imperial liturgy. This praise is offered to Jesus not to Caesar (Osborne 2002: 67). In Revelation, however, $\gamma\eta$ frequently refers narrowly to the land of Israel. The fortunes of the rulers of Israel are very much in view throughout the book, and part of the apocalyptic story is the establishment of Jesus’s dominion over Jewish leaders. Like the rest of the NT, Revelation operates on the principle of “to the Jew first.”

Land and sea are separated on Day 3 of the creation week, and in the OT these two zones take on political connotations (Jordan 1987: 146). The sea represents Gentile nations (2 Sam. 22:4–5; Ps. 65:7–8; Isa. 5:30; 17:12–13; 57:20; Jer. 6:23; Dan. 7:2–3; cf. Luke 21:25), while Israel is symbolized by the sea and the mountain, against which the sea rages (e.g., Ps. 48). Yahweh combats the sea of nations, sets boundaries, and keeps them away from his people, the people of the land (Jer. 5:22; Ps. 74:13; Job 26:10–12). The imagery extends to the residents of these different zones: Fish and sea monsters are Gentiles, but Israel is represented by land animals, particularly domesticated bovines and ovines, who are near to human beings as Israel is near to Yahweh as his flock. The symbolism of land and sea is crucial for identifying different characters in the Apocalypse.

John modifies Psalm 89 to stress that Jesus is firstborn *from the dead* (cf. Col. 1:18; Aune 1997: 38), implying that others will rise with and because of him (Apringius 2011: 25; Oecumenius 2011: 4). Jesus is the first to live the life after life after death (N. T. Wright’s phrase), and he inaugurates a world in which death is beginning not end. As firstborn, Jesus is preeminent in *everything*, especially in being the first to return from the grave. Psalm 89 is a lament over the destruction and casting off of the David line (vv. 38–51). “Where is the former lovingkindness to David?” the Psalm asks, but never answers. Revelation 1 answers by revealing a Davidic king who has passed through the death of David’s dynasty. “Firstborn from the dead” implies that Jesus’s resurrection restores Davidic line, and thus serves as testimony to the Lord’s faithfulness to his promises to David. Firstborn from the dead is like Isaiah’s “branch from the stump of Jesse,” a sign of new life coming from the dead stump of David’s father.

Jesus is the faithful $\mu\acute{\alpha}\rho\tau\upsilon\varsigma$. John has used the same word for himself, but Jesus is the model of witness. Jesus is faithful in suffering, faithful to death. He testifies to the faithfulness of God by that faithful witness. That is the courageous witness that he calls the church to carry on (2:10, 13; 3:14). There is a sequence in these titles. “Faithful witness” describes Jesus’s earthly ministry. He presented the Father’s case, at the cost of his life. Because of his faithful witness, it was just that the Father justify him in the resurrection. Having

raised him from the dead, making him firstborn from the dead, the Father has also made him King of kings. Wilcock (1984) suggests a prophet-priest-king sequence as well: Faithful witness followed by sacrificial death and resurrection followed by enthronement. The saints follow the same path. Those who are faithful unto death will be brothers of the Firstborn and will receive a crown of life. Kingship through death—that is Jesus’s story, and ours.

Revelation 1 describes Jesus’s *work* with another triad: he loves us, loosed us from our sins, and made us a kingdom of priests. The two triads match: Jesus loves us as a faithful witness, giving himself for us as witness to death; he looses us from our sins by his self-offering and resurrection as the firstborn of the dead; and Jesus is ruler over the kings of the earth, the priest-kings he made by his death and resurrection. That adds another layer to the meaning of “kings of the land” in verse 5. In Psalm 89, David rules kings after crushing them in war (vv. 21–23), and Beale suggests that “kings of the land” are subdued enemies (Beale 1999: 191) who by the end of Revelation have become allied with Jesus, as they bear tribute into the new Jerusalem (→21:24). Jesus went to the cross and rose again in order to constitute a company of priest-kings, so that kings of the land might become priests and kings of a new Israel. Loosed from sins, the saints are formed into a counter-kingdom, a βασιλεία, a counter-empire that is a community of praise and freedom. The priests and kings reign (5:10; 20:6), and the book of Revelation is about the making of this counter-empire, this kingdom that reigns on the earth, through the faithful witness of those who follow Jesus, the faithful Witness.

The Father has been identified with an expansion of the name “I am,” and Jesus’s work is expounded with an exodus typology. He *loves* us, not just loved us in the past but loves us now, with a love expressed in his death. He delivered us, loosed us, by his Passover blood and his exodus as firstborn of the dead. Having loved us and come to our rescue by dying to deliver us, he takes us to a new Sinai to make us a kingdom, a ruling people, and priests, palace servants to God (Exod. 19:6; 1 Pet. 2:11–12). Election, Passover, Sinai: That sequence is fulfilled in Jesus, Israel in person. And it is the sequence that will be recapitulated once again in the lives, deaths, and vindication of the witnesses who are the focus of Revelation. John encourages his readers who face the possibility of martyrdom: The path they are about to travel is the path of Israel from Egypt to Sinai to the Promised Land. It is the path of Jesus. It is a well-trodden path, and it leads to glory.

Some texts have λοῦω (“wash”) instead of λύω (“loose”) but. Though “washing” from sins might be more common, “loose” is preferable, for reasons of symmetry if nothing else: If 1:5 is included in the count, there are six “loosings” in Revelation (5:2; 9:14–15; 20:3, 7).

Paul writes of Jesus's work of liberating us from bondage under the reign of sin (singular; cf. Rom. 5:12–21), but the plural "sins" in Rev. 1:5 highlights a different dimension of sin. We are subject to the compulsions and desires of sin and need to be freed; we are also enslaved to habits formed by repeated sinful acts and enslaved by the guilt of past sin. An abusive husband and an abused wife dance a perverse dance, again and again; the sins of fathers against children poison their relationship for decades, even a lifetime. Because of our sins, we are guilty and need forgiveness. At the same time, our sins bind us, and we need to be loosed and let free.

Forgiveness is itself a liberation, and a socially dangerous one. Invoking Hannah Arendt, Walter Brueggemann (2001: 85) claims that Jesus's offer of forgiveness was his "most endangering action because if a society does not have an apparatus for forgiveness, then its members are fated to live forever with the consequences of any violation. Thus the refusal to forgive sin (or the management of the machinery of forgiveness) amounts to enormous social control. While the claims of Jesus may have been religiously staggering, its threat to the forms of accepted social control was even greater."

In *ST* III, 49, 1, Thomas asks whether Christ's passion liberates from sin (*liberati a peccato*), and answers affirmatively: Christ's death brings freedom. Then he shifts metaphors. Objection 2 says that "Christ's Passion could not cleanse (*mundare*) us from sin." In objection 4, he writes of "forgiveness" (*remissio*). At the end of the *Respondeo*, he concludes that Christ's sufferings have divine power to "expel" sins (*expellendum peccatum*). The terminological disconnect between the objection and response indicates that Thomas viewed these terms as virtually interchangeable. To an objection about "liberation" from sin, Thomas responds with a declaration that Christ's passion "expels" sin. To an objection about "cleansing," Thomas responds with an argument about *remissio*. Objection 4 speaks of forgiveness, but the reply introduces a new concept, *deletionem propriorum peccatorum*. Where Protestant theology generally distinguishes between forgiveness of the guilt of sin and liberation from the power of sin, Thomas smudges: Liberation is forgiveness is cleansing is expulsion is deletion. To be forgiven is, for Thomas, to be freed. It seems that John would agree.

Along similar lines, Chanon Ross (2014: 127) summarizes John Milbank (2003: 57) on the "ecstatic" character of forgiveness:

Milbank observes that such a severing of the self for the sake of the other in the name of forgiveness corresponds to a "relational *ecstasis*" or ecstasy, that is exemplified in the gift of the Eucharist. In the crucifixion, Christ utterly emptied himself of himself for the sake of fallen humanity. He was pierced (literally and figuratively) and he allowed himself to be severed in order that his beloved (humanity) might be joined to him and redeemed. Through the *ecstasis* of this forgiveness, the debasing ecstasy of the spectacle became the blood of the New Covenant. The New Covenant signifies an ecstasy, for, as Milbank observes, to forgive out of *ecstasis* is "to restore that order of free unlimited exchange of charity which is interrupted by sin." Thus, *ecstasis* is not a charity that comes to us through an economy of exchange, but through a pure and prevenient grace that exists before we even recognize that it has been offered.

Jesus's titles anticipate events and characters that appear later in Revelation. Jesus is the firstborn of the dead, and the beast presents a parody of resurrection, a head slain and healed (→13:3). Jesus is also the true witness, but there is a false witness, the land beast who performs wonders and makes everyone worship the first beast from the sea (→13:11–14). According to 17:18, the Harlot has βασιλεία over the kings of the earth. Jesus is the true beast (Lion

and Lamb), the true prophet, the head of the true bride. Jesus is the measure of all things, of his enemies also.

Rev. 1:7 states the theme of Revelation. It is a self-standing verse, beginning and ending with “Amen” (the “Amen” at the end of verse 6 should be taken as the beginning of the statement in verse 7). This is the Johannine Jesus, with the familiar verbal tic of ἀμήν, ἀμήν, a double witness and double oath that expands to a threefold witness with the addition of “Yes” to the second “Amen.” Thus isolated from its context, the verse quotes two passages of the OT that together anticipate the shape of the book.

Neither of these prophecies seems directly relevant to the substance of Revelation. Daniel 7 speaks of the exaltation of the Son of Man, but Jesus is already exalted before John sees his visions. Jesus is exalted when John first sees him (→1:12–16). If it is already fulfilled in Jesus’s ascension, how can Daniel 7 be fulfilled—*again?*—in Revelation? Zechariah 12 promises that those who pierced Jesus will mourn as they look on him, but Jesus has been taken down from the cross long before John receives the unveiling of Jesus. How can the tribes look on a pierced Jesus who ascended to heaven? Grasping how these two interwoven quotations describe the events of *Revelation* leads us to the book’s fundamental plot and theology.

The first, more straightforward, quotation is from Dan. 7:13. Daniel’s vision begins with four beasts arising from the sea, which has been stirred by the four winds of heaven. The beasts are “kings who will arise from the earth” (v. 17), and within Daniel this vision is chiasmatically related to Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of four kingdoms portrayed as a statue made of four metals. In both passages, Daniel foresees the same four kings/kingdoms, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome (Hippolytus 1981: 208–10). The fourth beast, Rome, terrifying and powerful, has ten horns, representing specific kings (Dan 7:7, 24), and from them emerges a single horn different from the rest. The “little horn” uproots three horns, grows eyes and a mouth, and speaks boastfully (v. 8), then wages war on the saints and overpowers them (vv. 21, 25). The Lord gives the saints into the hands of this horn from the Roman beast for a “time, times, half a time” (v. 25). Yet the situation is reversed in the course of the vision. The persecuted saints will be overpowered until judgment is given to them and they take possession of the kingdom forever (vv. 18, 21–22). In the end, sovereignty, dominion, and the greatness of all the kingdoms will be given to the saints of the Highest One. The reign of the saints is “His Kingdom,” the kingdom of God, an everlasting kingdom in which all dominions will serve God (v. 27).

The transition occurs as the “Son of Man” ascends on clouds to the Ancient of Days (vv. 13–14). In context, however, the “Son of Man” is not an

individual Messiah but the saints, once beleaguered but now vindicated and enthroned.

The Son of man is *ascending*, not descending. This is the Son of Man's entry into kingship, not a "second coming" (against Apringius 2011: 25; Smalley 2005: 37; and many others in between). The cloud is the cloud of incense that surrounded the high priest as he entered the most holy place on the Day of Atonement. It is the cloud of sacrificial smoke by which the sacrificial animal entered into the presence of God.

The transition from persecution to exaltation is based on a court decision. Thrones are set up, the Ancient of Days takes his seat, the court of myriads of attendants assembles, and books are opened (vv. 9–10). The court determines that the dominion claimed by the beasts rightfully belongs to the Son of Man, that is, the saints, and so dominion is transferred to them. The saints are "justified," declared innocent by being delivered from the horn and by being given dominion. Justified, they are enthroned. Their enthronement is their vindication and justification.

All this closely anticipates the story line of Revelation 13–20. A composite beast, exhibiting features of three of the beasts from Daniel 7, rises from the sea. It is Daniel's fourth beast, trampling and terrifying (→13:1-6). It makes war against the saints and overcomes them, with the help of a land beast and a harlot (→13:7-18; →17:1-18). Yet the Lord gathers his witnesses and prosecutes his case against the beasts and harlot through the testimony of the martyrs. Their very blood is evidence against the harlot city and the beasts, and simultaneously testifies to the righteousness of the witnesses (→14:14-20). In the end, the Lord sits for judgment, and the court decides in favor of the saints. After the tribulations of the saints, a divine judgment is declared in their favor and dominion granted to the saints (→20:4-6). This is how Jesus establishes his kingdom of priests. This is how the kingdom of God comes, as the saints reenact the cross of Jesus in their lives, deaths, and vindication.

Revelation includes a number of allusions to Daniel 7 that fill out the picture. In John's first vision, Jesus appears as "like the son of man" but with white hair like the Ancient of Days (→1:12-17). At the beginning of chapter 20, John sees the dragon shut up and sealed, like the beasts and horn of Daniel 7. While he watches, thrones are set up, "they" sit on them, and judgment is given. In Daniel 7, "the court sits" (vv. 10, 26), and gives judgment to the saints (v. 22). At the end of chapter 20, God sits on his great white throne, and the small and great gather. Books are opened, and judgment is given, another echo of Daniel 7:10. Both before and after the "millennium," we see a court scene resembling Daniel 7, when the court sits, judgment is given in favor of the saints who have witnessed to the end in spite of intense opposition and

murderous persecution, and they are crowned and included in the marriage supper of the lamb.

Jesus the Son of Man was exalted on clouds in his ascension. That will be recapitulated in the life of the church, as the corporate Son of Man suffers, is rescued and exalted to heavenly thrones. Rev. 1:7 thus informs us that the visions of Revelation will be about the defeat of the beast and the horn, the tribulation of the saints, and their eventual vindication, glorification, and enthronement. That exaltation of the Son of Man *in the exaltation of the saints* is the theme of Revelation. *This* is how Jesus is unveiled—in the unveiling of the glory of his slaves. And the new age—the fifth monarchy that follows the four ancient empires—*only* arrives when the Bride is unveiled and enthroned with the Lamb. The good news of Revelation is not merely the death and vindication of the Son; it is the death and vindication of the saints *in him*.

All straightforward, but then John adds another quotation, this from Zech. 12:10–14, which prophesies the mourning of those who look on the pierced one. Jerusalem is under siege (12:3), but the Lord promises that he will intervene to save Judah and Jerusalem (vv. 6–9). In Zech. 12:10–13:1, the siege has been lifted, and, during this respite, the Lord promises to pour out his Spirit upon the house of David and inhabitants of Jerusalem. The Spirit elicits mourning from those who look on “Me,” the Lord, whom they have pierced (v. 10). In the wider context, the verse refers to the rejected shepherd of chapter 11. Identified with the Lord, the good shepherd was “gored” by the people’s rejection. Yahweh himself, in the person of the shepherd, is pierced, spurned, and rejected by his people, but, Zechariah shows, when the Spirit comes, the people repent of their betrayal. Specifically, the leaders of Jerusalem and the royal house of David (“kings of the land”), who were directly responsible for piercing the shepherd, mourn over their sin.

Their mourning is like the mourning for an only child, a reference to Isaac’s “death” and resurrection. Isaac was the Abrahamic covenant incarnated, and the pierced shepherd is a new Isaac. The mourning over the pierced shepherd is also like the mourning of the Egyptians at the time of Passover (cf. Exod. 12:29–30). Zechariah describes in detail how each family, from the royal and priestly families on down to the lowest Israelites, was affected by the death of the pierced one. It is a strange Passover, since the dead is the firstborn of *Israel* not Egypt. The Lord’s *own* firstborn—indeed, Yahweh himself—has died like an Egyptian. The mourning is compared, finally, to the mourning on the plain of Megiddo, that is, to the mourning for Josiah (2 Chronicles 35). After Josiah’s death, the kingdom slides rapidly into chaos. Within a few decades after his death, Nebuchadnezzar destroys Jerusalem and the temple. Similarly, Zechariah’s good shepherd is the last chance for Israel. After

sending his servants the prophets, the Lord sends his own Shepherd, but they reject him, and within a generation, the city and temple are destroyed. But the Spirit will be poured out, and the people will recognize what they have done. They will recognize that the shepherd was another Josiah.

In that day, Zechariah says, there will be a fountain for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, a fountain bringing repentance and cleansing. Despite the hymns about fountain filled with blood, this is a fountain filled with *water*, the water for impurity (Numbers 19) that removes the *niddah* of corpse defilement (Num. 19:9). Zechariah prophesies of a time when there will be a continual, uninterrupted flow of cleansing water, which will cleanse the people from contact with corpse of the shepherd. The fountain of water is the Spirit, the true, refreshing water of cleansing.

Zechariah prophesies during the restoration era, when the Jews are rebuilding the temple. Whether or not Zechariah 12 applies directly to Zechariah's own time, the NT writers see the figure of Jesus in his vision of the rejected Good Shepherd. John directly quotes this passage in his Gospel (Jn 19:37). When the soldier pierces Jesus's side, blood and water flow out. John claims that this fulfills Zechariah 12, as well as the instruction that no bones of the Passover Lamb be broken. As we have seen, Zechariah 12 is a Passover text, focusing on the mourning of those who have lost the firstborn in the house. For John, Jesus is clearly the pierced shepherd. Yet, strangely, few or none mourn him at the cross. How does the cross fulfill Zechariah's prophecy?

We can move toward an answer by returning to Daniel 7. John does not quote from Daniel 7 in his account of the crucifixion, but it is clear from other parts of his Gospel that he saw Jesus's death as a fulfillment of Daniel 7. John speaks of the "Son of Man" being exalted or "lifted up," and invariably the exaltation of the Son of Man is *at the cross*. Jesus conflates Daniel 7 with the episode of the bronze serpent (Num. 21) when he declares that the Son of Man will be lifted up as the serpent in the wilderness (Jn 3:13–14). The Son of Man will be lifted up like the healing serpent when he is lifted up on a pole/cross, and this lifting up is the Son of Man's exaltation. People will "see" the Son of Man ascending (Jn 6:62), and "see" means "see"—they will *see* it when Jesus performs his last and greatest sign at the cross. Everyone will know that "I am," Jesus says, when he is lifted up (8:28)—again, *on the cross*. Jesus speaks of the hour of the glorification of the Son of Man (Jn 12:23), the hour when he is lifted up, and by this he signifies the kind of death he is going to die (Jn 12:31–34). This is the hour of the Son of Man's glorification, and the glorification of the Father in him (Jn 13:31).

Jn 19:37, then, overtly quotes Zechariah 12 and covertly alludes to Daniel 7, combining the two passages just as in Rev. 1:7. The Jews quite literally

see the Son of Man lifted from the earth, and quite literally gaze on the one whom they have pierced. Some mourn immediately when they see the pierced Shepherd—Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, and the women all make preparations for Jesus's burial, performing rites of mourning. Others mourn when the Lord opens the fountain of cleansing water at Pentecost, pouring out the Spirit of mourning to cut the Jews to the heart. At Pentecost, many still remember that they saw the Shepherd pierced, or, if they were not there to see it, they have heard of it. Hearing the Pentecostal preaching of the apostles, they suddenly recognize the scene on Golgotha: At the time, they did not realize they were witnessing the lifting up of the Son of Man; they did not recognize the scene from Daniel 7. They did not see the pierced Shepherd of Yahweh. They saw only a pierced rabbi. When the Spirit comes, though, they recognize Jesus's identity as the Shepherd and Son of Man, and they mourn, repent, and seek to be washed in the fountain.

Of course, that is all over and done when John receives visions on Patmos. But, like Daniel 7, Zechariah 12 is about to be enacted again, now in the bodies of the saints. The Son of Man's ascent on the clouds is the exaltation of the saints over the beasts. That is the story of Revelation, *not* the glorification of Jesus alone but the glorification of Jesus in his people. They are glorified just as Jesus is—by bearing faithful witness to death. They are *lifted up* as Jesus is, by bearing the cross with Jesus. And in their suffering, the Jews see the lifting up of the Son of Man, enacted all over again, not in the person of Jesus but in the saints. Just in this way, they also see the pierced Shepherd in the pierced flock, in whom the Shepherd dwells by the Spirit; they see the pierced Shepherd not in the person of Jesus but in the saints. When it becomes clear that persecution of saints is the persecution of the Lord's righteous One, when it becomes clear that the harlot city falls because of the just judgment of God, then the tribes of the land will mourn (→18:9–20) and repentant kings of the land will bring tribute to the Bride of the Lamb (→21:24). What the death of Jesus begins to accomplish—the turning of the tribes of Israel to their Shepherd—the death of the martyrs completes.

Beale (1999: 197) argues that in the LXX the phrase *φύλαι τῆς γῆς* refers to the nations (Gen. 12:3; 28:14; Ps. 72:17; Ezek. 20:32; Zech. 14:17). According to Beale, Revelation 1:7 does not prophesy a conversion of Israel but a conversion of nations. Yet in Zechariah 12, the mourners who are named are from various parts of the house of Israel, and that original context controls our understanding of John's vision. His hope is for the repentance of the tribes of *Israel*, who will mourn and repent over the Pierced One and his saints.

For the saints of Revelation as for Jesus, the cross is the pathway of exaltation. That is one dimension of Rev. 1:7. But the other dimension, a perfectly Girardian twist, is equally crucial: Through the suffering exaltation of

the corporate Son of Man, those who pierced them will be stricken in heart, mourn for the pierced shepherd, and turn to the Lord in repentance. The suffering of the 144,000 saints from every tribe of Israel will bring in “all Israel” to be saved. That is among the things that, John says, will happen ἐν τάχει; it is part of the closure of the old covenant and the inauguration of the new. For the new covenant does not come until all Israel is saved.

Though the dynamic is specific to the first century, it plays out again and again in the history of the church. Christians witness faithfully to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. Like Jesus, they are opposed, persecuted, crucified, pierced. Their suffering *is* their exaltation, and their patient, faithful, joyful, loving suffering opens a fountain of the Spirit that provokes repentance from their persecutors. Thus is the blood of the martyrs the seed of the church. Thus the martyrs rule the church, and the world, right to the very end.

The name of God in 1:4–7 is triads on triads: A triple source of grace and peace; the Father with a triadic name; and the triple-titled Son carries out his work in three phrases. The epistolary opening of Revelation ends in 1:8 with another set of triads. The Lord God identifies himself in three phrases: Alpha and Omega; One who is, was, comes; Pantocrator. There are twenty-one words in the whole verse, 3×7 , the number of the Triune God multiplied through the seven days of creation. It is the first of two passages in Revelation where the Lord speaks directly to the reader (Koester 2001: 51; the other is 21:5–8), and it is appropriately a triple septet, a triple of Trinity speaking the seven of creation. Alpha and Omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and hence encompass all the letters and words of language. God is the first and last word. As beginning and end, he is, as Nicholas of Lyra put it, the beginning of all effects and the end of all (Krey 1997: 35).

James Jordan (1999a: 21) has pointed out that these names link up with different periods of Israel’s history, though in reverse: Alpha and Omega to Isaiah and the promise of return from exile (in the form of “the first and the last,” Is 41:4; 44:6; 48:12); “He who is, was, and comes” is a riff on Yahweh, the name of the God of exodus; Almighty translates the patristic El Shaddai. The phrases work backward through Israel’s history. The opening ἐγὼ εἰμι evokes the revelation of Yahweh to Moses on Sinai (Exod. 4), but that is also picked up in Isaiah, where it is linked to the “first and last.” So the Lord who reveals himself to John is the Lord of Israel through all ages. This unveiling of Jesus and of the things that will shortly take place is accomplished by the God who has been the God of Israel since he revealed himself as El Shaddai to Abram.

These three self-identifications are made by the God who is called by a fourth name: Lord God. “Lord God” too has OT roots, in the Yahweh Elohim of the creation account and in the Adonai Yahweh that is common in the period of Kings. If we take it in the latter sense, we have a full reverse history

of divine names: Isaiah's "first and last"; the "Adonai Yahweh" of Kings; the "I am" of Exodus; the "God of Power" of the patriarchs.

The threefold God is also a four, which is to say that the threefold Triune God operates not only in the three phases of time but to the four corners of space, and through the four periods of Israel's history. He is a God of creation, a seven, and the God of Israel, a twelve. This God is also an eight (compare the beast later, →17:10-11). Jesus's triple title in verse 5 uses seven key words (apart from articles and conjunctions); Jesus reveals the Trinity, but he also is a seven, anointed with the sevenfold Spirit, the Lord of creation, the one who works by the sevenfold rhythm of the Spirit. In verse 8, we have a triple/quadruple name of God given in eight words: Alpha, Omega, Lord, God, Is, Was, Comes, Almighty (παντοκράτωρ). He is the God not only of the first creation, a seven, but the God who brings the eighth day of the new creation.

Praise to the God of grace and peace
Who is and was and comes.
All praise to heaven's seven Spir'its
Who burn before the throne.

All praise to you, our Witness true,
Born from the dead, our king.
All praise to Jesus Christ who died
And loosed our tongues to sing.
—to St. Peter, C.M.

Father, great I AM, he who was, is, and comes, who by the seven Spirits sent Jesus as witness, king, firstborn from the dead: Rend the firmament and visit the earth, that all nations may see the Son of Man seated at your right hand. Through Jesus Christ, who loved us, loosed us from our sins, and made us a kingdom and priests to the ages of ages. Yes. Amen.

III.1. In Spirit on Patmos: One Like a Son of Man—Rev. 1:9-20

Jesus on Patmos

I, Joannes, your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the witness of Jesus. I was in Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a voice great as a trumpet, saying, "What you see, write into a book and send to the seven churches, to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thuateira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodikea."

And I turned to see the voice which was speaking with me, and having turned I saw seven lampstands gold, and in the midst of the lampstands one like a son of man, robed to the feet and girded about the breasts with a gold sash. And his head and his hair were sparkling-white, as wool sparkling-white, as snow, and his eyes as a flame of fire, and his feet like bronze in a furnace fired, and his voice as a voice of many waters, and having in his right hand stars seven, and out of his mouth came a sword, sharp, double-edged, and his face as the sun shining in his strength.

—Rev. 1:9–16

With 1:9, John again introduces himself by name (cf. 1:1, 4), inaugurating the second panel of the chapter (→1:1-8). Verses 9–20 form a modified chiasm, within which a smaller chiasm is embedded:

A. John hears voice's command to write, vv. 9–11

B. Turned to see the voice: Lampstands, vv. 12–13a

C. One like Son of Man, vv. 13b–16

C¹. head and hair

C². eyes

C³. feet

C⁴. voice

C^{3'}. hand
C^{2'}. mouth
C^{1'}. face

B'. John sees and falls, v. 17a
A. Jesus, the Voice, speaks: Write, vv. 17b–19
B". Lampstands and stars, v. 20

The links in the larger chiasm are fairly obvious. The command to “write” (γράφω) frames the entire scene, the first two of twelve commands to write scattered throughout the book (Aune 1997: 85). This is John’s initial commission. He looks to see the voice and instead sees lampstands (B). When he *does* see the voice, he falls before him (B'). Verse 20 (B") provides a coda explaining the mystery of the stars and lampstands. At the center of the structure is a vision of one like the Son of man, whose features are arranged chiastically. Head and face match, eyes and mouth are features of the face, feet and hand are lower and upper appendages. At the center of the vision is the “hypostatic Voice” of the Father (88).

Adopting a Hebraic literary technique, John repeats key words. There are seven lampstands, and the word *λύχνια* is used four times, a 4 x 7 numerical symbol that indicates the lampstands’ spatial (four corners of earth) and temporal (seven days of week) extension. “Voice” (φωνή) is used four times. John hears a voice (v. 10), turns to see it (v. 12), and the central feature of the glorified being he sees is a “voice” like the “voice” of many waters (v. 15), the voice of Jesus resounding like the voice of God, the archetype of the voice of the heavenly choir (→14:2) and of the oceanic echo of the saints (→19:6). Jesus’s “right hand” receives a lot of attention. John notices seven stars in his right hand (v. 16). When John falls down dead at Jesus’s feet, Jesus revives him with a touch of the “right [hand, implied]” (v. 17). Of the features of Jesus’s person, only the stars in the right hand are explained (v. 20). The right hand holds seven stars (ἀστήρ; v. 16), the “angels of the seven churches” (v. 20, 2x). “Seven stars” mentioned three times hints at a Triune fullness, a 3 x 7, the angels of the churches sustained in the hand of Jesus whose eyes are like the seven Spirits and who is the Son of the he who is, was, and is to come.

As John turns, he sees lampstands, then a figure in a robe and belt, and only then does he begin to discern the features of the personified voice that spoke to him. The lampstands are a clue to his location: He is (in vision, not in physical reality) in the Holy Place of the temple, where the menorah was placed. Later, the Spirit will carry him up through a door in the sky to enter the throne room, the Most Holy Place (→4:1–5). Already in this initial vision, John glimpses the glory of heaven. His gaze traces the progress of a priest moving from the Holy to the Most Holy Place: First the lampstands of the Holy Place, through the veil/robe and golden chain separating the inner sanctuary, finally the Glory himself. The progression toward the glory is an ascent, like the ascent of Moses to Sinai. From another angle, Jesus is a living tabernacle, the Voice tabernacled not in flesh but in the glorified body of the

resurrection. His dazzling white head and hair and shining face correspond to the glory in the inner sanctuary, the Most Holy Place. The voice that comes from his sword-bearing mouth is the voice from the ark-throne. Jesus holds seven stars in his right hand, corresponding to the *menorah* on the south side of the Holy Place. Jesus's feet are bronze like the altar of ascensions in the court of the tabernacle, and they glow with the fire of offerings and incense.

The order of the physical description of Jesus anticipates John's experience. He sees Jesus with his head and hair of white, comes under the scrutiny of Jesus's eyes of fire, and falls down at his feet as a dead man (v. 17). Then Jesus lays his star-filled hand on John and speaks as the Voice of the Father, telling John to write everything that he speaks with his mouth-sword. He addresses John as the living one, who was dead in the darkness of the grave, but has risen like a sun shining in strength. In terms of the temple pattern that shapes the passage, John is in the courtyard when he falls at Jesus's altar-feet. Jesus raises him with a star-filled hand, bringing him into the holy place where he will shine like a star. In the following vision (→4:1), the Spirit that is the finger of God will bring John into the Most Holy place. That movement throws some important light on the messages to the churches: As he records the words of Jesus and the Spirit for the angels of the churches, John is standing in the holy place. The messages are oracles from the Glory enthroned above the cherubim.

John's description of Jesus resembles passages in the Song of Songs (cf. Oecumenius 2011: 8; Krey 1997: 38). Twice in the Song of Songs, Solomon sings an ecstatic head-to-toe hymn of praise to the bride using a form that, because of its resemblance to Arabic love poetry, biblical scholars have come to call a *wasf* (4:1-6; 7:1-9; the following is drawn from Leithart 2012b). Between these two poems, the bride describes the attractions of her man to the daughters of Jerusalem in a similar style (5:10-16). While she desperately searches the streets for her absent lover, her companions ask, "[W]hat kind of beloved is your beloved?" (5:9). She begins with his head of gold, moves down over his face to his hands, abs, and legs before moving back upward to his mouth full of sweetness. Like the lover's description of the bride, the *wasf* of the male lover depends heavily on similes to nature. His hair is like "clusters of dates" and is "black as a raven"; his eyes are like doves, his lips like lilies; his overall appearance as impressive as a cedar of Lebanon. He is a garden of delights to the bride as much as she is to him. Intertwining the natural similes is a thread of cultural and specifically architectural imagery. The lover's head is gold; his hands are rods of gold set with beryl; his abs are like ivory inlaid with sapphires; his legs are alabaster pillars set on pedestals of gold. He is not only a garden, but a human temple or palace. (Not: Men are from Mars, women from Venus; but: Men are buildings, women are gardens.) The bride's description convinces her companions. Though initially skeptical that any man is worth the trouble, they join in her quest (6:1).

In its poetic shape, John's description of Jesus is similar to the *wasf* of Song of Songs 5. John uses some natural imagery in his description of Jesus. Jesus's white hair is like "snow" and "wool," his eyes "fire," and his voice like crashing water. He is the cosmic man, embodying all of creation in himself. Mineral and metallic imagery dominates both Solomon's and John's poem. The lover's head is gold, his torso is ivory and precious jewels, his legs alabaster on pedestals of gold. Similarly, Jesus has feet like burnished bronze and a sword protrudes from his mouth. As in the Song, John begins with Jesus's head and hair, moves to his eyes, down to his feet, and then back up to his hand, mouth, and face. The first unveiling of Jesus is the unveiling of a Lover.

Jordan (2003: 11) summarizes the theology behind the portrait:

Humanity is the creation's point of self-awareness. In humanity, the soil of all creation comes into relationship with God as the image of God. Plants convert water, sunlight, air, and minerals into food, and men and animals eat the water-fire-air-earth food, and men eat the animals, converting all creation into the image of God. The metal man, thus, is the glorification of all creation. The appearance of Jesus as water & snow, sun & fire & stars, and bronze & sword in Revelation 1 is a picture of this reality. His (implied) linen garments and his hair of wool show him as the fullness of the plant and animal realms. Thus, Jesus is the Captain of all creation, the one in whom all things hold together (Col. 1:17). Having become man, and as man having eaten into Himself all aspects of the world, Jesus is now transfigured and glorified, and with him all creation is transfigured and glorified.

The *wasf* of Jesus kicks off a series of allusions to the Song of Songs within Revelation's opening vision that comes to a climax in the last of the seven messages, when Jesus stands at the door seeking entry to the church of Laodicea (→3:19-20). Within this frame, Jesus commissions John to write messages he hears from Jesus to angels of the seven churches of Asia. Jesus the Lover sends a sevenfold love letter to his sevenfold Bride. For those familiar with the contents of the seven letters, this seems a jarring description. "I have this against you" and "Repent" and "I will make war" and "I will cast you on a bed a sickness" and "you have a name that you are alive but you are dead" and "you are neither cold nor hot"—these hardly seem the endearments of a lover. But they are. As Jesus says at the climax of the series, "Those whom I love (φιλέω), I reprove and discipline" (3:19; cf. 1:5; 2:4, 19; 3:9, all of which use some form of ἀγαπ-). Jesus rebukes lukewarmness because he seeks a passionate Bride, whose responding love is, like his own, stronger than death and fiercer than Sheol.

The Song structures Revelation as a whole. John's first vision begins with an unveiling of Jesus the lover, and the book ends with an impassioned plea from the bride and the Spirit for Jesus the lover to return: "The Spirit and bride say, 'Come' ... Yes, come quickly ... Come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:17, 20). Despite the fact that the bride has descended from heaven and the marriage supper

has begun (Rev. 19:1-10), the Apocalypse ends *unended*, with an eschatological reserve yet to come, an anagogical excess that arouses the Spirit-filled bride to eager expectancy. So too the Song. The lovers appear to consummate their love (Song 4:16-5:1), and the lover views his beloved's naked body unveiled (7:1-7). She is a tree, and he has already climbed her to drink juice from the clusters that are her breasts (7:8). Despite this union and intimacy, the Song ends with the lovers separated, and with the bride longing for *dodi*, "my beloved" (or, more speculatively, "my David") to return: "Hurry, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag, on the mountains of spices" (8:14). The passionate lovers of the Song figure the life of Jesus the bridegroom with the woman who longs for him. The Song figures the glorified lover of the Apocalypse, the Lamb whose marriage supper begins with the bride's descent.

Edmund Spenser proved himself a perceptive reader of the Apocalypse when he retold Revelation as romantic quest in the first book of the *Fairie Queene*. As Florence Sandler (1985: 150) explains,

The Red Cross Knight, the hero of the Legend, is introduced as one 'Faithful and True' (cf. Rev. 19:11), who must yet endure temptations and oppressions, the equivalent of the Apocalypse's plagues and tyrannies that try and winnow the just on the earth. He is deceived at first by the evil ones, in this case Duessa and Archimago who fill roles similar to those of the Apocalyptic Whore and the False Prophet. Yet he perseveres, learning more clearly the character of his enemies and friends. From the time that the Knight has his vision of the New Jerusalem he is charged with new strength and goes forth like St. Michael to fight the Great Dragon; during the three days of the battle he is sustained and replenished through the night by the power of the Well of Life and the Tree of Life; finally while the whole city rejoices, the victor becomes also the Bridegroom, betrothed to Una, whose face is now finally unveiled. The Whore of Babylon has been exposed at last, and the True Bride, Jerusalem, revealed.

Most of the basic elements of the story correlate to the Apocalypse, with an added layer: Like the reformers, Spenser uses the Apocalypse to advance an anti-Catholic polemic. Sandler concludes, "Spenser, reading the Apocalypse as Quest, has refocused the story by setting one heroic figure, the Red Cross Knight, firmly in the middle to participate in all actions, while having Una represent the cause for which he fights and the prize he wins after his encounters with the various shapes of evil" (150).

John's Gospel also echoes the Song at various points. Jesus performs his first sign at a wedding, during which he takes the role of the bridegroom by providing an abundance of superb wine (Jn 2:1-11). John the Baptist responds to questions about Jesus by calling him the bridegroom whose voice calls the bride to himself. John decreases because he is only "best man," preparing the bride for the bridegroom's coming and issuing invitations to enter the joy of the wedding (Jn 3:27-30). Jesus brings the wedding wine and is the bridegroom, but where is the bride? John 4 records Jesus's encounter with the Samaritan woman who has been used and cast aside by one man after another. In Jesus, she finds a true husband. At the end of John's Gospel, Jesus is again the

Bridegroom of the Song as he appears to Mary in the garden of his resurrection (Jn 20:11–18). In each of these instances, Jesus the Bridegroom encounters potential brides, then departs. He specifically tells Mary Magdalene to stop clinging to him, since he has to ascend to his Father (Jn 20:17). John's Gospel thus leaves the bridal figures longing for the full coming of the bridegroom to pitch his nuptial tent and begin a feast of love. And John's Gospel leaves Jesus the Bridegroom in want of a bride. Only at the end of Revelation do we finally see a bride suitable for Jesus, and even then the bride still yearns for his final arrival, still sings the Song of the beloved: "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for his love is better than wine."

Jesus is the living tabernacle. Jesus is the lover. Jesus is the Lover *as* tabernacle, the Lover who spreads the wing of his curtain robe over his bride, the curtain robe that is himself, the Lover who himself overshadows his Bride and becomes their common dwelling place. Shifting the imagery, the robe is the people of Jesus. As the Lord wraps himself in the heavens as in a garment, as the High Priest wore a robe bearing the names of the tribes over his heart, so Jesus wraps himself in his people, taking them to himself to be one flesh with them.

Having examined the overarching logic of the passage, we turn to the details.

Just after he has recorded the Lord's ἐγὼ εἰμι, John identifies himself to his readers with ἐγὼ Ἰωάννης. John is no I AM, but he is about to be commissioned as the amanuensis of the I AM. His self-introduction echoes the self-introduction of the God who sends him; the seer's voice harmonizes on the Voice that is God. John does not identify himself as an apostle, though I think he was the Apostle John (→1:1). Instead, he identifies himself with the other "slaves" to whom he writes. He is their *brother*, a member of the fictive kin group of the church, a family not united by common blood except the Eucharistic blood of Jesus, a kin group united by a common Spirit. In other passages in Revelation, brotherhood is brotherhood in the "testimony of Jesus," that is, in the witness to Jesus (6:11; 19:10), and there is also a brotherhood of prophets (22:9). As brother, John shares the nature and family history of other members of brotherhood. He is a συγκοινωνός, which contains the root κοινω-, "common," and the root behind κοινωνία, the fellowship of the saints in Jesus and in the Spirit. A community is a people who share in common goods: According to Aristotle, this is the aspiration of the Greek city, and it is realized in the church. John is a sharer-with, participating in the things that are given in Christ by the Spirit. John and his brothers commune in three goods together: tribulation, kingdom, and perseverance. John is made into an image of the Christ who is himself an unveiling of a Triune life. His life is triadic as Jesus's. Christ has all of these things in

abundance: He has suffered the afflictions of the world, and has inherited a kingdom that will never pass, and he perseveres. John and the rest of the brothers share in these.

Endurance is the key element in the list. The word appears seven times in the Apocalypse (Aune 1997: 76). Endurance in the midst of tribulation is the path to the kingdom, the way toward Sabbath enthronement and new creation. As Charles (1920: 1.21) says, endurance is the “spiritual alchemy, which transmutes those who share in the θλίψις into members of the βασιλεία,” but this only happens “in Jesus,” as the tribulations are shared not only with brothers but with the Elder Brother.

Tribulations are shared among the brothers because they are tribulations in Jesus (Smalley 2005: 50). John’s share in the tribulation of the brothers is not theoretical or metaphorical. John is already experiencing the messianic θλίψις that will bring in the kingdom (Boxall 2006: 38). He suffers because of the word of God and testimony of Jesus, and elsewhere in Revelation this combination of “word and witness,” λόγος καὶ μαρτυρία, refers to witness in the face of opposition, even witness to death.

Farrer (1964: 64) notes that the phrase “testimony of Jesus” could refer to the testimony that Jesus himself bore, or to someone’s testimony about Jesus. Referring to verses 2 and 5, he argues that the latter meaning is preferable: “Christ’s witness carries St John’s witness with it: his witness, like his suffering, his sovereignty, and his endurance, is ‘in Jesus’”.

John has been exiled to the island of Patmos (cf. Aune 1997: 77–82). Patmos is a small island in the Aegean sea, one of a set of fortress islands known as the Sporades. It may have been used as a place of exile for political criminals (Mounce 1997: 54–5). Some have suggested that John went to Patmos to preach, but in Revelation διὰ with the accusative always indicates cause rather than purpose (Reddish 2001: 39; Smalley 2005: 51). Thus, John is on Patmos not “for the purpose” of testifying but “because of his testimony.” The early claim that John was exiled by a Roman emperor is unlikely. More likely, John was deported by local Asian authorities (Boxall 2006: 39), sentenced to a “capital” punishment involving a loss of rights and possessions and “relegation to an island” (cf. Koester 2015: 242; Smalley 2005: 51). John the Apostle, like Paul before him, is a political threat.

According to the ancient Israelite view of the world, the earth is divided between land and sea, analogous to Israel and the nations. Islands are bits of land scattered across the sea, stable outposts where Gentiles honor the God of the land, the God of Israel. Kings of the islands bring tribute to the Davidic king (Ps. 72:10), and the islands rejoice when God reigns over the earth (Ps. 97:1). John is literally on an island, but he writes to churches that

are figurative islands, colonies of new Israel that constitute a circular archipelago in the Gentile Sea of Asia.

Isa. 11:11 says that the Lord will recall his people from the places where they are scattered. He lists seven locations (Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar, Hamath) and then adds “from the islands of the sea.” An eighth location? Perhaps, but it is plausible to take it as an interpretation of the list of seven nations: “*even* from the islands of the sea.” During the dispersion, Israel was distributed like islands in the sea of nations, but one day the Lord will gather them from the lands. No book of the Bible refers to islands more often than Isaiah, and most of these occur after chapter 40.

John is ἐν πνεύματι on the Lord’s Day, which is to say, he is gathered in and by the Holy Spirit with other worshipers as a liturgical community (Boxall 2006: 40; for “Holy Spirit,” see Koester 2015: 243). Perhaps John leads the Lord’s service on the Lord’s Day. He stands before the assembly, and Jesus calls to him from behind. Behind the Apostle John is Jesus, the true High Priest, the ultimate liturgical officiant in the church’s worship (Jordan 1999a: 27). The voice that calls him is a trumpet. In 4:1, Jesus again speaks with his trumpet voice that carries John through a door in the sky, and later John sees what happens as the angels blow a series of seven trumpets (8:2). The seven trumpets are specifications, elaborations, improvisations on the trumpet voice of Jesus that John first hears (on trumpets, →8:1).

John turns to “see the voice,” sounding like the synesthetic Bottom the Weaver playing Pyramus in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* (“Hark! I see a voice!”). At Sinai, Israel “saw” the voice that spoke (Exod. 20:18), and Moses saw the voice (Deut. 7:11; LXX). Israel saw no “similitude” on the mountain, but “only a voice” (Deut. 4:12; Douglas 1938: 149). “Seeing the voice,” John is Moses on Sinai, standing on the mountain before Yahweh, commissioned to write what he sees and hears, and to take it down the mountain (on “seeing words,” see Isa. 2:1; 13:1; Jer. 23:18; Amos 1:1; Mic. 1:1; Hab. 1:1).

Jesus meets John first as the Voice; before he sees Jesus, he hears him. Revelation is given to a “seer,” but that seer is also a hearer. Word and vision go together through the book. The movement from hearing to sight is the movement of human experience and of history generally. We move from ear to eye, from hearing and obeying the word of the Lord to seeing him face to face. For John, Jesus is an *embodied* Voice, the living Word of God (Mangina 2010), a point underscored by the chiasmic structure that places the voice in the center of John’s *wasf*. First a Voice, the living presence of the Word, but the Voice commands John to write. We could go off on Plato and Aristotle and Derrida on the evils of writing, but that is not Scripture’s viewpoint. Scripture regards the written word as the enscripited voice of God, heard as

the Spirit speaking to the churches (the refrain in the messages that Jesus dictates to John). Writing makes the voice of the Voice portable and permanent (cf. Koester 2015: 244), as the reading of the written Word is made alive by the breath and music of the Spirit.

This Christophany is also John's commissioning (Beale 1999: 200), where John is twice ordered to write down what he sees. In this respect, it is similar to OT commissioning scenes: Isaiah's vision of Yahweh enthroned in the temple, Jeremiah's commissioning, Daniel 10, where a heavenly being comes to Daniel to give him a commission to write things. The "I, John" is reminiscent of "I, Daniel," used seven times in Daniel's visions (Aune 1997: 75; Dan. 7:15; 8:15, 27; 9:2, 10:2, 7; 12:5). Ezekiel's initial vision of the glory is also in the background (Koester 2015: 244). To Ezekiel comes "a voice from above the expanse" (1:25). As Ezekiel looks above the expanse to find the source of the voice, he sees a lapis lazuli throne and on the throne a human figure made of glowing metal, "like fire all around within it," radiating like a rainbow (vv. 26–27). Ezekiel falls on his face, and hears a voice commanding him to stand so he can be sent (1:28–2:7). Rev. 1:12-20 is beginning of a lengthy commissioning that occupies much of the first half of Revelation. Revelation 1 and 10 both draw on the commission of Ezekiel (→10:1–11:2), and in between John stands before the throne of God like Isaiah (→4:1-11). First John is commissioned to write to the churches of Asia, then to record visions, finally given a book to eat and speak. This extended commission includes three visions involving scrolls (Boxall 2006: 40): John writes in a scroll, the Lamb receives and opens a scroll, and an angel brings a scroll from heaven for John. Properly sorting these commissioning scenes and three scrolls will be crucial for discerning the shape of Revelation's plot.

Before John sees Jesus in the midst of the lampstands, he sees the lampstands (1:10, 12), which represent the seven churches (v. 20). John's first sight of Jesus is a glimpse of the church, a vision of the lampstands and not the lampstand keeper. The church upholds and shines the light of Jesus in the world. We come to know Jesus by knowing his visible body in the world, as we love Jesus by loving the church.

Austin Farrer points to parallels with Zech. 4:1-2: "Zechariah's vision was familiar to Israelites as a prophetic lesson for the Feast of Lamps, Dedication, the Jewish Christmas; and familiar to Christians as occurring in a series of visions which give a messianic significance to the High Priest Jesus, making him typical ... of Jesus Christ." The differences between the two visions are important:

In the Jewish scheme the "candlestick" of Israel's worship holds the centre; on either hand are planted oil-trees, symbolizing the two anointed stocks, the princely house of Zerubbabel and the priestly house of Jesus, to feed the wicks with the oil of their

anointing. In St. John's picture the singular figure of Jesus, both priestly and royal, takes the centre; the churches burn as candles round him, but his own radiance is greater—he holds the seven stars in his hand, his face shines like the sun.

Jesus is the oil-tree that supplies the lamps. He is the anointed One whose anointing and illumination by the Spirit flows out to the churches (Farrer 1964: 65–6).

When we see lampstands, we know we are in the tabernacle or temple, specifically in the Holy Place. In John's vision, there are seven separate lampstands, in contrast to the tabernacle, which has a single lampstand with seven branches and seven lamps. Under the old covenant system, God's light is hid under tent curtains, then in a stone building. Now is it raised as a burning city on a hill, shining the light of Jesus to the nations. The single lampstand points to the Lord's focus on the single nation of Israel; but now heaven has been opened and the heavenly sanctuary is our central sanctuary, with lampstands in every nation. The unveiling of Jesus includes the unveiling of the light of God in the city of God.

In Exodus, the lampstands are described as trees, with branches and buds like the buds of a tree. The lampstand is a burning bush, and that means that John is on Sinai, in the temple that is a permanent Sinai. Specifically, the lampstand is decorated with almond blossoms. The Hebrew word for "almond" puns on the verb for "watch," and the almond-tree *menorah* is set in the sanctuary to "watch" the twelve loaves of showbread on the north side of the tabernacle. The lamps are the eyes of Yahweh watching over Israel. With his almond-budded rod, Aaron (and his priestly descendants) are also "watchers" of Israel and of the sanctuary in the midst of Israel (Jordan 2003: 5–6). The lampstand-trees form a stylized grove, an Eden, and that Edenic setting fits John's description of Jesus as "one like a son of man." "Son of Man" means "new Adam" (a human, not an angelic figure, contra Boxall 2006: 41). Jesus's presence among the burning trees is reminiscent of the Lord walking in the midst of the trees of the garden, calling to Adam in the Spirit of the day (Genesis 3).

If this is a temple setting, then the "son of man" in the midst of the lampstands is a priest (Mounce 1997: 58; Boxall 2006: 42; contra Koester 2015: 245–6; axiomatic for premoderns, Apringius 2011: 29; Bede 2011: 116; Oecumenius 2011: 7; Krey 1997: 37). Jesus's clothing resembles the priestly garments of glory and beauty. The LXX uses ποδήρη exclusively of priestly vestments, and the gold belt is also a priestly accoutrement, the breastplate of the high priest woven from gold thread as well as thread of other materials and colors. The overall impression of the breastplate was of a sparkling, gemmed gold breastplate and belt, a "stole of gold" (Jordan 2003: 7).

The combination of tabernacle and priestly Christology in John's Gospel and Revelation grows out of the OT sanctuary system where there are built-in parallels between priest and temple (Kline 1999). Already in ancient Israel, the priest is a walking, breathing tabernacle, the tabernacling of a man among the people.

The vision communicates that Jesus is with his church, but his position among lampstands implies that Jesus is there to trim wicks and refill lamps with oil. Jesus is with his church to make sure that she keeps burning brightly. His messages to the angels are a way of trimming the wicks; the Spirit speaks to the church to fill them with the oil that radiates light to the world. The church shines as a lamp, but not by her own power (Oecumenius 2011: 7). Importantly, Jesus is among the lampstands to make them shine *during a period of tribulation*. If Jesus has his way, the pressures of persecution will not snuff out the lamps but make them burn more brightly.

Jesus's golden belt is said to be across his "breasts" (πρὸς τοῖς μαστοῖς). These are not, as many early commentators suggest, the two testaments that nourish the church (Victorinus 2011: 2; Apringius 2011: 29; Caesarius 2011: 64–5; Bede 2011: 116). Rather, the clue to the plural lies in the echoes of the Song of Songs that fill the passage. According to the Massoretic text of Song of Songs 1:2, the "lovings" (*dodeka*) of the bridegroom are better than wine. For unexplained reasons, the Septuagint rendered "lovings" as μᾶστοι, "breasts," and in this the Septuagint was followed by the Vulgate (*quia meliora sunt ubera tua vino*). The Son of Man John sees is girded across his "breasts" because he is *dodi*, the Lover of the Song. Jesus is feminized, like Moses the "nursing father" (Num. 11:12; Heb. *yisha' ha'omen et-hayonaq*), like Paul the apostolic wet nurse (1 Thess. 2:7: ὡς ἐὰν τροφὸς θάλπη τὰ ἑαυτῆς τέκνα). Jesus is the *maternal* Word who gives the milk of the word to the children of his Father.

Perhaps μαστοῖς is a startling gloss on the Johannine announcement that the "Word was made flesh": The eternal Word so identifies himself with the Bride he comes to save that, though male, he appears in female flesh. The Word becomes male flesh, but in his glory he takes on feminine features, because the woman is the glory of the man. Even before John has a glimpse of the bride, he sees a bridal Bridegroom, and when he does finally see the Bride, she has been conformed to this glorious Bridegroom. Whatever the Christological and ecclesial import of the passage, the literary effect of μᾶστοι is to connect John's vision with the initial description of the lover of the Song, whose kisses intoxicate like wine (see Bynum 1984).

"Son of man" (Rev. 1:13) alludes to Daniel 7 (→1:8; also Psalm 8; cf. Aune 1997: 73–4). Jesus is the beast-taming Son of Man who ascends to receive a kingdom and dominion. Unlike Daniel, John does *not* see Jesus ascending; he sees Jesus the Son of Man *after* he has ascended to receive his kingdom and glory and dominion. With his head of white hair like wool, white as snow (1:14), Jesus resembles another character from Daniel 7, the Ancient of Days, who *confers* a kingdom on the Son of Man. As Son of Man, Last Adam, Jesus receives a kingdom. In his exaltation, he *gives* one. Which is, as we have seen (→1:7), what Revelation is all about. Jesus's kingdom is established not

merely when he takes his throne, but when he has made space for his disciples on his throne, when he has gathered his bridal army into heaven, when he has elevated *them* to kingship. *That* is the “coming of the kingdom” that Revelation depicts.

If Jesus is Ancient of Days, he is also the judge, ready to open the books and to pass judgment in favor of the saints (Bandy 2010: 148–56). John is summoned to give evidence as a prophetic witness, and to deliver the indictments to the churches of Asia. Already in the opening theophany, Revelation sets us up for a continuation of the judicial drama of the John’s Gospel that will take us to the heavenly courtroom (→4:1–6) through the testimony of the witnesses to the final assembly of a new court with fresh judges (→20:4–6) and the final judgment (→20:11–14).

The combination of “head and hair” goes back to the Nazirite laws of Numbers 6 (Jordan 1999a: 358; 2003: 14), where “head” is used eight times (Num. 6:5, 7, 9, 11, 18), and “hair” twice (vv. 5, 18). Jesus is the Nazarene, the holy Nazirite warrior, the *nazir*/branch from the stump of Jesse. In his enthronement, he continues to fight holy war with the sword of his mouth and the fire of his eyes. In Lamentations 4, Jeremiah mourns the decline and capture of Israel: Gold has lost its luster and the glory has gone because of the sin of Jerusalem, greater than the sin of Sodom. Verse 7 speaks of Nazirites who were “purer than snow” and “whiter than milk” but became blacker than soot, withered like dried bones. They are no longer precious stones but shriveled skins. From the perspective of Lam. 4:7, Jesus is like the Nazirites of old, pure, white, like the land flowing with milk, healthy like coral, polished like a precious stone.

λευκος appears more often in Revelation than in any other book of the Bible. Jesus promises a white stone to the one who overcomes in Pergamum (2:17), and white clothing for those in Sardis (3:4–5) and Laodicea (3:18). White is a heavenly color: The elders in the heavenly temple wear white (4:4), the first horse that comes from heaven is white (6:2), the martyrs under the altar are given white robes (6:11), the innumerable multitude rescued from the tribulation are clothed in white (7:9, 13). The Son of Man harvests while riding a white cloud (14:14), and the Faithful and True rides in triumph on a white horse (19:11), followed by armies on white horses and clothed in white (19:14). Near the end of the book, a great judgment occurs before the “white throne” (20:11). Heaven is where things happen first, but eventually heavenly whiteness descends to earth with the bridal city who is white and light. Jesus is the original and model of all this. He is Jesus the White, pure and clear and bright like newly fallen snow. His heavenly whiteness is shared with his people, with the martyrs and the army that follows him. The Head is white, and the body is made white by union with him. White is the all-color of

colors, as Melville knew, *not* the colorless all-color of atheism, but all-color of all-embracing divinity. White is the color of heaven because it draws together the rainbow into one.

The whiteness of Jesus's head and hair is elaborated in several similes. It is like wool, anticipating the later revelation of Jesus as Lamb. It is as sparkling-white as snow. Snow describes the whiteness of leprosy (Exod. 4:6; Num. 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27) or purity (Ps. 51:7; Isa. 1:18). Leprosy defiles, but the whiteness of leprosy is connected to the whiteness of purity and glory. Leprosy defiled when it juxtaposed flesh and glory, exposed flesh and a white hair of glory. Under the Levitical system, a leper who became *completely* white was declared clean. Snow is white water, heavenly water, water on a high place that, melting, flows down below. That Jesus the head has snowy hair on his head indicates that he is the source of heavenly water, the water that descends from heaven in baptism (cf. Caesarius 2011: 64). Old men have "hoary heads," an index of maturity and wisdom. Jesus the White has matured to become an Ancient One, *the* Ancient of Days. He is an elder, the archetype of the white-robed πρεσβύτεροι whom John sees enthroned in heaven (→4:4).

Jesus eyes are flames of fire. Eyes are organs of discernment and judgment. When John ascends to heaven in the next vision and sees the Lamb, the Lamb has seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God (5:6), sent out into all the earth. The reference "seven eyes" goes to Zech. 3:9, where the crown on Joshua has seven eyes, the seven letters graven into the high priest's golden crown, which say "Holy to the Lord." Jesus receives the Spirit as a gift from his Father at his ascension (Acts 2), the Spirit who comes into the world for righteousness and judgment (John 16). This is how the Father gives all judgment to the Son (John 5). Jesus's eyes/Spirit are not merely receptive but "go out" into the earth. The eyes of the Lord roam to and fro, watching and reporting and keeping surveillance on the world (2 Chron. 16:9; Prov. 15:3; Zech. 4:10). The eyes of Jesus not only watch but carry out judgments, flashing out like the fire of Yahweh's glory in the temple, consuming his enemies in the fire of his eyes. They are the flaming eyes of his love, burning with the Spirit who is the Love of the Father and Son, burning with the Spirit for the Bride who is the delight of his eyes.

John's specific phrase appears in the OT. Moses sees the angel of the Lord ἐν φλόγι πυρός on Sinai (Exod. 3:2; LXX), and in the plague of hail fire is seen flashing (φλογίζω) within the hail (Exod. 9:24). Yahweh's voice splits fire into flame, φλόγα πυρός (Ps. 28:7 [29:7]), and Love flashes with πυρός φλόγης (Song of Songs 8:6). When Yahweh shows up in his chariots, his rebuke is like flashes of fire (ἐν φλόγι πυρός, Isa. 66:15). A number of these translate the Hebrew *levanah esh* (Exod. 2:3; Ps. 29:7; the two words are linked without being part of a phrase in Ps. 105:32; 106:18; Isa. 10:17), where *levanah* highlights both the shape and the glitter of a flame, similar to the sparkle and shape of a sword point (cf. 1 Sam. 17:7, where the word refers to the head of Goliath's spear).

The lampstands are the churches (1:20) and the lamps are the angels of the churches. The churches uphold flames, the angels who are inspired and kept aflame by *the* Angel, the Spirit. The light that radiates from the churches is the light of the sevenfold Spirit (cf. Victorinus 2011: 3: the “Holy Spirit with its sevenfold energy”; also Apringius 2011: 29), which is the light of the eyes of Jesus. More strongly: Filled with the sevenfold Spirit, we *are* the eyes of Jesus in the world. Jesus sees the world through us; he watches the world through us; he flashes his fire through us; he roams to and fro on the earth through the church.

Verse 15 says that Jesus’s feet are like burnished bronze, and that suggests a link with other metal figures in the prophets. In Daniel 2, Nebuchadnezzar sees a vision of a metallic statue that represents four kings/kingdoms of the “latter days.” The metals in Revelation do not match the metals of the vision, but there is a conceptual parallel. As metallic man, Jesus is an imperial figure. He is tabernacle, lover, priest, *and* empire. We have seen that the messages to the churches come from Jesus the Lover, and this imperial context provides another lens through which to read the messages. They are, among other things, royal edicts. They come from the Bridegroom who is also God’s empire-in-person, messages from an *Imperial* Lover (cf. Leithart 2012b).

Many recent scholars have devoted attention to the Apocalypse’s portrait of the Roman empire. Stephen D. Moore uses Homi Bhabha’s theory about parody turning to mimicry to explore how the NT, and Revelation in particular, responds to empire. He concludes, pessimistically, that Revelation presents a “conception of the divine sphere as ... empire writ large” (Moore 2006: 121). Moore complains that

[m]ore than any other early Christian text, Revelation is replete with the language of war, conquest, and empire—so much so, indeed, as to beggar description. Note in particular, however, that the promised reward for faithful Christian discipleship in Revelation is joint rulership of the Empire of empires soon destined to succeed Rome (3:21; 5:10; 20:4–6; 22:5), a messianic Empire established by means of mass-slaughter on a surreal scale ... calculated to make the combined military campaigns of Julius Caesar, Augustus, and all their successors pale to insignificance by comparison. All this suggests that Revelation’s overt resistance to and expressed revulsion toward Roman imperial ideology is surreptitiously compromised and undercut by covert compliance and attraction.

Far from viewing the book as a source of resistance, Moore thinks that Revelation’s vision is fulfilled in “Constantinian Christianity,” since Revelation “counters empire with empire” (119).

Christopher Frilingos (2004) observes that “spectacle” was central to the Roman empires efforts to gain and retain power: “The Roman Empire was not maintained by raw strength alone: of equal or greater significance were the countless moments of interaction and negotiation in which the subjects of Rome, from the elite pagans of the Greek East to the seemingly marginalized Christians of John’s community, struggled to grasp for themselves the truth of their society and their place in it.” Spectacles—triumphs, games, parades—“provided a framework for the delineation of the real in Roman society and for the forging of identity” (11). Spectacle did not provide Rome with a one-directional tool for imposing its

will on the empire. Spectacle itself was a destabilizing factor, one that allowed new forms of culture to surface (120). Within this context, Frilingos, like Moore, makes use of Homi Bhabha's notion of "mimicry" to explain the role of spectacle in Revelation. Bhabha defines "mimicry" as

the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite ... On the one hand, colonial mimicry is an expression of imperial intention: "the civilizing mission to transform the colonial culture by making it copy or 'repeat' the colonizer's culture." At the same time, however, mimicry is a "menace," since it reveals the limits of the realization of imperialist intentions: the colonized are always "almost the same, but not quite" ... Mimicry is thus a "double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority." (10)

Some have used postcolonial theory to describe Revelation as a "subaltern" within the Roman world, much as Thompson sees Revelation as "deviant knowledge." Frilingos also concludes pessimistically, arguing that Revelation is "an expression of Roman culture, possessed of the same ambiguities and ambivalence" found in a variety of other cultural products. Revelation is not a straightforward book of resistance to Rome, but a site of negotiation that makes use of one of Rome's tools—spectacle. On Revelation's treatment of empire, see further Howard-Brook and Gwyther (2000).

Recent analysis of Revelation and empire suffer from one-sided assumptions about empire (as in, "Empire is *bad*"). In Leithart (2012a), I attempt to present a more nuanced picture by developing a biblical typology of empires, contrasting "Abrahamic" to "Cyrianic" and "Babelic" empires. I reproduce my concluding summary (50–1):

- In response to the rebellious imperial project at Babel, Yahweh initiates his own imperial project. Through Abraham and Israel, he begins to form a family of tribes, tongues, nations, and peoples. He establishes Zion as the land in the midst of the sea of nations, and begins to bring Zion's light to the furthest islands. The full emergence of this empire is inherent in the gospel of the kingdom. It is the gospel of God's *imperium*.
- God's empire is founded on the self-sacrificial death of Jesus and of the firstfruits of his people. It is renewed by ritual commemoration of Jesus in Eucharist, which forms a community readied for martyrdom.
- God's empire is not a transhistorical aspiration, an ideal, or a sentiment of fellow-feeling among nations. It takes concrete form in a catholic church, where rival rulers and emperors, rival nations and empires, become table fellows and, under the church's discipline, are to learn the Lord's ways of peace and justice. Under Jesus and filled with the Pentecostal Spirit, the ecclesial empire is a historical form of international community. The church is the eschatological empire already founded.
- God's empire coexists with and interpenetrates other political structures of the world. Citizens of God's empire may serve the kings and rulers of this world, and may fight for kings and rulers of the world. Citizens of God's empire must be always ready to be martyrs when the demands of Caesar conflict with discipleship to Jesus.
- Empires differ. One of the key distinguishing marks is how they treat the people of God. Those that bless Abraham's seed, acknowledging the Abrahamic empire, are blessed. Those who curse, are cursed.
- For a time, God called a series of empires to be a refuge for Israel. Since the first century, no empire has filled that role. Constantine and Charlemagne are similar to David and Cyrus in some respects. Neither is a "Messiah."
- Babelic empires build a city and tower against God; Cyrian or cherubic empires endorse and support the building of God's temple. Babelic empires impose a uniform culture and religious confession; Cyrian empires are

multicultural and multi-confessional, and in particular leave space for the saints to worship God. Babelic empires gather; cherubic empires scatter and leave subjects relatively free to be themselves. Babelic empires arrest history; Cyrian empires remain open to disruptions and rearrangements in history. Babelic empires sow confusion; cherubic empires bring order.

- Babelic empires are founded on blood of innocents. Bestial empires are founded on the blood of the *saints*. Ironically, bestial empires get tipsy in the very act of drinking the blood of saints.

There is also a bronze figure in Dan. 10:5-6, who comes to tell Daniel things that will shortly take place. There are close parallels between this bronze figure and the bronze-footed Son of Man who appears to John.

Koester (2015: 246) suggests that the hapax χαλκολιβάνω in Rev. 1:15 derives from Daniel 10, combining two words from Theodotian's Greek version of the book. According to Theodotian, "the figure had legs like 'shining bronze' (*chalkou stilbontos*). The combined word is *chalkoustilbontos*, which in Rev 1:15 is modified to *chalkolibanos*, with the *s* and *t* sounds assimilated." Taking the vision of Jesus as a corporate portrait of Christ, earlier commentators suggested that the bronze furnace indicates the fire that the apostolic "feet" of Christ suffer as they proclaim the gospel in the world (Victorinus 2011: 3; Caesarius 2011: 64; Krey 1997: 39).

Adam is made of dust of the ground, and Yahweh breathes the breath of life into his nostrils, turning him into animated dust, Spirit-enlivened dirt. Scripture traces the perfection and glorification of humanity as a transmutation from earth into precious metals and gemstones. Gold also comes from the earth; sandstone and diamonds are both "of the earth, earth," but they are earth of a different color. The first Adam is a man of dust, but Jesus the Son of Adam has feet of glowing bronze.

When the Bride is revealed at the end of the book, she is constructed of precious stones and jewels. Her walls are like jasper—the same material that describes the Father himself in chapter 4—and the city as a whole is pure gold, so pure that it seems transparent. The foundation stones are the stones of the high priest's breastplate, the gates are all pearl, and the streets are gold. The bride taken from the side of the Last Adam has been glorified from dust into a sparkling, glorious city. When Jesus appears to John as the metal man, with feet like burning bronze, he is the Last Adam—Adam glorified from dust to metal, Adam burnished to be like glowing bronze. He is Adam deified. By the end of Revelation, we will see a deified Bride as well.

As noted above, the voice of Jesus is the center of John's description. He *is* a voice, and he *speaks* with an oceanic voice. The comparison to "many waters" comes most explicitly from Ezekiel. When Ezekiel first sees the Lord's glory at the river Chebar among the exiles, the wings of the cherubim and angels that make up the glory cloud make a voice of abundant waters, which Ezekiel (1:24) immediately compares to the voice of Yahweh himself and to

the deafening tramp of an army on the march. The voice of Yahweh is a great crashing waterfall, but that same crashing voice is *also* the sound of his glory, his angelic host. Ezekiel uses the same comparison when the glory returns to the rebuilt temple in Ezek. 43:2: It is the voice of Yahweh, but Yahweh's own voice is the sound of his host. When Ezekiel goes into exile, the glory of Yahweh goes with him. So too for John: In exile on Patmos, John is not alone, but is accompanied by the glory that is Jesus.

The same interplay of divine and ecclesial voices is evident in Revelation. Jesus's voice is the sound of many waters, but so is the voice of the multitude singing praise God (14:1-2; 19:6). God speaks with a world-shaking voice; and that voice resounds through us. God has the thunder, but he is not protective like Zeus. We do not need a Promethean Titan to wrest the thunderbolt from him. He gives his thunder-voice to men, freely. Our voices do not merely *echo* his voice, but are incorporated into his thunder-voice as we are incorporated into the Voice that was made flesh. The parallel of the voice of Jesus and his slaves is not "mere imagery." If Jesus thunders to us, we ought to thunder to the world: Our praise should be boisterous, loud enough to crack the sky and shatter the mountains.

Water purifies. God speaks and resounds and shakes the world; he speaks in and through the voice of the church, so that the church's worship thunders and shakes the earth. But the church's word also flows out like a mighty river, like the river in Ezekiel's vision (cf. Ezek. 47; →22:1-5), which cleanses the land and renews the Dead Sea. The voice of Jesus is a flood that sweeps away the old world, preserving his people in the ark, so that the world can be made new. Thus his watery voice comes to us in the waters of baptism that cleanses, the baptismal waters that provide the washing of regeneration (Victorinus 2011: 2).

Jesus has seven stars in his right hand, identified in verse 20 as the angels of the seven churches. Angels and stars are parallel in Job also, where the morning stars sing at the creation of the world (Job 38:7). Stars and constellations often represent human beings. Abraham is promised a progeny like the stars of the heaven (Gen. 22:17), and Christians shine like stars in a dark generation (Phil. 2:15-16). At creation, the sun, moon, and stars are set up as signs, for seasons, to *govern* the day and the night. If the angels of the churches are stars, then the church is set in the sky, joined with Christ in heavenly places, so that to keep time and to govern by illumination and by bringing things to light. That is how Jesus reigns through his people. Jesus's face is like the sun, his feet on the earth, and in his right hand he is holding stars. He bridges heaven and earth. The stars are perhaps the Pleiades, "the Seven" in ancient texts, or the Sun, Moon, and five known planets (Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus, Saturn), the seven "stars" that make up the days of the week and the ancient heavens (→1:20 below). Either way, Jesus is a cosmic ruler, spanning heaven and earth.

The sword in his mouth is his tongue, shaped like a sword, forged into a weapon of war. His Word kills and makes alive. The image is not found in this precise form anywhere else. The mouth of Yahweh's servant is made like a sharp sword (Isa. 49:2), and the Davidic anointed one has a weapon in his mouth (Isa. 11:1-5). The wicked have weapons in their mouths, razors (Ps. 52:2) and swords (Ps. 57:4), words to shred the righteous by slander. Jesus is shown with a sword in the mouth three other times in Revelation (2:16; 19:15, 21). He wields his sword-tongue against the impenitent members of the church at Sardis, and to overthrow the kings of the land (Aune 1997: 98–9).

His face shines like the sun, again emphasizing the cosmic dimensions of the Last Adam. As Sun, Jesus is the bridegroom, since the sun is like a bridegroom coming from his chamber, rejoicing to run his race (Ps. 19:4-6). The end of the Song of Deborah is a prayer that all the enemies of the Lord would perish, but those who love the Lord rise in victory like the sun in its might (Judg. 5:31; Beale 1999: 212). He is the new Samson, whose name means "sun." With his mouth-sword and his sun-face, Jesus is the divine warrior (Beale 1999: 212). The Sun-face is the seventh feature of Jesus, associated with Sabbath and the end of the week. Sunrise is the beginning of a day.

As many commentators point out, the vision presents a "high" Christology. Titles, features, and descriptions that normally describe God are attributed to "one like the Son of Man." But the vision is not simply Christological. *Because* it is Christological, it is also ecclesiological. As Bede (2011: 117) puts it (cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 46), "[A]ll that is said here of the appearance of the Son of man is true also of the church. Since Christ himself has become one nature with the church, he gives to her the priestly honor, and that she might shine as the sun, he gives to her also the power to judge in the kingdom of his Father." To put it otherwise, John sees the glorified *body* of Christ, which is the church. In Christ, the church wears the white glory of a heavenly crown; her eyes are flame, to illumine, investigate, judge; she speaks with the voice of many waters and her tongue is a sword in her mouth; her feet glow like burnished bronze, like an altar fired for the living sacrifice of prayer and praise. Jesus is the heavenly high priest among the lampstands, but he carries out his temple service through his body, through men like John, who see, hear, and are touched by Spirit-finger of the risen Christ.

John's commission

And when I saw Him, I fell to his feet as dead, and he put his right hand on me, saying, "Fear not. I AM the first and the last, and the

living—and I became dead and, behold, I am alive unto the ages of ages. And I have the keys of death and of Hades. Write therefore things you see and things that are and things that are about to happen after these things. The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are seven churches.”

—Rev. 1:17-20

After he describes Jesus, John recounts his reaction to the vision. This is John the Beloved Disciple, who was with Jesus for three years, who leaned on Jesus's bosom at the Last Supper, who saw Jesus transfigured and was with him in the garden of Gethsemane. John is an intimate of Jesus, but when he sees Jesus in glory, he is struck dead. No one can see God face-to-face and live (Exod. 33:20; cf. Gen. 32:30; Exod. 24:10-11; Num. 12:8; Judg. 6:22; 13:22; Jn 1:14-18). Jesus's feet (πόδες) glow like bronze in a furnace (v. 15), like an altar aflame, and when John has taken Jesus's glory in, he falls at those glowing feet (v. 17). He is at the foot of the altar, like the martyrs in the fifth seal (→6:9-11). John, who partakes of the suffering and perseverance that come with the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus, is the first “martyr” to be raised from the dead, the first to ascend from the foot of the altar to the presence of Jesus, the first witness to rise and write, rise and rule.

In the presence of God, people fall down to the ground, prostrate themselves at the Lord's footstool, which is the ark. It is an attitude of prayer before the living temple-house, before the altar-feet of Jesus. Falling at another's feet is also an act of a defeated enemy. In the Psalms (18:38), David praises God for the enemies that fall beneath his feet, and celebrates the fact that Yahweh causes the peoples and nations to be subdued “under our feet” (Ps. 47:3). Paul promises that Satan will be trampled under the feet of the church shortly (Rom. 16:20; cf. Mal. 4:3). Lam. 3:34 speaks of prisoners who are captured being under the feet of their captors, and putting a foot on the neck of a defeated enemy was a sign of the victory, a symbolic yoke of service placed on the vanquished. John is not an enemy of Jesus, and he is not defeated here. But he assumes the position of a defeated enemy. This is the choice: We can bow at the feet of Jesus voluntarily in worship, or we can submit to him *involuntarily* when he subdues us. Either way, all knees will genuflect to him, and all will lick the dust before him (Phil. 2:9-11).

Jesus raises John with a touch. Jesus's touch is a significant theme in the Gospels. He cleanses lepers by touching them (Matt. 8:3; Mk 1:41; Lk. 5:13); instead of becoming unclean, he communicates purity to the lepers, or, better, takes their impurity to himself. He touches people with fevers (Matt. 8:15), the eyes of the blind (Matt. 9:29; 20:34; Mk 8:22), the ears and mouth

of the deaf and dumb (Mk 7:33), and they are healed. When the woman with the flow of blood touches Jesus, power goes out from him and she is healed—again, she does not defile Jesus but he purifies her (Matt. 9:20–21; Mk 5:27–31; Lk. 8:44–47; cf. Matt. 14:36; Mk 6:56; Lk. 6:19). Death is intensely defiling in the OT, requiring a double cleansing with a special concoction of purifying water. Being in the same room with a dead body is enough to defile anyone, and touching a dead body more intensely defiling. Jesus touches dead bodies and coffins and radiates life (Lk. 7:14).

The most direct connection is to the Transfiguration. John was with Peter and James on the holy mountain when Jesus was transfigured, and when they saw Jesus in glory, they all fell on their faces. Afterward, Jesus touched them and told them not to be afraid (Matt. 17:7). When Jesus touches the prostrate John, who has fallen like a dead man, he naturally raises him from the ground. It is another act of power to bring the dead to life.

He touches John with his “right hand” (v. 17). The right hand is the hand of authority. Jesus is at the right hand of the Father, and that is his position of rule. More importantly, Jesus has seven stars in his right hand, which are the angels of the seven churches (v. 20). Since Jesus touches John with the right hand, he associates John with the stars. In effect, he places John in his right hand and makes him one of his stars. John is writing to the seven angels of the seven churches, and he is at the right hand of Jesus, the chief star writing to the seven stars, an angel messenger writings to angels.

Jesus’s declaration to the prostrate John (Rev. 1:17–18a) is a neat little, rich little chiasm:

- A. I am (ἐγὼ εἰμι)
- B. First
- C. Last
- D. Living One
- C’. Became dead
- B’. Behold! Alive
- A’. I am (εἰμι) to ages of ages

A and A’ repeat the “I am” name of God. “First” links with “alive,” since, in the normal order of things, life comes before death; “last” and “become dead” are linked for the same reason. Our first breath is the sign of life; our last marks the moment of death. At the center of the structure, Jesus declares himself to be the Living One, and as such, he reverses the order of life and death. B–C moves from first to last, in the normal order of human life. B’–C’ moves from death to life, from last to first, which is the order of the new life that is in Jesus. Because Jesus is the Living One, death comes *before* life, as the pathway to eternal and abundant life. Because Jesus is the Living One, the last shall be first and the first shall be last.

The whole statement is surrounded by the Hellenistic equivalent of Yahweh—"I am." The internal assertions unpack the meaning of that ἐγώ εἰμι. "I am" is not merely or primarily a claim to eternal duration. Jesus is indeed the Son who is eternal in that straightforward sense, the eternal Son of the Father who begets him in the Spirit. Because he is sheer eternal boundless life, he can give life; because he is eternal boundless life, he can overcome death. In context, though, the accent is on the utter liveliness of a God who overcomes all death. When Yahweh identifies himself as "I am" to Moses, and when Jesus identifies with Yahweh, he claims to be the One who overcomes death. In this context, what makes Jesus "Living One" is *not* the fact that he has always been and will be. In context, he is ὁ ζῶν because he was dead but, Behold he lives! He is not the living one "forever"; he is the living one εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, "to ages of ages," the one who lives through all ages and their endings, who unifies them as the Lord of all ages, not a man filled with the spirit of an age but the One who has the seven Spirits of all created time. As the risen One, he has put death behind him. Death has become beginning rather than the end. The first and last change places; better, ὁ πρῶτος καὶ ὁ ἔσχατος meet in the one who *is* the first and the last. Death, once last, has been promoted, and life becomes eschatological extension after death. This is why he can touch John and raise him to new life: By the finger of Jesus, John rises to a fearless life after his death in fear.

As the living One, who is first and last, Jesus opens a door in the back side of the grave because he has received the "keys of death and Hades." Passing through death and coming to eternal life, he has been given control of the gate of death. Having defeated Plutos, Minos, Sheol, and Mot, he takes their place as Lord of death. The combination of "death and Hades" provides another connection to the Song of Songs. θάνατος and ἄδης occur together a number of times in the LXX (Job 33:22; Ps. 6:6; 48:15; Prov. 2:18; 5:5; Isa. 28:18), most prominently in the theme verses of the Song of Songs: "love is strong as death, zeal as jealous as Hades" (8:6; LXX, κραταιὰ ὡς θάνατος ἀγάπη σκληρὸς ὡς ἄδης ζήλος). Jesus is the living Love of the Father, the Love that many waters cannot quench, the Fire of Yah stronger than death.

The reference to "keys" links to Isaiah 22, where the Lord threatens to replace Shebna, the steward of David's house, with Eliakim son of Hilkah. Shebna's clothing is reminiscent of Jesus's, and he has keys on his shoulder to open and shut the house of David, admitting to the king's presence and excluding from the king's presence. Shebna is a "priestly" figure in David's household, a personal attendant to the human king as the priests were personal and household servants of the divine King (cf. Leithart 2003b). What is said of Shebna in Isa. 22:22 (open and shutting) is repeated of Jesus in the letter to Sardis (Rev. 3:7). Jesus is of course the Son of David, but he is also

pictured as steward of his Father's house. In 1:18, his stewardship extends to the grave. Jesus is not only the firstborn of the Father's house, but also first-born over the dead, with authority to open and shut the grave. He locks some into death and keeps them there: What he shuts no one can open (→20:1-3). He unlocks death for others, and releases them, and death cannot pull them back. The living One is one whose eternal and unconquerable life begins in death.

Verse 19 repeats the instruction of verse 11, with variations. The least important but most obvious is that the destination of the messages given in verse 11 is not repeated in verse 19. More intriguingly, the content of John's writing is expanded. In verse 11, John is to write what he *sees*, while in verse 19, the content is threefold, marked by repetition of the relative pronoun ἃ: He is to write what he sees, what is, and what will happen after these things (ἃ εἶδες καὶ ἃ εἰσιν καὶ ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα). He is not limited to writing about appearances; he is commissioned to write about what *is*. And he is not limited to what is, but will record things that are *yet to come*. John's vision has expanded because of his vision of Jesus in glory in verses 12–16, his "death" at Jesus's feet, and his "resurrection" at Jesus's touch. John's face-to-face encounter with the risen Christ has qualified him to speak of things hidden.

Fittingly, the chapter ends with Jesus explaining a "mystery," that is, something kept secret in ages past. "Dead" and risen, John is qualified now to explain mysteries. Two specific things are explained: stars and lamps. These are stars in Jesus's right hand, the hand of power. John is there too, or at least John has been touched by that right hand with the seven stars, and so John is associated with the seven stars, made a messenger to the seven stars. The stars are angels of the churches. What kind of beings are these?

A variety of answers have been offered (cf. Aune 1997: 108–12; Smalley 2005: 55). Some see the angels as heavenly counterparts to earthly churches (Reddish 2001: 43), others as guardian angels of the churches (Oecumenius 2011: 8), others as personifications of the essence of particular churches (Mounce 1997: 66), others as symbols of the churches' spiritual condition (Koester 2015: 248). Premodern commentators take them as bishops or other human leads of the church (Bede 2011: 118; Krey 1997: 40–1), and Nicholas of Lyra goes so far as to attempt to identify each bishop by name (Krey 1997: 44–5, 46–7, 51, 55, 57). I am not as bold as Nicholas, but, for reasons explained below, I believe that this premodern interpretation is correct.

Ἄγγελος itself means "messenger," and can, like the equivalent Hebrew *mal'ak*, mean either "angel-spirit" John is the Lord's "angel" (Matt. 11:10), and the final book of the our OT is titled "My Messenger" and contains prophecies about a prophetic messenger (3:1; 4:4-6). The word cannot decide the issue for us, and we are left to rely on the context. The fact that John has been associated with the stars, touched with the star-hand of Jesus, provides one clue. If

John is touched by the angel hand and joins the angels as a messenger to the churches, then it seems plausible that the other stars in Jesus's hand are also human beings. Further, the fact that Jesus dictates messages for the angels to a human being strongly suggests that the seven messengers are human as well. The widespread conclusion that these are angel-spirits rests on an abstract, ahistorical conception of what Jesus tells John to do. If Jesus *actually* appeared to John, dictated the *actual* words we read in the text, and expected John *actually* to send the messages to the churches, then the notion that the recipients are angel-spirits makes little sense. Why could Jesus not simply speak directly to his angelic messengers (as he appears to do in other places in Revelation)? Angels presumably have access to heaven, so Jesus can address them without the bother of sending off a circuit rider. Why send the letters off to the *churches* of Asia, if the messages themselves are addressed to angel-spirits? What interest would the churches of Asia have in Jesus's instructions to heavenly hosts? To put it provocatively, or snarkily: *Where do angels receive their mail? And, how does John know the addresses?* The more we try to imagine a set of letters sent to angel-spirits, the more implausible it becomes. And then we are left with the unhappy (perhaps unfair) suspicion that commentators do not think Jesus *really* intended John to write to the angels at all.

The contents of the messages confirm beyond reasonable doubt that the angels are human. Modern English translations distract us because they do not distinguish between the singular and plural of the second person, but in Greek most of the exhortations of the messages are explicitly addressed to a single person—the angel. Jesus charges the *angel* of Ephesus with leaving his first love (τὴν ἀγάπην σου τὴν πρώτην ἀφῆκες, 2:4). Jesus tells the *angel* of the church at Pergamum to repent, because Jesus is coming quickly to him (ἔρχομαι σοι ταχύ, 2:16). The *angel* of the church at Laodikeia is lukewarm (χλιαρὸς εἶ, 3:16). Now, as difficult as it might be to imagine that Jesus holds the some human leader of a city church responsible for the condition of his flock, it is far *more* difficult to determine what these charges and exhortations mean when addressed to an angel-spirit. Do angel-spirits suffer spiritual lethargy? Do they have dry spells and dark nights of the soul? Do they experience acedia? How does an angel *repent*?

Boxall (2006: 45, 48, 49) consistently treats the ἄγγελοι as spiritual beings but this leads to some oddities, if not absurdities. The angel at Pergamum “is urged to repent” for his “undue tolerance” (60). How an angel manifests tolerance or its opposite he does not say. Oecumenius (2011: 10), more reasonably, thinks that the messages are written to guardian angels, but claims that the call to repentance is issued to the church, not the angel.

Many Christians have held the Miltonesque view that angels fell before or at the beginning of creation. Few or none have believed that angels continue

to fall (though cf. Boxall 2006: 50). Few or none have believed that angels, once fallen, might repent and be restored. Perhaps our angelology requires radical revision, but the letter to the Ephesian angel demands such a revision, if it is address to a spiritual angel. Worse: Jesus threatens to remove the lampstand (the church, 1:20) from Ephesus if the *angel* fails to repent. That leaves the future of the Ephesian church dependent *not* on the repentance of the community or its leader, but on the repentance of his spiritual guardian, over whom the community can exert *no* influence. That leaves the church at the mercy of angels (who seem to be subject to volatile mood swings), the very sort of enslavement to principalities and powers from which Jesus delivered us.

The *law* is given through angels. *Not* the message of Jesus. Or, the only Angel that now mediates is Jesus's own angel, the Angel that is his Spirit (→1:1). The message of Jesus comes through a Spirit-filled man, through the slave John to the human messengers of the churches. We were for a little while lower than angels, but now crowned with glory and honor. This is one of the key themes of Revelation: It is the last act of the angelic covenant, the last hurrah for those reliable spiritual beings that have run things from creation. Angels all but disappear from the story after Babylon falls (→19:1-10; cf. 22:6-15), as the world is turned over to the far less reliable race of humanity. The end of the book leaves us with visions of human warriors, human judges, a human city with human kings, and nations of humans. From the start of Revelation, this transition is already at work, as Jesus entrust his messages to a man who delivers them to other men.

The fact that Jesus calls these human leaders “angels,” that they are addressed as single leaders of the church (singular) in a city and are held responsible for the brightness of the church, suggests something about their stature, the church, and their role in it. In the old creation, angels were the ministers of the heavenly temple. As we will see throughout Revelation, angels carry out the final destruction of that old world, Jerusalem and the surrounding *oikoumene*. When they are finished, others take their place in the heavenly temple. These new recruits are also “angels,” but ontologically (by genus and phylum) they are human beings elevated above the angels. They are human beings who have become like the Ancient Ones who sat on thrones in the world of old (→4:5).

That the church is led by “angels” fits neatly with John’s “temple ecclesiology.” Priests in the tabernacle and temple were servants of God’s house, which was an intrusion of heaven into earth. With their winged robes, they served among the cherubim around the throne of Yahweh. They were angels of the holy house. In the new covenant, all the baptized are made priests, hands filled to draw near to God in service around his throne. All

are saints (ἅγιοι) and dwell in heaven (Rev. 12:12; 13:6), in contrast to others who are earth-bound land-dwellers (11:10; 14:6). If they live and serve God in heaven, they form a company of human angels, and their leaders are chief angels. The head angel over the churches of a city is *the* angel of that church, as the chief Angel of all the angels of the churches is the Angel of Jesus, the Spirit.

John writes to a *single* angel in each city church. We know from Acts that these cities had multiple assemblies of Christians—apostles go from “house to house” (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 20:20). When Paul left Ephesus, he said goodbye to the elders of the churches—more than one. Yet John addresses a single angel of a singular church, and that implies a municipal organization of the church under a single leader. From the beginning, the various house churches recognized that they formed a single body, and by the time John delivers these messages they had apparently appointed a chief pastor as the overseer for all the groups. This angel is personally responsible for the health of the church, which is made up of the churches of a city. Obviously, the church’s sins are also in view, but Jesus addresses a single angel who is responsible as the head of the church in each city. That suggests an important aspect of ministry in a city. Ideally, it seems, the church in a city should be organized as one church, with an overseer who leads various congregations. And he is the angel, messenger to the city and to the churches of the city. Failing a unity embodied in a bishop, the pastors of a city can cooperate in ministry, taking responsibility for the whole church of a city, and for the entire city.

Many object that the angels cannot be city pastors or bishops because there is no evidence of such an office in the first century church. That assumes a negative answer to the question in dispute: Namely, whether Revelation 1–3 provides precisely that evidence. An argument in the form, “Once we exclude Revelation as evidence, there is no evidence” is less than compelling. The view taken here appears to be a minority view in contemporary scholarship, but is neither unprecedented nor recent. Prior to the modern age, it was well-known (Bede 2011: 118; Krey 1997: 40–1). Bullinger was certain that the angels were “messengers, ministers and pastors” (quoted in Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 53).

The angel-bishops are stars who shine light into the churches. They are the eyes of the Lord who keep watch over the church and the world. Lamps bring things out of darkness into public view. Lamps are thus associated with surveillance and watching, acts of authority and rule. Christians rule by shining the light of Christ, the light of the gospel, the light of truth into the darkness of the world. Those who are in the dark, and who love darkness, do not want to be exposed, so they fight back. Lights are also eyes, eyes that search but also eyes that judge and discern. The angels of the churches are

called to ensure that the lights are burning in the church, to ensure that sin is being scared from the dark corners, ensure that the truth of God is being spoken so that the light can come. The angels of the churches shine the light of authority in order to maintain the health of the bodies that make up the body of Christ.

Abusive authority disables bodies. A husband who never lays an aggressive finger on his wife may still silence her with mockery and bullying threats. Children are blinded to reality by the manipulations of a sexual predator. Harsh teachers do not open ears to instruction, but deafen. Even when they do not cut out tongues, tyrants prevent tongues from doing what tongues are created to do—to speak truth. Propaganda sows confusion and leaves many of the propagandized “brain-damaged.” Ultimately, abusers deprive victims of the full use of their faculties.

We know all this. It is one of the main courses in the daily diet of news, at least in the West. What is *not* so obvious to us is the reverse: If abusive authority disables bodies, authority rightly used restores and heals. Well-used authority empowers us to raise our bodies and our selves to their full potential. In his wonderful book *Up With Authority* (Austin 2010), Victor Lee Austin uses the analogy of an orchestra to explain why authority is necessary for human life to flourish. Orchestras need conductors because reason provides no single right answer to questions like, “What shall we play at the concert?” or “What shall we practice today?” or “How shall we interpret this passage?” Each musician might have a perfectly reasonable opinion, but their opinions will inevitably be different and will almost inevitably be incompatible with one another. And it will not do for the brass section to insist on playing Mahler *fortissimo* if the strings have chosen to play Grieg *pianissimo*. If the orchestra is to perform coherently, if the musicians want to perform music rather than make noise, somebody has to have authority to decide.

Conductors seem to limit the freedom of individual musicians, but the goods that authority gives are individual as well as collective. Submitting to the authority of a conductor, individual musicians attain musical heights of expression they could never realize individually or as a collection of uncoordinated players. Authority is necessary for classical musicians to bring their own bodies to musical fulfillment. What is true for orchestras is true for human life generally. Teaching is the most fundamental and pervasive act of authority. Good teachers make it easy for students to hear, and give them eyes to see what they have not seen before. Good teachers do not talk to keep their students quiet. Good teachers talk to give their students something to say back.

Midway through his prophecy, Isaiah envisions “a king [who] will reign righteously, and princes [who] will rule justly.” Their reign miraculously transforms Israel. Bodies are healed: The blind see, the deaf hear, stammerers speak clearly, and the confused discern truth. Christians of course read this as a prophecy of the Davidic King Jesus. Jesus surrounds himself with “princely” apostles who extend his authoritative ministry of teaching and healing. Jesus preaches; the apostles preach. Jesus heals; the apostles heal. Jesus casts out demons and raises the dead, and the apostles do the same.

In the safety of a Western democracy, refugees from Eastern Europe slowly begin to tell the truth about conditions back home. Under a skillful political “conductor,” people who had no previous opportunity to develop skills or ideas find new uses for their minds and hands. For decades during the twentieth century, many Western intellectuals were willfully blind to Soviet tyranny—until Solzhenitsyn’s meticulous account of the Gulag opened their eyes. Truth was whispered in corners and codes—until John Paul II’s courageous, truthful speech loosed Polish tongues. Wherever authority is used well, a miracle occurs. Wherever

authority is used rightly, bodies are healed and empowered: The blind see, the deaf hear, the dumb speak, “dead” bodies are raised to new life.

The angels of the seven churches are called seven stars (Rev. 1:20), and for ancient readers and hearers, “seven stars” would evoke a number of associations: The seven planets (Farrer 1964: 68), the seven stars of Ursa Major, and the seven stars that make up the Pleiades.

In mythology, the Pleiades are the seven daughters of Atlas, sisters changed first into pigeons (*peleïades*) and then to stars to escape a pursuing god. John, we know, thinks of the churches as “sisters” (2 John 13). Might we push a bit further to suggest that the seven stars are also seven Spirit-eyes of the Lamb, and hence, like the Spirit, doves?

Chilton (1987: 75) sums up some of the biblical information about the constellation (used in Job 9:5-9; 38:31-33; Amos 5:8) and concludes: “The sun with Taurus in Spring (Easter), and the Pleiades are thus a fitting symbol in connection with the coming of Christ: He holds the stars that announce the rebirth and flowering of the world.” Bruce Malina (1995) acknowledges that the seven stars might allude to the Pleiades, but notes only that “[i]t was a basic sky sign for planting, hence for fertility and human survival.” Malina’s analysis begins in earnest with the throne-scene of Revelation 4; he does not recognize that John’s star journey begins as soon as John sees Jesus holding stars in his hand.

Jacques M. Chevalier (1997) recognizes the physical parallel between the seven stars and the seven churches: “Little imagination is needed to see in this symbolism the legacy of a seven-planetary system set in motion by the sun passing through the Pleiades at spring.” Chevalier suggests that the order of the churches follows an astronomical pattern: “The connection between the church-stars and the wheels of lunisolar time is indirectly confirmed by the orderly, clockwise presentation of the seven churches of the New Israel, from the west coast (Ephesus) to northern lands (Smyrna, Pergamum), and then to the east (Thyatira) and the south (Sardis, Philadelphia, Laodicea) of Asia Minor. This circular trajectory is modelled after the circuitry of the sun moving from the west at dusk to the north at night, the east at dawn, and the south at noon” (180). The circuit of seven churches thus forms a giant clock, matching the sun’s movements through the sky. As the messages go round from church to church, they tick off the hours of the day of the Lord. To say Jesus holds the stars of the churches in his hand is to say he holds the clock that will tell the hour of his coming. Jesus has become Lord of time, and, governed by stars who are angels, the churches are also masters of time. (We might speculate on the tone of the letters: Ephesus is a “dusk” letter of sorts, and both Sardis and Pergamum are going their dark night; day dawns (perhaps?) with Thyatira, but the last churches are facing the heat of persecution, and may wilt.)

The Pleiades are associated with the annual calendar.

Ancient perceptions of motions in heaven resulting in the sevenfold calculations of the Hebrew calendar, with a ritual emphasis on the spring and autumn equinoxes, the Alpha and Omega of yearly time . . . the seven star imagery and cognate motifs appearing in Revelation speak to Semitic religions based on the cult of the sun, the moon, and the seven planets marching through the zodiac, below and above the equator, under the leadership of the seven Pleiades rising to the east at spring and falling to the west at autumn. (Chevalier 1997: 191)

Like the Pleiades in the spiritual heavens, the angels of the churches are the ones who lead the heavenly hosts in their procession. As the sun rises through the Pleiades in the spring (254), so the Sun-faced Jesus rises up in the midst of the angel-stars to bring in the year of the Lord.

Chevalier (1997: 253) draws out another connection later in his book: “Since these stars are directly connected with Aries and navigation, they can serve the same function as the rainbow, which is to remind humans that God protects them against another Flood, saving the world from trials that would bring the solar order and the Noachic pact to a tragic end.” Here he is wiser than he knows. As stars of navigation, the Pleiades guide the land-people Israel through the seas of the nations. Further, the postdiluvian world is precisely the one coming to an end in the catastrophe described in Revelation (cf. 2 Peter 3).

Chevalier (1997: 253) goes on: “Cognate representations of the Pleiades include a flock of birds, in most cases doves, emblems of peaceful existence and reconciliation with God (Gen. 8:8, 10). Another common figure is that of a hen with her chicks, an expression used by Matthew and Luke with reference to Christ; Aben Ragel and other Hebrew writers thus imagined the Pleiades. The Starry Seven rising in the company of the seven planets thus signalled the vernal resurrection of the sun-god and Christ the Hen.” Jesus hovers over the stars to guide the churches to safe haven in the new creation. Chevalier suggests that there is a dark twin in the sky, a set of seven “half sisters,” the seven stars of Ursa Major: “The two heptadic formations are similar in so many respects that the Pleiades have been called the Chariot or Wagon, as in the late-antiquity writings of Hesychios. Given this resemblance, a hen with her chicks can easily turn into a child-killing she-bear, a beast as ferocious as Christ exercising wrath over his children at the End of Time” (253). Would John have missed the rich associations of doves, clocks, marine navigation, churches, persecuted sisters, and seven stars? Perhaps; but would his readers? Not all of them.

When the heavenly city finally descends to earth, it is a city of light, filled with the glory of God, illumined by the lamp who is the Lamb, a guide to nations and kings in darkness (→21:23-25; 22:5). Through the turmoil of seals, trumpets, and bowls, it has become ever brighter because of the faithful work of Jesus the priestly Son of Man among the lampstands. The angels who are stars descend in the city as sparkling gemstones, well-trimmed, their lamps full of the oil of the Spirit. The city glows because the Son of Man has been a faithful priest, and because he is there in the city, there with his eyes like fire and his face like the sun, there as the Lamb whose eyes are the seven fiery Spirits of God. Because she is the Bride of the Son of Man, she shares in his splendor. In Eden, the first Adam became one flesh with his wife. In the glorified Eden of new Jerusalem, the Last Adam becomes one *light* with his Bride.

He lays his star-filled hand on me,
and tells me, Do not fear.
He tells me, Do not fear.

Lord Jesus, eternal Voice of the Father: Speak to us and feed us the bread of heaven, that we may share the joy of your Spirit to the end of days. Amen.

III.2. In Spirit on Patmos: Messages to Seven Angels—Rev. 2:1–3:21

John is exiled on the island of Patmos, suffering with his fellow slaves and brothers as a *συγκοινωνός* in the affliction, kingdom, and perseverance in Jesus. From that island, he writes to islands in the sea—outposts of the holy city (→21:9–22:5) spread out in the sea of the nations, churches that are about to face the same *θλίψις* (2:9–10) that John suffers, churches that will share with him in the *βασιλεία* of Jesus (1:6) if they hold fast and display the same *ὑπομονή* (2:2–3, 19; 3:10). There is a path from suffering to the kingdom, the path of endurance, a path whose destination is so certain that suffering is *already* a foretaste of the kingdom, the path already participating in the destination.

John is authorized to become an author. Jesus appears and commissions him as an amanuensis to write to the angels of the churches of Asia. The messages will measure the churches by the standard of God's will and purpose, which is Jesus himself. Jesus is the standard of human excellence, the manifestation of God's intention and the One who does the will of God. He embodies the fullness of human existence, and he inspects the churches to determine whether or not they live up to his standard. The churches form a set of seven, and are called to portray the sevenfold man that Jesus is. He is the dead and living one, the one living in the life after life after death, and he calls the church at Smyrna to the same. He is the faithful and true witness, the shepherd with the rod of iron, the Bridegroom with the burning eyes of love, and he interrogates each angel for the truth of their witness, their faithfulness in rule, the steadiness of their love. The sevenfold sculptor of humanity intends to carve his image into the sevenfold church.

John's ready pen is Jesus's chisel and hammer. As the Sabbatical man, Jesus speaks his sevenfold, recreative Word in written edicts to angels of the churches. As the Creator Word, he brings the church to its fruition and completion, to its fullness, *by* his word. The written words to the seven churches are creative words that form new creation from the unformed matter of the old. As the words of the Word who created the world, the words of the messages are performative. They threaten curses, and curse; they promise

blessings, and bless; the messages, heard and heeded, form the angels and the churches they serve into the bridal image of the Imperial Lover who delivers the messages, so that she too can speak the word in the world. As the Bride is formed by the words of the Word, the Word enters more fully into his glory. John's pen is the instrument of the sword-tongue of Jesus, the sacrificial sword that divides soul and spirit, strips away flesh, so that the churches are ignited by the fire that flashes from his eyes of love.

Delivered through John, Jesus's words form a future bride by speaking of the future. The messages warn of afflictions to come, and hold out promises both for the present and the future. Jesus tells the churches what is about to take place so they will not be taken by surprise, and so they will recognize their sufferings for what they are, the tribulation that brings a new age of fulfillment. The messages answer the existential question that confronts the churches: Is God still in charge when Christians suffer slander, when they are plagued by false teachers and false prophets, when the angel falls from his first love and another angel is lukewarm? (Stevens 2014: 377). The answer is, Yes. Jesus is still Lord and Judge, even *then*, even in the midst of trials, ensuring that the travails of the church are birth pangs. Even then, he is priest of the heavenly temple, trimming the lamps and burnishing the lampstands.

As we have seen, Revelation 1 forms a structural unit, of which 1:9–20 is a subunit. At the same time, 1:9–20 introduces a section that stretches to the end of chapter 3. As noted (→Introduction), the phrase “in Spirit” marks the beginning of each large segment of Revelation (1:9–10; 4:1–2; 17:1–3; 21:9–10). In 1:9–20, John is in Spirit when he sees the unveiled Jesus who commissions him to write. Each of the messages begins with the same imperative, γράψον (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14); the messages contain the words of Jesus that John is commissioned to deliver to the churches. Rev. 1:9–3:22 form a single vision, arranged in a chiastic structure (Jordan 1999a: 35).

Ephesus—promise to eat (φαγεῖν) of tree of *life*

Smyrna—Jews (2:9), and tribulation coming soon (2:10: πειράζω)

Pergamum—manna, white stone (2:17), name, Jesus coming soon (2:16)

Thuateria—Jezebel (Babylon); true and false meal

Sardis—white garment (3:3–4), name, Jesus coming soon (3:3)

Philadelphia—Jews (3:9), and tribulation coming soon (3:10: πειράζω)

Laodicea—Promise of meal (δειπνέω) with Christ

The messages move through the stages of OT history (Jordan 1999a: 34; Chilton 1987: 86–9). The link with the OT comes in different places in each

of the seven messages. Jesus promises the Ephesian victors that they will eat from the tree of life in the paradise of God (2:7), an Edenic-Adamic allusion. Smyrna's connection to the OT is more subtle, but details of the letter link it with the period of the patriarchs, especially the life of Joseph. Some in Smyrna have been cast into prison (2:10), but the faithful will receive a crown. From prison to crown: That is the progress of Joseph. Pergamum is in the wilderness, in danger from Balaam and Balak (2:14), and promised hidden manna (2:17). The enemy is Thueria is Jezebel (2:20), the queen of Israel during the reign of Ahab, and the promise is authority to rule like the king on Zion like a Davidic king (2:26–27; cf. Ps. 2). Like Smyrna, Sardis's connection with the OT is obscure, but it appears to be an exilic message. It refers to the near-death of a people that is alive, to the conqueror and captor who comes like a thief, to a remnant that has not soiled their clothes. Philadelphia names "David" (3:7), and that suggests a return to the kingdom period. Given its position in the sequence, this must refer to a *revived* Davidic monarchy. It refers to "*new Jerusalem*" (3:12), which fits a postexilic context. Laodicea is associated with intertestamental Judaism, including the time of Jesus, the lukewarm reception of the Messiah, the boastful Pharisees who are naked and poor while thinking they are rich and well-off. As the Gospels show, Jesus himself recapitulates Israel's history. Because the church is the body of Jesus, Israel's history is also imprinted on the experience of the churches.

The messages are usually described as letters, which is not unreasonable. After all, they resemble Paul's letters to the churches, where, because of his familiarity with the church, he can address particular problems. Yet there are non-epistolary features in Jesus's "letters." John has begun the book with a benediction (1:4–6), and the book ends with another benediction. The whole book is a letter, but the seven so-called letters do not share these features. Each is addressed τῷ ἀγγέλῳ, but there are no friendly greetings at the beginning or benedictions at the end. (The Pauline letter they most resemble is the aggressive, agitated letter to Galatia, which launches into denunciation without the niceties that Paul usually employs.)

These divergences from usual epistolary form suggest that these epistles are not *entirely* epistolary but embody a variety of "genres" (Aune 1997: 124–9; Boxall 2006: 45; Koester 2015: 234). We can grasp the richness of the setting by remembering how Jesus is presented in chapter 1. Jesus is the priestly Son of Man tending the lampstands, and these are priestly pronouncements to the church: "the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts" (Mal. 2:7). Jesus's words trim the wicks of the angelic lamps; he speaks words of the Spirit, who is the oil that keeps the angel alight. The angels are stars, and Jesus is the cosmic Christ, keeping the stars bright in a dark world. Jesus

is the Ancient of Days, the Judge, and his “letters” are judicial pronouncements. Jesus is the temple, and his messages are like Yahweh’s oracles from the temple. The command to John to write puts John in a Mosaic position, receiving deliverances from the holy mountain and writing them for the people of God. Moses is the archetypal prophet, and the other prophets delivered written documents to the people of God. The messages are prophecies, each beginning with a prophetic τάδε λέγει (2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; an archaic form well captured by the English “thus saith,” used over 250 times in the LXX; cf. Aune 1997: 128–9). As prophet, Jesus delivers the covenant lawsuit to the covenant people, exposing those places where they have fallen short and urging them to renew covenant. The letters are forms of judicial scrutiny and investigation from the prophet who is an officer of the divine court (cf. Bandy 2010). Above (→1:12–16), we noted connections between the *wasf* description of the lover in Song of Songs 5 and the description of Jesus in Revelation 1. Jesus is a divine Lover, writing love letters to prepare his bride for the future marriage supper of the Lamb.

We have also noted the connections between the depiction of Jesus and the imperial statue of Daniel 2 (→1:12–16). Jesus is the empire-in-person, and his messages are imperial pronouncements, edicts to his alternative empire (see Aune 1990: 182–204). Like the emperor, he addresses the churches through provincial representatives, the angels. τάδε λέγει is relevant here as well. In the LXX of 2 Chron. 36:23, the phrase introduces the decree of Cyrus, Yahweh’s anointed who speaks with the authority of Yahweh. The churches of Asia are not merely assemblies within the cities of Asia. They are cities within the cities (→21:9–22:5), and together constitute an *imperium* within the *imperium*, governed by other angels, ultimately accountable to another emperor, responsive to another voice and another set of edicts. Jesus the imperial judge conducts a review in each of the provinces of his empire. He will visit the next Lord’s Day as they sit at the table; he will visit them when he comes to judge the whole *oikoumene*. He sends letters to prepare the provinces for his royal Parousia, his coming to distribute rewards and punishments. Indeed, the messages *are* Jesus’s advent (Stevens 2014: 375), in which his Angel-Spirit speaks to the church, passes judgment, corrects, and executes sentences by the sword of his mouth.

Aune (1997: 129) concludes: “The author’s use of the royal/imperial edict form is part of his strategy to polarize God/Jesus and the Roman emperor.” Caird (1966) notes that the decrees/letters of Jesus are not warnings about his parousia so much as calls to arms that assume a war is coming. That would also fit the imperial setting.

I will occasionally call these the “letters” of the churches. When I keep my wits about me, I will call them “messages.”

The messages are famously repetitive in structure. Each includes a description or title of Jesus, a warning about an enemy, usually an explicit or implied threat to the church, and a promise to the conquerors who remain faithful. Each ends with an exhortation to hear the speech of the Spirit as the written text is read.

Aune (1997: 128–9) uses classical rhetorical terms to describe the messages' stereotypical eight-section structure, seven of which are marked by stereotyped grammatical introductions. In the *adscriptio*, the addressee is named, an angel of a particular church. A Christological description follows, borrowing from the vision of Jesus in chapter 1.

The οἶδα clause is the *narratio*, which describes the situation of the angel and his church. Jesus frequently commends the angel and the church, but he also criticizes: "I have a few things against you." With his eyes of fire, he gazes into the heart of the church's angel and of the church's members. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before him.

The *dispositio* or "arrangement" section is not marked by a grammatical formula, but according to Aune it is the most important section of each decree. It includes Jesus's arrangements, threats, predictions, whatever Jesus intends to do to correct the situation described in the *narratio*. A "proclamation formula" follows, an exhortation to "hear" what the Spirit says to the churches. Jesus addresses the angels, but the Spirit speaks to the *churches*. The voice is a human voice, but it is the Spirit, the Angel of Jesus, communicating with the church, for those who have ears to hear. Smalley (2001: 63) points out that λέγει is present tense, indicating the Spirit's *continuous* speaking to the churches through the written text. Jesus promises victory and a specific reward to those who conquer. The concluding items switch places halfway through the sequence. In the messages to Ephesus, Smyrna, and Pergamum, the exhortation to heed the Spirit comes first, the promise second; in the messages to Thueria, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, the exhortation to hear the Spirit close with the command to hear. All the other sevens in Revelation are in a 4 + 3 pattern, like the creation week (which includes blessings on the final three days), but the messages to the churches have a 3 + 4.

Bandy (2010: 160) offers a seven-point outline: Address; prophetic formula; οἶδα A, a speech of commendation; οἶδα B, a speech of accusation; admonition; an exhortation to listen; a promise of eschatological salvation. Bandy sees a parallel with ANE covenant treaty forms, summarized as: Messenger preamble; historical prologue; ethical demands; sanctions; witness formula; and arrangements for preservation and publication of the treaty (170). For other analyses, see Boxall (2006: 46); Koester (2015: 235).

Each message repeats a feature of Jesus's glorified body, and descriptions of Jesus in the messages bear a complex relationship with the opening vision. As we have seen, at the heart of the vision in chapter 1 is a sevenfold description of Jesus's person (→1:14–16):

1. Head and hair white like wool
2. Eyes like flame of fire
3. Feet like burnished bronze
4. Voice like many waters
5. Stars in right hand

6. Two-edged sword from the mouth
7. Face like the sun

Jesus is a heptamorous, Sabbatical man, the man of seven who walks among seven lampstands with seven Spirits and seven stars. As Last Adam, he is *man* come to Sabbath maturity. We will all be made like him when we see him as he is, all remade to have white hair like snow, flaming eyes, altar feet, voices like thunder, hands that can handle stars, swords in our mouths, faces like the sun. Jesus the Last Adam is our measure, and his messages are one of his means for molding us to his image.

The messages borrow four of the features of chapter 1—eyes, feet, stars in hand, sword in mouth—moving from the middle of Jesus’s body to the top and back down to the feet, portraying the fourfold Lord of the church speaking to the angels, an emperor to the four corners who addresses the seven churches of Asia. There is no reference to numbers 1, 4, or 7, creating this pattern:

skip one→take two (2–3)→skip one→take two (5–6)→skip one.

Since the message to Thuateria includes two features (eyes and feet, 2:18), only three letters borrow features from the description of Jesus: Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thuateria, the first, third, and fourth. Three features are left out: his head and hair of white, his voice like waters, and his face like the sun. Though these features have been revealed to John, they are not yet unveiled to the angels of the seven churches. Though still in tribulation, John is given a glimpse of the full Jesus that is to come. In the messages to the angels, though, Jesus is not wholly unveiled. The angels receive an unfinished, fragmentary mosaic.

Through Revelation, the missing features of Jesus are implicitly or explicitly unveiled. With his white head and hair, Jesus is the Ancient of Days, conferring a kingdom on the saints, who are the son of Man. When Jesus sends messages to the churches, they have not yet received the kingdom. Jesus’s role as “Ancient of Days” is held in abeyance, promissory, revealed when Jesus is finally shown with shining crowns after Babylon falls (→19:12, the next reference to the “head” of Jesus) and when the saints reign on thrones (→20:4). Jesus’s face shines like the sun, but that feature is not mentioned in the messages to the churches. Someday, however, the Lamb will be the sun in the holy city where there is no night (→21:23). At the center of the description of Jesus in chapter 1, Jesus is the Voice speaking to John, the Voice like a trumpet, the Voice John turns to see. *John* sees the Voice, but the Voice like mighty waters is not yet seen-heard in the seven churches. That voice will be heard

only when the voices of the saints are added to the Voice, when the 144,000 learn the song of heaven (→14:2) and when the great shout of triumph comes after the harlot city falls (→19:6). Jesus's Voice is the voice of many waters when vocalized by the Spirit and harmonized by Bride. White head, Voice, and Sun-face are *eschatological*, the not-yet of Jesus which he will show only to the overcomers *after* they have overcome. Only when all is said and done is Jesus shown fully to be the Ancient of Days; only then is his voice heard in the song of the martyrs; only then does the sun of a new day rise. As the drama moves toward its climax, the church comes to see the missing features of the Son of Man, so that the church's final vision of Jesus is the complete portrait that John saw at the outset.

As the church comes to see the full-length portrait of Jesus, she is conformed to him. There is a subtle *totus Christus* ecclesiology embedded in the messages. Jesus is in glory from the beginning of the book. That full-scale vision of Jesus gives the reader and listener confidence that Jesus will someday fully unveil himself in and to the entire church, his Bride. Over the course of the book, the missing pieces of the portrait are presented so that a full Christ emerges when Jerusalem descends from heaven. But the churches will see Jesus unveiled in fullness *only* when they see him in his Bride. The Bride is not fully herself until she has the Bridegroom, but *the same is true for the Bridegroom*. For *neither* can be complete unless they are one flesh each with the other; neither can shine with full brightness until they are one light in the Spirit. As she sees the unveiled Christ, the church becomes *like* the unveiled Christ, the city that shines with the light of the Lamb, the choir singing with a voice of many waters, priests and kings reigning from heavenly thrones. As the beloved of the Song of Song grows up to be the feminine Solomon, so the church grows into the feminine of the heavenly Christ. She does not merely see Christ in his glory. She comes to share in that glory, as she comes to *be* the glory of the glorified man.

Jesus is fully God from eternity, the Word who was with God and was God, the Son who did not regard his equality with God something to be clung to. Yet Jesus's humanity is true humanity, realized in time. He grows in wisdom and stature, learns obedience by his sufferings, is glorified by the cross and resurrection. Revelation indicates that his growth in glory does *not* end with his exaltation to the right hand of the Father. He is fully glorified only when he possesses the fullness of his glory (the woman is the glory of the man), his Bridal city that is his church. The church grows up into him, and as glorified human he grows up by union with his church. Even in his exaltation, he *continues* to advance from glory to glory.

Though four messages do not employ descriptions of Jesus from 1:14-16, they *do* pick up on chapter 1's vision and titles for Jesus. In addition to mentioning stars in Jesus's right hand, the message to Ephesus refers to the vision

of Jesus in the midst of the lampstands (2:1). The message to Smyrna includes Jesus's declaration that he is first and last, the living one who became dead and rose (2:9). To Sardis (3:1) Jesus identifies himself as the one who "has" stars and Spirits, alluding to 1:4 and 1:16, but more loosely than in other messages. Jesus tells the Philadelphians that he has the key of David (3:7), linked to the "keys of death and Hades" in 1:18. The message to Laodicea (3:14) reaches back to the opening verses of Revelation, using a series of titles (the Amen, the witness faithful and true, the ἀρχή) that John used in his original identification of Jesus (1:5 includes μάρτυς, πιστός, and ἄρχων, and 1:7–8 uses the term ἀμύνη twice).

The overall result is roughly chiasmic, with the messages reusing images and phrases from chapter 1 in reverse order:

- Ch 1
 - A. faithful witness, ἄρχων, Amen, 1:5, 7–8
 - B. eyes, 1:14
 - B. feet burnished, 1:15
 - C. (-stars), 1:16
 - D. sword, 1:16
 - E. first & last, living one, 1:18
 - F. (-key), 1:18
 - G. lampstands and stars, 1:12, 16, 20
- Chs 2–3
 - G'. walking among lamps, stars in hand, 2:1
 - E'. first and last, living one, 2:9
 - D'. sword in mouth, 2:12
 - B'. eyes like fire/feet like bronze, 2:18
 - (C'. stars and spirits), 3:1
 - (F'. key), 3:7
 - A'. Amen, witness faithful & true, ἀρχή, 3:14

After the first four messages, the neat chiasm breaks up, until the final message closes the structure.

Each of the seven messages to the churches ends with a promised gift to victors, those who endure and overcome, whether angels of the churches or members (cf. the related analysis of Jordan (1999a: 41–2)).

1. Eating from the wood of life in Paradise.
- 2a. A crown of life.
- 2b. Rescue from the second death.
- 3a. Hidden manna.
- 3b. White stone with a new name.
- 4a. Authority and a rod of iron.
- 4b. The morning star.

- 5a. White garments.
- 5b. Not erased from book of life, confessed by Jesus.
- 6a. Made a pillar in the temple.
- 6b. Receives the name of God and Jerusalem.
- 7. Place on Jesus' throne.

Apart from the first and last, each church gets a double gift, thus a simple chiastic pattern:

- A. Single gift.
- B. 5 churches promised a double gift.
- A' Single gift.

Though distributed over seven messages, there are twelve gifts held out to the twelve "tribes" of overcomers. These gifts show up again in the final vision of heavenly Jerusalem (→21:9–22:5).

The gifts promised match up fairly well with the seven days of creation, as expanded in the sevenfold tabernacle instructions in Exodus 25–31:

1. In Exodus, the first speech describes the tabernacle and its furnishings, a rebirth of paradise and the formation of Yahweh's sabbatical tent. Jesus's first-day promise of the tree of life to victors in Ephesus anticipates the gifts of the seventh day, the Sabbath entry into paradise.
2. The second speech of Yahweh is about the atonement money, a ransom to prevent plague (30:12), a "firmament" ransom standing between Israel and death. This links with the promise to Smyrna that Jesus will ransom his people from the second death.
3. On day 3 of creation, land came from the sea and plants sprang from the earth, and this connects with the promises to Pergamum—stone and manna.
4. Day 4 is the day of heavenly lights, which "rule" the times. In the message to Thuatertia, Jesus promises a rod of rule and the morning star.
5. In Exodus, the fifth section has to do with billowy things like clouds of smoke and robes, which resemble the swarms of creatures on day 5 of creation. Jesus promises white garments to the victors at Sardis.
6. On day 6, Adam is formed from the dust and placed in the Edenic sanctuary, a pillar in the Creator's temple, made as his image to bear his name. The faithful in Philadelphia will be placed in God's new temple.
7. Sabbath is for enthronement as well as rest. On the first Sabbath, Yahweh takes his throne. Jesus promises that those who overcome will share the throne and feast.

Jesus criticizes and threatens five of the seven churches, and the threats are issued in a symmetrical pattern:

1 threat→*blank*→3 threats→*blank*→1 threat

Jesus often refers to his weapons and equipment in issuing these threats, and they are sometimes linked with the promised blessings:

Church	Description of Jesus	Threat from Jesus	Promise
Ephesus	Hold stars Walks among lamps	Remove lamp	Eat in paradise (lamps = trees)
Smyrna	First and last, dead and living	NO THREAT	Not hurt by second death
Pergamum	Sword in mouth	War with Sword	
Thuateria	Eyes of fire Feet of bronze	Kill Jezebel's children (burn?)	Iron rod Morning star (eyes?)
Sardis	Seven Spirits, seven stars	Come like thief (secrecy of Spirit)	Walk in white (like star)
Philadelphia	Keys of David	NO THREAT	Pillar in house (access by key)
Laodicea	Witness, beginning	Lax witness	Dine and rule

In addition to threatening the churches with discipline, Jesus also warns them about dangers from enemies outside and within the church, which anticipate enemies introduced more fully later in Revelation. The messages are prosaic warnings about the nightmare monsters that John sees in his visions. This is an early illustration of a stylistic habit that John uses throughout the book: He introduces a character, situation, or event briefly and opaquely, and unveils the character, situation, or threat more fully many chapters later. A beast is mentioned in 11:7 before we ever see a dragon (12:3), much less a beast (13:1-6). An angel cries out against Babylon the drunken whore (14:8) before we ever see her (17:1-18). John makes occasional references to the city of God, but we do not see the city until we join John on a mountaintop in chapter 21. John's style mimics the substance of the book. It is a book of unveiling, a book where things glimpsed from the foundation of the world are finally seen in full. And he delivers first glimpses and then full revelations. As readers, we are being trained in the virtues that John wants to reinforce, virtues of hope and patience. We see a flash of glory, and then learn to wait steadfastly until the Lord puts us face to face with that glory.

When compared to the promises given to the angels, the rewards given to new Jerusalem are arranged in a reverse chiasm that moves from the final vision toward the middle before doubling back toward the end:

Church	Reward promised	Reward given
Ephesus	Tree of life, 2:7	Tree of life, 22:2
Smyrna	No second death, 2:11	Escape second death, 20:6
Pergamum	Hidden manna, stone, name	Supper, name, 19:9, 12
Thuateria	Rod of iron	Rod of iron, 19:15

Church	Reward promised	Reward given
Sardis	Walk with Jesus in white	Ride with Jesus in white, 19:14
Philadelphia	Pillar in new Jerusalem	New Jerusalem, 21:2, 9–10
Laodicea	Sit on throne with Jesus	Saints reign, 22:5

Jesus fulfills his promises to the churches by adorning new Jerusalem. He is reliable. When he promises rewards to his followers, he delivers.

Like the fulfillments of the promises, the foreshadowings to later enemies follow a pattern, chiastically moving from the early part of the book toward the end, and then doubling back toward the beginning:

Church	Enemies	Enemies in Revelation
Ephesus	False apostles/Nicolaitans	
Smyrna	Synagogue of Satan	Demon horde from inverted temple, 9:1–11
Pergamum	Satan, Balaam and Balak	Satan and two beasts, 12–13
Thuateria	Jezebel	Harlot, 17–18
Sardis	Lethargy; Jesus the thief	Jesus like thief, 16:15
Philadelphia	Synagogue of Satan; testing	Harvest, 14:14–20
Laodicea	Lukewarmness	

We need to remember these associations for later, when we ask what the locusts from the abyss might be (→9:1–11), when we try to figure the figure of Babylon the harlot (→17–18), when we ask what kind of harvest is taking place in chapter 14 (→14:14–20).

For the sake of artistic symmetry, if for nothing else, we may combine two aspects of this analysis and note how the arrangement of the enemies and the arrangement of the rewards work in opposite directions:

Enemies	Rewards
—	Tree of life, 22:2
Demons from abyss, 9:1–11	Escape second death, 20:6
Satan and beasts, 12–13	Supper, name, 19:9, 12
Harlot Babylon, 17–18	Rod of iron, 19:15
Jesus the thief, 16:15	Ride with Jesus in white, 19:14
Harvest testing, 14:14–20	New Jerusalem, 21:2
—	Saints reign, 22:5

The enemies are revealed from midpoint to end and back; the rewards are listed from the end toward the middle and back. The two chiasms brush

up against each other in chapters 18–19, where the harlot meets the rod of iron. But the two lists never cross. In the arrangement given by the messages to the churches, the enemies and rewards point us toward the fall of Babylon (→18) and the conquest/triumph of the Rider on the White horse (→19:11–16) as the hinge of the book. As foreshadowed by the messages, the key confrontation is the encounter of the Harlot with Jesus's rod of iron.

No enemies later in the book correspond to the threats that Jesus describes in the messages to Ephesus and Laodicea. In both of those churches, the main threat comes not from corrupting influences in the church or from external enemies, but from the lost love and lukewarmness of the angels of those churches. Mundane as it may seem, lukewarmness is an eschatological danger as much as beasts and harlots are. Apostasy is a sign of the beginning of the end, when the love of many will grow cold (Matt. 24:10–12). Ultimately, the threats to the churches are *all* internal. If the angel of the church returns to his first love, endures in the face of Satanic slander, resists the Balaamites and drives out the followers of Jezebel, ensures that his works are completed, and stokes up the fire of love, all will be well at the King's coming. Then the angel and his church will stand in the judgment at the Parousia of God. Even if faithful angels and churches are slaughtered, they will be harvested to join the heavenly choir.

Farrer (1970) also traces links between the messages and the rest of the book, though somewhat differently. The first four messages set out the enemies of the church in different images: False apostles (Ephesus), false synagogue (Smyrna), Balaam and Balak (Pergamum), and the harlot (Thuateria). Farrer contends that these connect with the great heptamorous sequences of the Apocalypse. The false synagogue contrasts with the setting of the vision in heaven, and the breaking of the seals. There are elders in heaven, as in the synagogue, and the great event of synagogue worship is the opening and reading of Torah (cf. Luke 4). Balaam and Balak reappear in the aftermath of the seventh trumpet as the two beasts (13). Jezebel reappears as the great harlot of chapter 17–18, who is destroyed and burned after the bowls have been poured out. That leaves Ephesus and its false apostles matching the seven edicts. Ephesus is the archetypal edict. Schematically:

Messages	Sections of Revelation
Ephesus	Seven messages
Smyrna (false synagogue)	Seven seals (heavenly "synagogue")
Pergamum (Balak and Balaam)	Seven trumpets (two beasts)
Thuateria (Jezebel)	Seven bowls (Babylon)

Though I differ on details of Farrer's analysis, his identifications are generally accurate. Balaam and Balak do foreshadow the beasts, and Jezebel is surely a precursor of the harlot.

John may have had a personal connection with these churches, but we cannot know. *Jesus* is the one who shows familiarity with the intimate details of the churches, and he knows the churches because his fiery eyes can peer into the darkest corners. The reason Jesus writes to *these* churches has to do with the theological geography of the Mediterranean world. As we have noted (→1:4, 11), Asia is liminal space between Israel and Rome, therefore the space where Jews and Gentiles are knit together into one humanity. As often said, these seven cities are all along the same Roman road system. Ephesus is on the coast, Smyrna toward the northwest from Ephesus; Pergamum is due north of Smyrna, and Thuateria is southeast of Pergamum. Sardis is south and east of Pergamum, Philadelphia southeast of Sardis, and Laodicea southeast of Philadelphia. From Laodicea, one would travel back west to reach Ephesus. The list traces a ring, perhaps a circuit for delivering the messages. Though Jesus addresses particular struggles in each individual congregation, the entire collection would presumably be read in each church. After all, each ends with an exhortation to listen to what the Spirit says to the churches. As Koester (2001: 56) says, the messages are individual but not private. The business of the one church is the business of all, because together they form a body, in which the suffering of one is the suffering of all, where the sickness of one angel is the sickness of the whole host, where recovery of one who is lost brings joy and healing to the whole.

The messages have been taken as a preview of church history, or as exhortations to the church throughout all ages (cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 53). Victorinus (2011: 4–6) sees the churches as representatives of different classes of Christians. In the past century, it has become customary for interpreters to seek local references and allusions (Hemer 2000; Ramsay 1904; Reddish 2001: 52). It is a risky procedure. Scholars working on Revelation are naturally inclined to spot details that fit into their project (a “confirmation bias”), whether or not these would have been widely known in the cities themselves. As Koester (2015: 233) wisely points out,

[H]istorical information about a city must be molded to fit the distinctive imagery in Revelation. Yet in almost every instance, the images used for one city would fit other locations equally well. Ephesus was called the city of change because it had been relocated, yet Smyrna too had moved to a new location. Ephesus was supposed to have been uniquely associated with a tree shrine, but Smyrna’s refounding was linked to its own tree shrine . . . Smyrna was supposed to have died and risen, yet that imagery would have been even more appropriate for Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea, all of which were rebuilt following earthquakes during the early imperial period.

In the following pages, I give few details about the cities to which John writes, which can be found in many other commentaries, from scholars of antiquity more qualified than I (cf. the vivid descriptions in Mounce 1997; e.g., 67–8). Only rarely do I refer to NT texts outside of Revelation that mention the same locations. For my purposes, two incontestable contextual features are relevant: First, most of the cities of Asia had sizable Jewish populations (cf. Koester 2015: 273, 285–6, 311–12, 322–3, 335; Aune 1997: 169–72); and, second, many were centers of the imperial cult. Ephesus had a thriving Jewish population, and temples both to *Dea Roma* and *Divus Iulius* (Boxall 2006: 47; cf. Aune 1997: 136–41). Nero built a temple to the imperial cult in Ephesus (Smalley 2005: 59), and Smyrna and Pergamum likewise each had a temple devoted to the goddess Rome (Boxall 2006: 53, 58; Mounce 1997: 73, 79; Smalley 2005: 65; Aune 1997: 159–60). Pergamum was the “official seat” of the imperial cult in Asia (Smalley 2005: 68).

These undeniable factors are sufficient to grasp the main outlines of the situation of the churches of Asia. Many of the churches face internal challenges—from false apostles, false teachers identified as “Nicolaitans” or followers of Balaam, a false prophet named Jezebel. Besides these specific struggles, several of the churches suffer an atmospheric malaise. The angel of Ephesus has left his first love, and the angel of Laodicea is “lukewarm” rather than “hot or cold.” Many of the churches are also plagued by *external* enemies. Jews and Christians are engaged in an intense, sometimes violent, struggle over the name “Jew” and the heritage associated with it. For Jesus and John, Jews who reject Jesus are no more than “self-called” Jews, no longer worthy of the name. Synagogues that libel the church become synagogues of Satan, assemblies of the accuser (cf. Reddish 2001: 56; Smalley 2005: 66, 90). Diabolical Jews slander the church and encourage Roman authorities to suppress it. Even when Roman authorities would prefer to keep out of intra-mural Jewish debates, they cannot ignore struggles that disturb public peace. Under suspicion from Roman authorities, the churches are vulnerable and apparently powerless. The “poverty” of Smyrna, for instance, is not metaphorical but real. Even those who have not been physically punished or killed for their faith suffer deprivations for the sake of Jesus.

Koester (2015: 280) sketches the dynamics:

In the late first and early second centuries, Roman officials generally did not initiate action against Christians but responded to charges made by others. For denunciation to lead to imprisonment, officials had to be shown that Christians were a threat ... This situation posed a complex challenge for Jewish opponents of the congregation. Smyrnan Jews and Christians presumably shared an aversion to Greco-Roman polytheism, while differing sharply over the status of Jesus. Yet Roman authorities would not have considered an internal theological dispute worthy of attention ... Therefore, synagogue members would have to present themselves as loyal citizens

while charging that Christians threatened the social order. One charge could have been that professing loyalty to Jesus as sovereign showed disloyalty to the emperor . . . Another could have been that those making extravagant claims about Jesus were no longer true Jews, whose beliefs were part of a recognized tradition. Instead, Christians were to be seen as promoters of a new “superstition” that warranted suppression.

See also Reddish (2001: 57).

The internal and external struggles are related. False prophets (like Balaam) encourage rulers (e.g., Roman provincial governments, like Balak) to put stumbling blocks in the way of the saints, tempting them toward the spiritual infidelity that Revelation calls *πορνεία*. The churches are being and will be squeezed from one side and another, from Jews who consider them apostate and from Romans who consider them socially disruptive and from the combination of the two that seeks to wipe them out of the *oikoumene* once and for all. False teachers offer alternative gospels that relieve the pressure—by accommodating to Judaizing or by compromise with the imperial cult. Some will abandon Jesus in the face of the pressure, their love cooling, as Jesus predicted (Matt. 24:12). Others will stand firm, as Antipas has already done, and pay with their lives. These faithful witnesses are the conquerors, who will be elevated to reign with Christ (→6:9-11; →20:4-6). The letters, in short, lay out the plotline of Revelation, which is the plotline John already laid out when he introduced himself: Through suffering to kingship along the path of endurance.

Jordan (1999a: 38–40) helpfully sketches a more general pastoral typology with the two coordinates of unity and faithfulness. Ephesus is unified but compromised, Smyrna both unified and faithful. Pergamum is a divided church, though only a few have been led astray; Thuateria is more deeply divided, split down the middle between the harlot and the bride. Sardis is the mirror image of Pergamum, an evil church from which a few firebrands will be preserved. Philadelphia is, like Pergamum, both unified and faithful, and Laodicea is a unified church that slipped into unfaithfulness. Jesus's messages are directed to the specific needs of each angel and each congregation, his rhetoric of rebuke and encouragement suited to the situation. He investigates, scrutinizes, judges in order to shepherd the churches toward unity and faithfulness, to prevent Pergamum from slipping into Thuateria, to prevent Thuateria from becoming another Sardis.

Global South Christians find Jesus's warnings about coming sufferings and persecutions especially apt. Jenkins (2008: 153) quotes a sermon on the Lukan Olivet Discourse delivered by a pastor in Malawi:

Haven't you heard of wars in many parts of the world? Think of what happened in Rwanda and Burundi. What about Iraq and Liberia? . . . [A]re you not convinced that all these conflicts between nations are only taking place to fulfill what Jesus spoke to the disciples many years ago? We have heard of many people shedding their blood in South Africa, Burundi and Rwanda. We have heard of diseases like AIDS, Ebola and tuberculosis claiming many lives. All these, brethren, are signs which indicate to you and me that time has gone. We are now living in injury time like in a football match. Any time from now, brethren, Jesus is coming to take his faithful with him to God's Kingdom.

Jenkins adds that members in the independent churches of Kenya are encouraged to read the letters to the churches, in which, they are told, “they will find infallibly prophesied both the coming of persecution and the promise of immortality to those who keep their faith unto the end” (153).

I reiterate one final observation before examining the messages in detail: They are, as we have noted, addressed to the *angels* of the churches and *not* directly to the churches themselves. Throughout the messages the pronouns and verbs are often in the singular: “I know *thy* works” (2:2); “I have this against *thee*” (2:4); “remember *thee*” (2:5). Jesus the Emperor sends edicts to his provincial representatives, the angels, the pastors or bishops of the church in each city (→1:20). The angels are stars, and as those stars are corrected, they shine more brightly, and so the churches become bright in the dark firmament of the Roman *oikoumene*. As the angels shine, the Bride is prepared to become a city of light.

To the Angel of Ephesus

To the angel of the Ephesian church, write: “Thus saith¹ he who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands. I discern² your works and your toil and perseverance, and that you are not able to endure evils, and you test those who call themselves apostles and are not, and you found them false. And you have perseverance and you have endured on account of My name, and you have not tired. But I have against you: Your first love you have abandoned. Remember therefore where you have fallen, and repent and do the first works. But if not, I come to you, and I will remove your lampstand out of its place, if you do not repent. But this you have: That you hate the works of the Nikolaitans, which I also hate. He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To the conqueror I will give him to eat from the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.”

—Rev. 2:1–7

The message follows the standard structure outlined above, but is also chiasmically arranged (cf. Koester 2015: 267):

- A. Thus says: One who holds stars and walks in midst (Edenic scene), v. 1
- B. Know works (ἔργα), including opposition to false teachers, vv. 2–3

¹ As explained above, τάδε λέγει already was archaic in the first century. Hence the Authorized-Version idiom.

² In the translation, I have distinguished between οἶδα and various forms of γινώσκω. “Discern” is an attempt to retain the connection between οἶδα and εἶδεν, and hence the connection between Jesus’s knowing and his seeing.

- C. Left first love, v. 4
 - D. Remember and repent (μετανόησον), v. 5a
 - E. I am coming and will remove lampstand, v. 5b
 - D'. Unless repent (μετανοήσης), v. 5c
 - C'. Hate
- B'. works (ἔργα) of Nicolaitans, v. 6
- A'. Hear Spirit: Paradise of God, v. 7

To the Ephesian angel, Jesus describes himself as the Son of Man in the midst of the lampstands (1:13), his right hand holding the seven stars (1:16). In 1:15, Jesus “has” seven stars, while in 2:1 he “holds” seven stars. The words are near synonyms, but the latter slightly tilts in the direction of grasping, hanging on to. κρατέω can mean “hold power over,” as in the title Pantokrator, the “One who holds all.” The stars in Jesus’s hand are the seven angels of the churches, and the fact that he *holds* them is a reassurance. The right hand of Yahweh is his powerful hand stretched out against Egypt and Pharaoh (Exod. 15:6, 12). Jesus holds the stars, making it possible for them to hold on to him. Yet Jesus also threatens to remove the lampstand, and therefore the angel and the star. If the angel does not repent, he may become a falling star, like the king of the abyss (→9:1–13), like the king of Babylon (Isaiah 13–14). The only hope of the Ephesians is that the angel and church are both firmly grasped by the strong right hand of Jesus.

The addition of ὁ περιπατῶν in 2:1 to the description of 1:13 reinforces the Edenic allusion. Walking in the grove of burning trees, Jesus is Yahweh walking in the midst of the garden (Gen. 3:8; Boxall 2006: 48), coming to judge the Adamic guardian of the Ephesian garden. “Walking” suggests surveillance, inspection, circulation, and *presence*: Jesus is with the churches, in their midst (Mangina (2010: 58) notes that Jesus moves with the church), fulfilling Yahweh’s promise to walk among Israel (Leviticus 26; Mounce 1997: 68). His is an episcopal παρουσία, but he does not arrive from absence. His coming is the advent of an always-present Jesus. The fact that Jesus walks in the midst of the *lampstands* makes the threat of verse 5 very real. As priest, Jesus has charge of lamps and lampstands, which includes the authority to remove them.

Jesus’s evaluation of the angel at Ephesus is organized as a double triad (Smalley (2005: 61) counts seven marks of faithfulness in vv. 2–3). Jesus commends the angel’s works, toil, and perseverance, which are manifested in three actions—not enduring evil ones, putting apostles to the test, enduring for the name. The three general commendations seem to match the three specific actions:

Virtues	Specific actions
Works	Not enduring evil ones
Toil	Put apostles to test
Perseverance	Persevere and endure for Name

Good works begin with intolerance of evil. Adam's first good work *should* have been rejection of the serpent's temptation; Adam should have been unable to bear with him. Works cannot be genuinely good unless they exhibit hostility to evil. The angel's toil is linked with the difficult task of testing the ones who say they are apostles in order to expose them as liars. Perseverance or endurance is mentioned again at the beginning of verse 3, and is expounded in terms of bearing the name of Jesus and not yielding. The triad fits with the triplets earlier in the book. God the Father is, was, is to come; Jesus is Witness, Firstborn, Ruler, who loves, released, and made the church a priestly kingdom; the Triune God is the Father, the seven Spirits, and Jesus. The triple character of God is being imprinted on the angel and on the church as work, toil, and perseverance, manifest in intolerance, testing, and endurance. There may be a temporal dimension to the triad as well: The angel's present works are the result of his toil and labor, and give hope of a future of patient endurance.

The connections between the positive virtues and commendable but "negative" actions are filled out by wordplay on "bear": The angel bears on account of Jesus's name (ἐβάστας διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου, v. 3), but Jesus also approves the fact that οὐ δύνη βαστάσαι (v. 2). Bearing tribulation, the cross, the burdens of other believers—these are commendable, but bearing the wicked is wicked. The beast later bears the harlot on his back, but the Ephesian angel refuses to become a beast of burden for a whore. There is a hint of the third commandment here: Do not bear the name of Yahweh lightly. The angel of Ephesus has the name of Jesus on him, and he bears it, lifts it up, carries it before the world.

Jesus's message implies a complex vision of the fabric of Christian virtue. Christians are called to good works, but *among* those good works are the sturdier virtues of testing and hating falsehood. Christians are called to bear with affliction, but are also called to *refuse* putting up with evil men. Throughout the messages, intolerance is invariably a *virtue*. Tolerance of evil is evil.

Discussions of the place of good works often focus on Pauline sources, but Johannine texts are equally important. There are few NT passages richer in resources for a theology of works (perhaps a theology of human action) than the letters to the churches of Asia (Revelation 2–3).

1. Deeds are linked with toil, perseverance, and intolerance of evil. Doing good deeds means testing and discerning the claims of false apostles (2:2).
2. We can fall from deeds, and then we need to repent and return to the works we used to do before Jesus comes to remove the lampstand (2:5).
3. Some deeds should be hated. Jesus himself hates the deeds of the Nicolaitans (2:6).
4. Works are linked with love, faith, service, and perseverance (2:19). We can make this connection, among others: Our love and faith are expressed in works of service.

5. Works can become greater over time (2:19).
6. If we abandon good works, we may suffer tribulation that is designed to drive us to repentance (2:22).
7. Jesus rewards everyone according to what they do (2:23; a constant refrain late in Revelation—18:6; 20:12–13; 22:12).
8. Works are linked with victory. We need to keep doing good works to the end. Jesus promises authority to those who persevere in doing good works (2:26).
9. Works can be hypocritical—they can foster an undeserved reputation for vibrant life. But Jesus sees through the mask and knows the deeds that we actually do (3:1).
10. Deeds need to be completed, brought to fruition. We can become lazy, sleepy, and near death midway through our work, and then we need to be startled from slumber (3:2).
11. Jesus rewards good works by opening doors. Even those who act in weakness, with only a little power, but who keep his word and name, will have fresh opportunities for mission and service (3:8)—more good works.
12. Deeds can be hot, cold, or lukewarm. Jesus prefers either of the first two to the last (3:15).

Ἔργον is used twelve times in the letters to the churches. The numerology is too tempting: Doing good deeds, hating evil deeds, repenting of hypocritical works—these are the marks of those who are true Israelites. John's first epistle is likewise a thesaurus of teaching on good works and obedience.

The commendation is a list of ten, marked by clauses beginning with καί:

1. Your works
2. and toil
3. and your perseverance
4. and you do not bear evil men
5. and you test self-named apostles
6. and they are not
7. and you find them liars
8. and you have perseverance
9. and you bear on account of the name
10. and you do not grow weary.

This tenfold list neatly divides into a 3 + 7. The first three are single terms, and the last seven are all clauses with verbs in the second-person singular. A tenfold commendation suggests a link with the Ten Words of Exodus 20. The Ephesians are a new Israel, Jesus's words a new Torah.

John is dismissive of “self-appointed” or more literally “self-said” (τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς ἀποστόλους) apostles. From the very beginning of the messages, we see that the churches are plagued not only by attacks from outside but by dissension within (Boxall 2006: 48–9). “Self-appointed apostle” is an ironic designation. By definition, an apostle bears the authority of

his sender; he has authority because he is *authorized* to transact business and speak in the sender's name. In the Apocalypse, authority exists only as gift. Both good and evil powers are *given* authority by a higher authority. *All* authority must be authorized. Here we have the impossible: Self-authorized authorities, authoritative teachers whose backing is literally *nihil*.

Deuteronomy 13's warning about false prophets and leaders who entice the people of Israel away from Yahweh to serve other gods is in the background. The people of Israel were to test false teachers, prove them to be liars, and to put them to death. Cities led away from Yahweh by false teachers are put under the ban and burned with altar fire. Liars and false prophets appear throughout the book of Revelation: There are lying apostles, lying Jews, and the false prophet (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). Babylon is a city of lies, and is put under the ban and burned, and all liars end up in the lake of fire (→21:8, 27). The conflict in Revelation is between the true and false witnesses, between liars and martyrs. Liars are those who claim to be things they are not, but they are also those who do not bear faithful witness of Jesus to the end, who love their life more than Jesus. At Ephesus, we see this cosmic conflict at ground level, in the claims of false apostles and the angel's rigorous testing. Humdrum as such prosaic pastoral care may seem, it is a battle in the great war of the end of the age. Pastors need to beware complacency: Combat with false teaching and false teachers is spiritual warfare.

Other NT writers contend with so-called apostles (cf. 2 Cor. 11:13), teachers who claim authority that they do not possess. Their falseness consists as much in their presumption as in the content of their teaching. Here in Revelation 2, textual echoes enable us to form some guesses about the identity of the false apostles. Though the Ephesians perhaps refuse to tolerate other wicked men than false apostles, the false apostles are clearly among the men they refuse to bear. We can make the further connection between verses 2 and 6: Nicolaitans are also among the intolerable liars. While it would be too much to identify Nicolaitans and the false apostles, they belong to the same category of "unbearable evil men." The odd syntax of verse 2 links it with the following message to Smyrna: "and you test those calling themselves apostles, and they are not, and you find them liars" (καὶ ἐπείρασας τοὺς λέγοντας ἑαυτοὺς, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, καὶ εὗρες αὐτοὺς ψευδεῖς). That awkward phrasing reappears in verse 9, which describes Smyrna's struggles with "the ones Jews to be themselves, and they are not, but a synagogue of Satan" (καὶ τὴν βλασφημίαν ἐκ τῶν λεγόντων Ἰουδαίους εἶναι ἑαυτοὺς, καὶ οὐκ εἰσὶν, ἀλλὰ συναγωγὴ τοῦ Σατανᾶ; cf. Aune 1997: 145–6). That stylistic tangle perhaps hints that the false apostles are associated with false Jews, with a movement among Jews that is somehow competitive with the church. The content of the false teaching becomes clearer in the other messages. For now, we can

at least conclude that the church in Ephesus is already undergoing one of the apocalyptic trials Jesus warned about: “Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many” (Matt. 24:11; cf. v. 24).

After a series of *kai* clauses in second-person singular, verse 4 begins with the adversative *ἀλλὰ* and a return to the first-person singular of *οἶδα*. The two first-person statements that follow divide Jesus’s message into an “I know” and an “I have against you.” Famously, the Ephesian angel has abandoned his first love. As argued above (→1:20), the angels are human leaders of the churches. What does it mean for the bishop of Ephesus to leave his first love? Many pose the question in terms of a distinction between love for God and love for the brothers: Did the church, or the angel, abandon love for God or for one another? (cf. Oecumenius 2011: 11; Andrew of Caesarea 2011: 120). The two are, as many point out, interrelated (Mounce 1997: 70). Perhaps that is the wrong way to frame the issue. Is there an alternative?

We get a hint from the fact that Jesus repeats the *πρῶτ-* root (v. 5): The angel is to turn around and begin doing again the works he did at first. The verbal link suggests a connection between first love, which has been abandoned, and first *works*. Love and good works are intimately connected, especially in John’s gospel. “If you love Me, keep my commandments,” Jesus says again and again (14:15, 21; 15:10; cf. 1 Jn 5:2–3; 2 Jn 1:1, 6; cf. Exod. 20:6; Deut. 5:10; 7:9; 11:1, 13; 30:16; Josh. 22:5; Neh. 1:5). That the angel has left his first love suggests that, for all his doctrinal purity and rigorous gatekeeping, he does not keep the commandments of Jesus the Lord. The numerical allusion to the Ten Words in verses 2–3 suggests another connection. Though the Ephesian angel faithfully fulfills the ten works, he has fallen away from his *first* work. In Exodus 20, the first work is to remember the Lord who brought from Egypt and to have no other gods before him.

John 10 provides an additional clue. Jesus warns that hirelings abandon the flock when the wolf comes, in contrast to the Good Shepherd who gives himself for the sheep. In the Upper Room Discourse, Jesus predicts that the disciples themselves will abandon him and flee (16:32), though the Father will remain with him. An angel who leaves his first love is one who proves himself a hireling, who abandons the church when wolves attack. Given that Jesus addresses the churches as the Bridegroom, the charge might also take on a romantic/marital coloring. Jesus left his Father’s house to rescue his bride, and he expects the friends of the Bridegroom, the angels of the churches, to keep his Bride until he comes. Paul warned that wolves would attack the Ephesian church (Acts 20:29) and claims to have fought beasts in Ephesus (1 Cor. 15:32). The wolves have attacked (Aune 1997: 144–5), but the angel of Ephesus has not stayed in his post, has not kept the charge of the Good Shepherd. He has been an Adam, leaving the Bride rather than

guarding her, fleeing rather than giving his life. When an angel leaves his post, it is a sign that his affection has cooled (cf. Matt. 24:12; Sweet 1979: 79). He has left his love for God and for the brothers. Once he shone like a star in the sky, but he is now a fallen angel, fallen, like Lucifer, to earth.

Remembering the place he once enjoyed is the beginning of repentance, the first step of a climb back up into the firmament, where he can shine like a light (Sweet 1979: 81), a restoration to the position of guard to the Ephesian temple. What will happen to the church of Ephesus if the angel does *not* repent and return, and the lampstand was removed? The remainder of Revelation answers that question. Babylon is a temple whose lampstand is removed, and it is plunged into darkness, without “the light of a lamp” (18:23). When Jesus removes the lampstand, a starless night will follow. The angel is a light of the church in a dark world; but a church with a faithless angel will be plunged into dark.

Aune (1997: 147) notes the link between this passage and the promise of 1 Kgs 11:36, where the Lord promises to leave Benjamin with Rehoboam so that “David my servant may always have a lamp before me in Jerusalem.” He notes that the placement of the lamp before Yahweh suggests a cultic setting. The removal of the lamp is a final end, a more drastic cutting-off than the cutting-off of the house of David. Without light, Babylon is no longer the capital city of a Davidic king.

Verse 6 returns to commendation. The angel is not a good lover, but Jesus commends him because he is at least a good hater. In the ancient world, love and hate are not emotional states but have to do with loyalty and attachment to a group or person. Jesus intends the Ephesian angel (and through him the church) to detach from the Nicolaitans, whether or not they feel any strong revulsion against them (Malina and Pilch 2000: 52). It is surprising to many that Jesus the incarnate Love of God would commend hatred, but the surprise should occasion surprise. Especially in the Gospel of John, Jesus fights with the Jewish leaders again and again. He would not be the Love of God toward the oppressed if he did not oppose the oppressor. Neither can we truly love the good without hating evil.

The Ephesian angel hates a group called the Nicolaitans, who might be followers of a false teacher named “Nicolaus,” though the identity of this heretic has never been firmly established (cf. Aune 1997: 148–9). We will explore their agenda more fully when we examine the message to Pergamum.

Douglas (1915: 224) makes a suggestive connection with Nicolaus of Damascus, historian, adviser to Herod the Great and tutor to the children of Antony and Cleopatra, a source for Josephus. Nicolaus promoted Herod’s interests with Caesar, pacifying Caesar when he was angry with Herod and deflecting Caesar’s anger to Herod’s accusers (cf. Wacholder

1989: 147–72). Nicolaus was not Jewish, and he was long dead by the time John wrote. It is slightly possible, though, that there was a faction within the church that followed his example by striving to synthesize Jewish/Christian interests with those of Roman power and culture.

The Greek word *may* be a pun. It breaks into two words, “victor” and “people.” If we take this as a self-designation for the group, the name is a boast. Nicolaitans are the “Victory People.” For John, the name may be ironic, describing Christians who dominate others.

Bauckham (1993: 124) explains:

The name of the Nicolaitans, followers of Nicolaus, which means “conquer the people,” alludes to Revelation’s keyword “conquer” (νικᾶω). Their teaching made it possible for Christians to be successful in pagan society, but this was the beast’s success, a real conquest of the saints, winning them to his side, rather than the only apparent conquest he achieved by putting them to death. Hence the name Nicolaus is aptly explained by that of Balaam (2:14) ... Jewish exegesis explained the name Balaam as meaning “destroy the people.”

Nicolaitans thus claim to be showing a way of victory, but in fact point to a way of destruction. In the end, their followers do not conquer but are consumed.

The *Scofield Bible* etymologizes the name too, taking “people-conqueror” as a hint of oppressive clericalization in the church (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 54).

Jesus uses the phrase “He who has an ear” frequently during his earthly ministry (Matt. 11:15; 13:9, 16, 43; Mk 4:9, 23; 7:16; etc.). In the gospels, this phrase is linked with the use of parables and riddles. As in the days of Isaiah, most of the Jews are incapable of seeing or hearing, but Jesus recognizes that some still have ears to hear. In the messages to the churches, Jesus addresses an audience—in the *church!*—where some *lack* ears. The hardening that happened to Jews is happening also to some the churches, another sign of the impending eschatological crisis. Love has grown cold, ears have closed, and Jesus speaks like Isaiah to a people whose ears are closed to his word.

Jordan (1999a) argues that this reflects the larger biblical theme of the circumcised ear. Israel is called to circumcise or “open” their ears, like a permanent slave who will have his ear tuned only to the voice of the master. Their ears are opened by the Spirit, their hearts circumcised by the Spirit, to respond with the first works and to remember and turn to their first love.

Jesus’s words are one source of the traditional Christian idea of the spiritual senses, the notion that we can possess “spiritual” sight as well as physical, spiritual hearing as well as physical. There is a literal dimension to the spiritual senses. Our physical senses can be in perfect working order, and yet we can misperceive what is happening around us. To perceive accurately, we need something more than functioning senses; we need to see with an “inner eye” and hear with an “inner ear.” Even the most basic perception is more than a physical event. Throughout church history, many theologians have reflected on this reality, recognizing that Scripture speaks about the “eyes” and “ears” of the heart. See Chretien (2006).

Jesus dictates messages to John, which John records and circulates to the churches. At the end of each of the messages, though, Jesus calls on the churches to hear what the *Spirit* says to them. How did the Spirit intrude into the process? As argued above (→1:1), the Spirit is a hidden agent in the entire process of unveiling. He is the Angel of Jesus who signifies the apocalypse that the Father has given to Jesus, so that John can communicate that apocalypse to Jesus's slaves in the churches. The Spirit is at work as originator of the text, as the one who lifts and carries John to the places where he can see the unseen and hear the unheard. Yet the messages describe a different, complementary role for the Spirit. He is not merely the one who communicates to John but the one who communicates *through* John to the churches. John receives the unveiling ἐν πνεύματι, and then the same πνεῦμα continuously addresses the churches who hear and receive what he writes. Communication circulates chiasmatically, from a revelatory voice and vision, through text, to the voice of the reader in the church. The Spirit encloses the chiasmus: The Spirit signifies to John, who writes and sends, so that the reader can read in the churches and God's people can hear the voice of the Spirit. In short: Spirit→John→text→reader→Spirit.

This holds significant implications for our understanding of Scripture and Scripture's place in the church, but I will limit myself to a single comment: We can be certain that the words of the Word come to the church because we trust the Spirit to encompass the communication process. The process of recording the words of the Word is not left to human ingenuity and memory; the Angel of Jesus signifies to John. And the delivery of the words of the Word is not left to the rhetorical skill of the human reader or preacher; the Spirit speaks, and continues speaking, to the churches. The voice of the Spirit is heard not only by the angel, but by *anyone* with ears to hear (ὁ ἔχων οὖς).

Listening to the Spirit is the path of victory. Those who persevere will be victors over the victors, conquerors of the People-Conquerors. Νίκη has military and athletic connotations in ancient Greek (Koester 2015: 265), but here victory has a somewhat more "passive" sense of standing firm, witnessing to Jesus in the face of threats, refusing to tolerate Nicolaitans (cf. Caird 1966: 33). At the extreme, victory means martyrdom. The path to the fruit of the wood of life is the path of faithful witness. In their passion, the saints are more than conquerors.

Jesus is Yahweh among the trees, and he gives victors to eat from the tree of life in the Paradise of God (cf. Aune 1997: 152–4). Those who resist the Nicolaitans return to Eden to eat from the food of paradise. By using ξύλον (cf. Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:290; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24) rather than the expected δένδρον, Jesus connects the Paradisal tree of life with the wood of his cross.

Victors will enjoy a meal from the “wood of Paradise” or even the “gallows of Paradise” (Hemer 2000: 42–3; Sweet 1979: 83; Boxall 2006: 52; Caesarius 2011: 67). Jesus gained paradise by the cross; Jesus’s cross becomes the tree of life in a new Eden; Jesus disciples gain paradise through the same wood. More directly, Jesus is himself the tree of life (Krey 1997: 46). Feasting on the fruit of the tree means receiving Jesus’s flesh and blood as true food and drink. As we eat the fruit of the cross, we become what we eat. Nicolaitans, the “people-conquerors,” eat meat sacrificed to idols, but those who are victors over the Victor-cult have a better meal than idols offer (Farrer 1964: 71). This is *not* a promise of eternal life, but of access to the holy city, the polity that descends from heaven after the martyrs have triumphed (→22:1–5). It is a promise that the overcomers will enjoy the victory feast of the Eucharist, the marriage Supper of the Lamb, the feast of lovers in the garden (cf. Song 4:11–5:1). The advent that Jesus talks about is a Eucharistic advent (Boxall 2006: 50–1). Saints are prepared for witness by consuming the faithful Witness at the Lord’s table, and the reward for witness is a permanent place at the table.

Apringius (2011: 33) gives this lovely gloss:

[H]e promises rewards after this toil, so that, entering into paradise, they might freely eat from the tree of life, for which Adam was expelled from paradise, lest he eat anything from it. And so he says, “which is in the paradise of God,” where, namely, the wind breathes life, where the mysteries give virtue, and he furnishes the fruit of the tree of life, that is, an eternity that does not fade away.

Jesus warns the church at Ephesus that the church will collapse if the *pastor* persists in his fall, if he does not return to his post, to his first love and first deeds. No doubt, the angel’s departure damaged the church. If the star’s light dims, so will the rest of the lights that make up the church. But Jesus calls the *angel*, not the whole community, to repentance. Under the terms of the Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7), the health of Israel depended on the faithfulness of the king. The church is likewise dependent on the faithfulness of its Head, who fortunately is the faithful One, Jesus. Because he is indefectible, so is the church. Jesus applies this Davidic logic to an individual church. Congregations within the church—the church in Ephesus or Jerusalem or Rome or Constantinople or Geneva or Canterbury or Boston—*can* defect, and they defect when their angels leave their first love and first works and fail to repent. The future of First Mennonite of Macon, or Sacred Heart Catholic Church of Bartlesville, or the Holy Ghost Victory Church of Nairobi, or a hidden house church in Guanzhou, or any of a million other churches is bound up with the faithfulness of the church’s “angel.”

It is a heavy burden. So, as James says, “Be not many teachers.”

To the angel of Smyrna

And to the angel of the church in Smyrna, write: “Thus saith the first and the last, who became dead and lived: I discern your tribulation and poverty—but rich you are!—and the blasphemy of those who call themselves Jews, and are not, but a synagogue of Satan. Fear not what you are about to suffer. Behold the devil is about to throw some of you into prison in order that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Become faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life. The one who has ears let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The conqueror will in no way be treated unjustly at the second death.”

—Rev. 2:8–11

Smyrna means “myrrh” (Sweet 1979: 84). It is one of the components of the holy anointing oil for priests (Exod. 30:23; LXX). Esther bathed in myrrh (2:12), and Psalm 45 speaks of myrrh among the spices of the anointed Bridegroom king. Myrrh is one of perfumes that creates an aromatic cloud around the Lover (Song of Songs 3:6; cf. 4:6, 14; 5:1; 5:5 [2x], 13) and grows in the garden that is the bride (Song of Songs 4:14). In the NT, *σμύρνα* is one of the gifts of the magi (Matt. 2:11) and a component of the spicy concoction that was used for Jesus’s burial, which looks much like a nuptial (Jn 19:39). Jesus is appropriately identified as the dead and risen one (Boxall 2006: 53). With a church at Smyrna, Jesus is the myrrh-anointed Priest, the holy Lover, and the suffering church is also a priest in him, his perfumed beloved.

Jesus’s self-description as the dead and living one frames the entire message (cf. Koester 2015: 279):

- A. Jesus first and last, dead and living, v. 8
- B. Tribulation and poverty, riches, v. 9a
- C. Blasphemy of false Jews, synagogue of Satan, v. 9b
- D. Do not fear the things you suffer, v. 10a
- C’. Devil will cast you into prison, v. 10b
- B’. Tribulation ten days, v. 10c
- A’. Faithful to death, receive life; not taste of second death, vv. 10d–11

The message to the angel at Ephesus picks up on Edenic themes—Jesus is Yahweh walking among the flaming trees, and he promises the fruit of the tree of life in the Paradise of God. The second message is patriarchal, as the angel and church follow the story of Joseph. Like Joseph, some of the Smyrneans are going to be cast into prison. The Lord promises to bring them through that death into new life, crowning them with a crown of life, as Joseph passes through multiple

descents before rising to receive his crown. Death is the great enemy of the patriarchs. The Abraham narratives never mention sin, but Abraham is confronted by death everywhere he goes. His wife is barren, his own body old, the land famine-ridden. When he finally fathers the son he has waited for, Yahweh tells him to put him to death on Moriah. The angel and church at Smyrna face patriarchal threats. They have not left their first love or their first works, but they face tribulation, poverty, blasphemy from Jews, imprisonment, the threat of death.

Jesus is the first and the last, the origin of all things, the Word by which all things came to be, and the goal of all things, the One in whom all things hold together, the One toward whom all things are moving, the End in Person. This is the economy of the present time—that God is summing up all things in Jesus his Son. He is the “I am,” the one who is the beginning beyond all beginnings, the end that is always ahead of all our ends. That is true, but, as we have seen, the title has a more specific connotation in Revelation. The first time Jesus identifies himself as first and last, he immediately adds that he is the *living* one, specifying that he became dead and lives to the ages of ages (1:17–18). Beginning and end means not only creation and eschaton, but death and life. And in Jesus’s self-description, *death* is beginning, not end. Jesus is the beginning *in that* he was dead; he is the end *in that* he came to life, triumphed over death, and lives forever. He is the end *in that* he is born again, renewed in childhood, his life not behind him but ahead of him. This is the great inversion of the gospel, that the last shall be first and the first last. Because of Jesus death comes at the start, and the movement of Jesus and those who follow him is from death to life. It is the “ontology” of the new covenant, when time’s commonsensical coordinates are reversed.

Jesus’s reference to himself as “first” (πρῶτος) connects to the beginning of the book, the first time Jesus is identified with the triple-and-heptamerous title of “faithful witness, firstborn of the dead, ruler of the kings of the earth” (→1:5). Jesus is “first” in the sense that he is the first to come from the dead. That Jesus is “first” also hooks back to the message to the angel of Ephesus, who left his first love, ceased to do the “first” works. Jesus is supposed to be first in *everything*, and the Ephesian angel no longer put Jesus first. The title “first and last” is used in Isaiah in connection with the exile and restoration of Israel, Israel’s descent into prison and her return (Isa. 41:4; 44:6; 48:12), a history quite relevant to the church at Smyrna.

The central section of the message to Smyrna consists of two mini-paragraphs set out in parallels. The first has six segments:

- a. Affliction
 - b. and poverty
 - c. but (ἀλλά) you are rich.
- a'. Blasphemy from self-designated Jews
 - b'. and they are not
 - c'. but (ἀλλά) a synagogue of Satan.

This structure underscores the nature of the tribulation that the angel at Smyrna has so far endured. He (and the church) are blasphemed and slandered, and as a result have become poor. His poverty is not metaphorical or spiritual, but “real destitution” (Smalley 2001: 65). Slandered by Jews, he has been deprived of rights and wealth. His devotion to Jesus is costly. And the onslaught is not over yet. Worse is coming.

The following section is laid out in a five-segment scheme, divided by two imperatives:

- a. Do not fear (impv.) things you are going to suffer.
 - b. Devil is going to throw you into prison.
 - c. 10-day tribulation.
- a'. Become faithful (impv.) unto death.
 - b'. I will give a crown of life.

The hinge is Jesus's assurance that the church at Smyrna will suffer tribulation for only ten days. The structure also highlights the contrast between what the devil gives and what Jesus gives. Satan strips and casts down, Jesus elevates and crowns. The fact that the saints are enduring tribulation is another sign that the prophetic clock is ticking (cf. Matt. 24:9). The “birth pangs” of the new world have begun. When tribulation is intensified by an “abomination that brings desolation,” then the churches know that the end is at hand. Tribulation is coming for the *enemies* of the church, even “great tribulation” for Jezebel and her children (2:22), but the tribulation that Revelation is most concerned about is the great tribulation of the saints (7:14). The NT assumes the OT and Jewish understanding of the role of tribulation in the coming of the Messianic kingdom. Jesus's death was the beginning of labor, but the saints are privileged to participate in the Messianic transition. The kingdom is born through the combined tribulation of Jesus and his bride, his body.

There is a lot of throwing and tossing about in the book of Revelation. The devil casts (βάλλω) members of the church at Smyrna into prison (2:10), and Jesus threatens to “throw” Jezebel on a bed of sickness (2:22). An angel casts fire from heaven to earth, and causes all kinds of ruckus (8:1-5). When the devil reappears in chapter 12, βάλλω reappears. At first, he is still throwing things down, tossing stars from heaven with his tail. In the main, though, he is the one tossed (βάλλω is used 7x in chapter 12, six of which refer to the dragon being cast down). Finally, he is himself thrown into the prison of the abyss (20:3, 7) before being released and swiftly thrown into the lake of fire (20:10). Revelation is a *lex talionis* story, a story of poetic justice, of the thrower thrown. It also unveils the surprising weakness and passivity of the devil: Leviathan he may be, but the Lord who made Leviathan tosses him out the door like an annoying house pet.

Poverty and imprisonment are tests (v. 10). Again, patriarchal stories are in the background. Abraham is tested by death, by the fact that he has to wait for Yahweh to bring life from the dead womb of Sarah, and by the

command to sacrifice Isaac. Joseph is tested by death, by loss of privilege, by being reduced from the foreman of his brothers to the status of a slave, and then by being reduced from the chief steward of Potipher's house to the status of a prisoner. Like the patriarchs, the angel is a sojourner, without settled land, and yet he is rich because he belongs to Jesus the firstborn, who shares his inheritance with his brothers. The angel and his church are rich with the gifts that Jesus gives, gifts that remain hidden during a time of trial but will finally be manifest.

Blasphemy is usually insulting speech against God (Matt. 12:31; 26:65; Lk. 5:21; Jn 10:33). Jesus himself was accused of blasphemy on more than one occasion. The word can also mean "slander" more generally, damaging speech about another human being or a spiritual power. Like Yahweh hearing the cries of Israel, Jesus knows the blasphemy being directed at the saints of Smyrna; because they bear the name of God, verbal attacks on them are verbal attacks on God himself. The slanders and lies and damaging speech against the angel at Smyrna have led to affliction and poverty, but blasphemy ultimately recoils on the blasphemer. Blasphemy against the Son of Man is forgiven, but blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is *not* forgiven. Since the blasphemy is directed against the angel of the church who operates in the power of the Angel of Jesus, it amounts to blasphemy against the Spirit. The blasphemers of the church will be silenced and judged.

Who is doing the blaspheming? The answer is complex. Ultimately, the threat comes from Satan, the adversary or accuser, also called "devil," the slanderer. This may not be obvious, and it is essential for the Smyrna Christians to see that the attack is demonic and their battle a spiritual one in heavenly places (Caird 1966: 35–6). Romans might have attacked Christians the way Haman attacked Jews: "There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from those of all other people, and they do not observe the king's laws" (Est 3:8). In practice Roman authorities might have been quite reasonable, offering clemency for minimal compliance with Roman rules. Even if they are tempted to offer a tiny pinch of incense to the emperor, the believers at Smyrna should recognize a Satanic test. Even if they are tempted only to eat a bit of forbidden fruit, they should recognize that their tempter speaks with the voice of a serpent.

Satan is one of the main adversaries in the book of Revelation. Five of the eight uses of the name are in the messages to the angels of the churches (2:9, 13 [2x], 24; 3:9). After that, the word is not used until chapter 12 (the distribution of διάβολος, slanderer, is the same). Satan reappears at the middle of the book attacking the woman and the child, and then calling up the beasts who make war and triumph over the saints (12:9). Finally, Satan is imprisoned (20:2) and then released briefly (20:7) before being destroyed forever. "Devil" appears five times in the same contexts (2:10; 12:9, 12; 20:2, 10), and the devil is also identified as

the “serpent” (9:19; 12:9, 14, 15; 20:2). Satan is also called the “dragon” 13x (12:3, 4, 7 [2x], 9, 13, 16, 17; 13:2, 4, 11; 16:13; 20:2). We will examine other names of Satan as they appear in the book.

The book of Revelation tells the story of the triumph of the saints, and this inevitably involves the trampling of the serpent. Saints triumph as Jesus did: Now is the judgment of this world, now is the Prince of this world cast out, Jesus said as he went to the cross. The saints overcome Satan by spilling their blood in and with Jesus. It looks as if they are being judged and defeated by Satanic assault. In fact, they are, like Jesus, judges of their judges, witnesses against their accusers, God’s agents for bringing this world and its ruler under judgment, victors in the midst of suffering (→20:4-6).

Though it comes from Satan, the blasphemy, slander, and accusation are channeled primarily through the Jews (2:9). Jews are mentioned explicitly only twice in Revelation (2:9; 3:9), but they are more prominent than that statistic suggests (*pace* Aune (1997: 165), who claims that conflicts of Revelation are “extramural”). The land beast (→13:11-18) is a Jewish figure, a false prophet, and the harlot is a false bride, a false Jerusalem (→17). Both are figures of Judaism as persecutor of the church, in cooperation with the beast of Rome.

John is not anti-Semitic. John himself is a Jew, many Jews accept Jesus as Messiah, along with Gentile God-fearers. One of the key story-lines of Revelation has to do with the fate of the 144,000 *Israelite* martyrs (→7:1-8), and with the related fate of Jews who mourn when they see the One they pierced (→1:7; →18; →21:24). Like Paul, John longs for, and predicts, that “all Israel” will be saved.

Yet that does not prevent him from condemning his fellow Jews in the strongest terms when they turn against their own Messiah. Turning against Yahweh in flesh, they defect from their God and their own identity, and, by John’s lights, no longer deserve the name “Jew.” Throughout the book of Acts, Jews are the principal opponents of the church. After Pentecost, Jewish leaders try to stop the apostles from preaching Jesus. A Jewish mob kills Stephen for his alleged insults against temple and Torah, and Paul is authorized by the high priest to hunt down and eliminate Christians. The great internal contention in the book of Acts and several of the letters of Paul is about Judaizing: Should Gentile converts to Christ be required to “Judaize,” that is, to follow Jewish customs?

As we will see, Revelation depicts the conflicts of Acts in symbolic, visionary form, but the Apocalypse is written during a transition to a new set of circumstances that brings a new set of enemies. By the time John records the Apocalypse, the Judaizing battle is all but over, and the church is instead threatened by teachers who encourage idolatry and *porneia* (see below for

explanation of these terms). In Acts, Jewish opponents of the church try again and again to enlist Roman authorities in their attacks on Christians. They are distinctly unsuccessful. Romans are decidedly favorable to the church in Acts. As John writes the Apocalypse, that is about to change. Attacks from Jews continue. In both Smyrna and Philadelphia, self-identified Jews attack the church, but now they succeed in enlisting Roman authorities in their attacks. Roman and Jewish powers join forces against the Lamb, and they join forces again against his Bride. This is what makes the immediate future so daunting for the church: The whole world turns against the church. *Ecclesia contra mundum*.

Boxall (2006: 53–4) suggests two possibilities for identifying the synagogue of Satan. On the one hand, the self-proclaimed Jews may be

members of the non-Christian Jewish synagogue, who have rejected rival claims of Christians to be “true Jews,” possibly expelling them from the synagogue community ... and reporting them to local magistrates. Cut loose from the Jewish community, Christians would have lost the privileges accorded to Judaism as a *religio licita* and been more vulnerable to persecution for refusal to worship the local gods, whose goodwill was necessary for the maintenance of public order, or to participate in the imperial cult.

Alternatively, the synagogue might be made up of “Jewish Christians” whom John regards as “too closely accommodated to the ‘satanic’ culture of the province and the empire.” They may not be ethnically Jewish at all, but Gentiles who have Judaized, perhaps to ensure that they would not run afoul of the Roman authorities. The angel and church at Smyrna may be facing either or both of these threats, but of Boxall’s two scenarios, the first better fits the situation in Revelation 12–15.

Jewish attacks on the church continued into the early centuries. Jews were involved in the martyrdom of Polycarp at Smyrna (Sweet 1979: 85). According to the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (12:2),

When this was proclaimed by the herald, the whole multitude both of Gentiles and of Jews who dwelt in Smyrna cried out with ungovernable wrath and with a loud shout, “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the puller down of our gods, who teacheth numbers not to sacrifice nor worship.” Saying these things, they shouted aloud and asked the Asiarch Philip to let a lion loose upon Polycarp. But he said that it was not lawful for him, since he had brought the sports to a close.

Further, in 12:3:

Then they thought fit to shout out with one accord that Polycarp should be burned alive. For it must needs be that the matter of the vision should be fulfilled, which was shown him concerning his pillow, when he saw it on fire while praying, and turning round he said prophetically to the faithful who were with him, “I must needs be burned alive.”

Finally, in 13:1, we read, “These things then happened with so great speed, quicker than words could tell, the crowds forthwith collecting from the workshops and baths timber and faggots, and the Jews more especially assisting in this with zeal, as is their wont.” Though some of this is Jew-baiting rhetoric, there is no reason to doubt that Jews and Romans worked together to suppress the church, each for their own reasons.

The relationship between Judaism and Christianity has been a fraught issue in recent theology, because it has been a fraught and tragic reality in modern history. On the one hand,

mainstream theology has begun to recognize the disaster that followed from the anti-Jewish Marcionism of classical liberalism. In *The God of Israel and Christian Theology* (1996), R. Kendall Soulen recognizes that the “standard model” of dismissing the OT fosters a “double impoverishment for Christian theology”:

On the one hand, the standard model has led to a loss of biblical orientation for Christian theology, especially with regard to the Scriptures of Israel. On the other, it has led to a loss of creative theological engagement with the hard edges of human history. As a result, the standard model has fostered and supported a damaging dislocation of the gospel about Jesus Christ. Estranged from its proper context in the Scriptures of Israel and in public history, the gospel has been resettled in very different contexts. Alienated from the Hebrew Scriptures, the gospel has been interpreted in the context of accounts of human religiosity more or less foreign to the theological idiom of the Bible. Disconnected from the sweep of public history, the gospel has been contextualized one-sidedly in the realm of the personal and private. (17)

In Soulen’s telling, though, modern theology is not alone in rejecting OT. Christian theology as such is marred by the same “flaw in the heart of the crystal.” According to Soulen (1996: 1), Christianity has always taught a flawed doctrine of “supersessionism,” that is, the belief that God chose the Jewish people after the fall of Adam in order to prepare the world for the coming of Jesus Christ, the Savior. After Christ came, however, the special role of the Jewish people came to an end and its place was taken by the church, the new Israel ... the Jews failed to recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah and refused to enter the new spiritual Israel. God therefore rejected the Jews and scattered them over the earth, where God will preserve them until the end of time.

By contrast, Soulen endorses the view summarized in a statement of the Presbyterian Church (USA): “The church has not ‘replaced’ the Jewish people ... Hence, when speaking with Jews about matters of faith, we must always acknowledge that Jews are already in a covenantal relationship with God” (3).

Soulen’s treatment of NT texts announcing the removal of the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is unsatisfying. The church, he claims, is not a place where the identities of Jew and Gentile are erased, but the place in which they are reconciled: “Reconciliation does not mean the imposition of sameness, but the unity of reciprocal blessing,” and this means that the church is “a particularized form in which the basic relation between Jew and Gentile is actualized” (Soulen 1996: 170). It is true, as Soulen says, that “what God has done in Jesus engages Jews as Jews and Gentiles as Gentiles.” Soulen is wrong, however, to deny that the union of Jews and Gentiles in the church produces a “third column of biblical ontology next to that of the Jews and that of the Greeks,” for clearly Paul envisions precisely this: A new form of Jew-Gentile human being emerging in the body of Christ (Eph. 2:15). So did the post-apostolic church, with their talk of a “third race.” To the extent that he demanded that Jews and Gentiles maintain table fellowship, Paul did advocate a “sameness” in the church with regard to circumcision and purity regulations.

Matthew Levering offers a nuanced response to David Novak’s analysis of Christian “supersessionism.” Levering (2011: 17) observes that both Jews and Christians claim “the continuation of biblical Israel.” For some Christians,

the claim to be the fullness of ‘Israel’ might seem less requisite for Christianity [than for Judaism], but in fact I think it is equally central. Christians understand themselves as “one body” in the Messiah of Israel (Rom. 12.5; cf. 1 Cor. 12.13, Eph. 1.23, Col. 2.17), as “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12.27). The messianic Davidic King has accomplished the promised “new covenant” (Heb. 8.10, quoting Jer. 31.31) and has united his kingdom to himself through his Spirit. This kingdom can be no other than “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6.16), which is in the Messiah’s dispensation a “new creation” (Gal. 6.15). This kingdom includes both Jews and gentiles, both of whom now fulfill Torah in Christ.

The church is the product of a new and free act of God, one that throws light back onto the past: “Viewed in light of Christ, biblical Israel—and Judaism—find teleological fulfillment in Christ, but not the kind of fulfillment that can be seen to emerge necessarily from the operation of the mechanism, nor the kind of teleology that brings about its own fulfillment from within its own resources and that has value only in its end or goal. God’s Word includes his good gifts to Israel. That these gifts are ordered to a further fulfillment is indeed teleological, but the gifts cannot be reduced to an immanent and mechanical teleology” (21).

Does this smuggle supersessionism “through the back door”? Does it not mean that Christians and Jews will say, each to the other, “Come home”? Levering (2011: 22) answers Yes, but then adds that

neither Christians nor Jews can do so in a manner that denies or discards the realities that Christians and Jews affirm together. Sinai is not merely a trigger for something else, but rather proclaims realities that Christians and Jews both recognize as true. Sinai therefore cannot be solely claimed by either community. It follows that Christians can “hope that everyone will accept Christ” while engaging Jews as “elder brothers” rather than as adversaries.

A quotation from Novak, describing his relationship with Robert Jenson, provides the best summary of the unavoidable, albeit charitable, impasse. Novak writes, “The theological difference is that as a Christian and a Jew, Jens and I are existentially dedicated to faith assertions (i.e., willing to die for them if need be) about the truest relationship with God available in this world, which are undeniably not just distinctive but *mutually exclusive head-on*” (quoted in Levering 2011: 22; emphasis added). Levering glosses with:

When viewed in their entirety, Judaism and Christianity are “mutually exclusive head-on,” even if commonalities should also be affirmed due to shared roots in biblical Israel. Teleologically one can only ask, “Which is the best way to and from the Lord God of Israel: the Torah or Christ?” *The answer cannot be both.* Judaism does not accept Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah, and Christians, who do accept Jesus as Messiah, believe that he has reconstituted the Torah around himself. (22; emphasis added)

We are treading on delicate ground here. Jews have suffered horrors over many centuries, but compassion for Jewish suffering and abhorrence of the horrific crimes against the Jews should not lead us to soften the hard sayings of the NT. Absolutely nothing in the NT supports the idea that Christians should strive to maintain Judaism outside the church. Jews, like all other peoples, are called to acknowledge Jesus as Lord and God; more so than most, because Jesus claims to be the Messiah of Israel. When they do not, they risk becoming what the synagogue of Smyrna is: A synagogue of Satan, adversaries not only of the church but of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who is the Father of Jesus.

For John, the Jews of Asia are in the grip of a lie. Thinking they are Judahites, heirs of the promise to Abraham, they have in fact abandoned that promise. The phrase “synagogue of Satan” sounds like a piece of anti-Semitic bigotry, an epithet we dare not utter, but it has a specific theological significance in John’s first-century setting. Satan infested the synagogues before Jesus’s arrival, or perhaps *at* his arrival. In Mark, Jesus’s first, programmatic miracle is an exorcism in a synagogue (Mk 1:23–27). Jesus comes to clear Satan from the synagogue and the temple, but the leaders of the Jews who benefit from this exorcism do not accept Jesus or receive his Spirit. Because they blaspheme the Spirit, demons come back in full force. In place of the single demon in the

synagogue, seven demons worse than the first come to inhabit Israel. Satan and his hosts literally infest some of the synagogues of Judea, and now infest the synagogues of Asia. “Satan” means adversary or accuser, and insofar as the church’s Jewish opponents become slanderers and blasphemers against the church, they are Satanic, agents of the archaic serpent.

Slander and blasphemy is painful, and the angel and church at Smyrna have already paid a price. But Jesus warns that worse is coming. The devil is no longer going to be content with ruining reputations by blasphemy; he is going to start tossing Christians into prison. Jesus tells the angel at Smyrna, “Do not fear.” It is Jesus’s characteristic post-resurrection command to disciples (→1:17). Part of Jesus’s assurance is that the tribulation will be brief. When the devilish Jews conspire to throw Christians into prison, the imprisonment will last only ten days, and then they will rise again to receive crowns. Their present afflictions are light and momentary compared to the eternal weight of glory that they shall have.

The ten days of tribulation may have a specific liturgical reference (Jordan 1999a: 26). As noted (→introduction), Revelation tracks the seven feasts of Israel, as laid out in Leviticus 23. The messages are in the Passover section of the book, after the “in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day” Sabbath section. In the middle of the book, the trumpet section (8:6–11:19) corresponds to the Feast of Trumpets that begins the seventh month of Israel’s calendar. After the trumpets, Satan reappears, calls up the beasts, and attacks the saints (12–15). After the martyrs are harvested, angels pour out their blood in a variation of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Between the Feast of Trumpets and the Day of Atonement is a ten-day gap; in Revelation, it is the gap between the beginning of bestial persecution and the rescue of the saints. That is the period during which the angel and people of Smyrna are called to be faithful, as Jews accuse them, allying with the beast and trying to get the beast to kill all the saints that refuse to receive the beast’s mark.

Commentators call attention to the ten-day trial of Daniel and his friends when they arrive in Babylon (Dan. 1:12, 14; cf. Boxall 2006: 56; Smalley 2005: 66), but rarely press the parallel. It is worth pressing. Daniel and his friends undergo a food test for ten days, after which they are presented to Nebuchadnezzar and enter the king’s personal service (Dan. 1:17–21). The churches of Asia also face a food test: Will they eat meat sacrificed to idols and indulge in *πορνεῖα*, or will they keep the fast? If they refuse to eat the Caesar’s food for a time, they will receive places of honor in the court of the heavenly King, wearing crowns of life.

More whimsically, Nicholas of Lyra links the ten days to the Decalogue (Krey 1997: 48). Since the Decalogue will last to the end of the world, so will the testing of Christians. Whimsical, if a tad depressing.

If they endure through the ten days of trial, they will not suffer the second death. The “second death” is confinement to the lake of fire, eternal punishment in hell (→20:6, 14; →21:8). Saints who are faithful to death are delivered from the power of the second death, and become kings and priests to God. The choice is between death and death: They can be faithful to the first death, or face the second death.

The *parousia* of a king is a coronation. As the Ancient of Days, Jesus comes to *give* crowns (Hemer 2000). He gains crowns by giving them. The crown (στέφανος) is associated with athletic excellence, victory in war, or public service (Koester 2015: 277–8; cf. Aune 1997: 173–5). Those who hold firm may be killed, but their death will only elevate them to thrones. As Nicholas of Lyra put it, “By the cruelty of tyrants [God] lifts up the patient and the crown of the martyrs” (Krey 1997: 47). Do not fear: Murderous enemies may do their worst, but in the end they can do nothing but crown the saints. Jesus and his people are undefeatable, because defeat is itself victory. Do not fear: Followers of Jesus are victors indeed.

Message to Pergamum

And to the angel of the church in Pergamum, write: “Thus saith the one who has the sword double-edged and sharp: I know where you dwell, where the throne of Satan is, and you hold my Name, and you did not deny My faith, even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who died among you, where the Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you, because you have some there holding the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast stumbling blocks in front of the sons of Israel, to eat idol-food and to play the harlot³; so you also have some holding the teaching of Nikolaitans. Repent therefore. But if you do not, I come to you quickly and I will battle with them by the sword of my mouth. He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. To the conqueror I will give the hidden manna, and I will give to him a stone sparkling-white, and on the stone a new name written, which no one knows except he who receives it.”

—Rev. 2:13–17

In the sequence of messages, this message corresponds both to the exodus-wilderness period of Israel’s history and to the third day of creation. The great threat to the church at Pergamum comes from followers of “Balaam,” who instructed Balak to put stumbling blocks in Israel’s path (v. 14). Jesus refers to an incident that took place while Israel was in the wilderness (Numbers 22–25). After Balaam failed to curse Israel, he sent in women to seduce the Israelites to fornication and idolatry. Plague breaks out until Phinehas comes quickly, not with a

³ Despite the awkwardness that results in English translation, I have translated all πορν-words as variants of “harlot.” All the uses of this word group cluster around the great πόρνη, Babylon. While she does not appear until chapter 17, her influence is felt and her entrance is anticipated from the beginning.

sword but with a spear, to arrest it (Numbers 25). Jesus is the greater Phinehas, coming to slay the fornicators. Victors at Pergamum receive “hidden manna,” a reference to the heavenly bread Israel ate during the wilderness period. The wilderness is where “Satan dwells” (v. 13), where the sins and uncleannesses of Israel go on the Day of Atonement when they are sent to “Azazel” (perhaps a demonic figure?). In the prophets, a desolated city becomes a wilderness inhabited by satyrs and other malevolent spirits. When Jesus goes out into the wilderness, Satan is there to tempt him. The promise of manna also links with the creation week. On the third day, Yahweh divided the seas so dry land appeared, and from the ground he called out the seed-bearing grasses, such as wheat, and fruit trees bearing fruit. Manna is the bread of angels, springing not from earth but from the sky. The promise of a “stone” also links to the third day, since the stones of dry land first appeared from under the water of the sea.

Like the other messages, this is arranged chiastically:

- A. To the angel of Pergamum, v. 12a
- B. Jesus with the two-edged sword, v. 12b
- C. Holding the name, v. 13
- D. Holding the teaching of Balaam and Nicolaitans, vv. 14-15
- C'. Repent, v. 16a
- B'. Jesus makes war with the two-edged sword, v. 16b
- A'. Closing promise, v. 17

The two longer sections (C and D) have an internal order of their own, which we will examine in due course.

In the original vision, the sword comes out of Jesus's mouth (1:16), and thus corresponds to the Word that is like a sharp sword that cuts to heart and divides between joints and marrow (Heb. 4:12-13). This is a sword of war (2:16; 19:15, 21) and a sword of judgment, pronouncing sentences against the wicked and slaying them by those sentences. It is also a *sacrificial* sword, which is why Hebrews 4 speaks of “joints and marrow” and not merely of the “thoughts and intents of the heart.” Genesis 3:24 is the ultimate source of the image: Cherubim at the gate of the garden are given flaming swords to guard the way of return. To return to the tree of life, one has to pass through the sacrificial fire and sword of the cherubim (cf. Isa. 34:6). When Jesus arrives in his Parousia, he makes war against his enemies, but his sword also cuts the angel, the church, and its members in pieces, so that all be offered up as a fitting sacrifice for the Lord.

Like Balaam and manna, Jesus's sword is associated with the wilderness. When Balaam goes to curse Israel, the Angel of Yahweh blocks his way with a sword (Num. 22:23, 29, 31). In the end, Balaam is killed by the sword, along with the kings of Midian (Num. 31:8). At Kadesh Barnea, Israel complains that Yahweh brought them to the land to kill them by the sword (Num. 14:3),

and so they draw back. Yahweh retorts that they will fall by the sword *because* they turn back (14:43). So too, Jesus warns the angel of Pergamum not to shrink back from the Promised Land.

The only place in the LXX where *βομπαία* and *δίστομος* appear together is Ps. 149:6, which juxtaposes the sword with praise. Jesus is the chief warrior because he is the chief worshipper. Worship and war go together. Prov. 5:4 says that those who follow the adulteress eventually find that she is “bitter as wormwood” and “sharp as a two-edged sword.” Jesus is coming with a two-edged sword to slay those who are following the adulteress, Lady Folly.

Verse 13 contains a chiastically arranged *οἶδα* statement:

- A. You dwell where Satan’s throne is
- B. Hold my name, not denying
- B’. Even in days of Antipas, who was killed among you
- A’. Where Satan dwells

Though A and A’ are similar, they are not identical. In A, the angel is said to dwell in the place where Satan’s throne is; in A’, Satan *himself* dwells in that place. The link of B/B’ gives us a hint about what Jesus means by “holding my name, not denying my faith”: Holding Jesus’s name involves faithful testimony to the death, like Antipas the *μάρτυς*.

Normally, Jesus speaks of knowing what his angels are doing. He knows their deeds (2:2, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). In Pergamum, all is location, location, location. The particles *ποῦ* or *ὅπου* appear three times in verse 13: “where you dwell,” “where the throne of Satan,” and “where Satan dwells.” The most important fact about the church at Pergamum is *where* it is, and that it shares the same civic space with Satan and his kingdom.

Two of the other seven uses of *ποῦ* in Revelation occur in the vision of the woman fleeing from the dragon (12). The “where” of chapter 12 is also the wilderness, and this is also the setting of 17:9, where *ποῦ* is used again. The last “where” is in 20:10, the lake of fire where Satan joins “the beast and false prophet” in eternal torment. It is an unenviable progression: From throne to eternal fire.

What is “Satan’s throne”? And why is Satan’s throne in Pergamum? (For options, see Koester 2015: 286; Aune 1997: 182–4). Pergamum is a center of imperial cult, and many commentators think this is referent for “Satan’s throne” (Mounce 1997: 79). That makes sense not only historically but literarily. When the dragon calls the beast from the sea, he gives him power and throne and authority (13:2). “Throne” means dominion, a gift from Satan to the beast that represents Rome (→13:1–5). The fifth vial of wrath-wine is poured out upon the “throne of the beast,” and his kingdom goes dark (→16:10). It is a judgment on the bestial power of Rome. Most of the references to “throne” or “seat” in Revelation refer to the throne of God, or the throne of the Lamb, the heavenly throne of God. Though Satan too has a parody throne, we never see

him sitting on it! With the wilderness context in view, the parody is sharpened. Yahweh was enthroned above the cherubim in the tabernacle, and the tabernacle was the place “where” he dwelt among his people. In the wilderness of Pergamum, there is an infernal enthronement and infernal “incarnation” or “Immanuel,” even though Satan never gets around to assuming his throne.

We should not, however, forget that Satan first appears in the phrase “synagogues of Satan” (2:9), a reference to satanically inspired Jews who blaspheme Jesus and the saints. In Asia we see Satan’s power nestling down in *two* settings, in the synagogue and the imperial governor’s palace. They have the same object—to blaspheme and wipe out the churches. Already we have a hint that the sea and land beasts are forming a covenant against the church, the nations gathered against the Lord’s anointed (→13:1-18). The influence may in fact be moving from the synagogue to the throne (→8:8-9).

Jesus commends the angel at Pergamum for his endurance and faithfulness in witness. The verb “hold fast” (κρατέω) is the word used of Jesus, the one who “holds fast” the stars (2:1). The verb is repeated twice in Jesus’s criticism of the angel (vv. 14–15): Holding Jesus’s name is contrasted with holding to the teaching of Balaam on the one hand, and holding the teaching of the Nicolaitans on the other. Humans do not have enough hands to hold Jesus’s name and the teachings of heretics. They must lay down one or the other.

The third commandment forbids us to bear the name of God lightly. Israel bears the name of Yahweh because Yahweh has identified Israel as his people, as the people of Yahweh. Every circumcised member of the people of God was marked with the sign of Yahweh’s covenant. The “Name” is also linked with the presence of Yahweh dwelling on his throne in his sanctuary. Yahweh promises that his “Name” will dwell with Israel. Jesus transfers that theology of name, temple, presence, and “holding” to the church: Holding fast to the name means remaining faithful in worship of the God whose name dwells among them, and resisting the enticement and false teachers who worship at Satan’s throne and honor Satan’s dwelling among them. Christians baptized into the name bear the name, and become temples in which the name dwells. We may not bear that name in vain.

Jesus names a specific witness who died because he was holding fast to the name of Jesus. Ἀντίπαρος is the name of the Herod responsible for the death of John the Baptist, who also participates in the trial of Jesus. It is ironic that the only named martyr in Revelation shares his name. “Antipas” name is short for “Antipater” and that longer name means “in place of the Father.” For Herod Antipas, it referred to his resemblance to, or replacement of, Herod the Great. It is also, of course, a fitting name for Jesus, who was the Son who stood in the place of his Father: If you have seen the Son, you have seen the Father (John 14). And the disciple Antipas is clearly modeled after Jesus (Reddish (2001: 60)

speaks of an *imitatio Christi*). In keeping with this family resemblance, Jesus describes Antipas as “My witness, my faithful” (ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός μου), which echoes the initial description of Jesus (1:5; ὁ μάρτυς, ὁ πιστός). As faithful witness, Jesus gave his life to loose us from sin (1:5). Antipas, the one who stands in place of the Father, is killed among the saints of Pergamum. He is the first in Revelation whose blood mingles with the blood of Jesus, the first to add his death to the liberating death of the original Antipas. Antipas stands in the place of Jesus, a preview of the later witnesses who will also stand in Jesus’s place and suffer with him (→14:1-20; →20:4-6). Antipas is killed near Satan’s throne, “where Satan dwells,” that is, before Satan’s counterfeit sanctuary. It is a sacrificial slaying. Just as Jesus was killed as the “one man who should die for the people,” the scapegoat for Israel, so Antipas’s death was a sacrificial death, an offering carried out before the place where Satan dwells. While his murderers think they are offering service to the Satanic imperial power, Antipas offers himself to God as a living and dying sacrifice. Might we go so far as to say that Antipas’s death, like Jesus’s, looses from sin and constitutes the priestly kingdom? Does Antipas’s death cancel old things and make way for new? The parallels are suggestive, but we will have to wait to see the hints developed.

This is the first message where Jesus divides the church into faithful and un-. Like John’s prophesying later in the book (→11:1-2), Jesus’s messages to the angels distinguish between holy and profane. Division within the church, division by the sword of the Word, is inevitable, and part of Jesus’s work in forming the churches into a glorious bride. Jesus words are directed to the angel, whom he expects to do something about the Balaamites. He expects the angel to be a Phinehas and put the fornicators to death with the sword of the Word.

Verses 14–15 are arranged in a simple chiasm:

- A. Hold the teaching of Balaam
 - B. who taught Balak to put stumbling blocks before Israel
 - B’. to eat idolatrous sacrifices, and commit porneia
- A’. So also, the teaching of Nicolaitans

The structure makes it clear that the teaching of Balaam is the same as the teaching of the Nicolaitans. διδασχὴ is used in both phrases, in one case modified by Βαλαάμ and in the other case modified by Νικολαϊστών. The repetition of the verb διδάσκειν in verse 14 fills out the picture. Balaam’s teaching is to teach Balak something, namely, to put stumbling blocks before Israel. That too is the teaching of the Nicolaitans. And the stumbling blocks are related to eating idolatrous food (εἰδωλόθυτα) and indulging in πορνεία.

What are these sins? A review of the OT narrative of Balaam clarifies. As Israel nears the end of their forty years in the wilderness, the exodus

generation is dying. Miriam dies (Numbers 20), then Aaron, replaced by his son Eleazar (20:22–29). The death of the high priest is a sacrificial moment in the life of Israel. According to the rules of the cities of refuge (Numbers 35), the manslayer is free to return home after the high priest dies. The death of the high priest covers the blood the manslayer has spilled on the land, cleansing the land. The wilderness is treated as a city of refuge, so that when Aaron dies, the people almost immediately begin to conquer the land. In quick succession, they defeat the king of Arad (21:1–3), Sihon of the Amorites (21:21–32), and Og of Bashan (21:33–35). That leaves them on the plains of Moab, opposite Jericho (22:1). The land is within sight, and within reach. Israel has begun to conquer the transJordan, and are almost ready to cross to begin the conquest on the west side of Jordan.

Israel's success startles Balak, king of Moab, into action. The Moabites and Midianites are both frightened at the people that has come from Egypt and is ready to take the land. Balak hires the prophet Balaam to curse Israel, but that effort utterly fails, as Yahweh turns all his curses into blessings. That is followed by a successful scheme to pervert Israel internally: Daughters of Moab and some of the women of Midian enter the Israelite camp, inducing the people to “play the harlot” (Numbers 25; Heb. *zanah*; LXX, ἐκπορνεύσαι). They offer sacrifice to false gods (v. 2), celebrate a sacrificial feast, and fornicate (vv. 6–7). A plague breaks out, but Phinehas arrests the plague by impaling a fornicating man and woman. Though Balaam is not mentioned in chapter 25, we later learn that he was behind the effort (Num. 31:16). Having failed to curse Israel, he corrupts Israel from within with εἰδωλόθυτα and πορνεία.

By the first century, Balaam was a popular symbol of a false teacher (Hemer 2000: 90–1). Jesus was viewed as a seducer, a Balaam. In the NT, Balaam is a figure for a greedy false prophet, who corrupts the people (2 Pet. 2:15; Jude 1:11).

The typology fits very snugly. The high priest, Jesus, has died, and the saints, released from the city of refuge of the old covenant, are on the edge of the Promised Land. In alarm, the enemies of the church respond. Synagogues of Satan blaspheme and slander the church, Balaams urging Roman Balaks to trip up the saints by throwing stumbling blocks in their way. Some Christians are summoned before Satan's throne (the Roman court) to face charges, and one at least has been executed. Meanwhile, some Christians at Pergamum have buckled under various pressures, or been deceived by the false prophet, and have begun to eat idol food and indulge in harlotry. If the angel at Pergamum does not deal with these Balaamite practices and teachings, Jesus will come as a Phinehas, sword drawn, to impale the sinners and to stay the plague.

What are the *actual* actions that Jesus describes as “eating sacrificial food” and “fornication”? Eating meat sacrificed to idols was a recurrent issue in the early church (Aune 1997: 191–4). It was one of the questions addressed by the Jerusalem council (Acts 15), and Paul deals with it extensively (1 Cor. 8–10). Paul’s position seems to be contradictory. At times, he appears to forbid *any* eating of meat sacrificed to idols, while at other times he permits it. The issue for Paul is not consumption of food, but participation in idolatrous worship. If the meat of an animal sacrificed to idols is sold on the market, as was common in the ancient world, Christians should receive it for what it is, a gift of God. The only limit is love: If a brother is offended by eating sacrificial meat, Paul said that it was better to become a vegetarian than to lose a brother. On the other hand, Christians are forbidden to participate in a sacrificial rite at a pagan temple. Eating at the *table* of demons is incompatible with eating at the table of the Lord. Given this context, it is best to take φάγειν εἰδωλοθύτα in Revelation 2 as a reference to participating in idolatrous civic feasts. This maintains the analogy with the Balaam/wilderness typology, and makes sense of the rest of the NT (*pace* Reddish 2001: 65, John is no more “hardline” than Paul).

In John’s context, the scenario may have been this: Romans become suspicious of Christians because of Jewish slanders, and, egged on by Jews, they force Christians to loyalty tests. They demand that Christians participate in idolatry to prove that they honor the Roman social contract, which requires homage to Roman gods (cf. Hansen 2014). Fearful, some Christians go along. Less dramatically: Christians are under general suspicion because they do not worship the Roman gods, and some voluntarily prove their Roman bona fides by attending an idol feast.

What is πορνεία? Actual sexual sin would fit the typology of Numbers 25. In addition to enticing the people to idolatry, the agents of Balaam enticed some Israelites to “play the harlot” in a literal sense. Πορνεία, though, has a wider connotation of infidelity, especially in the prophetic literature. Ezekiel’s (16, 23) prophecies against Jerusalem and Samaria lay out the most explicit and complete portrait of *porneia*. For Ezekiel, it involves idolatry but also *political* infidelity, Jerusalem’s habit of trusting alliances with Gentile nations to maintain her security. In Revelation, the verb is used to describe what the kings do with the harlot (→17:2; →18:3, 9), and the noun is used in similar contexts (14:8; 17:2, 4; 18:3; 19:2; 7x total in the book). If we take πορνεία metaphorically, it describes the church’s infidelity toward her Bridegroom (cf. Boxall 2006: 60; Koester 2015: 293; Reddish 2001: 62; *pace* Mounce 1997: 81, who believes the fornication is literal; and Aune 1997: 204, who calls it a “groundless” “stock” accusation).

Koester (2015: 289) suggests that there are commercial overtones to πορνεία. A harlot *sells* sexual favors, and the harlot-city Babylon in Revelation 18 is nothing if not a commercial center.

Porneia might take a number of different specific forms. According to Paul, eating at the table of demons provokes the Lord to jealousy, a marital term (1 Cor. 10:22). Participating in idol feasts is *itself* an act of πορνεία. In the first-century situation, πορνεία also involves alliances with Roman authorities, or with the Roman-Jewish alliance that is beginning to form. Balaamites and Nicolaitans encourage compromise with surrounding paganism. False (Jewish or Judaizing) prophets encourage Balak-like Roman officials to terrorize Christians into compromise. Babylon is the harlot who promotes harlotry and, I shall argue, is a figure for Jerusalem. Non-Christian Jews and Judaizing Christians are unfaithful to the new covenant because they refuse to enter it, choosing to remain in slavery to the shadows of Torah. Babylon's infidelity is also to the new covenant, but takes a different shape. Babylon spreads her legs to mount the sea beast in a counterfeit new covenant, an orgiastic parody of the marriage Supper of the Lamb (→13:11–15; →17:1–6). It is a replay of Israel's political harlotry but with a twist, including a willingness to compromise with idolatry and an eagerness to shed holy blood. Christians who abandon Jesus out of fear, or who actively support the harlot-beast alliance commit *porneia*.

Under the law, three sins are classified as “abominations” that defile not only the sanctuary but the land: the shedding of innocent blood, sexual sin, and idolatry (cf. Klawans 2000). These make the land so sick that it expels Israel into exile. The harlot Babylon is guilty of all three sins, and so is demolished. Jesus applies the same logic to the church, his body: These evils are abominations that lead Jesus to remove the lampstand of the church. They are abominations that cause Jesus to spew churches from his mouth.

Conquerors refuse to join Balaamites in their orgy or feast, yet they are promised the food of the wilderness. Like the tree of life, this is not ethereal or heavenly food in eternity, but the real-life food of the church, the manna that is Jesus the Bread from heaven, the manna that the church receives from God during her time in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1–14). There is a place at the table of the Lord for those who refuse idols (Boxall 2006: 60). They receive is “hidden” manna (δώσω αὐτῷ τοῦ μάννα τοῦ κεκρυμμένου), a reference to the jar of manna kept as a memorial inside the ark of the covenant in the Holy of Holies (Exod. 16:33; Heb. 9:4; cf. Douglas 1915: 98–9; Mounce 1997: 82–3). Those who refuse to enter Satan's dwelling, to worship at his dwelling place, and to eat what he offers will be guaranteed a place in the priestly feast, at the Lord's throne, where he dwells. To the conquerors, Jesus

promises to unveil the hidden bread, the apocalyptic bread. Not even Israel's priests were allowed to open the ark and eat the manna. Jesus the Greater High Priest leads his people into the inner sanctuary, throws open the coffer of the covenant, and distributes heavenly bread.

The white stone with the name is obscure (cf. the survey of opinions in Smalley (2001: 70–1)). λευκός can mean “brilliant,” “bright,” “dazzling,” sparkling white like snow. Jesus' raiment is “white as light” on the mount of transfiguration (Matt. 17:2), shining “exceeding white as snow” (Mk 9:3), or “white and glistening” (Lk. 9:29). In Revelation, white is the color of heaven, and of those victors who share in the life of heaven. Mounce (1997: 82–3) notes Jewish legends about stones falling from heaven with manna. Greco-Roman courts determined cases by voting with stones. This fits the context, since the danger is that the saints at Pergamum will be sentenced to death: Jesus offers faithful witnesses a stone of acquittal (Boxall 2006: 60). The reference might also be to the custom of using stones as invitations, tickets of access to banquets. Again, the suggestion fits the context, since Jesus is offering food that serves as an alternative to the food of pagan sacrifice.

Within the Bible, there are inscribed stones on the high priest's shoulders (Exod. 28:9–12), stones that memorialize Israel before Yahweh whenever the high priest enters the tabernacle or temple. Onyx is frequently black, but the stone can be nearly every color except purple and blue. A reference to these priestly stones would fit the tabernacle/wilderness setting of the message to Pergamum: The saints who overcome are allowed to eat from the manna hidden beneath God's throne and are also given gemstones to wear, like named gemstones of the high priest. Exodus tells us that manna was white (Exod. 16:31) and like bdellium (Num. 11:7). The Bible mentions bdellium only one other time (Gen. 2:12) to describe the riches of the land of Havilah (gold, bdellium, and onyx stone). The combination of manna and a white stone takes us to Havilah, downstream from Eden, where Adam is supposed to mine the riches to adorn the Lord's house.

The priest also wears stones on his breastplate inscribed with the names of the tribes. While the onyx stones have the names of the *sons* of Jacob, the twelve stones on the high priest's breast, over his heart, are inscribed with the names of the twelve *tribes* (Exod. 28:21). These are new names, since the tribes do not exactly match the sons. At the end of Revelation (→21:9–22:5), the foundation stones of the holy city are inscribed with new names again, apostolic ones, since the bride is dressed like the high priest, in festal bridal garments. She has been given the hidden manna, and received a rainbow of gemstones named for the apostles of the Lamb.

The name inscribed on the stone is specific to the recipient (2:17), a secret to all except the one who receives it. Whatever else this might imply, it suggests the intimacy of lovers: Jesus has a pet name for each victor. No two disciples are interchangeable; each has a unique identity and a unique intimacy with the Bridegroom of the church. Each shines with his own unique brilliance.

We can deepen these suggestions by returning to the narrative of Balaam, Balak, and Phinehas. The Balaamites of Pergamum do what the original Balaam does, and Jesus threatens to come armed like a new Phinehas to make war on his enemies. In the original story, Phinehas acts alone, but in Pergamum, Jesus looks for others to follow him into war. He is looking for a company of Phinehases. He calls on the *church* to “overcome,” which certainly means not enduring the Nicolaitans, preventing further idolatry and *πορνεῖα*.

Because Phinehas turns away Yahweh’s wrath by being filled with Yahweh’s own jealousy (*beqanō ‘et-qan’atīy*), Yahweh rewards him with a gift of “covenant of peace” (*berythiy-shalom*) and a “covenant of perpetual priesthood” (Num. 25:11; *beryth kehanath-’olam*). Ps. 106:31 adds that Phinehas was rewarded by being “reckoned righteous” (cf. Gen. 15:7). Like Numbers, Psalm 106 emphasizes that Phinehas’s reward was passed to future generations. The righteous status reckoned to Phinehas takes the specific form of peace with Yahweh and a gift of priestly status for himself and his descendants. For his zeal, Phinehas is rewarded with a gift, and Jesus likewise offers to give (δώσω) the overcomers rewards for their zeal.

Reading the message to Pergamum from the perspective of the story of Balaam and Phinehas, the gifts of Jesus are parallel to the gifts given to Phinehas. If the saints in Pergamum show Jesus-like zeal in fighting the Balaamites, he will make peace with them, invite them into a perpetual priesthood, and reckon them as righteous ones. Manna and the white stone are emblems of these gifts. We can make specific connections: As Phinehas is given a priesthood, so the overcomers of Pergamum are given “hidden manna,” the manna stashed away in the ark of the covenant (Exod. 16:33; Heb. 9). Overcomers receive a privilege *greater* than Phinehas’s because they are allowed to eat from the manna, while Phinehas has to settle for weekly showbread. Access to hidden manna is a sign of peaceable table communion, of priestly privilege, of righteousness.

How is the dazzling stone a sign of Phinehas’s priesthood? If the hidden manna is the manna stowed in the ark, then the white stone might well correspond to something else in or near the ark, “in the presence of Yahweh.” The closest match is the rod of Aaron, inscribed with the name of Aaron, which buds (*white!*) almond blossoms when placed with other rods in the presence of Yahweh in the tabernacle (Numbers 17). Aaron is no dead rod, but a fruitful tree in the presence of God. Phinehas, a descendant of Aaron, is rewarded with priesthood, a promise that he too will bloom white in God’s house. As priest, he goes before the manna and rod; overcomers go Phinehas one better: They *eat* the manna and are given the white stone, *perpetually* white, perpetually blossoming in the Lord’s presence.

The problem with that explanation is that there does not appear to be any connection between the white *blossom* of the almond and a *stone*, nor between rod and stone. Perhaps we can make that work by noting that the third item in the ark was the tablets of the covenant, made of stone (Heb. 9:4). After the two gifts that Jesus promises to the victors a Pergamum is secretly a triple gift: Manna, the white-blossoming rod, and stone tables of the law. According to Deut. 33:8, Urim and Thummim were given to the tribe of Levi, manipulated by the high priest who kept them hidden in the pouch of his breastplate (Exod. 28:30), just as the jar of manna was hidden with the tables of the law in the ark. No one knows for sure what the Urim and Thummim were, but Josephus considered them stones that shone to communicate Yahweh’s will to the people. The belief that they were stones has been a widespread, though hardly universal, tradition. Jesus’s gift of a white stone thus might be another of the gifts of priesthood.

A preferable explanation arises from Zechariah 3, where Joshua the high priest is cleansed and restored to priestly status. Yahweh promises to “give” before him (*nath-thiy lifne-yhosh’ua*) a “stone” with seven eyes, inscribed by Yahweh. Commentators (e.g., Petersen 1984) link this to the high priest’s “crown,” the gold plate on the high priest’s forehead inscribed with “Holy to Yahweh” (Exod. 28:36-8). Given a perpetual priesthood, Phinehas dons this golden head-stone, and goes into Yahweh’s presence wearing a pure gold crown that would “dazzle.” Jesus promises the overcomers a similar gift so they might have similar access. Crowned with glistening stones, the zealous eat the hidden manna. Baptism is the rite that confers the white stone, as the Eucharist is the feast of manna.

Summing up: The angel of Pergamum needs to get busy. Balaamites and Nicolaitans are already in his church, and they need to be driven out. In the wilderness of Pergamum, those who overcome will receive an enduring priesthood, *if* they take up the spear of Phinehas and the sword of the Spirit and act in the Spirit-zeal of Jesus.

To the angel of Thuateira

And to the angel of the church in Thuateira, write: “Thus saith the Son of God, who has his eyes as flames of fire and his feet like burnished bronze: I discern your works and the love and the faith and the service and your perseverance, and your last works are better than the first. But I have against you that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches and seduces My slaves to play the harlot and eat idol-food. And I gave her time that she might repent, and she did not wish to repent of her harlotry. Behold I will cast her into a bed, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, if they do not repent of her works. And her children I will kill with death, and all the churches will know that I AM the one who searches kidneys and hearts, and I will give to you each according to your works. But to you I say, to the rest in Thuateira, as many as do not have this teaching, who do not know the depths of the Satan, as they call it, I will not throw another burden on you. Yet what you have, hold until I come. And the conqueror and the one who guards My works until the end, I will give to him authority over the nations, and he will shepherd them with an iron rod as the vessels of potters are shattered, as also I have received from My Father. And I will give to him the morning star. He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

—Rev. 2:18-29

Jesus comes to Pergamum with a sword. He comes to Thuateria burning from head to toe. He has the full panoply of sacrifice. He is the true seraph, the

fiery sword of the cherub who cuts and turns to smoke. His tongue is a sword, his eyes “flame(s) of fire” (ὡς φλόγα πυρός, 1:15; 2:18).

When fire “flames,” it becomes a weapon that can be pointed at a target. Yahweh appears with flames of fire in the burning bush because he is on the warpath against Pharaoh and Egypt. His love flashes because it burns jealously, to protect his beloved. And now Jesus shows up with *eyes* that are flames, two spear points of fire that peer into the kidneys and hearts of his people. With his fiery eyes, Jesus sees and judges, sees and acts, all at a stroke. His gaze strikes home like a spear point and carries out the judgment of God.

Yahweh inspects and judges in his house. He is the king, and Jesus is his Son, the prince on Zion (“Son of God” is a royal title). Father and Son both inspect and judge with the eyes of flame. Yahweh sees the altar laden with food, and fire flashes out to consume it, in his first act as enthroned king. When he sees Nadab and Abihu bring their strange fire, his eyes flash with spears of flame, and he consumes *them*. This is *also* an act of divine royalty. The king judges with his eyes. A king is like an angel of God who knows everything (2 Sam. 14:12-20), and a just king “disperses all evil with his eyes” (Prov. 20:8). “In your eyes” means “before your presence”; to be in the presence is to be in the light of the eyes, to be in danger of being destroyed but also to be in hope of being consumed in the flame of that glance, to be caught up into the eye of the Imperial Lover, to become the apple of his fiery eye.

The letter to the angel at Thuateria is, like the others, organized chiastically (cf. Koester 2015: 303):

- A. To the angel of Thuateria, 2:18
 - B. I know your works, 2:19
 - C. But Jezebel and her children, 2:20-23a
 - D. That all the churches will know Jesus inspects, 2:23b
 - C'. But to the rest who does not hold teaching, no other burden, 2:24-25
 - B'. Overcomers will receive authority and star, 2:26-28
- A'. Hear what the Spirit says, 2:29

Verse 19 is surrounded by references to works:

- A. Your works I know
 - B. And your
 - Love
 - Faith
 - Service
 - Perseverance
- A'. Last works better than first.

“First” (πρώτων) is the last word of the sentence, just after “last” (ἔσχατα). Syntactically as well as theologically, first is last and last first.

Verses 20–23a are chiasmic:

- A. You tolerate the woman Jezebel the prophetess, 20
- B. I gave her time to repent, but she did not wish to repent, 21
- C. I cast her onto bed and her paramours, 22a
- B'. Unless they repent, 22b
- A'. I will kill her children with death, 23a

Though Jesus commends the deeds of the angel at Thuateria, he also has things against him. As before, the criticism has to do with what the angel permits, allows, and tolerates. As overseer of the church, he has authority to act, and he should use his authority to root out intolerable evil. Once again, intolerance is a virtue. Pressure is not coming from Jews in a synagogue of Satan outside the church, but from within, as in Pergamum. The threat is not external attack, but, as in Pergamum, internal corruption, seduction, and deception. Resisting external enemies is not enough. The pastor has to battle deceptive leaders within the church. His eyes should burn like Jesus's.

Jesus calls the prophetess “Jezebel,” etymologized by premodern commentators, immune to the sensitivities of feminism, as “dung heap” or “flow of blood” (e.g., Apringius 2011: 35). The original Jezebel was the Sidonian princess who became the wife of Ahab and thereby the queen of Israel, the northern kingdom. Jezebel's appearance in the history of Kings is a moment in an extended history of Israel's relationship with Tyre and Sidon. During the days of David and Solomon, Hiram of Tyre was an ally of Israel, providing material and personnel to build the temple. It was a preview of the gospel age, when all nations devote themselves to building the Lord's house. Other Canaanite cities were devoted to destruction in Joshua's conquest. Tyre and Sidon, also Canaanite cities (prototypical Canaanite cities—Sidon was son of Canaan), voluntarily devoted themselves to Yahweh and his house. This is the ideal relationship between Jew and Gentiles, Israel and the nations. Jezebel inverts the Solomon-Hiram relationship. Ahab is an anti-Solomon, an idolater, a pre-fallen king without a period of faithfulness. Son of a David-like king Omri, Ahab builds a temple in Samaria and takes a foreign wife, as Solomon married the daughter of Pharaoh. But his temple is a temple to Baal, and his wife is an open idolater, even a sorceress (as Jehu says), and sponsor to a band of Baal prophets. Ahab and Jezebel aim to reunite the two kingdoms, but instead of placing Yahweh and his house at the center, they place Baal worship at the center. Under Ahab and Jezebel, Gentiles no longer assist in Israel's project. Instead, Israel is enlisted to pursue a Baalist agenda (see Leithart 2006: 117–21).

Jezebel of Thuateria is a prophetess, as the first Jezebel was the high priestess of a company of prophets. She leads the saints into Baalamite sin, eating meat sacrificed to idols and committing acts of fornication, πορνεία (cf. Jehu's accusation against Jezebel, 2 Kgs 9:22, LXX, αἱ πορνεῖαι Ἰεζάβελ). Πλανᾶω is used in LXX to describe the seductions of false prophets (Deut. 4:19; 13:6; 22:1; 30:17; 2 Kgs 4:28). It refers to a sin of wandering or inadvertency, an "Eve" sin rather than the high-handed sin of Adam. Jezebel the seductress leads the bridal church into adultery with other gods. When Jehu comes riding up to Samaria, the first Jezebel paints her face and waits for him to arrive (2 Kgs 9:30-37). Jehu is not seduced, and calls on the men near her to throw her to the ground, where dogs eat her flesh so thoroughly that there is nothing left that can be identified as Jezebel. Jeremiah 4 alludes to this incident: Yahweh addresses the land that has become formless and void and dark, decreeted. In the midst of the land is a desolated city, a shriveled whore who tries desperately to renew her charms. She dresses in scarlet, enlarges her eyes with paint, but her lovers despise her and kill her (v. 30; →17:16). The harlot Babylon, Jezebel's double later in Revelation, is charged with "sorcery," as Jezebel was, and meets a Jezebelian fate.

The heresy of Jezebel is the same as that of the Balaamites. Both entice the saints to *porneia*, spiritual adultery, and to eat things sacrificed to idols. As we have seen above, *porneia* describes infidelity, especially as expressed in compromise with pagan idolatry. More specifically, the harlot Babylon promotes a false new covenant, an ungodly alliance of Jew and Gentile against Christ and his church. Jezebel is the first glimpse we get of a harlot, and her agenda is probably similar.

To this, the message to Thuateria highlights the fact that these twin sins violate the apostolic decree of the Council of Jerusalem, which forbade eating things sacrificed to idols and fornication. Here the connection is reinforced by Jesus's statement that he lays "no other burden" (βάρος) on the Thuaterians (v. 24; cf. Acts 15:28; Sweet 1979: 95; Boxall 2006: 66). Balaam and Jezebel both encourage violation of the apostolic decision, and that again helps us to specify the nature of the pressure on the Christians of Asia. The Council of Jerusalem dealt with the issue of Judaizing. Gentiles were not required to be circumcised or to keep dietary restrictions and purity rules. But the council also determined the limits of participation in Greco-Roman culture and worship. Gentiles have to observe certain quasi-ceremonial rules (refraining from blood), in deference to the Jews who make up the bulk of the church. Children of Jezebel violate these Gentile restrictions and thus endanger the union of Jews and Gentiles in the church. Pressure comes from various quarters: It comes from Judaizers who want the church to keep Torah; from Jews outside, slandering Christians before Roman authorities; from Gentile Christians who

do not want to conform to the decision of Jerusalem. Soon, the pressure will become more intense, as Jews and Romans ally against the church.

If this prophetess is a Jezebel, then Jesus is an Elijah, Jezebel's prophetic opponent (Caird 1966: 45). The reference to Jezebel anticipates the appearance of the Elijah imagery with the two witnesses in chapter 11, in the city where Jesus was crucified. Jesus also takes the role of Jehu (Smalley 2001: 75), the anointed king who had Jezebel killed. Jesus does give Jezebel time to repent. Time is the gift of repentance, but there comes a time when time is no longer (→10:6), when repentance is no longer an option (→22:11). Jezebel does not wish to repent, and so her time will soon be up. For the moment, there is still time. Her children and disciples can still refuse her enticements and leave her bed of *πορνεία*. If her children renounce mother and brothers and sisters and return to their first love and first Lord, they will be saved. Jesus threatens to "throw" her (*βάλλω*), as Jehu had the original Jezebel tossed from a window. Jesus is full of the zeal of Phinehas. He is as fiery a personality as the *meshuggah* Jehu.

It is significant, of course, that Jesus throws her into a "bed" with those who commit adultery with her. As always, judgment fits the crime (Boxall 2006: 65; Reddish 2001: 65). An adulteress and a whore, Jezebel will be thrown into a bed for an incestuous *ménage à trois, quatre, plus en plus*. The bed is the place where she has done her harlotry, but the bed will become a sickbed, even a deathbed. The bed might also be a couch where she reclined for idolatrous feasts (Boxall 2006: 65). If so, it would again highlight the inner link between eating *ειδωλοθύτα* and *πορνεία*. She will be thrown onto the same couch where she ate her idol feast. Her table has become a snare. Nicholas of Lyra suggests that she is thrown into a bed of maggots, like the proud king of Babylon (Isa. 14:11; Krey 1997: 52).

Jesus sends Jezebel and her children into a "great tribulation." The phrase is used in Matt. 24:21 to describe the convulsions that end the old world, and is used elsewhere in Revelation only of the tribulation of martyrs. Jezebel has children, her disciples. Jesus is going to "kill them with death" (*ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ*). The doubling reminds us of the "dying you will die" of Gen. 2:17. Jezebel is more serpent than Eve, and she and her children come under the same judgment of death. The doubling anticipates the "second death" mentioned later in Revelation. The children of the false prophetess will end in the late of fire, the second death, where the beast and false prophet are.

More subtly, the threat picks up on the recurrent bed theme in 1–2 Kings, where beds are places of sickness and death and also graves from which the dead rise (Leithart 2006: 30). Beds are sites for the daily death of sleep and the daily drama of waking and resurrection. Beds are also altars, as altars (Heb. *mizbeach*) are "sites of communion" between Yahweh (or a false god) and his bridal people. In Thuateria, Jezebel has enticed the people to commune

with idols, and Jesus threatens to toss her on her bed/altar, where he will consume her in the fire of his eyes.

Jesus will do all this to prove that his eyes of fire penetrate beyond the exterior, and burn right through into the minds and hearts of each (v. 23). He acts so that the churches will know who he is, that he is the royal judge who gives to everyone according to their deeds. Νεφρός means “kidneys” in the LXX (Ps. 7:10; Jer. 11:20; 17:10; Smalley 2001: 76). Ancient worshipers inspected entrails to determine whether or not the sacrifice was accepted. With his burning eyes, Jesus is the best of the haruspices, who can examine entrails *before* sacrifice!

Jesus promises not to lay furthers on τοῖς λοιποῖς who remain faithful. Jesus uses the verb βάλλω again: He throws down Jezebel with her lovers onto a bed of sickness, but he will not “throw” anything more on the faithful. Jesus will not overload his people with things they cannot handle. Resisting Jezebel is all they *can* do, all they *need* do. They simply have to share Jesus’s intolerance for the harlot. And if they hold fast to that, bear that *one* burden, they can live in hope that Jesus will come to settle things and give everyone according to their deeds.

The teaching of Jezebel is described in verse 24 as the βαθεῖα τοῦ Σατανᾶ, a parody of Paul’s “deep things of God” (1 Cor. 2:10), which the Spirit searches in order to reveal them to us. Jehu accuses Jezebel of being involved in sorcery (2 Kgs 9:22), and the church’s counterpart to Jezebel is likewise a sorceress. Pharaoh has sorcerers, and so purging sorcerers from Israel is a way of purging Egypt. Like other enemies of the churches, Jezebel is inspired by Satan. Satan has synagogues, a throne, and now prophets who explore his “depths.” Jesus again reminds the angels and churches of Asia that their enemies are spiritual powers of wickedness in heavenly places. How fortunate that the churches are led by “angels,” “stars” who can fight in the firmament of heaven. Jezebel claims to have the power of unveiling, but it is not the unveiling of Jesus through his Angel. She claims to unmask, but without the mess of martyrdom.

βαθεῖα appears only twice in the LXX (Job 12:22; Dan. 2:22), both times referring to the deep darkness that only Yahweh can reveal (ἀποκαλύπτω). To explore the deep things of Satan is to attempt to peer beyond the clouds and darkness into things that only God can reveal. Jezebel and her children act as if they too have eyes of fire that can see to the bottom of the abyss. Twice the Proverbs speak of harlots as “deep pits” (Heb. *’amoq*; LXX βάθος). The adulteress’s mouth is a pit (Prov. 22:14; 23:27); her words entice the unsuspecting into a trap, she devours men like a lioness devouring prey, her seductive mouth is a ghastly gateway to hell. Jezebel is such an adulteress, another Lady Folly, with a mouth that gapes open to the pit.

Victors are promised authority, a kingly promise that matches a monarchical situation and a kingly threat. Israel’s kings are warned about foreign women who brought their own gods (cf. Deuteronomy 17), a temptation to which

Solomon and Ahab succumb (1 Kgs 11:1-8). Kings who resist strange wives will see their reign and realm expanded. Jesus is the recipient of authority (v. 27), but He, like his Father, is a giver of authority. He is Son of Man *and* Ancient of Days. Jesus always shares what he receives. The Father gives nations as an inheritance to the Son; Jesus cites Psalm 2 to promise victors “authority” over the nations. Victors will not “break” nations with a rod, but “shepherd” them (ποιμανεῖ). This verb is the LXX translation of a Hebrew verb that, with different vocalization, can mean either “shepherd” or “destroy.” Shepherds are rulers and kings, and Jesus promises that the nations will be guided, led to green pastures and still waters, by the shepherd-kings that make up Jesus’s victorious people. At the end of Revelation, the victors, formed *now* into a Bride, do just that, leading nations by the light of the Lamb and offering refreshing water and the fruit of the tree of life (→22:1-5).

Shepherding does have a destructive dimension. One cannot be a faithful shepherd without smashing some pots. Pottery symbolizes people; Yahweh the potter “forms” Adam from dust as a vessel to bear his glory (Gen. 2:7; Heb. *yatsar*, used in Ps. 2:9). In the law, pottery that becomes defiled has to be broken. Nations are pottery, and the victorious saints break rebellious nations in pieces *in order to* shepherd them. Victors smash nations in the same way that they receive the kingdom, by faithful, suffering discipleship, by following the Lamb to the cross, grave, and glory. Suffering martyrdom, they dash the world to bits, so the Lord can *yatsar* a new world from its shards (Smalley 2001: 79, citing Caird 1966: 46).

Jesus promises victors the morning star. Jesus *is* the morning star (22:16), fulfilling Balaam’s prophecy about a Messianic star (Numbers 24; cf. Boxall 2006: 67; Mounce (1997: 90) surveys options). He is morning star as Davidic king, so in receiving Jesus the star, the victors are raised to shine like kings in the firmament. Perhaps another aspect is more in the foreground in this context. *Venus* is the morning star, the heavenly woman, the heavenly Bride. In contrast to Jezebel the harlot on her bed of adultery, Venus descends from heaven, pure and spotless. Those who receive the morning star receive a share in the other city, the true bride, the faithful prophetess.

Jesus searches the entrails and hearts of his people (Rev. 2:23), but then turns around and judges everyone “according to your deeds” (ἔργα). Why does he conduct the internal inspection if he plans to judge *behavior*? That question highlights one dimension of the biblical “philosophy of action.” Works are never simply external, bodily behaviors, never simply conditioned responses. Scripture treats motivation, goals, inclinations, desires, emotions as facets of ἔργα. What Jesus judges is the whole package, the external bodily action and the movements of the heart. Better put: Works involve the *whole* body, heart, kidneys, and livers as well as hands and feet and tongues. To

judge rightly, it is not enough to judge visible organs. The hidden organs have to be brought to light by the Judge with the fiery eyes who by the Spirit judges the poor with righteousness (cf. Isa. 11:3–4).

Like his eyes, Jesus's feet are fiery, glowing bronze like a fired altar. When a subject bows at the bronze feet of Jesus, he is at an altar; when an enemy becomes a footstool for the feet of Jesus, the enemy is placed under the altar. Jesus is king, a king who is also the temple of God, God the Son indwelt by God the Spirit, whose body has become the place of worship.

Message to the angel of Sardis

And to the angel of the church in Sardis, write: "Thus saith the one who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars: I discern your works, that you have a name that you live, and you are dead. Wake up! And strengthen what remains, which was about to die, for I have not found your works fulfilled before My God. Remember therefore how you received and heard, and guard and repent. If therefore you do not wake up, I will come as a thief, and you will not know which hour I will come on you. But you have a few names in Sardis who have not stained their garments, and they will walk with me in sparkling-white, because they are worthy. The conqueror thus will be clothed in garments sparkling-white, and his name will not be erased from the book of the life, and I will confess his name before My Father and before his angels. He who has ears, let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

—Rev. 3:1–6

The seven messages follow the history of Israel. Ephesus ends with Edenic motifs; Smyrna evokes stories of the patriarchs; Pergamum mentions Balaam and Balak, and manna and white stones; Thuateria mentions Jezebel, Israel's queen during the divided kingdom. If the pattern holds, the message to Sardis should connect to the late monarchy or exilic period. Though not as obvious as the other messages, it works. The angel of Sardis appears to be alive but is in fact dead (v. 1); he appears to be awake, but is fast asleep (v. 2). Exile is a kind of death, a metaphor employed most clearly and thoroughly in Ezekiel's dry bones vision (Ezek. 37). Isaiah 52 depicts the return from exile as the resurrection of Zion and Jerusalem, awaking from sleep. The fact that there are a "few" (v. 4, ὀλίγα) in Sardis whose garments remain unsoiled hints at the remnant theme of the late monarchy and the exile (e.g., Jer. 6:9; 8:3; 11:23; 23:23; etc.). ἐμόλυναν τὰ ἱμάτια αὐτῶν recalls the scene of the high priest Joshua standing before Yahweh in "filthy garments" (Zech. 3:3–4, LXX, ἱμάτια ῥύπαρα).

Israel's history moves through phases that match the first three of the Ten Words. Early on, Israel's great temptation is to worship false gods, Baals and Ashteroth. During the monarchy, she is plagued by images, golden calf worship of Yahweh at Dan and Bethel in the north and the high places scattered around Judah. During the exile, Israel has to bear the Name of Yahweh weightily, as they are scattered among the nations (Jordan 1999a: 49). The message to Sardis matches the third of these phases, as *ὄνομα* is used four times. The whole message turns on different uses of the word. Here Jesus speaks to a "nominal" church (Reddish 2001: 72).

Jesus warns that he will come *ὡς κλέπτης*, like one of the sudden invasions of the exilic period (Jer. 49:9 (LXX 30:3; *ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νύκτι*); Hos. 7:1; Joel 2:9). Invading armies come like thieves, surprising the unprepared and plundering their land. Jesus describes his coming as the coming of a thief (Matt. 24:43) and so does Paul (1 Thess. 5:2, 4; *ὡς κλέπτης ἐν νύκτι*). If Jesus is a thief, he comes to plunder from the enemy he surprises. The church at Sardis has few things worth taking, but Jesus threatens to take those things that are left, the few bits that are still alive. Whoever has, gets more; whoever has little loses what he has. Jesus later warns the unprepared in Babylon that he is coming like a thief (→16:15), and those who are not ready are going to be ashamed: "Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his garments, lest he walk about naked and men see his shame." The reuse of the image of the thief suggests a substantive connection between the two locations: Unprepared and drowsy, the church at Sardis will be surprised by the fall of Babylon. This reinforces the exilic motif: The unprepared at Sardis are like Babylon's Belshazzar feasting while Cyrus sneaks to the city (cf. the account of Cyrus's conquest in Herodotus). Those who fall asleep in Sardis will lose their (royal) garments and be exposed to shame. Jesus's conquest of Babylon is a liberation for the true Jews who dwell in the harlot city. "Come out, come out" (18:4) is Jesus's version of the decree of Cyrus.

The message to the angel at Sardis is framed by word repetitions. "Name" appears in verse 1, and three times in verses 4–5 (often translated as "people"). Jesus says that the angel of Sardis has a "name" for being alive (*ζῆς*), but is in fact dead, and the message ends with a promise that Jesus will not erase the names of the faithful *ἐκ τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς* (v. 5). Within this frame, there are two small chiasms. The first covers verses 1b–3:

- A. I *know* your deeds, 1b
- B. **Wake up**, 2
- C. Remember, 3a
- B': If you do not **wake up**, 3b
- A': You do not *know* the hour, 3c

The second chiasm covers verses 4–5:

- A. A few *names* have not soiled garments, 4a
- B. Walk in **white**, 4b
- C. They are worthy, 4c
- B'. Clothed in **white** garments, 5a
- A'. Not erase *name*; confess *name*, 5b

Though the sections bleed into one another, the message as a whole has a chiastic structure:

- A. To the angel of Sardis, 1a
- B. Deeds and name, 1b
- C. Wake up and remember, 1–3
- C'. A few unsoiled, alert names, 4–5
- B'. Names in book of life, 5
- A'. He who has an ear, 6

In John's first vision, Jesus has seven stars in his right hand (1:16), the seven planets of ancient astronomy. Jesus is a cosmic figure with his white head in heaven, his feet on the earth, and the stars in his hand. He unites heaven and earth, the entire cosmos along with the uncreated God. The seven stars are also a temple reference. Jesus is a *cosmic* temple, and the seven stars are the starry lamps on the lampstand. Rev. 1:20 links the imagery of seven stars and lamps with the churches: the stars are angels (= pastors) of the seven churches; the pastor/angels are the lamps that burn on the lampstand. The churches are the lampstands, but each stand has a lamp that shines into the darkness, like a star in the heavens.

Uniquely, 3:1 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 light(s) descend to earth as the light of the Lamb which is also the light of the Bride. Even at the beginning, the earthly stars/lamps shine because they participate in the heavenly lamps of the Spirit. 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 is the people of Jesus, who is the “firstborn from the dead” (1:5), the First and Last who was dead and now lives (1:18; 2:8). The church and her angels *should* resemble the Lord of the church. That they resemble the Lord of the church means that they are alive, even if they appear dead. Jesus had a “name” of being dead—he is a crucified Man. Yet he *lives*. The reality is life, even if the appearance is death. So too for Paul: Pummeled and stoned, beaten and despised, he and the apostles carry around the glorious dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus might be manifest in the church (2 Cor. 4:10).

The angel at Sardis no longer resembles Jesus, but has turned into his opposite. He has an *appearance* of life, but inwardly is full of dead men’s bones. The churches bear the name of Jesus; they are marked with the baptismal name of Jesus, and they assemble as Christian assemblies around the table of Jesus. They *do* have a “name” that they live, which is the name of Jesus. Marked with that name, they are to *have* life and not merely a reputation for life. Jesus rebukes the angel because he bears Jesus’s name, but bears it lightly. As elsewhere in these messages, “name” is connected to the temple theology. When Yahweh gives Israel rest in the land, he selects a place to set his Name, first a tabernacle at Shiloh, then the temple on Moriah. Now, with the coming of the Spirit, the “name” is given to the churches, the new temple. The “Name” who has the “seven stars” and the “seven Spirits” and the lamps is in these churches. Because this new temple is the place of the Name, it should be the place of life. Sardis too is in danger of losing its lampstand, of becoming an empty shell instead of a living house of the living God.

Death and sleep merge in verse 2, where Jesus summons the dead to life with a “Wake up!” call. The angel needs to wake up to complete his works in the sight of God. His works are dead because he fell asleep while performing them. He could not watch with Jesus even for an hour; he nodded off during his own sermon and snored through the Supper he served. Jesus gives a fourfold imperative—“become watchful”; “strengthen”; “remember”; “repent.” Watchfulness is the prerequisite to strengthening: If we are sluggish, we are not strong. If we are not alert, the things that remain will crumble. Watchfulness is the prerequisite of memory: Our memories go flabby when we are not alert enough to see and hear. Watchfulness is the prerequisite for repentance: We cannot repent unless we have become alert to our sins. Watchfulness *depends* on strengthening: We cannot be alert while weak. Watchfulness depends on memory: When we forget, we lose interest and do not guard faithfully. Watchfulness depends on repentance from sleepiness. We could continue through the whole list: Strengthening is both the prerequisite for and dependent on memory. Strengthening is the prerequisite for and dependent on repentance. Jesus’s fourfold exhortation covers the corners of repentance.

The NASB translates γρηγορήσης as “wake up,” a possible translation (Matt. 26:40; Mk 14:37; 1 Thess. 5:6, 10), especially in texts about the Lord’s coming. It fits with the imagery of death as a form of sleep, the disciples sleeping in the garden of Gethsemane, the parable of the virgins, whose unpreparedness for the Bridegroom’s arrive is a result of sleepiness. But the word has less to do with waking from sleep than with being alert instead of careless. The exhortation to “watch” or “be alert” is also used in connection with the coming of the Son of Man (Matt. 24:42–43; 25:13; Mk 13:34–37; Lk. 14:37–39) or more generally of alertness and readiness (1 Cor. 16:13; Col. 4:2; 1 Pet. 5:8).

“Remember” is the center of this section of the message. The two last imperatives are closely linked: Remember and repent. We learn, and we forget; repentance is recollection of what we have once known. Repentance is a change of mind because it calls things back to memory that we have shoved out. Memory is triple: The angel is to remember how he *received*, how he *heard*, and how he *kept* or guarded. He is supposed to recall the beginning of his vocation as angel, and the calling he was given to guard Jesus’s bride, the church. Memory leads to resurrection: Memory and repentance will bring him back to life, shore up the things that remain, and keep him alert.

The charge against angel of Sardis is: οὐ . . . τὰ ἔργα πεπληρωμένα. Jesus has “found” (εὑρηκα) them incomplete, a judicial turn of phrase. He has investigated and seen and now presents his *findings*. The works of the angel are not judged bad or good but “incomplete” (3:2). That is why his reputation for liveliness is undeserved. Without *completed* works, he is asleep, dead, or about to die (3:1–2). His works are seedlings that have begun to grow but have produced no fruit, unripe or uncircumcised fruit, and they do not pass muster with the fruit inspector with eyes of fire. This too is part of the Bible’s “philosophy of action”: Our deeds will be judged not only by their conformity to God’s commandments, not only by the motives that moved us and the ends we sought to achieve. They will be judged by their *maturity*. When Jesus judges, he asks not only “What have you done?” but “Did you finish?” The significance of our works and of our lives is apparent at the end, eschatologically, when they are complete. Our works *are* what they will be.

“Hour” is common in John’s gospel. Jesus’s hour is the hour of his glorification, which is the hour of his crucifixion. By the time John writes, *that* “hour” has come and gone, but another hour is coming, the hour of God’s judgment (→Rev. 14:7) or the hour of harvest (→14:15), the hour when the beast and the horn will have power over the saints (→17:12), the “hour” of the judgment on Babylon (→18:10), when, in one hour, her riches are plundered and she is left desolate (→18:17, 19). The hour is the hour of the *Parousia* of the Son of Man, the hour of the judgment on the harlot city, and the hour of judgment against the beast as well, the hour that will complete the hour of the cross. Jesus comes to tear down the postexilic οἰκουμένη, in the hour when martyr blood is shed and poured out. That hour will come as a surprise to the angel and others in the church at Sardis, because they are not watchful

and are unprepared. They are like the virgins of the parable, who do not keep their lamps burning with the light of the Spirit. Without the Spirit of life, the angel is no longer a lamp and a star but a smoldering wick.

The angel is among the names who has defiled (μολύνω) his garments. In Torah, certain forms of impurity infect not only the person but his clothes. Because clothing is a second skin, it can be defiled. Touching or eating unclean food defiles the person and his clothes (11:25, 28, 40). After a man has skin disease and is cured, he has to wash his clothes to become clean (13:6, 34; 14:8–9). Clothing can contract leprosy or skin disease, as can skin or a house. Numbers 19 describes cleansing from corpse defilement and those who prepare the concoction have to wash their clothes afterward (19:7–8). Death defiled the person and his clothing (anyone corpse defiled has to wash his clothes). In Leviticus 15, people contract uncleanness on their bodies and clothes by indirect but intimate contact with a person with a flow from the “flesh,” the genitals (15:5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 21, 22, 27). Jesus’s reference to soiled garments during sleep suggests a nocturnal emission, and connects to his warnings about πορνεία in the earlier edicts. The angel has defiled his clothing by being a dead man wearing the name of the living. He was once fruitful; his works were once growing; but they have withered on the vine. Incomplete works are dead works, and dead works defile. The angel has defiled his clothes by his drowsy infidelity, his inattentive *porneia*.

Bad as things are, not all is lost. There are “remaining things” and some ὀλίγα ὀνόματα that have *not* soiled their garments. The word translated as “people” in verse 4 is ὀνόματα, a reference to people *as* names. A name is not simply an identity marker pinned to our collar. We *are* our names. Once again, the “name” of the church and of its members is linked to the name of Jesus. If we have the name of Jesus, and our names are our identity, then we are the people of Jesus. Jesus’s name is not an external label, but constitutive of our personhood and identity. If the Name “Jesus” present in the church constitutes the church as the new temple of God, then the Name that identifies each of us as followers of Jesus also dwells in us and constitutes us as temples with an indwelling name. Named with the name of Christ, we are Christ, as members of his body. Named with the name of Christ, we are members of the Bride who is one Spirit and shares one Name with him.

The names in Sardis who are truly alive do *not* soil their garments, and their names are, appropriately enough, retained in the book of life (Rev. 3:5). The linen garments of the saints are identified elsewhere as their righteous acts (→19:8). Clothing represents *works*, and defiled clothing symbolizes defiled works. Here the defilement does not come from the work itself, but from the condition of the “name” wearing the clothing. A dead name defiles the works he wears, soaking his works in death. He can have clean clothes only if he wakes from his death-sleep, only if he rises from the dead. If his name

stays dead, his clothing will remain polluted and his name will be blotted from the book of life. So, name = person; clothing = works; and clothing is clean or dirty depending on whether the name is alive or dead. The person is identified by his clothing, by what he does. Works are no more external to us than our names. Works are a second skin that, like our first skin, can be holy or impure.

Jesus promises white clothing to worthy victors who keep their garments spotless. Jesus has white hair like wool and snow (1:14), and he promises the church at Smyrna a white stone (2:17). White garments are given to the martyrs (→6:11; 7:9, 13). Walking with Jesus means walking in procession with white garments, a procession that is simultaneously military, liturgical, and nuptial (→19:11–16). Worthiness is attributed elsewhere in Revelation to God and the Lamb, but the saints are also worthy, made worthy to walk with him. Their white garments are a sartorial sign that their names are written in the book of life and confessed before the Father. Jesus confesses those with white clothing, who are, like him, clothed in glory. Those covered with shame will not have their names repeated before the Father, nor will their names be in the citizen-roll of the saints in the new Jerusalem. In Revelation 3, the book of life is not an eternally settled list of names. Names may be removed, though Jesus promises victors that their names will *not* be removed (→20:11–15).

John Frame distinguishes between “historical election,” symbolized by the book of 3:5, from which names can be expunged, and “election in a stronger sense,” figured by the book that has names listed from the foundation of the world. Citing Psalm 69, he writes,

[T]he psalmist envisages a book in God’s presence containing the names of those he has chosen for covenant blessing. Initially, it seems, the list contains everybody in Israel. But God will blot some of them out because of their sin, for not all who are descended from Israel are Israel. The image of people’s being blotted out of the book of life is parallel to Paul’s image of “natural branches” being broken off from the tree of redemption.

By contrast,

In Revelation 17:8, those not in the book of life are excluded from it “from the foundation of the world,” and, implicitly, those written in the book were written in it from the world’s foundation. This expression precludes the notion that one could be listed in the book and later blotted out because of something that happens in history ... Revelation 13:8 should also be taken this way, as is suggested by the correlation between the writing of the book and the “Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world.” (Frame 2013: 219)

As a piece of systematic theology, this is a reasonable position. Within Revelation, however, it is untenable. Revelation 3:5 speaks of the τῆς βίβλου τῆς ζωῆς, and 17:8 uses the identical phrase; 17:8 adds ἀπὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου, apparently implying that names were written in the book from the beginning and also that the names cannot be expunged. That is the conclusion we have to question. That names are written in the book of life from the foundation of the world does *not* necessarily mean that they will remain there forever. It is important to note that both 13:8 and 17:8 speak of a negative, of those whose names are *not* written in the book of life from the foundation of the world (οὗ οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς, 13:8; οὐ γέγραπται τὸ ὄνομα ἐπὶ τῷ βιβλίῳ τῆς ζωῆς, 17:8). These are *excluded* from the beginning. But 3:5 has made it clear that some names are in the book and then are removed *later*.

All the passages in Revelation are consistent with the notion that the book of life is a book of *historical* election. Some names have never been there from the beginning, but the fact that one's name is enrolled does not guarantee that it will remain there. The book contains the names of those who have been written in the book, chosen to be among the people of God, from the foundation of the world, those who have not fallen asleep, soiled their garments, or left their deeds unfinished (3:2-5). If they do these things, Jesus *will* erase them, and their names will not be written in the book on judgment day. When we get to the final judgment, the book of life is a record of works, just like the other "books" that are opened; everyone, *including the saved*, is judged according to works. The book of life is a record of *perseverance*.

This does not undermine the theological claim that God has chosen his own in Christ from the foundation of the world, and that these will be saved. God is, was, and comes; he knows the end from the beginning, and knows the end *at* the beginning. At the beginning, the end does not yet exist, so God can know the end at the beginning only because he is determined to bring things *to* a certain end. He knows the end because he knows what he will do; he knows the end by knowing *himself*, not by knowing something outside himself. Foreknowledge thus entails predestination.

We can make a similar point anthropologically: God makes human beings to be what they are, and we are what we are at the *end*. If God makes us as the specific creatures that we are, he must make us *toward* a specified end. Otherwise, we are finally *self*-created. God's determination to make us the beings he intends is the ground of perseverance; God knows what he intends to do and he will not fail, will not lose anyone he intends to preserve to the end. It is the ground of assurance, which is simply trust that God will preserve us on the path to life.

Thomas takes the imagery of Revelation seriously when he writes, after affirming predestination, that "to be blotted out, and not blotted out, of the book of life is not only to be referred to the opinion of man, but to the reality of the fact" (ST 1, 24, 3). He handles this conditionality by distinguishing between "predestination," which "never fails" and grace, which "fails sometimes, because some are directed by possessing grace, to obtain eternal life, yet they fail to obtain it, through mortal sin." Those who are written according to predestination have their names written *simpliciter*, but those who are ordained to eternal life through grace are written in the book of life only "relatively." God is not befuddled by any of this, since God does not "foreknow a thing" and then afterward *not* know it. God knows one who is first ordained to life, and then afterward *not* ordained when he falls from grace. This raises Protestant-Catholic divergences that I have no space to address here. As an exegetical matter, it would have been preferable for Thomas to avoid using "book of life" to refer to predestination.

Whatever the *theological* reasoning, I believe Caird is correct about Revelation: "The predestination in which John believes is a conditional predestination. A man cannot earn the right to have his name in the citizen roll, but he can forfeit it. Christ may 'strike his name from the book of life.'" As envisioned by Revelation, "the decrees of God are not irreversible but wait on the acceptance or rejection of man" (Caird 1966: 49–50), an acceptance manifested in persevering obedience to God's commandments or failure to persevere.

To the angel of Philadelphia

And to the angel of the Philadelphian church, write: "Thus saith the Holy, the True, he who has the key of David, who opens and no one keys-shut, and who keys-shut and no one opens: I discern your works; behold I give you an opened door, which no one is able to key-shut, because you have a little power, and you guarded My word and you did not deny My name.

Behold I will give you from the synagogue of the Satan the ones who call themselves Jews and are not but lie—behold I will make them fall and prostrate before your feet, and they will know that I love you. Because you guarded the word of My perseverance, I also will guard you in the hour of testing that is about to come on the entire *oikoumene*, testing those who dwell on the land. I come quickly. Hold what you have, that no one may take your crown. I will make the conqueror a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will never go out of it again, and I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which descends from heaven from My God, and My new name. He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches.”

—Rev. 3:7-13

The message to the church at Sardis rings the changes on the exilic period of Israel's history. Sardis faces a life-and-death crisis. A few things remain alive in the church, but even those are about to die, and have to be vigorously protected in order to survive. Jesus threatens to come like a thief and strip the church clean, as Yahweh stripped Edom (Jer. 49:9).

Much of that is reversed in the following message to the church at Philadelphia. This church has an open door (v. 8) rather than the closing door of the church at Sardis. The angel has a little power, but he does *have* power, and he holds on and keeps the word of Jesus (v. 8, 10). False Jews will bow down before him (v. 9). An hour comes to the church at Philadelphia, just as to Sardis, but Jesus promises to hold and guard the Philadelphians through that hour of testing (v. 10). Jesus's advent seems less a threat than a promise: Philadelphia holds on, and Jesus promises to come before they lose hold.

The church at Philadelphia is in a situation comparable to that of the restoration church. Jesus's description of himself draws on the prophecy of Isaiah 22, where Yahweh replaces Shebna, the unfaithful steward of the Davidic house with Eliakim the son of Hilkiah (→1:18). Jesus is also the new Cyrus, before whom no gates can be shut (Isa. 45:1). Within Isaiah, Eliakim foreshadows Cyrus. As Eliakim administers David's house as Yahweh's "servant" (22:20), so Cyrus, Yahweh's anointed Servant, takes over the Davidic vocation by delivering exiles from bondage and rebuilding the temple (Isaiah 44–45). When Cyrus opens the gates of the grave and lets the Jews go home, no one can close that door. Cyrus takes Babylon, opening the gates of the great city to let the Jews go free (Hemer 2000: 162).

Isaiah (49:23) prophesies that after Yahweh restores Israel to the land, kings and princesses will bow down at their feet, like the sons of the afflicted (60:14; cf. Mounce 1997: 102). Zechariah predicts that after the exile ten men will grasp the garment of each Jew because they know God is with them (Zech. 8:23). Grasping the garment is a covenant-making gesture: The ten

Gentiles seek to come under the protective covering of the Jews, which is the covering of Yahweh; ten men seek to enter Yahweh's marital covenant as members of his Bride. These postexilic promises are reiterated, with an ironic twist, in the message to the angel of Philadelphia (Rev. 3:9). Philadelphia's victors are, further, promised they will be pillars in the temple within the "new Jerusalem" (v. 12). This is not Solomon's temple but the temple of the restoration in the rebuilt "new" city. The victors will be residents of the Bridal city that descends from heaven (→21:9-10).

When compared to the message to Smyrna, the message to Philadelphia provides the clearest evidence that the seven messages are arranged in a chiasmic pattern. Both refer to Jews and synagogue of Satan (2:9; 3:9). Both warn of a time of testing and trial (2:10; 3:10), using the root *πειρασ-*. Both promise a *στεφάνος* (2:10; 3:11). Smyrna is poor, with few resources, but Jesus considers them rich (2:9), rich, if nothing else, with the grace of poverty (Apringius 2011: 33). Similarly, Philadelphia has a "little power" but they are commended for using their little power well. Jesus does not criticize either church. Alone among the angels of Asia, the angels of these two churches have done all they were called to do. Alone among the angels, they hear a welcome "Well done, good and faithful angel."

As for the internal structure of the message, it is essentially chiasmic:

- A. To the angel of the church at Philadelphia, v. 7a
 - B. Holy Jesus with the key of David, v. 7b
 - C. Open door, v. 8a
 - D. You kept My word, v. 8b
 - E. False Jews will bow, v. 9
 - D'. Because you kept My word, I will keep you, v. 10
 - C'. Crown, v. 11
 - B'. Jesus sets up pillars in his temple, v. 12
 - A'. Those with ears hear the Spirit to the churches, v. 13

Jesus has the key of David (Rev. 3:7), which allows him to open and shut:

- A. who opens
 - B. and no one shuts
 - B'. and shuts
 - A' and no one opens.

The sentence's structure mimics its content: It speaks of "opening" at the "open ends," while "shutting" is shut up in the middle. This chiasm is crossed by another structure, defined by the subject of the clause:

- A. Who [i.e., Jesus] opens
 - B. no one (οὐδεὶς) shuts

- A. and [Jesus] shuts
 B. no one (οὐδείς) opens.

Jesus's self-identification (v. 7) is structurally complex and substantively rich. Structure first: Jesus identifies himself with a triple designation as "the holy, the true, the one who has the key of David." The triple phrasing reminds us of the complex triads of the opening verses of Revelation, and suggests a Trinitarian substructure. Jesus speaks, but Jesus is the revelation of the Three. He is Holy as the Father is Holy, and has the key as the Angel-Spirit has the key (→20:1-3). There is an overlapping fourfold structure: Two adjectives—"the holy" and "the true"—followed by two participial clauses—"the one who has ... the one who opens." Keys are for opening and shutting. As I have (lamely) indicated in the translation, the Greek verb "shut" (κλείω) comes from the same root as the noun "key" (κλεῖς): To say something is shut in Greek is to say it is "keyed." If we take this as a fourfold series, it gestures to Jesus's global, four-cornered work. He is the holy one, the true, the one who has keys, the one who opens and shuts to the four corners of the earth, who has oversight of doors at every border of the *οικουμένη*.

Jesus is *the holy*, the holy One, Yahweh "the Holy" (2 Kgs 19:22; Job 6:10; Ps 78:41; 89:18; Prov. 9:10; 30:3; Isa. 1:4; 5:19, 24). "The Holy One" is an especially common designation in Isaiah's prophecies of Israel's return from exile (Isa. 40:25; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14; 45:11; etc.). Like Isaiah, when John enters heaven, he hears angels calling out "Holy, Holy, Holy." The triple holiness of the Triune God is manifested in Jesus, The Holy. By virtue of the ordination rite, the rite of filling, the priest was consecrated as a holy one with access to the holy place of the holy God. As the Holy, Jesus is the priest who is the household servant and steward of God. In Isaiah, the Holy God is the Holy One of *Israel* (e.g., Isa. 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; 12:6; 17:7; etc.). In his very "transcendence" as Holy One, he qualifies himself as God of his chosen people. There is a mutuality within the Triune life: The Father is holy as indwelt by the Son in the Spirit, and the Son is Holy by the Spirit that indwells him from the Father. And this God of holy perichoresis is the God who indwells Israel, who opens himself to allow Israel to indwell him, even to the point of allowing Israel to inhabit his very name. As Holy One, he keeps his covenant and brings Israel back to dwell under his wings in the land.

Most of Revelation's uses of ἅγιος are plural and refer to the saints (5:8; 8:3, 4; 11:18; 13:7, 10; 14:12; 15:3; 16:6; 17:6; 18:24; 20:9). Jesus is the leading Saint, the firstborn of the Holy Ones, the source of the holiness of all the Holy Ones. As all are "anointed" and christed in Christ, so all are saints in the Saint. Sharing in the Holy One means sharing in his life: Those who have a part in the first resurrection are holy and blessed (20:6). Conversely, other holy things in Revelation are holy by virtue of their relationship with Jesus. The "holy city"

is the place where Jesus was crucified (11:2), but it is going to be succeeded by another “holy city” that comes from heaven (21:2, 10; 22:19). The city is holy because the Lamb is in the midst of it, and because it is made up of saints sanctified in and by the Holy One. The holy bride is constituted by holy ones.

Jesus is “the true,” another claim to identity with Yahweh. Yahweh is true God not only because he is the only One who exists and possesses divine attributes. He is also true God because he is the faithful God. Truth in the OT *does* have to do with reliability and accuracy. A true statement is one that corresponds to what is in fact the case, but “truth” can apply to persons and things as well as to statements. In Christian theology, truth is a quality of *things*, insofar as they correspond to their Creator as faithful representations of him. God is true in the sense that he does what he says, acts in accord with his character and promises, and fulfills his purposes. A man is true when his words are faithful, and when his actions are in accord with what he promises and claims.

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, the Life. In the Gospel of John, “truth” is associated with the completion and fulfillment of God’s purposes in his enfleshed Word. The Word comes in the flesh “full of grace and truth” (1:14), and a few verses later “grace and truth” are contrasted to the law that was given through Moses (v. 17). Moses does not speak lies; but he does not reveal the *real* real, the *true* truth, which is the truth *of the end*. Jesus tells the Samaritan woman that the time has come for worshipers to worship in “Spirit and truth” (4:23–24), in contrast to old world worship that was governed by attachment to particular places. Elsewhere in Revelation, “The True” is a designation for the one who, the martyrs hope, will deliver them and avenge their blood (6:10). The holy and true one will defend his holy ones from violation, and will keep his promise to avenge their blood. When their blood is finally avenged, the saints sing the Song of Moses: “Just and true are Your Ways, O King of the saints” (15:3; cf. 16:7), and when the harlot is destroyed, they sing the praise of the One whose judgments are “true” (19:2). Jesus leads his hosts from heaven as the “Faithful and True” who judges and makes war in righteousness (19:11). The words of John delivered in the book of Revelation are also “faithful and true” words about the Faithful and True (21:5; 22:6), the words of the Faithful and True. In John and Revelation both, things *are* what they will be. The Last Adam is true man, new Jerusalem the true Eve. Truth is what is disclosed and unveiled in and as the end.

This rich ontological, teleological understanding of truth is articulated most clearly in Thomas Aquinas. For Thomas, truth is not a quality of propositions only, but a quality of things. He claims that a *thing* is true by adequation to the intellect, rather than that a proposition is true by adequation to the thing of which it speaks. He is no “Kantian,” who thinks that human minds determine reality. His understanding of truth is theological: The intellect to which things are adequated is the *divine* intellect. Thomas writes,

[N]atural things, from which our intellect derives knowledge, measure our intellect ... but they are measured by divine intellect in which all things exist, just as all artifacts are in the intellect of the artist. Thus, the divine intellect measures but is not measured, the natural thing is measured and measures, but our intellect is measured by and does not measure natural things, but only artificial things.

As a result,

The natural thing, placed between two intellects, is called true because of adequation to both. It is called true according to its adequation to the divine intellect insofar as it fulfills that to which it is ordered by the divine intellect ... The thing is called true according to its adequation to human intellect insofar as it is fashioned to give a true account of itself. (From *Disputed Questions on Truth*, in McInerney 1999: 171–2)

The phrase “it fulfills that to which it is ordered” introduces teleology; adequation to divine intellect is adequation to divinely determined destiny.

A thing is true in the first sense *before* it is true in the second: “its comparison to the divine intellect is prior to its comparison to the human intellect.” Even if human intellect did not exist, “things could still be called true in relation to divine intellect.” By contrast, without divine intellect, *nothing* could be true. Elsewhere, Thomas writes,

[N]atural things are said to be true insofar as they express the likeness of the species that are in the divine mind. For a stone is called true which possesses the nature proper to a stone, according to the preconception in the divine intellect ... truth resides secondarily in things according as they are related to the intellect as their principle. (*ST I*, 16, 1)

Things themselves imitate and are compared to the divine intellect: truth is not merely in human intellect or language, but in things insofar as they conform to and imitate the divine intellect.

Jesus the Holy and the True has the key. Within Revelation, this refers back to 1:18, where Jesus’s power over life and death is symbolized as the power of the keys. The grave is a closed door, like the abyss (→9:1; →20:1), but Jesus has the key to Death and can open up to let out everyone he wants. He can condemn to the grave and the “second death,” even as he has power to deliver from the second death and give a share in the first and second resurrection. Jesus has keys as “The Holy.” Because he is the Holy One, the Holy God, and also the Holy Priest, he holds the key to the holy house of God. Adam is created to be a guardian of the holy place, but when he sins he is cast out and angels receive the keys of the kingdom. Priests are given the task of guarding the house of Yahweh in the OT, but human beings are not wholly restored to the original Adamic task until the new covenant. Jesus gives the keys of the kingdom to a new Adam, Peter, and with him the entire apostolate receives the keys, and with the apostles the entire church receives the privilege of the keys. We are *all* guardians of the house because we are holy ones in The Holy.

In the first century, Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus and the church forfeit their role as stewards, gatekeepers, and doormen for the house of Yahweh. They have been replaced by the true Israel, Jesus, who has conferred the

power of the keys on his disciples, both Jews and Gentiles. As Hort observes, “His opening is doubtless primarily the admission of Gentiles despite Jewish resistance. His shutting is the exclusion of unbelieving Israel despite their parentage and privileges” (quoted in Hemer 2000: 161). The conflict between Jews and the church can be focused here: Who is the true steward of the house of David? Who is allowed in and who is shut out, and who *decides* whom to welcome and to exclude?

Opening and shutting also has to do partly with interpretation of Scripture (Sweet 1979: 101–102). Whose interpretation unlocks the door of the kingdom, and which closes people out (see Matthew 23)? Opening and shutting has to do with access to or exclusion from the land. Since Jesus has keys, he is a new Nebuchadnezzar, who locks up the cities of the Negev so that no one can open them as he carries Judah into exile (Jer. 13:19). There is no escape from Nebuchadnezzar, as there will be no hiding from Cyrus, because both have keys that open the gates of any city.

Jesus has opened a door for the angel at Philadelphia. This open door is a door of access, perhaps to new areas of ministry, or to new success in ministry (cf. 1 Cor. 16:9; 2 Cor. 2:12; Col. 4:3; Sweet 1979: 102). The angel does not possess influence or money that could open doors, but he has done what he should with his “little power” (μικρὰν ἔχεις δύναμιν), holding fast to the Word of Jesus and not denying his name (v. 8). He has guarded the Word of perseverance (v. 10). He has faced persecution but has not backed down. Because of that, Jesus promises a reward. He has made use of the little he has, and he will be given more. He has walked through the doors Jesus opened for him, so Jesus will open more. There is pastoral wisdom here: Churches expand and extend their ministry not by manipulating the levers of the world’s power. *Jesus* has the keys, and pleasing him is the key to ensuring open doors and wide horizons. If we make good use of the little we have, we can depend on Jesus to multiple it.

Verse 9 tells us where that pressure is coming from. The explicit reference to false Jews and a “synagogue of Satan” takes us back to the message to the church at Smyrna. Opposition to the angel in Philadelphia comes from Jews who claim to be Jews, and who deny that the Christians are Jews. According to Jesus, the true Jews are not the circumcision Jews in the synagogue, but very people who have been locked *out*. In John 9, the blind man is cast out of the synagogue, and the Pharisees threaten to expel anyone who follows Jesus. They have closed the door against the Christians. That closed synagogue door is in fact an open door: As soon as the blind mind steps out the synagogue, he finds Jesus waiting for him, outside the gates. Philadelphia’s angel has learned the lesson: The synagogue is not coextensive with reality. With Coriolanus, he knows there is a “world outside” (cf. Reddish 2001: 75).

Jesus promises that the Jews who have cast the Christians out of their synagogues will return to do homage to the angel of the church. It is Purim with a twist: Instead of the nations bowing before *Jews*, Jews who have rejected Christ will bow before the angel (cf. Isa. 60:14; Sweet 1979: 102; Mounce 1997: 102; the possessive pronoun is singular, ἐνώπιον τῶν ποδῶν σου). Jews expect the Gentiles to bow to *them*, but they will bow to the pastor who leads a church of Jews and Gentiles. It is best to understand these as *converted* Jews (Caird 1966: 52-3). In the OT, Gentiles bow to Jews when they turn from idols to the God of Israel (Isa. 45:14; 60:14; Ezek. 36:23; 37:27-28), and the Jews will bow to the angel as an act of return to Jesus their Messiah. Philadelphia will be one site where the promise of Zechariah 12 is fulfilled: The tribes of the land will look on the one whom they pierced, and they will mourn (→1:7). The message to Philadelphia gives a glimpse of the repentance described later in more detail (→18:9-19; →21:24).

Jews will repent when they recognize that Jesus loves the church, and this will be evident by the way that Jesus avenges and protects them in the hour of testing. When the Jews see that the Christians have been preserved and elevated through the tribulation, they will see that the Lord is with them. Jesus's declaration "I have loved you" echoes Isa. 43:4, where Yahweh declares his love for Israel (Sweet 1979: 103) by calling Israel back from exile. He will demonstrate his love by bringing his church through the fiery furnace. As throughout the message, the angel is the object of attention. Jesus makes the Jews come to bow at his feet to demonstrate God loves his people, but that love is directed here specifically, *individually*, to the angel who faithfully guards his bride (ἐγὼ ἡγάπησά σε, v. 9).

This is another piece of evidence, decisive by itself, that the angels cannot be spiritual beings. When John prostrates to spirit angels later in Revelation (19:9-10), the angel rebukes him and tells him to stop. Why would Jesus promise the angel of Philadelphia that he will receive homage that the angel forbids to John?

Jews will bow *at his feet*, a liturgical gesture. The Lord's feet rest on his ark in the Most Holy Place (1 Chr. 28:2; Ps. 99:5; 132:7), and when Israel prostrates before the Lord in worship, they fall at his footstool. The Father promises to make Jesus's enemies into a footstool on which he rests his feet (Ps. 110:1), and the disciples of Jesus share in the same privilege. In the early chapters of Acts, the apostles' feet mark the location of a new temple. The Spirit falls on the disciples, consecrating the community of Jesus as holy space. In Christ, the apostles are elevated to thrones; they sit on Jesus's throne as Jesus sits on his Father's throne. They are, symbolically, enthroned on the ark in the midst of the glory, their feet resting on the footstool of the earth. Thus, Christians who

sell their property bring their tribute not to the temple but to the apostles' feet (Acts 4:35, 37) and when Ananias and Sapphira lie to the Spirit about their sale, they die at the apostles' feet (Acts 5:2, 9-10). Cornelius falls at the feet of Peter to worship him (Acts 10:25). The footstool of God is no longer in the temple, but at the feet of the apostles, at the feet of the church. Jesus promises that Jews will bow down at the true temple when they bow at the feet of Jesus's angels who serve the churches in the power of the Angel-Spirit.

The coming "hour" is the hour of testing ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκουμένης ὄλος. I have argued (→Introduction) that *oikoumene* has a restricted sense referring to the Greco-Roman civilization that encircled the Mediterranean, the Israel-in-empire order that God established during and after the exile. The testing comes to the dwellers on the earth. Possibly, Jesus predicts that the whole Greco-Roman world will be shaken, all those who dwell on the "earth" (γῆ) in this sense. More likely, "earth" has a more specific connotation, referring to the dwellers on the land of Israel. Both *oikoumene* and land will be shaken in the coming hour. Jesus is coming soon to shake that world. It climaxes with the destruction of the temple and the collapse of the Julio-Claudian dynasty in Rome, and it reverberates for centuries until Jesus claims the empire itself. With John's Gospel in mind, we can see that Jesus's hour of glorious suffering is linked with the crisis that engulfs the *oikoumene*. Jesus will conquer the *oikoumene* the way his conquest started, with suffering witness.

Jesus's advent is a threat to the church at Sardis, but in Philadelphia his advent is reassurance. Because the angel has kept his Word, he and his church can look forward to Jesus's coming. The hour of testing for the world will be the time of their deliverance, if they hold fast they will receive Eliakim's reward, a crown (Sweet 1979: 104).

Jesus promises victors a share in the new temple, the temple of the restoration, the temple city from heaven (→21:9–22:5). They will become structural features of that city. Yahweh is the original pillar. He leads Israel to Sinai in a pillar of cloud, and then his cloudy pillar descends from Sinai to fill the tabernacle. Yahweh is the pillar in his own house, the load-bearing structure that keeps the house intact. The two most prominent pillars in the temple are the king and priest pillars, Jachin and Boaz (1 Kgs 7:15-22). In the new covenant temple, people are the pillars. Saints in Philadelphia have been cast out of the synagogue, with the door shutting behind them. But Jesus has the keys and will open up the door of his house, and will give the victors a place there. Jesus promises to make the overcomers Yahweh-like, pillars in the house, trees and ladders stretched between heaven and earth, structural features of God's house. Pillars are stylized trees, often symbolic of people, especially priests (cf. Ps. 52:8; 92:13). Victors will be trees in the new Eden garden (which is both a temple and a city).

And—ain't it grand?!—"he will not go out from it anymore" (3:12). Who is "he"? It makes most sense to say that it is the pillar. What would make us think that the pillar might move out from the house he holds up? Yahweh-as-pillar is the background, because he *does* leave his earlier house, and it collapsed (Ezekiel 8–11). Jachin and Boaz leave too, cut in pieces and dragged to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:13–17). *Not* the human pillars. The Lord will remain in his house, and his house will not fall because he has erected a host of pillars to hold it up. (Shall we call this infallibility? Indefectability?) Following that "he will not go out from it" thread takes us in another direction too. After Aaron's sons are killed, Moses forbids him to leave the sanctuary (Lev. 10:7). According to Lev. 21:12, the high priest is forbidden to leave the sanctuary. At least we can make these connections: The priest is a human pillar in Yahweh's house, and Jesus promises to make the faithful in Philadelphia priest-pillars as well.

Numbers 17 is also in the background. Aaron's rod buds and blossoms with almond (watcher) blossoms, proving that he is the holy one who can flourish as a pillar and rod in the house of the Lord. Names written by Jesus also contrast with the blasphemous names written on the beast.

Jesus uses "My God" four times in verse 12. The temple is the temple of "My God"; he writes the name of "My God" on the victors, along with the name of the city of "My God," the city that comes from "My God" (cf. 3:2). In Jn 20:17, Jesus warns Mary not to cling to him before he ascends to "My Father and your Father, My God and your God." Disciples of Jesus have the same God that Jesus has. In the Gospel, the phrase is used on the day of Jesus's resurrection, when Jesus's God reveals himself as the God of Jesus and of the disciples. The Father's Godness is evident in the power to bring the living back from the dead. By calling the Father "My God," Jesus assures the faithful at Philadelphia that they will be delivered from the hour of temptation, preserved and kept, and put into a safe house. The God of Jesus, who does not allow him to see corruption, will also raise the saints.

Jesus promises to write a triple name on the pillars that are in the temple: The ὄνομα of "My God," of the city, which is New Jerusalem, and of Jesus. Like Jachin and Boaz, the pillars of the new temple are inscribed; they are priestly pillars, *qodesh-l'YHWH*. Israel's high priest was also a pillar bearing the name of Yahweh on his crown—"Holy to Yahweh." In Jesus, God has built a new house, and this one will *not* be torn stone from stone; it will *always* have its structural pillars to keep it intact. The triple name is another Trinitarian formula. "My God" is the Father, and Jesus's own Name is the Name of the Son. The third Name is a surprise; we expect the name of the Spirit but read the name of the city, as if the city were incorporated into God. It is. The bride

from heaven is incorporated into the divine name. She becomes part of the family and bears the family name.

The interchangeability of Spirit and Bride points to central themes of Revelation, evident especially in the closing section where the Spirit and the Bride speak with one voice, calling on the Bridegroom to come (→22:17). The seven Spirits of God form and inhabit a new-creation Bride, so that the Bride speaks with the Spirit's voice. When the Bride speaks, we can hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Further, the Bride's descent from heaven reminds us of the dove descending from heaven onto Jesus at his baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mk 1:10; Lk. 3:22; Jn 1:32-33). In Rev. 3:12, the phrase "descending from heaven" (καταβαίνουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) is nearly identical to Jn 1:32 (καταβαίνον ... ἐξ οὐρανοῦ). That the Spirit is pictured as a dove reinforces the association with the Bride, since the Bride is the "dove" of the Song of Songs (2:14; 5:2). By receiving the Spirit as a dove coming from heaven, Jesus receives the Bride; when that same Spirit is poured on the Bride, Bridegroom and Bride are joined in one Spirit, a union so close that the God of heaven names himself by the Name of the Bride of his Son. It is the unveiling of Jesus, the manifestation of the Name: It is the unveiling of Jesus in the Bride, who is folded into the divine name and lives within the divine life.

Message to the angel of Laodicea

And to the angel of the Laodikeian church, write: "Thus saith the Amen, the Witness Faithful and True, the Archon of the creation of God: I discern your works that you are neither cold nor hot. I would you were cold or hot. Because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I am about to vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'Rich I am and wealthy, and I have no need,' and you do not discern that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked, I counsel you to buy from Me gold fired by fire that you may be rich; and garments sparkling-white that you may be clothed and not reveal the shame of your nakedness; and salve to anoint your eyes that you may see. I, whomever I love, I chasten and discipline. Be zealous and repent. Behold I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I also will enter into him and dine with him and he with Me. The conqueror I will give to sit with Me on My throne, as I also conquered and sat with My Father on his throne. He who has ears let him hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches."

—Rev. 3:14-22

With the church at Laodicea, we move symbolically into the "intertestamental" period of Israel's history. This angel is not commended for *anything*. Worse, the

angel is proud of his wealth, wisdom, and status. He believes he needs nothing, blind to his true condition of utter and absolute need. He reminds us of the Pharisees of the Gospels, who have the law but are not cut to the quick by the law (cf. Romans 7). He is wretched, in need of mercy (ἐλεεινός, from ἐλέεω), but thinks, like the Pharisees in the Gospels, he can do well enough without mercy. Jesus comes to call the members of the church to a feast, but they will not have him as a dinner companion (v. 20). Jesus announces the kingdom feast, but they have closed the door to receive him. He comes to his own, but they do not receive him. Jesus urges the angel to a kind of zeal (v. 19), using terminology familiar to first-century Jews, but he gives it a different twist. Unlike the Pharisees and Zealots, the angel is to be zealous in turning from his sins.

The seventh message has specific links with the Sabbath. Gen. 1:1–2:4 is organized into seven sections, and Genesis 2–3 has a parallel set of seven sections (→Introduction). The seventh episode in Genesis 2–3 is the fall, a Sabbatical event. The fall occurs on the day Yahweh comes into the garden in the Spirit to meet with Adam and Eve. The message to Laodicea is a fall story. As in the fall story in Genesis 3, there is an emphasis on eyes. Eve saw the fruit that it was good to look at, tasty, and desirable to make one wise. Like a proper image of God, Eve used her eyes to form judgments, though her judgments were false. After Adam and Eve ate, their eyes are opened. The message to Laodicea also speaks of eyes. The Laodicean angel is blind without knowing it; the church's members cannot make proper judgments and cannot evaluate things accurately (v. 17). Jesus offers eye salve to heal their blindness. Like the fall account, the message to Laodicea emphasizes nakedness and clothing. With their open eyes, Adam and Eve saw they were naked, and made aprons of fig leaves to cover themselves. The story ends with Lord covering them with tunics of skin. Jesus offers clothing to hide the shame of their nakedness. In Genesis 3, Yahweh sent Adam and Eve out of the garden because of their rebellion, while in the message to Laodicea the church is warned that unless they repent Jesus himself will expel them from his mouth. Jesus is the garden of the Laodicean church, and if they persist in their shame, blindness, and nakedness, Jesus will send them out, forcefully. The more general Sabbath theme is the meal. The fall was a premature meal, as Adam and Eve dined at the table of the serpent. Jesus comes to celebrate a true Sabbath feast.

Rev. 3:15–16 forms a fairly neat chiasm.

- A. know works
- B. neither cold nor hot
- C. would that you were cold or hot
- C'. you are lukewarm
- B'. neither hot nor cold
- A'. spew out of mouth

Alternatively, we can put the first two “cold and hot” references together, which would make the “lukewarm” statement a unique center. Verses 17–18 have a neat alternating structure.

- A. You say: rich, wealthy, no need
- B. But you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked
- A' Buy gold (answer to poverty)
- B' garments for nakedness (answer to nakedness)
- A'' Eye salve (answer to blindness)

Verse 19 seems to stand alone at the center of the passage. Verse 20 matches the references to gold, garments, and eye salve, all connected to the setting of a feast, and verse 21 promises the true riches and wealth of sitting with Jesus on his throne. Thus the overall outline is:

- A. Thus says the Amen, Faithful, Beginning, v. 14
- B. Lukewarm, vv. 15–16
- C. Poor may buy, vv. 17–18
- D. Be zealous and repent, v. 19
- C' Feast with Jesus, v. 20
- B' Overcome, v. 21
- A' He who has an ear, let him hear, v. 22

The parallel of B and B' suggests a connection between temperature (hot, cold, lukewarm) and rule (sitting on the throne). The C and C' are linked because the goods Jesus offers for sale are, as we will see, necessary to prepare for a festival.

Jesus identifies himself with a triple designation, again a Trinitarian form. As the human manifestation of the Trinity, Jesus is three. He is the Ἀμήν, from the Hebrew for “to be true” or “to be faithful.” In the Gospels, Jesus uses the word (translated as “verily” or “truly”; cf. Matt. 5:18, 26; 6:2, 5, 13, 16; 8:10; 10:15, 23, 42; 11:11; 16:28; 17:20; 18:3, 13, 18; 19:23, 28; 21:21, 31; 23:36; 24:2, 34, 47; 25:12, 40, 45; 26:13, 21, 34), frequently when beginning a statement: “truly I say” (ἀμὴν λέγω). Paul uses the word seven times in Romans, often at the conclusion of an expression of praise to God (1:25; 9:5; 11:36) or a benediction or ascription (15:33; 16:20, 24, 27). Paul refers to the use of Amen in worship (1 Cor. 14:16). In all these passages, “Amen” confirms speech, whether a command, a warning, or promise, an act of praise. In 2 Cor. 1:20, Paul says that all of God’s promises are “Amen” in Christ. God has spoken, and then pronounces the Amen, the confirmation of what he has spoken, when he speaks in and *as* Jesus. Jesus is the concluding oath, the Amen to all of the promises God gave to Israel. Jesus is also Amen in that he is pure obedience to the Father, through whom new creation comes. In Jesus God’s promises are Yes. Through the Yes that is Jesus comes *our* Amen, our affirming response.

Amen is used nine times in Rev. 1:6–7. Both the verses end with *Amen*, and both are ascriptions of praise to God. “*Amen*” is used in the heavenly worship (5:14; 7:12; 19:4), and it also closes the book (22:20–21), as it opened the book. Sweet (1979: 107) points to the phrase “The God of *Amen*” or “the God of Truth” in Isa. 65:16, part of a prophecy about a new heavens and earth.

Jesus is the witness, the faithful and true one (cf. 1:5). *μάρτυς* again edges toward its later meaning of “someone who dies for his faith.” Jesus has been faithful to death, and proven that the Father raises the faithful dead. He is the model for martyrs like Antipas (“in place of the Father”), who died in a Christlike way, and he is also the model for the two witnesses (→11:3) and the witnesses whose blood the harlot drinks. Jesus’s blood, like Abel’s and like that of later martyrs, witnesses against those who kill the saints, crying out for vindication and justice.

Jesus is the “beginning of the creation of God.” *ἀρχή* can mean a beginning, a ruler, or a cause (Aune 1997: 256). Three other times in Revelation, Jesus or the Father identifies himself as the beginning, sometimes combined with Alpha and Omega or “first and last” (1:8; 21:6; 22:13). Jesus is the One through whom the Father began the world. Elsewhere in the NT, the plural *ἀρχαί* is translated as “principalities,” and refers to the spiritual or political rulers dethroned by Jesus (Eph. 1:21; 3:10; 6:10; Col. 2:10, 15; Tit. 3:1). As *the ἀρχή*, Jesus is, as Paul says, head of principalities and powers, the source and chief of all rule and authority. Jesus is the Word who is at the beginning with God (Jn 1:1–2), and *ἀρχή* as the firstborn from the dead (Col. 1:18), the agent of the recreation who brings the world back from the aggressive, hungry nothing of death. Caird (1966: 57) takes the word as final cause: “When God set in motion the creative process, what he intended to produce was Christ and men like Christ.”

Jesus knows the works of the Laodicean angel, and they are not acceptable to him. Though the angel is a star, he is neither hot nor cold. The hot/cold is often seen as a local allusion to the water supply of Laodicea (Boxall 2006: 76; Mounce 1997: 107). Koester (2015: 337) finds that suggestion “untenable,” arguing that the water supply at Laodicea was no different from that of other cities and that there is ancient testimony to the sweetness of Laodicean water. Koester suggests instead that the image is one of hospitality. Hosts were expected to provide drinks for guests. Wine was often cooled with snow or warmed with hot water. Hot or cold, wine is a pleasing drink; lukewarm, it is not. A host who offered lukewarm wine failed as a host because he insulted his guest (343–4). That fits the message to the Laodicean church. The angel *unwelcomes* Jesus with lukewarm wine, and Jesus spews it out in disgust. The Laodicean church is like the Pharisee Simon (Luke 14), who received Jesus but did not kiss him or wash his feet. An image of hospitality also matches

the Eucharistic motifs at the end of the message (see below) and fits neatly with the first-century background of the imagery: Refusing to receive Jesus hospitably was precisely the sin of Jesus's generation. Now the same inhospitality is appearing in the church. As Jesus predicted (Matt. 24:12), the love of many is growing cold.

This does not exclude the traditional idea that the Laodicean angel is rebuked for a lack of fervor. At the center of the passage is an exhortation to zeal (ζήλουε), and the whole message is redolent with references to the Song of Songs, where love is sweet, aromatic, intoxicating wine and blazing fire (Song 1:1-2; 5:1). The angel's unacceptable host-gift manifests his spiritual state: As the representative of the Bride, he should offer wine-love strong as death, as coolly refreshing as an evening breeze or the shade of a tree (Song 2:17; 4:6), as warming as the love that is the flame of Yah (Song 8:6).

James Jordan (1999a: 51) notes the connection between Jesus' warning to the angel of Laodicea and Yahweh's promise to Noah after the flood. In Genesis 8, Yahweh promises not to curse the ground again, adding that while earth remains sowing and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will not cease. These pairs form a pattern: Sowing, cold, winter, and night line up on one side, while harvest, heat, summer, and day line up on the other. In the text, they are chiastically arranged:

A. Sowing and harvest

B. Cold and Heat

B'. Summer (corresponding with harvest and heat) and Winter (sowing and cold)

A'. Day (corresponding with harvest and heat) and night (sowing and cold)

Against the background of the promise to Noah, the message to the Laodicean angel anticipates the final vision of Revelation, where sun and moon, day and night, and the whole pattern of the Noahic creation is transfigured into the eternal day of the church.

This background might enable us to specify the sin of Laodicean angel. The old covenant was the covenant of night, therefore a covenant of sowing, winter, cold, while the new covenant is hot, day, harvest, summer. In the Bible, evening comes before morning. So too the law comes before the unveiling of the gospel.

The lukewarmness of the Laodicean angel is a halting between day and night. He is among those who see the light come, yet loves darkness rather than light, or cannot decide *which* he prefers. He is like the Jews of Elijah's day, hesitating between Baal and Yahweh. With such an angel at the helm, the Laodicean church is ambiguously crepuscular, a church of dawn and dusk, straddling the divide between the old and new, between the *oikoumene* and the empire of Christ. Perhaps we can see here an image of the counterfeit new covenant unveiled later in Revelation (→13:1-18). Jesus finds this indecision unpalatable, abominable, and vomits them out.

Jesus's terminology also links with Greek scientific concepts. "Cold" and "hot," with "dry" and "moist" were the four primary qualities of matter, which combine to form the four elements. Fire is hot and dry, air is hot and wet, water is wet and cold, and earth is dry and cold. Combining these qualities gives rise to atoms of different shapes, which themselves combines to form the material substances of the universe. There is a micro/macro relationship; the four elements match four humors—yellow bile is fiery, black bile earthy, blood airy, and phlegm watery.

Greek science is brought into the biblical world in a series of puns. ψύχρος is used only here in the NT. A synonym, ψύχος, is used in several passages (Jn 18:18; Acts 28:2; 2 Cor. 11:27). Each of these terms is punningly linked with the Greek words for “soul” and “soul-ish” (or natural). ψύχκος means “having breath” or “natural,” which Paul uses to describe the character of the first man. Adam is created from the (cold) ground and has “breath” from God, but he is not yet Spiritual, animated by the (fiery) Spirit of God. Jesus is the Last Man, the man from heaven, who *is* Spirit and not mere breathiness (1 Cor. 2:14; 15:44, 46; cf. Jas. 3:15; Jude 19). Adam is created soul-ish, a breathing-one, but when Eve is brought to him, he becomes *’ish*, a pun on *’esh*, “fire.” Adam went from earth to fire, from cold to hot, when he sees the woman Yahweh God built for him. This is the trajectory of humanity, from soul-ish/cold to Spiritual/hot. The first covenant was cold, the second hot; the first of earth, the second of heaven. Again the angel at Laodicea hesitates between these options. He wants to remain on the fence, lukewarm. This ultimately gives support to the traditional view of the passage: The angel will not withdraw, nor will he throw himself into the flame of Yah, so as to become a new man with his soul fired by the Spirit. As much as the angel of Ephesus, the angel of Laodicea fails through a failure of love.

Because of the lukewarmness of the angel, Jesus threatens to vomit (ἐμέσαι) him from his mouth. If the angel is spewed out, the church is in trouble too. The Hebrew word behind ἐμέσαι (*qv*) is used to describe the land’s reaction to defilement (Lev. 18:25, 28 [2x]; 20:22). In Jon. 2:10, the fish vomits the Israelite prophet back into dry land, an image of a reverse exile, a vomiting-back from the Gentile sea to Israel. A noun form (*qe*) is used several times to describe the vomit of a drunk man, especially of a nation made drunk with the wine of God’s wrath (Isa. 19:14; 28:8; Jer. 48:26; cf. Jer. 25:27, which uses a slightly different verb, *qyh*).

Food goes into our stomachs, and if everything goes as it should, the food gets transformed into body. What is eaten gets transformed into the eater. Sometimes food goes in, but does not get incorporated. It is *in* the body but *not* body. It is ready to be expelled. Likewise, some Israelites are in the land, but when the wrath of God comes, they are expelled, vomited out. Israel’s abominations of sex, violence, and idolatry make the land sick, so that the land expels them, vomiting them out into exile. Israel will be vomited out of Babylon when the Lord pours out his wine and makes Babylon fall down drunk. Likewise, some enter the body of Christ, are partially digested into the body, but then expelled *de visceribus ecclesiae meae*, as Bede (2011: 123) says. Food is supposed to be transformed into the eater, but the angel has *not* been transformed into Christ. Jesus has sipped the wine he offers, tasted and tested him. If he were cold or hot, Jesus would consume him as the consuming fire of Yahweh that eats the sacrifices into himself, transforming them by and into his own fiery Spirit. Since the food he offers is not acceptable, Jesus spits it out, as Yahweh flashed out in fire against presumptuous worshippers. The assumption is that Jesus is the true

land of Christians; he is the true nation and city, and they are incorporate with him. The angel has been in his body for a time, but has not been digested. It is clear that lukewarmness is not a minor failure. It is an abomination, like idolatry, like the shedding of innocent blood, like sexual perversions that pollute the land. A lukewarm pastor might as well be killing the innocent, might as well be a sodomite.

His lukewarmness is evident in his complacency, which rests on a diremption between what he says and believes about himself and what is actually the case. Jesus uses “rich” twice in the sarcastic quotation of the angel in verse 17: πλούσιος comes emphatically at the beginning of the sentence, “Rich am I!” It is immediately followed by a perfect participle based on the same root (πεπλούηκα, from πλουτέω). We might translate, “Rich am I! And I have become rich!” (accompanied by a jig). The angel is a self-made man, rich by his own becoming-rich. As such, he angel has no needs. He is a virtual god, manufacturing his own wealth from himself, his complacency evident in his adaptation of the divine εἰμι. He might as well be a citizen of Babylon, the complacent, abominable harlot, who claims to be an unmovable Being, a demi-divine ἐγὼ εἰμι (Revelation 18). The angel of Laodicea has so identified with Jezebel/Babylon that he begins to sound like her (Boxall 2006: 77). “No need” is repeated at the end of the book, both times of the condition of the new Jerusalem, which has “no need” of the sun and “no need” of candles or lamps (→21:23; 22:5). The Laodicean angel thinks he has arrived in the new Jerusalem; he thinks he is the eschatological *It*. His boasts of wealth tell another story. If he is rich, it is because he has been “trading” with the great whore Babylon, and that city will not remain.

His triple boast is matched by Jesus’s quadruple evaluation of the angel’s condition: Wretched, miserable, poor, blind, naked. The only other use of the word “wretched” in the NT is in Romans 7, where Paul laments his divided existence under the law, which leaves him a “wretched” man longing for release. Wretchedness is an “Egyptian” condition, the condition before exodus, the condition of David crying for deliverance (Ps. 11:6 LXX; Engl. 12:5), the condition of Israel under what became the bondage of Torah. Unlike Paul, the Laodicean angel does not even know he is wretched. Paul’s wretchedness consists in his recognition of the difference between his heart and his conduct, a dichotomy that is brought about by the sharp sword of the Torah. The angel’s heart and conduct are of a piece: Both are unacceptably lukewarm. The angel of Laodicea is like the Pharisees who, though they have the law, are not undone by it. Perhaps he *is* a Pharisee.

Jesus invites the Laodicean angel to take a shopping trip and offers investment advice: συμβουεύω σοι ἀγοράσαι (v. 18). Each item on the shopping list is described with the same literary structure:

gold fired in fire	that	you may be rich
white garments	that	the shame of nakedness might not exposed
anoint eyes	that	you may see

Jesus’s parables sometimes include an implicit exhortation to buy. The man who finds a treasure in the field and the man who finds the pearl sell everything to purchase the one desirable thing (Matt. 13:44, 46). Jesus condemns the buying and selling in the temple (Matt. 21:12; Mk 11:15; Lk. 19:45), but he has his own marketplace. In Revelation, “buy” is used in connection with the buying and selling permitted by the beast (→13:17), which is related to the buying and selling of merchants with the harlot city (→18:11). God makes purchases too, buying his people with the blood of his Son (5:9; 14:4). There are two apocalyptic markets: The angel may purchase from the market of Jesus or from the harlot.

Jesus offers three specific goods: gold, garments, and eye salve. Jesus’s products answer to the last three poverties of the Laodicean angel—poverty, nakedness, and blindness. The only OT passage that uses “anoint” (ἐγγρῖσαι) and “eyes” (ὀφθαλμός) together is Jer. 4:30: “you anoint your eyes with paint” (LXX). Jer. 4:30 describes harlot Judah as she prepares (like Jezebel) to meet her lovers (v. 29). It does not work any better for Judah than it did for Jezebel: “In vain you make yourself beautiful; your lovers despise you; they seek your life.” Jesus urges Laodicea to become a true bride, with the gold ornaments, glistening robes, and anointed eyes befitting a wedding supper. Pure (κάθαρος) gold is the material of the city and its streets (21:18, 21), which is the bride. Garments cover the nakedness of the Adamic Laodicean angel, who has been unfaithful in guarding, and make it possible for one to enter heaven (→6:11) and to maintain access to the bridal city (→22:14). If the angel buys from Jesus, he will be ready when the Lord comes like a thief. The Laodicean angel should buy these things because the Bridegroom is knocking at the door (Rev. 3:20) just like the Bridegroom of the Song of Songs, calling to his dove, his perfect one (5:2), whose anointed eyes are like pools of Heshbon (7:4) and who is adorned with gold ornaments (1:11). These items are the necessities the Laodicean pastor needs to prepare himself and his bride for the coming of her Husband. In this context, “be zealous” (Rev. 3:19) takes on an erotic coloring. Jesus urges the Laodicean angel to cultivate the love that is stronger as death, as jealous (LXX, ζήλος) as the grave (Song of Songs 8:6).

Jesus is also selling royal equipment. White raiment is worn by the Ancient Ones who sit enthroned in heaven (→Rev. 4:4). Since eyes are organs of judgment, eye slave will enable the Laodicean angel and his church to have a share in heavenly judgments. The living creatures in Rev. 4:4 are full of eyes, and if Laodiceans repent and anoint their eyes, they will see like beasts, with their all-seeing eyes. Jesus the king gives the equipment they need to sit with Jesus on his throne (Rev. 3:21). The Laodicean angel is a ruler in the church, already a star in the heavens. He must have the right clothing to sit in counsel, gold for a crown, eyes anointed so they, like the eyes of Jesus, burn with the fire of discerning love.

The deeper connection is with the three gifts of God that are offered in the tabernacle. In the Holy Place are three gold objects—a lampstand to cast light, a golden altar for incense, and a table for bread. The ark contains three comparable things: The manna, the tablets of the law, and the staff of Aaron the priest that budded. The furniture of the Holy Place manifests the hidden treasures in the ark. Torah, manna, and rod represent word, food, and authority; bread, law, person. The furniture of the Holy Place has the same meaning: The table for food, the lamp as the light of Torah, the incense altar the man of prayer.

Jesus's treasures are like those hidden in the ark. Eye salve is for anointing (the verb is ἔγχριω) eyes (χρί- roots are used in the LXX to speak of the anointing of the priest; Exod. 28:41; 29:2, 7; 29:29, 36; 30:25, 26, 30, 31), and the combination of oil/anointing and seeing links this with the lampstand. The lamp of the body is the eye, and Jesus promises to sell the Laodiceans what they need to have clear eyes, eyes like fiery lamps burning out into the world, eyes like Jesus's own eyes. The lampstand parallels the Torah, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Ps. 119).

The garment that covers nakedness and shame is linked to the High Priestly garments and therefore to the rod that blossomed and the golden altar of incense. Aaron wears priestly breeches so that his nakedness does not appear in God's presence. When Yahweh judges Israel, he exposes her nakedness, so that it does appear and becomes public. Incense forms a cloudy garment of smoke, a cloud that enveloped the high priest when he entered the most holy place. When Jesus offers garments, he is offering a priestly position at the golden altar.

If this paradigm is correct, the gold Jesus offers corresponds to the bread on the golden table and the manna in the ark. Perhaps we are to think of gold as bread, baked in the fire.

How are they supposed to buy if they are poor? How can someone become rich by *buying*? Jesus's symbolic invitation echoes Isa. 55:1 (→22:17), which promises food, wine, and milk to those who come to buy and have no money. There is no cost for what Jesus offers. He opens a market, and has already covered the cost of all purchases. Jesus knocks at the door of the church, and the Laodicean angel has only to open the door to receive these gifts.

The conclusion of the seven messages resorts to the Song of Songs. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev. 3:20; Gr. ἰδοὺ ἔστηκα ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν καὶ κρούω) anticipates the marriage supper of

the Lamb at the end of Revelation (19:9), and the Eucharistic overtones are clear (Oecumenius 2011: 20; Reddish 2001: 83; *pace* Aune 1997: 254). The scene recalls Song of Songs (5:2), where the bride wakes to the sound of her lover's knocking on her door (LXX, κρούει ἐπὶ τὴν θύραν) and the sound of his voice (LXX, φωνή). The lover reaches through the keyhole to arouse his beloved. He is aroused himself, hungry for a feast of love-making: "I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk. Eat friends; drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers" (5:1). Jesus the Lover now knocks at the door of the Laodicean church, seeking entry to enjoy a feast of love with the few remaining in the Laodicean church who are still passionate members of his Bride. Jesus promises to begin the feast with anyone who opens the door to dine with him, and he brings with him all that the Bride needs. So long as they do not welcome him with yesterday's warmed-over leftovers, he will dine with them.

In the opening chapters, John works through the Song in reverse order. He begins with a *wasf* like that of Song of Songs 5:10–16 and moves back to the opening verses of Song of Songs 5, the lover's knocking (5:2), and finally to the feast (5:1). Revelation's first vision thus chiasmatically inverts the Song:

- A. Feast of love, Song 5:1
- B. Lover knocking, Song 5:2
- C. *Wasf* of lover, Song 5:10–16
- C'. *Wasf* of Jesus, Rev. 1:14–16
- B'. Jesus knocking, Rev. 3:22a
- A'. Jesus wants to dine, Rev. 3:22b

Jesus the prophet brings the covenant lawsuit against the churches; Jesus the Emperor sends the imperial edicts to his provincial angels; Jesus the priest teaches commandments to his people; with his sword-mouth and fire-eyes, he prepares his churches for a final sacrifice; he builds a bride. From beginning to end, the overarching aim is Love. Jesus wants to dine (δειπνέω), to begin the "wedding supper of the lamb" (→19:9, 17; δείπνον; cf. Boxall 2006: 78). It is a royal wedding and a royal feast, when he and his Bride sit on the same throne, his bride having become one body with him. The Spirit who is the Passion of God speaks to the church, so that they welcome him when he comes, so they will not be lukewarm, but renewed in loving zeal. Jesus the Lover speaks to prepare the Bride for the feast by preparing the angels to prepare the bride.

Slash me with a glance.
Purge me with your gaze.

Consume me in your flaming eyes,
and set my heart ablaze.

*Jesus, Sun among the stars of heaven: Strip away our flesh by the sword
of your Word, that we may be consumed in the fire of your eyes and shine
forever in your kingdom. Amen.*

IV.1. In Spirit in Heaven: In Heaven's Court—Rev. 4:1–5:14

Jesus has dictated seven messages to the angels of the churches of Asia, prophetic messages from the Lord of the church, who speaks a “thus saith” to his people; edicts from the Son of Man who has been installed as head of a fifth empire, the kingdom of God. They are judicial letters from the Ancient of Days, the results of his scrutiny and surveillance, warning the provinces of his empire to prepare for his approaching, cataclysmic Parousia, preparing them to be witnesses when God begins to prosecute his lawsuit. They are love letters from the Bridegroom to his beloved Bride, commending her beauties, removing her blemishes. They encourage and rebuke and warn of dangers to come. Ephesus might lose its lampstand, some in Smyrna are going to be cast into prison, Balaam and Balak and Jezebel threaten the fidelity of the churches of Pergamum and Thyateira. And then there are the spiritual dangers that the angels bring upon themselves and their churches—one has left his first love, another has become drowsy or complacently self-satisfied. Few of the angels survive his scrutiny unscathed. Few of the churches seem prepared for the crisis about to take place.

As noted, Revelation is divided into four large visionary sequences, each marked by the phrase “in Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι; on uses of spirit, see Aune (1997: 283)). In the Spirit on the Lord's Day, John sees Christ, who commissions him to write to the seven churches (1:10). That initiates a sequence that stretches 3:22, the messages to the seven churches. Then, 4:2 repeats ἐν πνεύματι to introduce the lengthiest section of the book, 4:1–16:21. Summoned by a trumpet and whisked up by the Spirit, John passes through a door in the sky. Over the next twelve chapters, John is in Spirit in heaven. That vision is organized as a worship service, a liturgy of word and sacrament. It begins with a summons to enter the throne room (4:1-2). John witnesses an ongoing service of praise. The Lamb appears and unseals a scroll (5), which unleashes heavenly initiatives that untune the world, culminating with an angel casting down coals from the golden altar in response to the prayers of the saints (8:1-5). Trumpets disclose the conflicts of the

early church and announce that the Word of the scroll will be spoken (8–11). John eats the book and proclaims its contents in a visionary sermon (12–15). Finally, angels pour out bowls of sacramental wine-blood onto the world, shaking it until the throne of God crashes through from heaven to earth (16).

John ascends to heaven, witnesses and partially participates in a heavenly liturgy. But worship is not a retreat from the challenges the churches face. John does not cease to be a *συγκοινωνός* in the tribulation of Jesus. Rather, the liturgy rightly orients John (and all worshipers) toward earthly challenges (Boxall 2006: 93). “My feet came close to stumbling ... until I came into the sanctuary of God” (Ps. 73:2, 17). To see what must take place, and to see what it all means, and to be prepared for faithful witness, the churches need the perspective of the heavenly sanctuary, because heaven is the place where the future happens first, the place from which future arrives.

The visions move from heaven to earth. John is caught up to the heavenly temple, but the actions of the Lamb and the angels with trumpets and bowls effect changes on earth. Heaven has already been revolutionized by the ascension of the Lamb. During the heavenly visions, it is earth’s turn for revolution. In the next two visions, John descends from heaven, first to a wilderness and then to a mountain. After chapter 16, events are not directed from heaven at all. Heaven is a way-station, not a resting place. It is beginning, not end. John passes through heaven *on his way* to a renewed city. Heaven is where things happen *first*; *earth* is the end.

As the vision of Jesus in 1:12–20 inaugurated the series of seven messages, so a second vision of Jesus, now as ascended Lamb, inaugurates a triple sequence of sevens (cf. Boxall 2006: 79). The Lamb opens the seven seals on the scroll (6:1–8:5), angels sound seven trumpets (8:6–11:19), angels pour out seven vials of blood on the city (16:1–18). Between the trumpets and the bowls is a long visionary sequence that depicts the coming Satanic assault on the saints, which leads to a final harvest (12:1–15:4). These three sets of seven are parallel in a number of ways. Each ends with thunder, voices, lightnings, earthquakes (8:5; 11:19; 16:18), and each includes some reference to the end of a time period (7:14, those who come through tribulation; 10:6, “time is no more”; and 16:17, “it is done”). The seven seals and the seven trumpets end with a vision of heavenly worship (7:9–8:5; 11:15–18), as does the sequence of events between chapters 12 and 15 (15:1–8; cf. Boxall 2006: 79). The episodes of each visionary sequence match, though the trumpets and bowls are a closer match than the seals. The following chart summarizes the contents of these visions, comparing them with the contents of the creation week of Genesis 1 and the tabernacle texts of Exodus:

#	Seals	Trumpets	Bowls	Creation daysGenesis 2 Exodus
1	White horse • conquers • bow & crown	Hail, fire, blood • 1/3 earth burns • 1/3 trees burn • all grass burns	Sores • earth • sore on those with mark	Gen. 1: Light/dark Gen. 2: Adam Exod.: Materials for tabernacle
2	Red horse • takes peace • sword	Mountain into sea • burning mount • sea to blood • 1/3 creatures die • 1/3 ships destroyed	Sea as blood • sea like blood of dead • all creatures died	Gen. 1: Firmament Gen. 2: Garden Exod.: Ransom payment
3	Black horse • scales • prices	Wormwood • great star • falls into rivers • 1/3 waters bitter	Rivers as blood • angel speaks: righteous God • poured blood of saints	Gen. 1: Land/sea Gen. 2: Trees and rivers Exod.: Laver
4	Green horse • death on back • kills a 1/4 of the earth • sword, famine, pestilence	Sun, moon, stars • 1/3 sun, moon, stars • day not shine for 1/3	Sun • scorches with fire • blaspheme • no repentance	Gen. 1: Lights Gen. 2: Adam in garden Exod.: Lampstand
5	Souls under altar • how long? • white robe • wait	Abyss opened • star falls with key • smoke from pit • locorpions	Beast's kingdom dark • on throne of beast • gnaw tongues • blaspheme • no repentance	Gen. 1: Swarmers in sea and land Gen. 2: Do not eat Exod.: Garments
6	Sky falls • earthquake • sun black • moon blood • stars fall • sky splits • kings hide	Angels kill army • release 4 angels • kill 1/3 mankind • horses and army	Kings • poured on Euphrates • waters dried • kings of east • frogs from dragon • come like a thief • Armageddon	Gen. 1: Man and beasts Gen. 2: Eve Exod.: Priests
7	Silence • 1/2 hour • trumpet angels	Praise • kingdom is X's	City split • poured in air • lightning etc. • city split • islands fled • hailstones	Gen. 1: Sabbath Gen. 2: Fall and judgment Exod.: Sabbath

We will examine each of these sequences, and their interconnections, as we move through the text.

The explicit heptamorous structuring connects these series of visions with the creation week. For the most part, they are sequences of *decreation* (cf. Strand 1987). Patterns vary. The seals and trumpets have a similar formal structure, each beginning with four rapid visions, followed by three longer sections (4 + 3; cf. Boxall 2006: 91). In both cases, the fifth and sixth are much longer and more complex than the seventh (6:12–7:17; 9:13–11:14), suggesting a 4 + 2 + 1 rhythm. (For reasons explained in later chapters, I do not believe there are “interludes” between the sequences.) Alternately, the seals and trumpets follow a 6 + 1 pattern, six incidents followed by a transitional seventh vision. Each of these formal organizational patterns reflects a feature of the creation account in Genesis 1:

Pattern	Genesis 1
4 + 3	4 days without “blessing” + 3 with “blessing”
4 + 2 + 1	4 days of inanimate + 2 of living things + Sabbath
6 + 1	6 creation days + Sabbath

The bowl visions are more compact. The fifth and sixth visions are slightly longer than the first four, but the disparity is not nearly as great as in the seal and trumpet sequence. As Farrer (1970) observes, the bowl section gives literary form to the declaration, “Time is no longer” (10:6), or, more colloquially: The jig is up.

The seals section (4:1–8:5) begins and ends with similar phrases and scenes. The throne phenomena of “lightning, sounds, thunder” are listed in 4:5 and again in 8:5, and there is a reference to fire in both 4:5 and 8:5. When John first ascends to heaven, he sees a throne, twenty-four elders, four beasts. *πρεσβύτεροι*, always in the plural, is used seven times in chapters 4–5, never in chapter 6, and twice in the final scene of the sixth seal (7:11, 13). “Living creatures” (*ζῶα*) follows a similar pattern, used seventeen times—the gematria of the Hebrew *kabod*, “glory” (Labuschagne 2000: 89–90)—in chapters 4–5 (4:6–9; 5:6, 8, 11, 14; Smalley 2005: 114), a handful of times at the beginning of chapter 6 (6:1, 3, 5–7), and then reappears after 7:11. *Θρόνος* is used repeatedly in chapters 4–8, and the uses are also clustered at the beginning and end, fifteen times in chapter 4, four in chapter 5, only once in chapter 6. The throne reappears dramatically at the end of the section, with a Sabbatical seven uses in 7:9–17. Elders and living creatures praise the Lord God, the Almighty, and prostrate before the throne. Another worship service is unveiled at the end, with songs of praise (δόξα: 4:9, 11; 5:12–13; 7:12; *τιμὴ* in the same verses; *εὐχαριστία* in 4:9; 7:12) and prostrations before the throne (7:11). Thus the whole section is enclosed by visions of the heavenly liturgy:

A. heavenly liturgy, 4–5 (angels only)

B. Seven seals

A' heavenly liturgy, 7:9–8:5 (including the saints)

Despite the similarities of the beginning and end, the two sections are not identical nor do they depict the same events. Lightnings and thunders and voices move down from the heavenly throne (4:5) to shake the earth (8:5). Through the upheavals of the seals, saints glimpse their eventual elevation to heaven when they will wear white robes (7:9, 13), like the white robes of the elders (4:4) “around the throne” (κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου, 4:4; 7:11). At this point, the saints are *standing* (7:11), not seated, but their anticipated elevation as standing priests is a pledge they *will* be enthroned (→20:4). The movement of Revelation is from heaven to earth, and from priest to king, through the path of tribulation. That overall progress is signaled in a small scale by the seal section. Revelation is fractal, each smaller section displaying the same shape as each other and as the book.

Chapters 4–5 glance backward to the messages to the angels and forward to the vision of new Jerusalem. Heavenly beings model the gifts promised to victors—white garments (4:4; 3:4–5), crowns (4:4; 2:10), enthronement (4:4; 3:21). Jesus offers victorious Laodiceans gold, garments, and eye salve (3:18), which will make them like living creatures full of eyes (4:6) and robed elders wearing gold crowns (4:4). By the end of Revelation, heaven comes to earth. Only in chapters 4, 17, and 21 do we read of precious stones. More specifically, the jasper Enthronement (4:3) is replicated in the jasper of the bridal city (21:12, 18). The heavenly Lamb is the lamp in the city (21:23), and the throne we first see in the heavenly Most Holy Place is last seen in the cubic city (22:3). The arc of Revelation runs from the promises of the messages through heaven to the new city; victors are caught up to enjoy the gifts of heaven and then, after the Lord has removed the counterfeit throne-city of Babylon, the new throne-city descends, teeming with victors who have become kings.

The two opening chapters of this section have a structural integrity of their own. Below, I analyze the structure of chapters 4 and 5 individually, but we can note the structural girders and thematic adornments that bind them together. One is praise, which functions thematically and structurally. Chapter 4 begins in an ongoing liturgy, the living creatures singing the Sanctus and presiding over the twenty-four Ancient Ones who will sing the worthiness of God the Creator (4:8, 10). Aune (1997: 302) denies that Judaism has a concept of “continuous liturgy,” but that misunderstands temple worship. Sacrifice is *tamid*, “continual,” not because priests offer sacrifices every minute and hour of the day, but because they offer ascension offerings morning and evening, so that they burn through the day and night. When the Lamb appears, living creatures

and Ancient Ones combine to sing his worth (5:9), joined by myriads of angels (5:12), and finally by the whole creation (v. 13). The two chapters depict a progressively unfolding liturgy. That there are five hymns is significant, for five is the number of power, the number of fingers on the hand and the number of troops in a rank, and so is fitting for a scene in which the Enthroned One honors the Lamb's conquest by giving him the sealed scroll.

Repeated words form another structural pattern within these two chapters. *Θρόνος* is used nineteen times over the two chapters, seventeen in the singular (the *gematria* of *kabod*, "glory"; Labuschagne 2000), describing the throne of the Father, twice of the thrones of the Ancient Ones. *καθήμενος* appears eight times (4:2, 3, 4, 9, 10; 5:1, 7, 13), seven times of the Lord's enthronement and once of the seating of the elders. (In Revelation as a whole, "the Enthronement" appears twelve times (Aune 1997: 284).) The Father's sevenfold enthronement beams out in an eighth, the enthronement of Ancient Ones around his throne. *Πρεσβύτεροι* is used seven times, always in the plural, mostly in chapter 5 after the Lamb makes his surprise entry (4:4, 10; 5:5, 6, 8, 13). *ζῶα*, also in the plural, appears nine times. Both elders and living things are linked with the number four, which is used nine times (twenty-four elders, four creatures). *Οὐρανός* frames (4:1-2; 5:13) and bisects (5:3) the chapters, a fourfold gesture toward the four winds of the sky. Six times in chapter 4 John says something is "like" (*ὅράσει*) something else (4:3 [2x], 6, 7 [3]).

The moments of praise help to order the two chapters in a chiastic pattern:

- A. Throne room in heaven, 4:1-3
 - B. Ancient Ones and living creatures worship, 4:4-8
 - C. When the living creatures give thanks, elders will fall, 4:9-11
 - D. Book on right of the throne, 5:1-4
 - E. Appearance of the Lamb, 5:5-7
 - D'. Lamb takes book, 5:8a
 - C'. Living creatures and elders fall and worship, 5:8b-10
 - B'. Myriads of angels worship, 5:11-12
 - A'. All creation praises Lamb and one on the throne, 5:13-14

Read superficially, C seems to describe the present actions of the living creatures and elders, but the verbs are future. The elders do not fall and cast their crowns until C'; after the Lamb appears. *Βιβλίον* is used seven times (5:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9), climactically when the Lamb takes the book (D', the sixth use, matching the sixth day, Adam's creation). At the center, the hinge around which the scene in heaven turns, is the Lamb's arrival. The Lamb ascends into the heavenly liturgy to gather it and bring it to earth as the bridal city, in which the Lamb serves as lamp, temple, and sun (→21:22-27). Even for the Lamb, heaven is not an end but part of a path to a new, heavenized earth.

More prosaically: John first describes the heavenly scene (4:1-7), then the heavenly worship (4:8-11), then a heavenly drama of the book and the Lamb (5:1-7) before returning to the heavenly liturgy (5:8-14).

Charles Talbot has suggested that the two chapters run parallel (cited in Reddish 2001: 92):

Revelation 4	Revelation 5
God's glory, 4:2b-8a	The Lamb's glory, 5:5-7
Worship, 8b-11	Worship of the lamb, 8–12
First hymn, 8b	First hymn, 9–10
Narrative, 9–10	Narrative, 11–12a
Second hymn, 11	Second hymn, 12b

This scheme has something to recommend it, especially because it brings out the parallel between the worship of the Enthroned One and the worship of the Lamb. But there are significant flaws—4:9-10 is “narrative” only in the most attenuated sense, and overall the scheme works only because Talbot leaves off the final hymn in 5:13-14.

Heaven's temple, heaven's court

After these things I saw, and behold a door opened in the sky-heaven,¹ and the first voice which I heard as a trumpet spoke with me, saying: “Ascend here, and I will show you things that must happen after these things.”² Immediately I was in Spirit, and behold, a throne set in the sky-heaven, and on the throne an Enthronement,³ and the Enthronement was similar in appearance to jasper stone and sardius, and a rainbow was

¹ Οὐρανός can refer to the visible sky or to the dwelling place of God. Here, it refers to the firmament, but since John enters the heavenly presence of God by ascending through it, I have used the cumbersome double translation: “sky-heaven.”

² The punctuation of 4:1 is ambiguous. Does it mean “things that shall take place after these things” (μετὰ ταῦτα)? Or does the “after these things” begin the following statement—“after these things I was immediately in the Spirit?” The parallel with 1:19 suggests that it modifies “things that shall take place.” 1:19 has ἃ μέλλει γίνεσθαι μετὰ ταῦτα; 4:1 differs only by the substitution of δεῖ for μέλλει. John has seen and written the things that are, and now is getting ready to see and write things that will and must take place after the things that now are. The passage in 4:1 also evokes 1:1, which uses the phrase ἃ δεῖ γένεσθαι but with the addition ἐν τάχει instead of μετὰ ταῦτα. Both “shortly” and “after these things” qualify “things that must happen.”

³ The Greek is not ὁ καθήμενος, as one might expect, but καθήμενος. The anarthrous form suggests something like “pure enthronement,” but the word itself does not contain the idea of “throne.” To preserve its more general sense, and to link this figure with seated ones elsewhere in Revelation, I considered translating the word as “Seating” but in the end that seemed to diminish the majesty of the scene. I opted instead for “the Enthronement.” “The Session” would also capture the sense.

around the throne similar in appearance to turquoise. And around the throne were thrones twenty-four, and on the thrones twenty-four Ancient Ones⁴ sitting clothed in garments sparkling-white and on their heads were crowns of gold. And out of the throne came flashing and voices and thunders. And seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God, and before the throne was something like a sea, glass like crystal. And in the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living things, full of eyes in front and behind. And the first living thing was like a lion, and the second living thing like an ox, and the third living thing had the face like a man, and the fourth living thing like an eagle flying.

—Rev. 4:1-7

The opening verse is a chiasm:

- A. After these things I looked
 - B. an open door in the sky-heaven
 - C. And the voice like a trumpet
 - B': Come up here
- A' I will show you what must happen

Like the hovering Spirit of Gen. 1:2, who shapes the *tohu-v-bohu* into a cosmos over seven days, the Spirit that carries John unveils a scene with seven main features. The description of the heavenly scene (vv. 2–3) begins from the throne and moves out, repeatedly using some form of *κυκλο-*. Then it repeats. First John sees the throne itself, then the Enthronement, and then he describes the One sitting. Verse 4 moves out from the rainbow to the surrounding thrones, and the pattern of verses 2–3 recurs: First thrones and ones sitting on the thrones, then a description of the ones sitting on the thrones. John moves back to the throne to describe the lightning and thunder, then out to the torches and sea that are “before” the throne. Again at the end, he moves back to the center, to the “midst” of the throne, occupied by the four living things. The pattern is:

- A. Throne, Enthronement, appearance, v. 3a
 - B. Around the throne: turquoise rainbow, v. 3b
 - C. Around the throne: Thrones and ancient ones enthroned, v. 4
- A¹. From throne: Lightning, voices, thunder, v. 5a

⁴ To translate *πρεσβυτέρους* as “elders” captures one dimension of the scene. They are like elders of ancient Israel assembled at the gates of a town. Yet, these are, I argue, *angelic* elders, and so the grander translation “Ancient Ones” seemed appropriate. I toyed with calling them “Ents,” but determined it would be too free a translation.

B². Before throne: Seven torches, v. 5b

C². Before throne: sea, v. 6a

A². In the midst and around throne: Four living things, vv. 6b–7

The list can be read in a 3 + 3 + 1 pattern, with items 1–3 matching items 4–6. The first and fourth focus on the throne itself—its occupant (A) and the phenomena that accompany it (A¹). The turquoise (or emerald) rainbow surrounds the throne, and the crystalline sea stretches out before it, both gem-like. The Ancient Ones and living creatures are both enumerated, and, other than the enthroned one, are the only living beings in the scene. A² combines the whole apparatus: Ancient Ones and four living creatures worship before the throne of the Enthronement.

A¹ could be divided into two sections, grouping the lightning, voices, and thunder together, with the seven lamps forming a separate item. The Greek links the four phenomena more intimately. Woodenly translated and maintaining Greek word order, 4:5 says:

A. And out of the throne

B. coming

C. lightning

C¹. and voices

C². and thunder

C³. and seven lamps of fire

B¹. burning

A¹. before the throne.

Grammatically, the seven lamps are merely the fourth item on the list. A four-fold list of throne phenomena makes numerological sense, matching the four living creatures and suggesting a link with a rectangular or square throne stretching to the four winds of heaven and the four corners of earth. The list contains seven words (lightning, sounds, thunder, seven, lamps, fire, burning), as indeed does the final clause (“which are the seven spirits of God”) that dangles outside the structure.

The seven items in the scene perhaps match the days of creation:

1. God himself enthroned in heaven.
2. A firmament rainbow surrounds the throne.
3. Twenty-four Ancient Ones sit on thrones, corresponding to the emergence of the throne-land from the waters on Day 3.
4. Sun, moon, and stars rule the sky in Genesis 1, matched by seven burning Spirits that correspond to the seven planets.
5. The sea is filled with teeming things on Day 5, and the crystal sea is the fifth item on the list.
6. Three of the living creatures (ox, lion, man) are Day 6 creatures.

7. An eternal round of worship, the sons of God singing together as they did on the first Sabbath when creation was completed.

To enter into heaven is to enter the created order refreshed, the whole creation focused on the reign of the Creator.

Open heaven

From the opening chapter of the Bible, “heaven” has a double reference. Gen. 1:1 describes the formation of a heavenly heaven, the high heaven distinct from earth as God’s created environment, his space. Heaven is God’s space, and because God dwells in heaven, he is both in his own space and infinitely near everything. Heaven is a throne room, the room of a judge, a synagogue, a temple, a command center. Heaven is where things happen first because heaven is where the God who speaks all things into being first speaks.

Of divine space, Barth insists that we must speak of God’s “eminent spatiality,” rather than his spacelessness. Space has its origin in Trinitarian relations, the fact that there is a proximity and remoteness, difference and distance, *within* God. This internal “space” within the Godhead, which is not space, is the origin of created space.

The idea of an “open heaven” is found a number of times in the OT. Yahweh promises he will open his storehouse to give rain as a blessing to Israelites who keep covenant (Deut. 28:12). Heaven is God’s treasure house, and he opens the door to rain gifts down (cf. Ps. 78:23, which speaks of “doors” in heaven; Mal. 3:10). Heaven opens so Ezekiel sees the glory descending and is able to gaze into the glory to see the creatures and the throne in the center (Ezekiel 1). We will see numerous connections between John’s visions and Ezekiel’s. Heaven opens again at the baptism of Jesus (Matt. 3:16; Mk. 1:10; Lk. 3:21), and Jesus promises Nathaniel that he will see the heaven opened like Jacob did (Jn 1:51). Jesus’s baptism foreshadows his baptism of blood, which opens heaven permanently. At *his* death, Stephen sees the heavens open and Jesus standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56); by sharing Christ’s sufferings, the first martyr glimpses Christ’s glory through an open door in the sky (Sweet 1979: 117; →14:1–13). Like Stephen, John the witness sees heaven open from Patmos, where he suffers for the testimony of Jesus and the Word of God. The door is not open *only* to martyrs or those who suffer deprivations. Jesus promises to open a door for the church at Philadelphia that cannot be shut, and he encourages the Laodiceans to open the door to let him in. The door into the heavenly sanctuary is open to all churches, every time they assemble to celebrate the heavenly banquet of the Eucharist (Boxall 2006: 82). As Tyconius noted, Jesus the Door (Jn 10:7, 9) has opened a

heavenly door to all his people (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 57–8; cf. Caesarius 2011: 69; Bede 2011: 129). Yet, as we shall see, the door is open *by* martyrs.

This is the first of several openings in heaven that occur in the book of Revelation.

The verb “open” occurs 27 (3³) times. Things are not sealed up in Revelation; rather, sealed things are opened. Things are not hidden but disclosed and unveiled. “Heaven” is used 54 times (3³ x 2), framed by references to the heavenly Jerusalem (3:12; 21:10).

After the trumpets, the temple opens to reveal the ark of the covenant (11:19), and after the harvest the tabernacle of testimony is opened further to revealing God's presence in cloud and lightning and fire (15:5). Finally, Christ rides out of the open heaven leading an army into battle (19:11).

John hears the same trumpet voice that called him when he was in Spirit on the Lord's Day (1:10), now summoning to the heavenly worship service, as the trumpets of Israel summon the people for worship (Numbers 10). The voice again carries all the OT associations of a trumpet sound—the Lord's trumpet voice at Sinai, the trumpet triumph over Jericho, the feast of trumpets, Gideon's battle and victory, the trumpet as announcement of the great cosmic Jubilee (→1:10). The voice issues an invitation to ascend (ἀνάβα) and John finds himself “immediately” (εὐθέως) in Spirit, and, in Spirit, immediately in the presence of the throne. Jesus calls and John ascends. It is an effectual calling. By the power of the Spirit, the Word of invitation accomplishes what it speaks. He is in heaven to see the things that “must become after these things.” After *what* things? Given the parallels with 1:19, the sense seems to be equivalent to “shortly” (cf. fn. 2 above). From the heavenly sanctuary, he will glimpse the events of the near future.

When John ascends in the Spirit through the door in the sky, he sees a “Seating” (Gr. καθήμενος) on the throne. In 4:2, the Greek is not “*the* One who sits,” but simply the participle, “a Seating” (though cf. 4:3). Enthronement is not accident, but essence. John sees Enthronement itself, enthroned, sheer undiluted sovereignty, the God whose very being is to be King. Everything in the scene is described in relation to the throne: The Enthronement is ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον (v. 3a), the rainbow and elders κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου (vv. 3b–4), lightning and thunder and voices radiate ἐκ τοῦ θρόνου (v. 5a), lamps and sea are ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου (vv. 5b–6a), and the living things are both ἐν μέσῳ and κύκλῳ the throne (v. 6b). John uses the word θρόνος fourteen times in chapter 4, a double seven that marks the throne as the Sabbatical throne of the Creator.

Temple, court, command center

John enters a heavenly sanctuary, fitted out like every sanctuary in Scripture. Nearly every use of “door” in the OT refers to temple gates and doors. The trumpet voice that summons John is like the trumpets that summoned Israel to the tabernacle (Numbers 10). John sees a throne (v. 2), the heavenly counterpart to the ark. Around the throne are twenty-four thrones, where God’s attendants (πρεσβυτεροι) sit, wearing white garments and gold crowns (v. 4). By the end of the chapter, they are preparing to bow and chant praise to God (vv. 10–11). There are seven lamps before the throne (v. 5), reminiscent of the ten lamps of the temple (2 Chr. 4:7). Before the throne is a sea like glass (v. 6), resembling the great bronze sea in the temple court (1 Kgs 7:23–26). The four creatures (ζῳα) are cherubim (vv. 6–7; Ezek. 1:10; 10:1–20). Fittingly, they are ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου as well as κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου, forming the throne and surrounding it, like the cherub-ark surrounded by the cherubim-woven curtains or cherub-carved walls of the inner sanctuary (Exod. 25:18–20; Davis 1992: 131; Exod. 26:1, 31; 1 Kgs 6:29, 32). The number of creatures corresponds to the number of cherubim figures in the *debir* of the temple, two gold cherubim on the ark (Exod. 25:18–20) overshadowed by two self-standing monumental “oil-wood” cherubim (1 Kgs 6:23–28). In chapter 5, the twenty-four elders have bowls full of incense, forming an angelic altar (5:8), and later John sees an angel at an incense altar (8:3; cf. Exod. 30:1–9).

Both the temple and tabernacle are divided into three main zones, each of which has characteristic furnishings. The open-air tabernacle courtyard contains the bronze altar and laver; in the Holy Place, the first indoor room, are the golden lampstand, the table of showbread, and the golden altar of incense; the Most Holy Place houses the ark of the covenant, the throne of Yahweh, which consists of a gold-covered wooden box with a solid gold cover that has two cherubim worked into it. The cherubim stretch their wings over the ark to form the throne. The tent itself has a wood frame spread with elaborate curtains interwoven with cherubim and other designs.

The temple is a permanent structure of stone and wood, much larger than the tabernacle. Like the tabernacle, it is divided into three zones, though the three zones are assigned different names. The temple has courts, but 1 Kings pays attention instead to the *ulam* or porch; the first zone of the temple proper is the *heykal*, or palace, paneled with cedar that is carved with cherubim and plants; the innermost zone is called the *debir*, or “oracle.” The temple is the permanent palace of Yahweh, set next to the palace of the king, Yahweh’s son, who reigns at his right hand.

In addition to these changes of name, the temple has somewhat different furnishings from the tabernacle. In place of the laver (the only water source in the tabernacle), the temple forecourt has a large bronze sea set on the back of twelve bronze oxen, three to each point of the compass, as well as a series of “chariots” with basins of water inside (1 Kgs 7:23–39), arranged in two rows of five and forming a gauntlet of water, a split-sea, leading up to the house. The tabernacle has only one lampstand, but the temple has ten, five on each side in front of the *debir* (1 Kgs 7:49). The ark is in the *debir*, but two “oil wood” cherubim are added, ten cubits tall and each with a wing span of ten cubits (1 Kgs 6:23–28), making a

total of four cherubim in the temple Most Holy Place. David reorganizes the priesthood into twenty-four courses of priests, each of them headed by a chief priest (1 Chr. 24:7–19), and he makes musical instruments and choirs become a prominent part of Israel's worship for the first time (1 Chr. 25:1–31; cf. Leithart 2003a).

On the temple and its symbolism, see Haran (1985); Jordan (1987); Beale (2004); Morales (2012).

Though John is in a heavenly temple, there are several anomalies. Features and furnishings from several different zones of the earthly temple are scrunched together in one place. In Solomon's temple, the throne is in the Most Holy Place or *debir*, behind carved doors, the lamps are in the Holy Place or *heykal*, and the sea is outside in the court. John sees all of these furnishings in one heavenly space. No dividing curtains or internal doors separate the twenty-four "elders" from throne they circumscribe. The only door is the *front* door, and once through the front door John is in a sanctuary that serves as outer court and inner sanctuary all at once. Hebrews 9 says that the divided sanctuary, separated into a "first" and "second" tent, was a sign of Israel's exclusion from the presence of God. So long as a "first tent" stands, the way into God's presence is blocked (Heb. 9:6–10). That "first tent" is a symbol of the "first covenant" (Heb. 9:1–5), which, according to Hebrews, has now been fulfilled in a new, second covenant with an undivided sanctuary. The heavenly sanctuary is always-already undivided, with no firmament barrier separating the people of God from God. The heavenly sanctuary is the *eschatological* sanctuary, the sanctuary of the end of time, where the end of time happens first.

The Ancient Ones *sit* on thrones. Under the old covenant regulations, *nobody* sits in the presence of the Seated One. Hebrews (10:11) famously notes that the priests of old stand because their work is never done; they offer sacrifices over and over again, day after day and year after year. Indeed, this is what Aaronic priests do: They *stand* to serve (Deut. 10:8; 17:12; 18:5). Jesus signals a new order of priesthood when he makes one offering and "sat down at the right hand of God" (Heb. 10:12). We do not yet know who these Ancient Ones are, but the fact that they are sitting enthroned and crowned is a sign of the difference between the heavenly and earthly sanctuaries. The attendants of heaven's sanctuary are in the posture that Jesus achieves in his ascension.

The heavenly sanctuary lacks a crucial piece of furniture. There is a sea, lamps, a throne, a golden altar (8:1–5), but no table and no bread for the table. The sanctuary assembly in heaven is incomplete. The same is true of Jesus, the living temple, as revealed in chapter 1. His sparkling-white head is crowned with the glory of the Most Holy Place, his glowing bronze feet are planted on earth like an altar, and he holds the star-lamps in his right hand, but there is no table of showbread in his left. Revelation shows us the filling of his left hand, as the saints are harvested in the heat of tribulation to form the twelve loaves of a heavenly Israel (→14:14–20). The Apocalypse is an unveiling and a romance. It is also a baking demonstration.

From these anomalies, we might conclude that heaven as a steady-state zone where the future *always* already exists. When Israel is excluded from access to the glory of Yahweh, heavenly elders are already gathered before the throne. While Aaronic priests stand and serve, the household servants of the heavenly temple sit wearing crowns. The elders are a sign of what human beings *will* be. That is true in some respects: Heaven never has a first and second “tent,” its lamps never go out, its elders are always crowned and enthroned. Yet heaven is not an eternal fixity, the eidetic steady-state of which earth’s history is a moving image. Heaven too has a history, and experiences change. Over the course of these chapters, John will witness a revolution in the heavenly liturgy (→5:8–9).

Heaven is *not* where the future has *always* already happened. Heaven is where the future happens *first*. Ancient Ones sit on thrones first, but later the martyrs take their place (→20:4), the beginning of their reign on earth. Michael defeats Satan in heaven (→12:7–12) before the saints defeat him on earth. The bride is prepared in heaven for her husband, then descends from heaven (→21:1–8). Revelation describes how the undivided sanctuary gets planted from heaven to earth (→21:9–22:5). The future is the realization of God’s will and plan and purpose in Jesus Christ. The End is a *Person*, God himself (Koester 2001). That end must be done in heaven, so that it may be done on earth.

David Aune has argued that the heavenly court “bears such a striking resemblance to the ceremonial of the imperial court and cult that the latter can only be a parody of the former” (Aune 1983: 5; Reddish 2001: 96–7; Boxall (2006: 81) notes broader parallels with Ancient Near Eastern court ceremony). Aune (1983: 5) proposes this against the main “major competing view” that “the heavenly liturgy of the Apocalypse is a projection of the liturgy of the Christian church on earth.”

As Aune (1983: 8) points out, portraits of the Roman pantheon resemble the scene in heaven:

In the Roman world, God (Jupiter or Zeus) is conceptualized as surrounded by armies, commanders, prefects, governors and messengers; all agents used by the supreme god to maintain control and communication over the universe in general and the world of man in particular. In Rome, which had a centralized monarchy unknown in the Greek world until the Hellenistic and Roman periods, Jupiter and his Council were conceptualized in terms of the emperor and his court; heaven was even called the “palatial.”

Romans believed that the pattern of heaven is replicated on earth, with the emperor serving as the earthly equivalent of the king of the gods:

The primary role of the Roman emperor, from the time of Julius Caesar on, was that of rendering justice; this corresponds to the ancient conception that Zeus and Jupiter were guarantors of justice and that they provided sanctions supporting the maintenance of the laws and customs of men. The judicial task of the Roman emperor, as of provincial governors, involved responding to a constant flow of letters and petitions from everywhere in the empire to the emperor, wherever he happened to be.

In carrying on this business, the emperor was surrounded by an earthly “pantheon” of “friends (*amici*) and advisors (*consilium*)” whose task it was to aid him in his role of

dispensing justice, accompanied by lictors bearing fasces, and by other *apparitores* (public servants), and sat between the consuls on their bench” (8).

Even the numerology and spatial arrangement of the heavenly court resembles the courts of Hellenistic and Roman rulers. Many ancients believed heaven is organized as a series of concentric circles radiating from the throne of God (various forms of the Greek *kuklo*, “encircle,” are used), and the number of advisors has cosmic significance. After Alexander, “Hellenistic kings incorporated cosmic and astral imagery as visible symbols of their divine rule,” including the Herods (Aune 1983: 11). After the Roman fire, Nero built a new house that reinforced his cosmic stature:

Nero, after the great fire of C.E. 64, embarked on an enormous and extravagant building project in which he constructed for himself the famous Golden House. A central feature of this house, according to Suetonius, was a revolving rotunda: “The main banquet hall was circular and constantly revolved day and night, like the heavens” (*Nero* 31. 2; LCL trans.). Further, Nero was represented by statues, some of which were gold, as Apollo-Helios, and on occasion he even acted the part of this divinity in person. Nero also reportedly wore a Greek cloak adorned with golden stars, perhaps similar to that worn by Demetrius An earlier emperor, Claudius, is reported to have worn a golden robe as well (Tacitus *Annals* 12.51). (11)

When the elders throw their crowns before the Lord, they enact another Hellenistic custom. According to Arrian's life of Alexander: “Embassies (*presbeiai*) also in the meantime came from Greece, and their envoys (*présbeis*), themselves crowned, came forward and crowned Alexander with golden crowns, as if they had come on a sacred embassy to honour some god,” and adds that “the Roman emperor was customarily presented with gold crowns by the senate (and provincial cities) on the occasions of accessions, consulships, victories and anniversaries” (Aune 1983: 12). Senators and servants of the emperor offered their *proskunesis* and hymns of praise to the “saving” emperor, just as the elders prostrate themselves before God's throne (13–17; cf. Reddish 2001: 101; Koester 2015: 365; Boxall 2006: 89). Torches burn before the Lord's throne, and torches are used in imperial processions (Aune 1997: 295).

The hymns of Revelation use titles for God that are also used for emperors. It is doubtful that Domitian used the title *Dominus et Deus* more than other emperors (Thompson 1997); other Roman emperors, including Nero, accepted such divine accolades (Boxall 2006: 89; Mounce 1997: 245; Aune 1997: 310–11). According to Adolf Deissmann,

The cult of Christ goes forth into the world of the Mediterranean and soon displays the endeavour to reserve for Christ the words already in use for worship in that world, words that had just been transferred to the deified emperors or had perhaps even been invented in emperor worship. Thus there arises a polemical parallelism between the cult of the emperor and the cult of Christ, which makes itself felt where ancient words derived by Christianity from the treasury of the Septuagint and the Gospels happen to coincide with solemn concepts of the Imperial cult which sounded the same or similar. (Quoted in Aune 1983: 21)

The notion that the heavenly liturgy is a “projection,” either of Christian liturgy or of imperial court ceremonial appears to rest on the assumption that John *composes* the Apocalypse rather than recording visions he actually sees. If John really is caught up through a door in the sky to see heaven's worship, there is no projection, unless it is the other direction—the heavenly court and liturgy is dimly mimicked by God's images on earth. Of course, John has to *describe* what he saw, and in doing so he uses terms that come from both the biblical temples and from the Roman court. The parallels with Hellenistic and Roman court protocols are theologically significant as well: John sees *the* Imperator on his throne, of which Zeuslike Caesar is a murky shadow.

The heavenly scene is fundamental to the counter-Roman political theology of Revelation, with its alternative empire ruled by the Imperial Lover and his angels. That vision of a counter-political heavenly court continues to offer encouragement in the modern age. Jenkins (2008: 151) writes:

In China, Christians turned to Revelation for hope during times of persecution, above all during the phantasmagoric horrors of the Cultural Revolution. According to K. K. Yeo, “By means of the motifs of visionary transportation to heaven, visions of God’s throne room in heaven, angelic mediators of revelation, symbolic visions of political powers, coming judgment, and new creation, Chinese Christians see the final destiny of this despaired world in the transcendent divine purpose ... It is the hope portrayed in the Book of Revelation that sustains Chinese Christians to endure to the end.”

The fact that there are “elders” around God’s throne indicates that heaven is a council chamber as well as a temple. Like an ancient Israelite king surrounded by advisors, the Lord God of Hosts sits surrounded by King’s friends. Swept up to heaven, John enters a *courtroom* (cf. Bandy 2010: 178–83; Davis 1992). Whoever the elders are, then, they participate not only in worship but in judicial deliberations. They are, after all, *enthroned*, and verse 4 repeats the word “throne” in a way that reinforces the correspondence of the singular throne and the twenty-four thrones: *κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου θρόνοι*. The Enthroned One also radiates out in the enthronement of the twenty-four. The Enthronement is Enthronement in himself, sheer sovereignty, yet he does not hoard authority. He is Enthronement himself, but in his enthronement he makes space for other thrones. God’s sheer sovereignty is a sheer sovereign *generosity*, a sovereignty so infinite that it can be shared without being diminished.

As noted (→1:2), witness, μαρτύρια, is one of the key themes binding Revelation to John’s Gospel. The Gospel of John is a series of episodes in a long trial. Jesus seems to be in the dock, but the Gospel unveils the truth: Israel and the Gentiles are accused and finally condemned as Jesus carries on God’s lawsuit against the nations. Jesus the Bridegroom ends the Gospel of John without a Bride, and the cosmic lawsuit is no more finished than the romance is. Revelation completes the drama.

Revelation is even more obviously a trial than the Gospel. In Revelation, the witnesses are nearly all human beings. Jesus himself is the “faithful witness” (Rev. 1:5), the Amen and true witness (3:14) who sends an angel to bear witness (21:16). Others bear witness *to* Jesus. Antipas of Pergamum is, like Jesus, a witness and a “faithful one” (2:13), two witnesses appear in the great city (11:3), and there are scattered references to multiple witnesses of Jesus (17:6) who hold to the testimony of Jesus (1:2, 9; 12:17; 19:10; 20:4). The incarnation produce the first fully human human being—Jesus. Revelation unveils the formation of a fully human church as it describes the cruciformation of witness: To be a witness is to be a witness to death, a witness in death.

Jesus hands over his Spirit from the cross to accomplish just this: So that his Spirit might hover over the world to form new witnesses conformed to his image, to breathe into the dust of Israel to form a new-Adamic humanity. Witnesses become fully human as they bear witness to God's glory in the face of Christ, manifesting the suffering of Jesus as they share it.

We shall see this develop as we move through the Apocalypse—from the first revelation of the martyrs under the throne, crying for justice (→6:9-11), through their harvest (→14:14-20) and exaltation (→15:2-4), eventually to their enthronement around the Enthronement on the throne, as the beheaded assume the positions originally occupied by the Ancient Ones (→20:4-6), and finally to the great judgment before the dazzling throne of God (→20:11-15). Revelation unveils Jesus Christ as it unveils witnesses and judges who will pass judgment with him in the heavenly court.

Heaven is a temple, a heavenly alternative to the court of Caesar, and a courtroom where witnesses are called and judgments passed. To pose these as *competing* views is to depoliticize Christian worship. Temple and court belong together. Ancient temples are not founded on a modern distinction of religion and politics, and temples have political as well as liturgical functions. The tabernacle and temple of Israel are houses of the High King; the priests attendants at the King's court; the furnishings of the temple the furnishings of a luxurious palace. Like Solomon's own palace, Yahweh's house includes a hall of judgment, the throne room known as the Most Holy Place, where Yahweh renders judgments and issues edicts. Yahweh is the Lord of Armies, and his house is also the command center for his hosts (see Suh 2003).

Christian worship, being worship of a heavenly *king*, is a challenge to imperial propaganda. Heavenly worship is not a retreat from the world, but an entry to the center of the world. Worship of the Enthronement is *the* challenge to the pretenses of Caesar and all his latter-day imitators. "Worship God" is the central *political* commandment in Revelation (cf. Boxall 2006: 83; cf. Wannenwetsch 2009; Hansen 2014).

Jeweled heaven

The Enthronement looks like a jasper (ἵασπις) and sardius (σάρδιον), surrounded by a rainbow like turquoise (v. 3), three stones with an ancient pedigree (Mounce 1997: 120).

John does not directly compare the Enthronement to precious stones, but uses a circumlocution that emphasizes the intervention of sight. He does not say that the Father is ὁμοιος λίθῳ ἱάσπιδι but ὁμοιος ὁράσει λίθῳ ἱάσπιδι. The qualifier ὁράσει is often translated as

“in appearance.” Against Oecumenius (2011: 20), this phrasing is *not* used because God is “similar to nothing in appearance” or because he is not “in any way” like any perceptible body. God created gems and quasars and great fish and mountains to reveal himself; if there *no* likeness, then creation does not speak of God. Indeed, if there is *no* likeness, much of Scripture is rendered nonsensical or false, since Scripture repeatedly asserts likeness. It is also a mistake to conclude that we see “God as he appears” but not “God as he is.” We cannot comprehend God, cannot fully know or understand him; but if there is no analogy between appearance and essence, we cannot know him *at all*.

John uses ὁπάσει for literary reasons. In the LXX it is used to describe visionary experiences (Ps. 88:20 [89:19]; Jer. 14:14; Ezek. 1:1; 8:3; 11:24; 40:2). Specifically, it links John’s vision to the chariot vision of Ezek. 1:26–28. The prophet looks above the firmament that is over the heads of the living creatures, and sees a throne that is *kimar’ah ‘even-saphir* (v. 26) and on the throne sees the “likeness as the appearance of a man” (*demuth kemar’ah ‘adam*, v. 26). The Hebrew *mar’ah* is used nine times in these three verses of Ezekiel, and the related term *damuth* is used another four times.

The Enthronement is the Rock of Israel, not rough desert granite or lime-stone but a sparkling precious stone. God is the archetype of all creation, which consists of myriad copies of him. His glory is a cloud full of fire and lightning, and precious stones that capture lightning, stones that are solid light, manifest his glory. Lithomorphic descriptions of God are true because stones of fire were created theomorphic.

Premodern commentators often spin allegories from the color of the stones. Believing that jasper was green and sardius red, Nicholas of Lyra says that the stones represented comfort and the fire of God’s wrath (Krey 1997: 68). Victorinus (2011: 6) associates jasper with water and carnelian/sardius with fire (cf. Caesarius 2011: 69; Bede 2011: 124). The rainbow is included to remind us that God promised never to repeat the primordial judgment of water; future judgment will be a sardius judgment by fire (cf. Apringius 2011: 40). Apringius sees in the combination a sign of the incarnation, the everlasting green of the jasper combined with the red that represents the undefiled flesh of the incarnate Son (40). Oecumenius links the green jasper with food that comes to us by the benevolence of God, and carnelian red to his fearsomeness. So far, so good, but then he adds that God is unwillingly forced to act contrary to his benevolent nature in punishing sin (Oecumenius 2011: 20–1). On the contrary: God is simple; there can be no “tension” between attributes of God because God *is* his attributes, and there can be no tension in God. Contemporary interpreters are apt to dismiss these “allegorizations” and stress that the vision is intended only to communicate the brilliance of the Enthroned one (e.g., Reddish 2001: 84). That is a cop-out. Brilliance can be suggested through all manner of similes and comparisons, and so the task is to investigate why John used *these* rather than some other available terms.

Twelve precious stones are set in four rows of three in the breastplate of Israel high priest, a stone for each of the tribes of Israel (Exod. 28:17–20; 39:10–13). Human beings are made of earth; glorified human beings are precious gems. According to Jordan (1999a: 58), the stones of the breastplate are listed in birth order, “according to their names” (Exod. 28:21). The first stone is a sardius, a red stone, and the last is jasper. Thus, the jasper and sardius Enthronement is first and last, beginning and end, Alpha and

Omega not only if the Alphabet but of Israel. Can we identify sons and stones?

The last-born is easy: The Enthronement sparkles like Benjamite jasper. The firstborn is harder to determine (cf. 1 Chr. 5:1–2). By birth, Reuben is first, but he loses his preeminence because he sleeps with his father's concubine Bilhah (Gen. 35:22). Simeon and Levi, the next two sons of Leah, lose their positions after they slaughter the recently circumcised residents of Shechem (Genesis 34). Judah is the fourth son, who attains the status of firstborn by virtue of willingness to offer himself for his brother Benjamin. Judah is the preeminent tribe, arguably linked with the first stone on the breastplate, the sardius. Sardius and jasper are Judah and Benjamin, the royal tribes.

A Jenson-esque note: Even in his full panoply of heavenly glory, the Enthronement is described in terms of Israel. He is the original of which the precious stones of Israel are copies (see parallels in Exod. 25:40 and Heb. 8:5; 9:23–24), but the original is described in terms of the copies.

In the full biblical story, Benjamin is himself a last and a first. Benjamite Saul is the first king of Israel, but he falls; when we meet another Saul, he is persecuting the church of the new David, but he is turned into Paul. There is a broad “chiasm of Sauls” stretching from the beginning of the kingdom to the apostolic announcement of that kingdom to the Gentiles: Benjamin encompasses the first king and the “last apostle,” one untimely born.

When we use the Hebrew list (Exod. 28:17–20), Jordan's analysis is plausible. The first stone is *ʾodem*, related to *ʾedom*, “red,” and the final stone is *yashpah*, reasonably identified with the Greek ἰασπις. The LXX is less friendly to Jordan's interpretation. The first stone is indeed σάρδιος but ἰασπις is the last stone of the second row:

σάρδιος, τοπάζιον, σμάραγδος,
 ἄνθραξ, σάρφειρος, ἰασπις
 λιγύριον, ἀχάτης, ἀμέθυστος
 χρυσόλιθος, βηρύλλιον, ὀνύχιον

Stimulating as Jordan's thesis is, it needs to be held with a certain amount of caution. Identifying the stones in the breastplate is notoriously difficult (cf. Harrell 2011), especially so when we are working in both Hebrew and Greek. One illustration: It is not even certain whether or not some precious stones (e.g., emeralds) would have been in circulation in ancient Israel. Harrell suggests that the stones in new Jerusalem's foundation are more likely semiprecious than precious, so the rainbow may be turquoise rather than emerald (see further →21:18–20).

The rainbow alludes to Noah. As the world is created again, another sign appears in the heavens alongside the created signs of sun, moon, and stars—the rainbow in the cloud (Gen. 9:13–16; Koester (2015: 360) doubts a link with Noah, but misses the Noachic backdrop to the entire book). Unlike Greek, Hebrew has no separate word for “rainbow.” The word is simply “bow” (*qeshit*), which usually refers to a weapon (e.g., Ps. 7:12). When Yahweh puts his bow in the sky, he is hanging up his weapon of war, pledging peace.

According to Genesis 9, the bow in the sky is a reminder to *Yahweh*, not to human beings. Every time the cloud appears, the rainbow is there, reminding *Yahweh* to keep his covenant promise that he will not again destroy the world. Scientifically, the bow forms as sunlight refracts through raindrops that make up clouds. Since God radiates light and travels in a cloud, he is surrounded by a rainbow wherever he goes. As the radiant face of the Father is refracted through the cloud of his Spirit, he cannot but produce a rainbow, memorial of his promise. He cannot gaze at the world at all without gazing through the screen of the bow (→10:1; →6:1–2).

Primasius connects the theological point with the natural phenomenon of the rainbow: “Since the rainbow was given as a sign of safety after the flood, it is now suitably used as a sign of the church’s reconciliation to God. For when the storm clouds are irradiated by the splendor of the sun, they produce the form of a rainbow. In comparison to this, when the souls of the saints are illumined by the Sun of Righteousness, which is Christ, his deity deigns to be reconciled by their intercession” (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 60).

John’s description of the heavenly temple supports this, since it links the Ancient Ones “around the throne” with the rainbow *κυκλόθεν τοῦ θρόνου* (vv. 3–4). Eventually, martyrs will occupy those thrones to become the human rainbow (→20:4–6). When the Sunlight of the Son shines through the saints, we become bright with the colors of the rainbow, a sign of God’s peace. We are rainbow people, our reconciliation with one another a sign of the reconciliation of God and man.

Outside Genesis, Ezekiel is the only OT book to refer to the rainbow. Ezekiel describes the “radiance” (*nogah*) that surrounds the throne as “the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day” (1:28). The radiance is a fire that resembles “amber” with the appearance of a bow “round about” (*saviv*) the throne. In Genesis, *Yahweh* promises to remember his promise when he sees the “bow . . . in the cloud” (*wnir’athah haqashath va’anani*). Ezekiel sees the appearance of a bow which is in the cloud on a day of rain (*haqashath ‘asher yihyeh va’anani*).

Jordan (1999a: 58) argues that emerald is the fourth stone on the high priest’s breastplate, the first in the second row (Exod. 28:18), the stone of Levi. When Judah takes first position, the three older brothers move down a notch, in order (Reuben, Simeon, Levi). If that is correct, the emerald rainbow around the throne is a *Levitical* rainbow. Heavenly Levites serve as a rainbow memorials before the throne, reminding God of his commitment. With his breastplate of scarlet, purple, and gold, adorned with precious stones, the high priest is himself a rainbow, shining through the cloud. Aaron stops a plague with his censor (Num. 16:41–50), standing in his rainbow clothing within the cloud of incense. At the altar, his rainbow breastplate sparkles through the smoke of daily sacrifice and incense. He is never to leave the sanctuary because his rainbow presence is a memorial before *Yahweh*. Though the high priest alone is clothed in rainbow gems, the gems bear the names of the tribes of Israel: Israel as a whole is the rainbow before the throne. The church has

now taken that position. When we gather for worship “around the throne,” we are the Levite rainbow, the leaf-colored glasses through which the Lord views humanity and the world. The world is preserved and blessed through the intercession of the priestly people (cf. Bede 2011: 125).

Ancient Ones

Who or what are the Ancient Ones?

Commentators have suggested that they are human beings, or angels, or symbols of cosmic or astronomical entities, or temporal patterns like the twenty-four hours of the day (Koester 2015: 360–1; Reddish 2015: 95–6; Aune 1997: 287–92; Smalley 2005: 117–18). Many have suggested that the twenty-four represents a sum of Israel's patriarchs or tribes and the number of the apostles (Victorinus 2011: 7; Apringius 2011: 40). Caesarius sees them as an image of the church. Twelve of the Ancient Ones are the apostles, and the other twelve represent the people (Caesarius 2011: 69). Oecumenius lists twenty-four specific saints of the old and new covenant eras (Oecumenius 2011: 22); Andrew of Caesarea notes that some list twenty-one from the old and only three from the new, but prefers to split the number evenly, twelve and twelve. Smalley (2005: 116) suggests that John “created” the symbol of twenty-four Ancient Ones; apparently, he did not *see* them.

The most persuasive answer is that they are heavenly equivalents of the twenty-four courses of priests that David establishes as he prepares for the construction of the first temple (so Nicholas of Lyra in Krey 1997: 68; Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 64; Boxall 2006: 85). The whole scene is templar. John is in the throne room, which is to say, the Most Holy Place, and the only personnel we expect to see are priests. Koester (2015: 361) does not think the Ancient Ones do enough priestly things to establish their priestly credentials, but he underestimates the uniqueness of the actions they do perform. They worship, and later harp on harps and offer incense (5:8). *Only* priests are allowed to handle the holy incense and censers, and all singing and music-making in the temple is led by Levites. Their crowns are consistent with this identification. High priests wear gold crowns on their heads, and the twenty-four chief priests are *sharim*, princes (2 Kgs 19:2; Jer. 19:1; Aune 1997: 289).

In verses 2–4, the prepositions form a chiasm: ἐπί, κυκλόθεν, κυκλόθεν, ἐπί. Both ἐπί phrases have θρόνος as object, and both describe “sitting” figures: The first states that a Seated One is on the throne, while the second says that the twenty-four πρεσβύτεροι are seated on their thrones. The patterned phrasing reinforces the connection between the *One* enthroned and the *ones* enthroned, between the eternal Father and the ancient ones seated around him.

My argument that the Ancient Ones are heavenly priests assumes a *strong* correlation between earthly and heavenly sanctuaries. The logic is: If priests do X in the temple, and

heavenly beings also do X, then the heavenly beings are priests. The argument breaks down if the correlation between earth and heaven is looser. To my mind, the Bible assumes a strong correlation. The tabernacle and temple, including the priests' garments and responsibilities, are made according to the *tabnit*, the pattern of the heavenly sanctuary. To readers who regard this as childish literalistic, I say: Become as a little child.

Unlike the Aaronic priests, the Ancient Ones are not clothed in jewels, but that confirms rather than refutes their priestly status: They are in the heavenly Most Holy Place, and, like Aaron on the Day of Atonement, they wear white garments (Aune 1997: 193; on further allusions to Yom Kippur, →16:1), robes like the ones Jesus promised to the church at Sardis (3:5), garments of light and gaiety (Andrew 2011: 128). In the presence of the divine gem, priests are un-gemmed. Glorious as they may be in the outer sanctuary and the court, in the inner sanctuary their glory is restrained. If anyone looks like a priest, it is the Enthroned One himself, with an emerald rainbow around his head (cf. 10:1), a στεφάνος like the golden crowns of the high priest. The heavenly city sparkles like a jasper (→21:11, 18) and is studded with jewels (→21:19–20). She is not *before* the throne; rather the throne is *within* her jasper walls (21:22; 22:3). Like the Ancient Ones, she is clothed in white. *Unlike* the Ancient Ones, she is jeweled before the divine Jewel, bright with the same glory that shines from the Enthronement. The Bride radiates a glory that the Ancient Ones never attained.

We have correlated the twenty-four Ancient Ones with the chief priests of the Solomonic temple, but we have not yet *identified* them. Are they human priests or angelic? I think the latter for several reasons (cf. Boxall 2006: 85; Reddish 2001: 96; *pace* Koester 2015: 362). First, the Lamb is not yet in heaven when the scene opens (→5:23; the Lamb is *nowhere* to be found). Jesus is the Forerunner and pioneer (Heb. 6:20), the first human to enter the heavenly sanctuary. If the Lamb is not before the throne, no other human beings are before the throne either. If the Ancient Ones are in the heavenly sanctuary before the Lamb arrives, they cannot be human.

In 4:10, the Ancient Ones are said to cast their crowns before the throne when the living creatures fall down to worship. Most translations make it sound as if John sees that happen before the Lamb comes; some translations take it as a repeated action (ὅταν translated as “whenever”). That is incorrect. 4:9–10 is a prediction. ὅταν can mean simply “when,” as it does elsewhere in Revelation (8:1; 10:7; 11:7; 12:4; cf. Aune 1997: 307), and all the verbs describing the actions of the πρεσβύτεροι are futures (πесσοῦνται ... προσκυνήσουσιν ... βαλοῦσιν). Verses 9–10 thus mean: “When the living things give glory and honor and thanks ... the twenty-four elders *will* fall down ... and *will* worship ... and *will* cast their crowns.” It is an event, not a continuous ceremony, and it *will* happen when the living creatures

give thanks and glory. John does witness that event, later, when the Lamb appears. Then, the living creatures prostrate themselves for the first time (5:8), and *at that point* the elders cast their crowns before the throne—once for all. Revelation 5 describes the day when the Ancient Ones resign. They are never intended to occupy the thrones permanently, and the remainder of the book demonstrates that only a *jeweled* company of human witnesses can occupy eternal thrones. For a little while, the Bride was lower than the white-robed Ones, but she has been adorned with glory and honor, a new humanity in union with the Son of Man. Given that plot-movement, the Ancient Ones are temporary councilors to the Enthronement, angels rather than humans.

Jordan (1999a: 63) suggests that the twenty-four elders are archangels who perform various actions throughout Revelation:

1. The two strong angels of
 - a. 5:2, a priestly guardian.
 - b. 18:21 a kingly administrator.
2. The four corner angels of 7:1&2 and 9:14&15 (kingly administrators).
3. The seven trumpet angels.
4. The seven bowl angels, including:
 - a. The prophetic angel.
 - b. The water angel of 16:5.
 - c. The solar angel of 19:17.
5. The two herald angels of 14:8&9.
6. The calling angel of 14:15.
7. The reaping angel of 14:17&19.

The twenty-four are distributed in two groups of twelve (chiastically arranged), each heading up the work of one half of the apocalyptic liturgy:

- 12 angels of the Book, the Word:
 - 1 Strong angel, guards Book, 5:2
 - 4 Corner angels, lead to Trumpets, 7:1-2, 9:14-15
 - 7 Trumpet angels
- 12 angels of action, the Sacrament:
 - 4 Harvest angels, lead to Bowls, 14:8-9, 15, 17
 - 7 Bowl angels
 - 1 Strong angel, destroys Babylon, 18:21

In Jordan's view, the twenty-four angels do their work to finish off the old creation, and then turn the new world over to the martyrs. For a little while angels rule, but now humanity reigns, crowned, like Christ, with the glory of martyrdom.

It is an interesting suggestion, but I will have reason to question it at various points, especially when it comes to identifying the "another angels" of chapter 14.

If these are angels, why are they called "elders"? The word means "old one," a connotation I have captured by translating the term with the dignified and capitalized title, "Ancient Ones." They are enthroned with the Father, *the* Ancient One, from creation. But they have "grown old," and

are about to be replaced with a new generation, a *human* generation of priests, advisors, witnesses, and judges. The transition in heaven replicates the story of Israel in the wilderness: During the forty years of wandering, the ancient ones die off and are replaced by their children. So too, during the forty years between Jesus's death and the fall of Jerusalem, the first generation dies off to make way for a new and, more mystically, the ancient heavenly rulers leave their thrones to make room for a new generation (→20:4–6). Revelation is the story of the youthening of heaven. Heaven is where the future happens first, where the “second generation”—that is, human beings—first take dominion, so that they can latterly take dominion also on earth.

Anselm goes to great lengths in *Cur Deus Homo* to explain how the elect fill the slots left by the fallen angels in the heavenly assembly. My argument is different: As a newborn, Adam is under angels; during her minority, Israel too is under guardians and managers. In Christ, humanity has grown up, ready to *judge* angels.

As noted above, heaven is a courtroom as well as a temple, a courtroom *because* a temple. John enters a Daniel 7 scene and sees court poised for a trial. But the trial is aborted. No case is presented, no witnesses called, no judgment passed. The officers abandon the process mid-stream, piling their crowns before the throne, resigning from the bench. No one can open the book (5:4), and if the court is going to make a decision, it needs the evidence that the book provides (cf. Dan. 7:9). If the book were the only obstacle, the trial could proceed as soon as the Lamb appears and begins to open the seals. As the True Witness (Rev. 1:5), Jesus is qualified to present the evidence, and seems ready enough to declare a verdict and pass the sentence. When the firmament is rolled back, men scurry under rocks to escape exposure before the Lamb and the One on the throne (Rev. 6:12–17). Installing the Lamb on the throne of heaven, however, is *not* enough to finish off the trial. The Lamb serves as Witness and Judge *only* when he has been joined by others. The Lamb is in the midst of the throne, but he has promised to leave room for victors to share the throne with him (Rev. 3:21). Eventually, John sees thrones set up again (20:4) and *then* books are opened so that the dragon, and eventually all the living and the dead, can be judged (20:12). The Lamb is a qualified Witness and Judge because he was slain to purchase a *kingdom* and priests (5:9), and the assembly of those priests and kings is part of the Lamb's case, an essential array of evidence. Without that assembly, the Lamb is not fully qualified to be Judge, because he has not fully completed his work. He is Judge insofar as he gathers witnesses and puts together a judicial *panel*. Jesus is unveiled as Judge as he assembles judges.

Seven lamps and a crystal sea

The throne flashes with lightning, accompanied by “voices” and thunders, a Sinai theophany (Boxall 2006: 86). That triad, sometimes modified by the addition of an earthquake, is found three more times in Revelation (8:5; 11:19; 16:18), marking the end of each heptamorous series—seals (8:5), trumpets (11:19), and bowls (16:18). Before the throne is a sevenfold lampstand, seven torches that are the seven Spirits of God. “Seven” symbolizes fullness, but more concretely is the number of the days of creation. To say that the Spirit is sevenfold is to say that the Spirit creates in a sevenfold rhythm and gives a sevenfold gift (→1:4; Nicholas of Lyra in Krey 1997: 69). The Spirit is the music of God, and his melody is heptamorous, running up and down the septave of the Spirit. The Spirits of God are light and a source of light. When the Spirit falls at Pentecost, he turns the apostles into lamps who burn with his heavenly light (heaven is where light happens first). The seven Spirit-lamps are associated with the seven planets recognized in antiquity, five planets along with the sun and moon. The Spirit is the animating power of the lights of heaven, the original sky-light of which the heavenly luminaries are created copies.

The crystal sea corresponds to the waters above the firmament (Boxall 2006: 86), gathered on the second day of the creation and separated from the waters below by a firmament.

Ezek. 1:22 describes the firmament (*raqia*) over the heads of the living creatures as crystal. This links crystal directly with the firmament, and confirms our initial conclusion that the sea before the throne of God is the firmament, the dome of the blue sky, seen from above. The Hebrew phrase is *qarach-hanara*, which might be translated as “ice of fear.”

The firmament is both a barrier between heaven and earth and an antechamber of heaven (cf. Andrew 2011: 129). Moses, Aaron, and the elders and priests of Israel ascend Sinai but eat and drink *below* the pavement of sapphire (Exod. 24:9–11). In the Spirit of new covenant, John sees the pavement from above. The heavenly sea is also a recognizable piece of temple furniture, corresponding to the bronze sea in Solomon's temple. Smalley (2005: 119) thinks that the firmament is “more probable” than an allusion to Solomon's temple, but that comment misses the cosmic dimension of the temple. The temple court has a giant sea because it is an architectural replication of the cosmos. A priest would pass by the sea to enter the temple, as John passes through the firmament sea to enter the heavenly sanctuary. Through their baptism in blood, victors over the beast pass through the heavenly sea (→15:2; an exodus, hence the “song of Moses,” 15:3) to stand singing in the presence of God, along with the elders and living creatures (15:7).

There is something of a puzzle in the fact that the sea is described ὡς θάλασσα ὑαλινὴ ὁμοία κρυστάλλῳ (4:6). From John's perch in heaven, the sea is glass, solidified and congealed, not turbulent like the waters below. Boxall (2006: 86–7) misses that distinction when he claims that the sea of heaven is a sign that evil infects every sector of creation (Caird 1966: 65 and Reddish 2001: 98 agree). *Crystal* water is not chaotic. One day there will be no sea at all (→21:1–8), no turbulent churn of war and violence, but only a crystalline city whose residents come from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. Heaven is where things happen first, where the roiling sea is first pacified. In the crystal city, water flows in a crystal river (→22:1–5; cf. Ezekiel 47), as the heavenly sea is drained into a bridal city. By the end of Revelation, no one needs to ascend through the firmament sea to receive heavenly water. All the life-giving power of heavenly water now flows through the city that descends to earth.

The LXX use of κρυστάλλος hints at other associations. In a number of places, the word refers to ice (Job 6:16; 38:29; Ps. 147:17; 148:8). In Job 38:29–30, the Lord claims to be the one who gives birth to ice (“from whose womb has come the ice?”), and the frost that descends from heaven comes from God. God makes water “hard like stone” so that the “surface of the deep is imprisoned” (v. 30). As κρυστάλλος, the heavenly sea is ice from God's womb, water turned to stone (the reverse of Israel's wilderness experience, where stone turned to water), the imprisonment of the water.

According to Psalm 147, Yahweh is the one who gives snow, scatters frost, and casts down ice like breadcrumbs (vv. 16–17a). God is a consuming fire, but the Psalmist asks, “Who can stand before his *cold*?” (v. 17b). Yahweh's power over solid water is linked to the power of his Word—the command sent to the earth, the Word that runs swiftly, the word that melts the frost and the breath/wind that makes waters flow (vv. 15, 18). This section of the Psalm is a modified chiasm:

- A. Yahweh blesses Zion, vv. 12–13
- B. Wheat, v. 14
- C. His Word/command goes out, v. 15
- D. Snow, frost, ice, vv. 16–17
- B': Sends forth word and breath to melt ice, v. 18
- C': Words, statutes, ordinances, v. 19
- A': Blessings to Israel, v. 20

The sequence from verses 18–19 suggests that the Lord's statutes to Israel, accompanied by his Spirit, liberate Israel from her frozen condition. There is also a creation theme: The word and breath of God loosen the original formless-and-empty sea so that it becomes flowing water and fertile earth.

κρυστάλλος also translates *bdellium* (Gen. 2:1; Num. 11:7). When the Israelites first find manna, they discover “frost” on the ground (Exod. 16:14; cf. Job 38:29; Ps. 147:16); the frost melts into “manna” seeds that can be turned to bread. Usually the process is slower and less direct: Snow and frost fall, melt, and irrigate fields, which produce grain that can be transformed to bread. Manna short-circuits the process; it is bread from heaven, crystalline grain falling directly from the crystal sea. In Isa. 54:12, the walls and gates of the restored Jerusalem are compared to crystal and precious stones. The Hebrew phrase translated by κρυστάλλος is *even-ʾaqdash*, “stone of fire,” which resembles the heavenly sea (cf. Rev. 15:2): Solid, icy, rock-hard, yet sparkling with reflected light as if fire were trapped within.

As in Revelation 22, the city Isaiah shares this crystalline quality. Elsewhere, *qarach*, “ice,” is associated with night (Gen. 31:40) as heat is associated with day. Yahweh breathes fire, but he also can freeze with his breath (Jer. 36:30).

This association of ice and firmament will return when we examine Revelation's plagues of hail (→8:7; →11:19; 16:21).

Premodern interpreters often see a baptismal font when they look at the sea.

Primasius asks “where is the Holy Spirit more properly said to be present than at the time of baptism, when we believe that each one of the faithful have properly received him.” He emphasizes the fact that baptism is said to be in the presence of the throne (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 62). Victorinus agrees that the sea of glass “is the gift of baptism, which he poured out through his Son during the time of repentance, before he should begin the judgment” (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 62). Nicholas of Lyra likewise links the sea with baptism (Krey 1997: 69), as do Apringius (2011: 41), Caesarius (2011: 69), and Bede (2011: 125).

That may seem a hyper-sacramentalist stretch, but it neatly fits the scene. Israelites entered the sanctuary through water—through the various baptisms of the purity regulations (cf. Leviticus 12–15; Numbers 19). Passing through the firmament sea, John has been baptized into the heavenly temple. Baptism is the watery admission into the church, the people who tabernacle in heaven; it is the inauguration of the baptized into the royal priesthood, and an entry into the undivided heavenly sanctuary of the new covenant with its heavenly liturgy. Baptism is a new exodus passage, now through a heavenly ocean rather than through the ground waters of the Red Sea. Later in Revelation, saints stand on top of the firmament sea (→15:1–4), singing songs of exodus, songs of baptism through the Lamb, celebrating their baptism of blood.

Four living things

John's vision of heaven closely follows that of Ezekiel. Ezekiel is exiled to Babylon in the first deportation of Jews. By the River Chebar, a tributary to the Tigris, he sees the Lord coming from the North in a “great cloud with fire flashing forth continually” with “something like glowing metal” in the midst (1:4). As Yahweh approaches, Ezekiel sees a cloud of winged beings. Above the living beings is a firmament like crystal, and above that is a throne, and on the throne is one like a man, like glowing metal and fire (1:22–28). Instead of staying put in the temple while the people of Judah go off into exile, Yahweh suffers exile with his people. He shares the curse—the curse he imposes!

The living beings are human in their general upright form. Each has four faces and four wings (vv. 5–6), feet like calf's hooves (v. 7), and full of eyes (v. 18). When they move, they remain in formation, moving at right angles (v. 9), so each face is pointed in the same direction all the time. They are called cherubim in Ezek. 10:1–20. This is the Lord's traveling throne, his cherub chariot, his mobile sanctuary, known in Jewish mysticism as the *merkabah*. John sees a similar vision, a throne with four living creatures like Ezekiel's. The differences are differences in setting: John sees no wheels (Boxall 2006: 83) because the throne is stationary, "parked" in heaven.

For centuries, commentators have linked the four cherubim with various fourfold structures in the church and world (cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 63–4, 66).

Irenaeus famously defends the fourfold form of the Gospel against Gnostics by claiming that each Gospel corresponds to a face of the cherubim, and that the fourfold cherubim corresponds in turn to the four winds of heaven and the four cardinal directions (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.11.8; cf. Victorinus 2011: 7; Apringius 2011: 41–2; Bede 2011: 125–6). Caesarius (2011: 69) moralizes: The creatures represent courage (lion), the suffering of Christ (ox), humility (man), and the freedom of the church, which "is flying and free and also raised up from the earth, elevated as though obey the wings of the two Testaments or guided by the rudders of the two commandments." Nicholas of Lyra claims that the four living creatures represent the four principal patriarchates of the early church, Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Constantinople (Krey 1997: 70). As wild animal, tame animal, bird, and man, the creatures are said represent the "totality" of creation (Boxall 2006: 87). For a general overview of options, see Koester (2015: 352–3).

Modern commentators commonly dismiss these quadrilateral correspondences as "groundless" (Mounce 1997: 125; Smalley 2005: 121) or worse (but cf. Boxall 2006: 88). That dismissal is an error, since the faces and form of the cherubim play an architectonic role in Scripture.

Adam is created to be the guardian of the garden-sanctuary of Eden, trained under the tutelage of the angelic attendants of heaven. When Adam submits to the beast, cherubim assume the Adamic role, stationed at the gate of the garden to prevent reentry to the tree of life (Gen. 3:24). Cherubim reappear after the exodus, woven into the curtains of the tabernacle and the veil that separated the Holy from the Most Holy Place. Golden cherubim are part of the cover of the ark of the covenant, their wings forming the throne of the Holy One of Israel. In the temple, two monumental self-standing cherubim are added to the *debir*, the Most Holy Place (1 Kings 7). Within the inner sanctuary, then, are four living creatures, two on the ark spreading wings to constitute Yahweh's throne and two overshadowing the throne with the canopy of their wings. Exodus and Kings give us only the smallest glimpses of the appearance of the cherubim, but they are fully unveiled

to Ezekiel as four-winged creatures with faces of ox, lion, eagle, and man. Though crafted cherubim guard the doorways and throne of Israel's sanctuaries, priests and Levites guard the house in fact, reassuming the original Adamic role of guardian. Already in the OT, we see a glimpse of the trajectory of Revelation, as angels give way to human beings.

The four faces sum up the history of God's covenant with Israel. The historical sequence is ox, lion, eagle, man. Israel moves from an ox covenant to a lion covenant to an aquiline covenant to a human covenant. The ox or bull is the largest animal in the sacrificial system, the animal required for a purification offering (*hatt'at*) offered by a priest (Lev. 4:13–21). Lions are royal beasts in the Bible as in many cultures (Gen. 49:9), associated specifically with the Davidic dynasty (→5:5). Eagles soar above the earth, reaching to the edge of the firmament, and from that vantage can see earth to distant horizons. Eagles thus make fitting symbols of prophetic foresight and insight. In Jesus, history moves into its human phase, as the Last Adam overcomes the beasts and incorporates them into the image of God. The sequence of covenants from Moses to David to prophets to Jesus is a sequence from ox to lion to eagle to man. And, yes, Irenaeus is right: the Gospels follow the same sequence, as we follow the Western canonical order. Matthew presents Jesus as a priestly teacher of Torah, an ox; Mark's Jesus is a leonine warrior on the move, the "Son of God" whose greatest victory comes, as the centurion recognizes, at his death; Luke presents Jesus as an eagle-prophet filled with and driven by the Spirit; John tells us that Jesus is the Word made flesh, the human tabernacle.

To summarize:

Ox	Priest	Mosaic	Matthew
Lion	King	Davidic	Mark
Eagle	Prophet	Post-Monarchic	Luke
Man	Messiah	New Covenant	John

All this confirms Andrew of Caesarea's insight that Christ is *the* cherub (Andrew 2011: 130).

The fourfold cherubim represent human vocation and responsibility. Adam is created a lion to rule, an ox to plow and offer himself, an eagle to ascend, and a man to do all these things as image of God. Healthy human societies manifest this differentiation: Some men and women are lion-kings, some ox-priests, some eagle-lions; all are human, created to manifest all of these features in some measure.

Attending to the faces of the cherubim helps us orient ourselves within John's vision (see especially Jordan 1999b; also Douglas 1915: 43–4; Ryan 2012: 60–72). We may begin with Ezekiel. When he first sees the chariot, he is looking from south to north (Ezek. 1:4), and

the first face he sees is the human face (Ezek. 1:10). Thus, the human face faces south. To the right is the face of a lion, facing eastward. To the left (west) is the bull face. The direction of the eagle face is not specified, but there is only one possibility: It faces north (v. 10). Ezek. 10:14 assumes the same orientation, but now Ezekiel is in a different position. Ezekiel sees the face of a “cherub,” the ox or bull, peering west; he moves around counterclockwise to see the face of a man to the south, the face of the lion to the east and the face of the eagle to the north.

Instead of four creatures each of which has the same four faces, John sees four separate creatures, each of which has a single face. (Only one is said to have a *πρόσωπον*, the man (v. 7), a detail that disrupts John’s list; cf. Aune 1997: 299.) John names the faces in the order of lion, calf, man, eagle (4:7). If we assume he names the lion first because he *sees* it first, and if we assume Ezekiel’s directions, then John must be on the east facing west, so that he sees the eastward-facing lion. His vision moves from the eastern lion to the western ox to the southern man to the northern eagle. John’s position in heaven is consistent with the pattern of OT sanctuaries, with their eastward entrances. Christians turn around very early. Instead of facing west, they make the “west wall” the entrance, and face the “east wall” during worship. During worship, they look toward the “rising sun” on the east, but this new position is also a sign that they believe they have entered the sanctuary of God. Instead of peering in from the east door *toward* the Most Holy Place, they are positioned *inside* the Most Holy Place *looking out*. In the liturgy, the church occupies the ark-throne. (Take a half hour break to muse over *that*!) If John enters moving east to west, he is still oriented old-covenantly. That reinforces the arguments made earlier: When John first arrives, heaven is still in old covenant, with angels as heavenly priests and no Lamb in sight.

We can press this a few steps further by correlating the four faces of the cherubim with the main pieces of furniture in the temple and in the heavenly sanctuary. To the far east of the tabernacle and temple are the altar and the laver, both associated with the bull: Bulls and calves are sacrificed on the bronze altar and the sea is held up on the backs of twelve bulls. In Ezekiel (and Revelation), the eastern cherub face is the face of the *lion* not the bull. The bull face is to the west, the location of the ark-throne. This is a puzzle. A royal animal should be on the throne: We do not talk about the “Bull of the Tribe of Judah” but the “Lion of the Tribe of Judah” (Rev. 5:5). Lion and bull seem to be in the wrong places. It is a puzzle, but we *like* puzzles. Let us test our *chochmah*, our ability to untie knots and solve riddles (Prov. 1:1-6).

Perhaps the cherubim are not immobile at one point of the compass; perhaps they are in motion, and the direction they face is the direction they are moving *toward*. In Ezekiel, there is no “perhaps” about it: They *are* in motion. Let us see if that helps. The bull faces west, and that means the bull is *moving* west. That does make liturgical sense: Sacrificial bulls begin at the altar on the east, but then charge through the smoke toward the throne on the west. Sacrifice is a movement of enthronement, an ascent (as the name of the first offering, *’olah*, “ascension,” suggests; Leviticus 1). Consider the Christological import: Jesus’s sacrifice is a “lifting up,” an elevation, and a return to the Father. Death is only an early moment in the sacrificial movement from altar to throne.

King Lion faces east because he moves opposite the bull, from the western throne toward the eastern altar. Bulls move toward the lion-throne; lions move toward the bovine altar. Priests sacrifice to become kings; kings in turn offer themselves as sacrifices. It is the chiasm of life: Priests rise to kingship, and kings rule by offering themselves in priestly sacrifice. Again, the Christological import is richly suggestive.

There are similar anomalies on the north-south axis. The eagle faces north, where the table of showbread is, but the table of showbread is set with twelve loaves of bread that represent the twelve tribes. We would expect the *man* face on the north side. Meanwhile, the man-face faces south, linked with the lampstand. That is a sensible association (human beings as

lights) but the lampstand, with its burning lamps that represent the “seven Spirits of God,” might be better associated with a hovering eagle. The lampstand, elevated to shed its light on the golden table, seems more appropriate to the eagle.

Again, we can resolve the puzzle by putting the eagle and man in motion. The eagle faces north because that is the direction he *goes*, toward the throne of God in the far north (Ps. 48:2; prp. Isa. 14:13), the throne from which God sends Gentiles into the land (Isa. 41:25; Jer. 1:13–15). The light of the eagle lamp shines toward the twelve loaves to illuminate them, to watch over them. Lightened, the man with the bread moves south, bringing life-giving food along the path of light from the throne of God in the far north. Ultimately, *the* Man comes from the throne of God *as* bread from heaven. The man creature begins as bread and ascends to become light; the Eagle-Spirit hovers over the twelve loaves to fill the loaves of Israel with light.

We are moving in concentric circles, like John's own vision. First the throne room with its four cherubim; then, radiating to the tabernacle; finally, the wilderness camp of Israel radiates from the house of God, which radiates from the cherub throne (cf. Douglas (1915: 171), who works out the connections among the city, the tabernacle, and the cherubic chariot). The tabernacle is a “secondary” throne, an architectural elaboration of the cherub throne itself. Extending the fourfold pattern to the camp means recognizing Israel as a human tabernacle, as a cherubic nation. We move from an angelic fourfold to an architectural fourfold and finally to a human fourfold.

The Levites form the first human ring around the tabernacle, cherubic human guardians of the throne. The priests take the lion/throne position on the east, and the three subgroups of the tribe of Levi were on the other three sides of the tabernacle. The twelve tribes form an outer ring, three tribes at each point of the compass. The faces of the cherubim are associated with the lead tribe in each direction. On the east, the lead tribe is Judah, a lion (Gen. 49:9). Deut. 33:17 describes Joseph, the father of Ephraim, as an ox, and Ephraim is the lead western tribe. Dan, the lead tribe of the north, is a serpent (Gen. 49:17), and Reuben, the tribe to the south, is the man, unstable as water (Gen. 49:4). With the exception of Dan, the tribal symbolism perfectly matches the faces of the cherubim.

The wilderness camp mirrors the heavens. Many of the numbers in Numbers are astronomically significant, a sign that Israel has become a nation like the stars of heaven, just as God promised Abraham. There are twelve tribes, numerically matching the twelve constellations of the zodiac. Now associated with astrology and fakery, the zodiac is rooted in the natural motion of constellations, planets, and other bodies in the sky. Stars remain fixed in relation to each other, but the night sky rotates around the fixed north star in a stately nightly procession. Constellations rotate every night, but their position in the sky changes through the year. The stars that first appear in the east just before sunrise and in the western sky just after sunset do not remain the same through the course of the year. The sun rises and sets through different constellations as the year progresses. Through the twelve months, the sun travels through a series of constellations, which ancient astronomers named in order to mark the sun's progress. These are the constellations that make up the zodiac, the twelve constellations that mark the pathway of the sun on its annual transit. If you flatten out the sky, and run an equator down the middle, the sun's annual motion is a wave moving up and down across the equator. As it moves, it follows the band of constellations of the zodiac.

Ancient astronomers traced planetary motion in the same way. Ancients were aware of five planets (Venus, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Saturn), distinguishable from stars because, like the sun and moon, they do not keep fixed positions in relation to other heavenly bodies. Planets move across the sky, reach a limit, seem to pause, and then head back in the opposite direction, loop around, change direction, then continue. To the ancients, they appeared to be dancing, or lost wanderers, which is what the name planet means. Erratic as their motion is, the planets roughly follow the same path as the sun, moving through the constellations

of the zodiac. While the sun’s movement through the stars is steady, stately, and constant, the planets jazz around, Pips to the sun’s Gladys Knight.

From these observations, ancient astronomers concluded fairly early (too early for us to know who first formulates this theory) that the constellations of the zodiac are passing *under* the earth, and that they move in the same path as the sun and moon, but at different velocities. And from this they concluded that the heavens are spherical. The earthly sphere is at the center, enclosed by a larger sphere, with stars and planets on the surface of that larger sphere. Like the terrestrial sphere, the celestial sphere has a north pole, the throne of God (or the gods). The celestial sphere also has an equator, a projection from the earth’s equator outward to the celestial sphere. The celestial sphere is tilted to the east, like the earth, and the celestial equator tilted with it (like the earthly equator). The path of the sun—the ecliptic, the belt of the zodiac constellations—is a line set at a 23-degree angle to the celestial equator. The ecliptic and the equator intersect at the equinoxes.

Four of the zodiac constellations are relevant to our purposes: Leo the lion, Taurus the bull, Aquarius the water-carrier, and Scorpio the scorpion. These four stand at regular intervals in the zodiac. If you start with Aries, the ram, directly north in the celestial sphere, these four constellations are in the second, fifth, eighth, and eleventh positions, forming four coordinates. In astrology, and in ancient astronomy, they are the four fixed celestial signs:

Aries (ram/lamb), Taurus, Gemini (twins), Cancer (crab).

Leo, Virgo (maiden), Libra (scales).

Scorpio (scorpion), Saggitarius (Centaur), Capricorn (Sea-goat).

Aquarius (man carrying water), Pisces (fish).

The four constellations mark the seasons of the year (Farrer 1964: 92). The sun passes along the ecliptic through Taurus in April, marking spring; through Leo in July marking summer; through Scorpio in October, marking autumn; and through Aquarius in December, marking winter. The sequence of the seasons is Bull/ox, lion, scorpion, man. In ancient science, the four were linked to the four elements, earth, air, fire, water. Leo is fire, Taurus earth, Aquarius air, and Scorpio is water.

Except for Scorpio, these correspond precisely to the living creatures that Ezekiel and John see around the throne of God, and to the tribes associated with them. Judah is Leo; Ephraim Taurus; Reuben Aquarius; and Dan Scorpio. When we bring the zodiac into play, Dan makes better sense. Moses describes him as a serpent—not a scorpion, but something closer to Scorpio than an eagle. For the ancient Israelites, the universe and the earth correspond to one another. Israel is the keeper of times and seasons. Israel is the heavenly people on earth, shining like stars, the stars through which the divine Sun passes, the stars of heaven incarnate in the ancient near east.

In sum:

Direction	Cherub face	Tribe	Constellation	Season
East	Lion	Judah	Leo	Summer (winter in S)
West	Bull	Ephraim	Taurus	Spring (fall in S)
North	Eagle	Dan	Scorpio	Autumn (spring in S)
South	Man	Reuben	Aquarius	Winter (summer in S)

Bruce Malina (Malina and Pilch 2000) suggests a different astronomical background to the “elders” surrounding Yahweh’s throne:

As celestial personages, the twenty-four elders about the central throne of God fit the profile of those truly significant astronomic beings of antiquity, the astral deities known as decans. The word decan (from the Greek *deka*, meaning “ten”) is a creation of the Hellenistic period to designate the astral deities who dominate every 10 degrees of the circle of the zodiac (hence thirty-six). These deities are far more ancient than the Hellenistic period, deriving from Egypt in Pharaonic times ... As astral deities, the decans exerted tremendous influence on the land below and its inhabitants.

Usually there are thirty-six decans, but there is evidence from the second century AD that shows twenty-four decans. Coffin lids depict the sky goddess Nut surrounded by the signs of the Zodiac, and “on the sides of the cover are, to the left, the twelve decans of the day and to the right the twelve decans of the night.” As Malina sees it (Malina and Pilch 2000: 85), John shows the decans as

sovereign astral beings, embracing the whole cosmos in the course of one night and one day, keeping watch over everything ... in previous perceptions the decans were considered guardians and rescuers of the whole cosmos, at the same rank as the highest of astral deities, beings of power and might second only to the highest God(s). It would seem the elders here, now in henotheistic context, are much the same.

If this is right, then the fact that the elders toss down their crowns, which the saints later pick up, suggests that the saints who rule in heavenly places now fill the function once played by the decans in the old covenant.

Like the cherubim of Ezekiel’s vision, the living things in Revelation 4 (v. 6) are “full of eyes, around and within.” They are constellations, and their “eyes” individual stars. That stars are described as “eyes” links the living things with Jesus, the One with the burning eyes (→1:12-16). Eyes are organs of judgment, and so the living creatures, like Jesus, oversee and survey and watch the world; they are the watchers over the creation, who investigate and report back (cf. Job 1–2). The eyes of Jesus are linked with the torches before the throne that are the Spirits of God (which become the eyes of the Lamb, →5:6). By the torches of his Spirit, Jesus sees into the darkness, judges the darkness, dispels the darkness. The cherubim are incorporated into that judicial surveillance, the Son’s cosmic episcopacy. The storyline of Revelation is the elevation of the saints over the angels: In the end, the bride sparkles with precious stones, a heavenly city come to earth sparkling like a star, full of gemstone “eyes.”

Two details connect the scene to Isaiah’s commissioning as prophet. The living creatures have six wings, rather than four, as did the burning ones that surrounded Yahweh’s exalted throne (Isa. 6:2). And the opening phrase of the Trishagion of the living things is virtually identical to the song of the seraphs:

Isa. 6:3 (LXX): ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος, κύριος σαβαωθ

Rev. 4:8: ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος, κύριος, ὁ θεός, ὁ παντοκράτωρ

κύριος σαβαωθ transliterates/ translates the Hebrew phrase *YHWH tzeba'oth*, “Yahweh of hosts” or “Yahweh of Armies,” usually transposed into ὁ παντοκράτωρ. The Hebrew phrase does not point to the omnipotence of God but to his role as Yahweh, the covenant God, the Lord of the hosts of heaven and the armies of Israel. The title is a military title, the name of the God who committed himself to Israel by promise and oath, the God who has committed his entire force of angels to fulfill his purposes, the God who has determined to join his people together as the Armies of God carrying out his conquest of the world.

Isaiah's vision distracts us with another digression into angelology. When Isaiah enters Yahweh's throne room, he sees seraphim standing above the throne (6:2), one of which flies to him carrying the coal that will purify his unclean lips (v. 6). What are these creatures at the throne of God? The word *seraph* means “burn,” and so the seraphim are, fundamentally, “burning ones.” Burnings *whats?* From Isaiah 6, we learn that they have six wings (v. 2) and (human?) faces and feet (v. 2). One of them has at least one hand (v. 6). Needless to say, these are composite burning beings, combining features of winged creatures with human features and appendages.

The noun *seraph* occurs several other times in the OT, and those passages have been used to identify the seraphim of Isaiah's vision. In the incident of the fiery serpents (Numbers 21), *seraph* shifts in meaning. It initially functions as an adjective modifying “serpent” (*nachash*, v. 6), prompting the people to cry for relief from the serpents (*nachash*, v. 7). In response, Yahweh tells Moses to construct a “fiery one” (*seraph*) to set on a pole, as a standard for Israel to look to (v. 8). What Moses actually constructs is a *nachash nachasheth*, a “bronze bronze-one/serpent.” *Seraph* has become synonymous with “bronze serpent.” Deut. 8:15 uses the word again, recounting the dangers of the wilderness, which include scorpions, drought, and “fiery serpents” (*nachash seraph*).

The other uses of the noun occur in Isaiah. In 14:29, he describes the offspring of the serpent (*nachash*) as fiery flying ones (*seraph me'eph*, the latter from *'uph*, “fly”). The fact that it is the “fruit” of a serpent suggests that it is serpentine. In 30:6, Isaiah refers to the land of the south, populated by lions, vipers, and, again, fiery flying ones (*seraph me'eph*). The fact that these fiery ones *fly* connects them back to Isaiah 6, the winged fiery ones around the throne of Yahweh.

Are seraphim flying, fiery serpents? Karen Randolph Jones (1967) says Yes, appealing to parallels with the Egyptian uraei, an erect cobra standing on its coil with neck spread out like wings:

A plausible conclusion in view of the linguistic and archeological evidence is that the seraphim of Isaiah's inaugural vision are to be understood in the light of the Egypt symbol of the winged uraeus. Yahweh is called “the King” (6:5), and in his temple he is like a majestic monarch whose regalia fills his palace. The Egyptians used the crawling serpent as an emblem of chaos and evil, but the uraeus is always standing. The seraphim of Isaiah 6 are standing. The four wings of an Egyptian uraeus represent the pharaoh's rule to extend to the four corners of the earth; the winged seraphim chant “the whole earth is full of his glory” (6:3). The reverent repetition of the trisagion of the seraphim shook the temple, filling it with smoke; the Egyptian uraeus belched consuming fire on the pharaoh's enemies. The wings of the seraphim are raised and lowered, as so often are those of the uraei. At a period when Egyptian art was so common in Palestine, it is not surprising to find it in the symbolism of Isaiah. Also, if the symbol of the winged uraeus could find a place in the palace of the ninth-century B.C. Israelite kings, it may well have been in the palaces of the eighth-century B.C. monarchs in Jerusalem yet unexcavated.

Appealing to analogies to Canaanite depictions of Baal, John Day (1979) suggests another connection: Baal is sometimes depicted in a cloud with seven thunders and seven bolts of lightning, sometimes personified as servants of Baal in his royal entourage: “the seraphim in Is. vi are to be regarded as personifications of the lightning.” In form, the lightning is serpentine: “they are winged serpents (uraei) with an ultimately Egyptian origin. In this there is an analogy with the cherubim which, as winged sphinxes, are ultimately Egyptian in origin as regards form but could symbolize the clouds on which Yahweh rose in the manner of the Canaanite god Baal.”

Isaiah sees slithering, flaming lightning that flashes from the cloud that fills the temple, beings who are winged lightning-serpents. Why would Yahweh reveal himself to Isaiah in this way? It perhaps takes us back to Numbers 21: In Isaiah's day as in Moses's, the people's lips are rendered unclean by complaints and grumbling against Yahweh's provisions. Isaiah sees Yahweh enthroned, ready to unleash the fiery ones among them.

For more on the pagan and Jewish lore of the cherubim and seraphim, see Barker (2000: 118–20).

The living creatures around the Enthronement are like the cherubim of Ezekiel vision, with additional features from Isaiah's vision. Both OT texts describe a prophet commissioned to speak to a recalcitrant audience. Ezekiel speaks to a “rebellious people” who are “stubborn and obstinate children.” Whether they listen or not, they will know that a prophet is among them (Ezek. 1:1–7). Isaiah recognizes that he cannot even speak to Yahweh without defilement; he cannot join the seraphic song of praise. The organs of communication, confession, praise—his lips—are unclean, and every breath that passes through them pollutes the temple. Unbidden, uncommanded, in response to Isaiah's helpless cry of woe, one of the seraphim flies to the incense altar and takes a coal from the altar. The seraph is a burning one, personified lightning, but the coal is too hot for the seraph, so he takes a coal with tongs and places it on Isaiah's lips.

When the coal touches Isaiah's mouth, he is cleansed. He can stand and speak before Yahweh. His lips have been circumcised, and the obstacles that keep him from communication with Yahweh are removed. Implicitly, Isaiah is separated from the people. He has identified with the unclean people, but now he is no longer unclean but covered, no longer polluted but pure, transferred to the side of the angels. That means that he can take up his proper prophetic role, speaking in the divine council and volunteering for service: “Here am I. Send me!” and “Lord, how long?” His tongue is loosed to join in the cries of the seraphim. More implicitly, Isaiah's mouth is lit on fire. The burning coal lights his lips, and with burning heart he becomes a seraph, a fire-breather. The breath that earlier polluted the presence of Yahweh now becomes an agent of the Spirit of judgment and burning by which Yahweh is going to cleanse the people of Judah. Touched with the coal, Isaiah becomes an agent and an angel of the Holy One who will be hallowed in justice and judgment (5:16).

"I saw Adonai sitting on a throne," Isaiah begins. That phrase occurs only one other time in the OT, spoken by Micaiah, the sole true prophet among the prophets of Ahab. Isaiah is a new Micaiah. Micaiah appears only once (1 Kings 22; cf. Boxall 2006: 81), when Ahab assembles his prophets to consult with them about a battle with the Arameans. "Shall I go against Ramoth-gilead to battle?" Ahab asks, and the prophets speak with one voice, "Go up, for the Lord will give into the hand of the king!" Only Micaiah demurs, and he is the only prophet who has actually stood in the divine council, the only one who has seen Yahweh enthroned among the hosts of heaven (like Isaiah). During the council deliberations, Yahweh asks for a volunteer. "Who will entice Ahab to go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?" One spirit offers a plot to deceive Ahab by putting a lying spirit into the mouths of his prophets, so they give him false encouragement to enter the battle. Isaiah too sees Yahweh on a throne, and in Isaiah's hearing, Yahweh asks for a volunteer: "Whom shall I send, and who will go out for Us?" Isaiah has been ignited and become a seraph, a human lightning bolt, and he, like the spirit in 1 Kings, volunteers. His commission is a commission like the commission of the spirit, a commission to lure Judah to destruction.

In Isaiah's time, Judah's body is diseased, full of sores and wounds. Daughter Jerusalem has turned harlot, and according to the law priests' daughters that play the harlot must be burned. Jerusalem has become a Sodom and Judah like Gomorrah, and Isaiah is the seraph fire that falls from Yahweh's throne to consume the city of the mountain. Isaiah has been purged by fire, and by that same fire, he has become an agent for the purging of Judah and Jerusalem. Through the desolation, through the great tribulation, through purging prophetic fires, Yahweh is sanctifying his people, the Holy God is making his people holy, the God who is exalted in righteousness and justice will bring justice and righteousness on earth, in the land, among his people. The holy God will have a holy seed in the end, but only through fire.

All this is in the background of John vision of heaven. John is a new Isaiah, witnessing the Enthronement among the hosts of heaven, in the midst of cherubim and flaming seraphs. John's mouth is not purged here, nor does he eat a book, as Ezekiel does. His commissioning is stretched out over several chapters (→10:1-11). In heaven he is admitted to the council chamber of God, the primary privilege of prophetic ministry (cf. Jer. 23:16-22), but he is not yet given a speaking part or the privilege of the floor. For now, he is only a seer, recording what he hears and sees without speaking out. He is not yet an agent for the hardening and devastation of Israel. But the echoes of Isaiah 6 and Ezekiel 1 set a trajectory. In the messages to the churches, we have already seen that some parts of the body of Christ are diseased; some have become blind and too deaf to hear what the Spirit is saying to the churches. Love is growing cold, some are falling away, few are ready for the hour of testing. Given the echoes of Isaiah's commission, we expect that John *will*, like Isaiah, prophesy to a stiff-necked people who will not turn from their idols in spite of his admonitions and God's punishing disciplines (→9:20-21; →11:1-2; →16:0, 11). We expect to see burning and devastation and a desolate city

like Sodom. And, in the end, we expect to see a new exodus, a new city, and a new creation emerge from the charred rubble.

Hymns of heaven

And the four living things, one by one, each having six wings, full of eyes around and within, and they have no rest day and night, saying “Holy Holy Holy Lord, God, the All-Ruler, who was and who is and who comes.” And when the living things give glory and honor and thanksgiving to the Enthronement on the throne, to the One living unto the ages of the ages, the twenty-four Ancient Ones will fall before the Enthronement on the throne and will prostrate to the One living unto the ages of the ages, and they will cast their crowns before the throne, saying, “Worthy are you, Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, because you created the all-things and through Your will they were and were created.”

—Rev. 4:8-11

The expressions of praise in the heavenly temple are triadically structured (on hymns of Revelation, cf. Aune 1997: 314–17; Grabiner 2015). The first praise is an intricate knot of intersecting structures. There is, first, a simple chiasm:

A. Triple “holy”

B. Three titles: Lord, God, Pantokrator

A' Triple name: “He who was, is, comes”

It is a triad of triads, a trinity of trinities, linked with the Triune name: The Father holy, the Son Lord, the Spirit the One who was, is, comes. Or, the Father Holy, the Son Holy, the Spirit holy; the Son Lord, the Father God, the Spirit Almighty; the Father who was, the Son who is, the Spirit who comes, Father past, Son present, Spirit future. Seven different substantive words are used in verse 8: holy, Lord, God, Almighty, was, is, comes. Numerically if not semantically, these titles link with the days of creation (though Pantokrator is a good “fourth-day” title, and “the One who comes” is Sabbatical). Though the first song does not speak of creation, the structure suggests that God is the sevenfold Creator of a sevenfold creation.

When the repetitions, the articles, and the conjunctions are added, the total number of words is 16, 2×8 . They are arranged in phrases that have an increasing number of words: 3 words, 5 words, 8 words. The Triune Holy moves through the five-word name of power and military might to the eight-word name of new creation. Rhymes and assonance add to the

beauty of the song. Six of the nine substantive terms end in *-ος*. The first five are ἅγιος ἅγιος ἅγιος, κύριος, θεός and the last word of the song is ἐρχόμενος. The definite article, always in the nominative masculine (ὁ), is repeated five times, and creates a breathy overtone, especially when combined with the vocalized *ά* of ἅγιος.

In chapter 4, there is no singing, only saying. Once the Lamb takes the scroll, praise resumes (5:9–10), this time in song and now focused on the Lamb. The triadic structure remains. The Lamb is worthy to take the book and break the seals (perhaps a faint triad of worthy, take, break), and this worthiness is based on his triple work: He was slain, he purchased, he made them a kingdom and priests. The purchased people are a fourfold (tribe, tongue, people, nation) but also triadic (kingdom, priests, who reign). The fourfold list are Gentiles, the triad names Jewish privileges. If we sum up the purchased people, they are a seven (old creation, Jew and Gentile juxtaposed); if we multiply them, they are a twelve (new creation, Jew and Gentile perichoretically united). The hymn in 5:12 is again faintly triadic (worthy, Lamb, slain), but the accent is on the heptamorous list of gifts received: power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, blessing. That creation motif is also evident in the final hymn in 5:13: The Enthroned One and the Lamb receive a fourfold gift of “blessing, honor, glory, dominion,” a fourfold gift matching the four corners of the creation, the four winds of heaven, the triple-triple God extending dominion to the corners of creation. We move from the triad of triads in chapter 4 to a creation-based numerology of sevens and fours in chapter 5.

The living creatures offer praise “day and night,” a heavenly round like the morning and evening sacrifices of the earthly temple, like the evenings and mornings of creation week. At this point, the twenty-four elders do not participate in the worship at all (→above). They will join in when the living creatures fall before the Lamb. Instead of praising God’s holiness, his titles, his overarching mastery of time, the Ancient Ones will praise his acts, and specifically his actions of creation. Their song will be instigated by the song of the living creatures, who give δόξα, τιμή, εὐχαριστία to God. They will fall down and worship, and sing of glory, honor, and power. Instead of holiness (ἅγιος), the Ancient Ones focus on the worthiness (ἄξιος) of God (cf. 5:9, 12). God is worthy to receive praise and honor and power. God is receptive, and *power* (or attribution of power) is one of the things he receives. The creatures speak of God in the “third person,” but never claim him as their God. The twenty-four will not only address God in the second person (ἄξιος εἶ), but also claim him as “our God” (ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν). They will praise God for creation, and for the existence of everything. The last phrase, the explanatory clause that justifies his worthiness to receive praise, is surrounded by the verb κτίσειν—σύ ἐκτίσας τὰ πάντα . . . καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν (4:11). By this song, God stands in a threefold relation to creation.

1. He is the origin of τὰ πάντα, all things. He is the active subject who creates.
2. All things were *through* the will of God. God's will is the instrument by which he brings all things to be. That is still a past-oriented claim; it is not about God maintaining things in being by his will but about God making-them-be through his will.
3. The final clause assumes τὰ πάντα as the subject, and uses a passive verb. τὰ πάντα are not self-created but they are (grammatically at least, perhaps ontologically) subjects of creation, albeit passive ones. Created things have a role in creation, not as creating but as things-created. (Eventually, the God who makes τὰ πάντα will make τὰ πάντα new: καίνα ποίω πάντα) (→21:1-8).

Given the overall triadic pattern of the praise of Revelation 4, we can again press the point Trinitarianly: The Father is subject, the active creator; the Son is the Word/Will of the Father through whom all things were; the Spirit is the immanent principle by which created things are created, the One by whom creation suffers divine action. Not only the origin, but the present existence and being and contours of every created thing accords with the will of the Triune God.

Praise will continue to play a prominent role in Revelation, and it will soon be glorified by the addition of vocal and instrumental music. If so disposed, and properly trained, one could work out an entire theology of music, song, and liturgical praise from the book of Revelation. Whatever else that work might uncover, it would have to reckon with the political dimensions of song. The first singers in Revelation are the throne-beasts, the cherubim, and the Ancient Ones, who occupy thrones. Their kingship is expressed in song. For human beings too, elevation to kingship will be equivalent to joining the heavenly choir (→15:1-4). Music is a form of rule. The saints reign in Revelation by faithful, courageous witness, and, finally, by song.

The Lamb and the book

And I saw on the right of the Enthronement on the throne a book, written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals. And I saw a strong angel heralding in a great voice, "Who is worthy to open the book and loose its seals?" And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to see it. And I wept greatly because no one worthy was found to open the book nor to see it. And one of the ancient ones says to me, "Weep not. Behold the lion out of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has gained victory to open the book and its seven seals."

And I saw in the midst of the throne and of the four living things and in the midst of the Ancient Ones a Lamb standing as slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent into all the land. And he came and received from the right of the Enthronement on the throne. And when he received the book, the four living things and the twenty-four Ancient Ones fell before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls filled with incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are you to receive the book and to open its seals, because you were slain and you purchased⁵ for God with your blood people from every tribe and tongue and people and ethnicity, and you made them a kingdom and priests for our God, and they shall reign-as-kings on the land.”

And I saw, and I heard a voice of many angels around the throne and the living things and the Ancient Ones, and their number was myriads and myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a voice great: “Worthy is the Lamb slain to receive the power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” And all creation which in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To the Enthronement on the throne and to the Lamb, the blessing and the honor and the glory and the power unto the ages of the ages.” And the four living things were saying, “Amen.” And the Ancient Ones fell and prostrated themselves.

—Rev. 5:1-14

Chapter 4 sets the scene and describes the heavenly liturgy. With chapter 5, a drama begins. It is the crucial moment in heaven’s history, and the opening verses of have a rhythmic quality that creates suspense concerning the book and the seals. John sees a book with seven seals (v. 1). Verse 2 ends with the question about who is worthy “open the book” and “loose its seals.” Verse 3 gives the disappointing results of the search for a worthy and capable one to open the seals of the scroll: *No one* is “able to open the book or to look into it.” Verse 4 ends the same way: “*no one* was found worthy to open the book, or to look into it.” John begins to weep. Verse 5, spoken by one of the elders, goes back to the original phrasing and resolves the tension: Someone *has* overcome “to open the book and its seven seals.” There is a chiasmic structure to the endings of verses 2–5:

- A. Open/seal
- B. Open/look
- B'. Open/look
- A'. Open/seal.

⁵ Some manuscripts say that the Lamb has “purchased *us*” (Boxall 2006: 100).

Clearly, someone has to open the seals to look into the book, and looking into the book is what the worthy and capable someone is going to do. Only when the book is opened can the discovery proceed toward trial.

καὶ εἶδον is used thirty-three times in Revelation, usually to announce a new scene or phase of a vision. More generally, John uses the verb εἶδω (“see, know”) seventy times. Seventy is the number of the nations, the seventy uses hint that Revelation will show the nations coming to see, entering the city to see God face to face (→22:4).

Seven times in his messages to the churches Jesus says “I saw/know/discern your works” (οἶδα τὰ ἔργα; 2:2, 9, 13, 19; 3:1, 8, 15). With his burning eyes, Jesus sees everything and judges rightly. The Septuagint of Genesis 1 uses the phrase εἶδεν ὁ θεός eight times (1:4, 8, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). Jesus is the Creator of the churches surveying not his works but the works of the members of the church. His seven viewings match the seven eyes (5:6). Fifty of the seventy occurrences of the verb are “I saw” statements from John (1:12, 17; 4:1, 4; 5:1, 2, 6, 11; 6:1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 12; 7:1, 2, 9, 14; 8:2, 13; 9:1, 17; 10:1, 5; 13:1, 2, 3, 11; 14:1, 6, 14; 15:1, 2, 5; 16:13; 17:3, 6 [2x]; 18:1; 19:11, 17, 19; 20:1, 4, 11, 12; 21:1, 2, 22). Carried by the seven burning eye-Spirits of the Lamb, John is able to see 7x7-fold, plus one. The numerology points to Pentecost and Jubilee: John sees a “50,” the firstfruits gift of the Spirit and the year of release announced by the blowing of a trumpet. That leaves thirteen other uses. Once John speaks of his own sight in the third person (1:2). Eight times, someone addresses John and tells him what “you see” (1:19, 20; 7:14; 17:8, 12, 15, 16, 18), usually for the purposes of interpretation. The other four uses describe what some character “sees” or “knows” (12:12, 13; 18:7; 19:12).

What does John see? He sees a book ἐπὶ τὴν δεξιὰν the Enthronement.

Stefanovic (2001) has argued that the prepositional phrase means simply “on the right side” rather than “in the right hand.” In 1:20 and 2:1, it means “in the right hand,” but χεῖρα is used in the context (cf. 1:17). In chapter 4, nothing necessitates reading “hand” into the context. Stefanovic points out that the phrase “on the right” never appears in the LXX or elsewhere in the NT, and when it appears in extra-biblical Greek literature it means “to the right” or “on the right side.”

The right side is associated with the firstborn, preeminence, and most particularly with royalty. Israel's king is at the right of Yahweh (Ps. 80:17; 110:1). The right hand of God is the hand of judgment and salvation, which are always two sides of the same saving coin (Boxall 2006: 94). The Davidic Messiah, Israel hopes, will one day take the throne at the right hand that has been vacated since the collapse of the Davidic monarchy. Elsewhere in the NT, Jesus is at the right of the power or of God (Matt. 26:64; Mk 14:62; Lk. 22:69; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 10:12; 1 Pet. 3:22). That Jesus is enthroned at the right of the Father is central to the proclamation of the apostles (Acts 2:36). In heaven, at the right of the enthroned Father, is a scroll that is *not* being used, a scroll that is *not* in the hand of any king. David's throne is unoccupied, and the scroll is waiting for a worthy candidate.

When John first sees Jesus, he has the lights of the lampstand, the stars that are the angels of the seven churches, in his right hand. In Revelation 5, John witnesses Jesus receiving this authority; what is on the right of the Father is given into Jesus's right hand (cf. 10:1–2). The scroll is parallel to the lamps. Once the Lamb receives the scroll, he has the lights of the lamps in his right hand. Once Jesus opens the sealed Word, it will shine like a light no longer hidden under a basket.

The four faces of the cherubim match the four main pieces of furniture but face outward. Insofar as the scroll is to the right of the throne, to the south, it is associated with the man, the king who will ascend to the right of the Father to take his seat on the throne with the Father. The Word of God is there, but the Word needs a Man to unleash it, so that it has its effect.

The hymns that follow give us a general clue to the significance of the book. The Lamb is worthy to receive (λάβειν) the book and to open it (v. 9). He is also worthy to receive (λάβειν) the sevenfold gift of power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing. In receiving the book, he receives all this too, and these seven blessings are linked with the sevenfold Spirit that is the eyes of the Lamb, an association that becomes evident as the vision progresses.

Revelation 5 begins with a book at the right side of the Enthronement, but no Jesus. *No one* occupies the space at the right hand of God, and that means John is taken back to heaven *before* Jesus is enthroned (like Ezekiel's visions of the temple, also a chronological throwback). When Jesus ascends, the disciples watched him disappear into a cloud (Acts 1). Revelation 5 shows the ascension of Jesus from the other side of the firmament, from heaven. This point is critical to understanding the flow of the next several chapters of the book, which move from Jesus's ascension to the beginning of the church's mission, Pentecost, conflicts with Judaizers and Jews, persecution. Between chapter 5 and 11, Revelation offers a visionary retrospective of the post-ascension history of the church.

Douglas Farrow (2011) insists that, if the ascension is bodily, and if Jesus ascends with his creaturehood intact, then the ascension must be *to a place*: "It in the resurrection Jesus is already transfigured and transformed . . . in the ascension he is also translated or relocated. That is, he is taken up and placed by God he properly belongs, just as God once took Adam and put him in Eden." But *where* is said place? The answer must be "stubbornly independent of any merely natural cosmology or anthropology," but must just as stubbornly resist the Origenist temptation to mentalize and psychologize. Eschatology provides an answer: "the entry of which we are speaking does not entail admission to an already existing place but the creation of a new one . . . it entails the creation of a new time and place and mode of life, and that not *ex nihilo* . . . but *ex vetere*." It is "not somewhere in this world" nor "an 'outside' to which one escapes." Rather, "it exists by virtue of the transformation or reconstitution of this world in the Spirit." The "time and place which Jesus occupies are those in which, and by way of which, God's sovereign act of recreation is extended through him to all times and places" (47).

Though included in every creed, the ascension has been given somewhat short shrift in the history of theology, most markedly in the skittishness about ascension that characterizes demythologized modern theology. Not all the distortions are modern. According to Farrow, Origen begins “a long gradation in ascension theology” that leads all the way to Bultmann. Origen believes it more “befitting his divinity” for us to conceive of Jesus’s ascension as “an ascension of the mind rather than of the body.” Even while rejecting the Origenist conception, Augustine undermines the very thing he wants to affirm, explaining the ascension as an effort “to remove from the disciples the stumbling block of his humanity, in order that they might come to a robust faith in his divinity” (Farrow 2011: 21).

Modern theology twists ascension beyond recognition. Schleiermacher is the first to explain the ascension “in terms of *the effect Jesus has on us*,” and this tendency is taken further in Kantian and especially Hegelian theology (Farrow 2011: 25). For the Hegelian Strauss, Jesus’s ascension is his diffusion into humanity, his ascent to become a principle of historical development. Ascension theology thus underwrites an explicit religion of humanity: As Strauss sang, “*Mankind* is the union of the two natures . . . *Mankind* is the worker of miracles . . . *Mankind* is the sinless existence . . . It is *Mankind* that dies, rises, and ascends to heaven” (29; emphases in the original). For Teilhard “the risen Christ is no longer a particular man” but “the theanthropic power that is slowly transforming our transient nature into a unified spiritual one.” *Jesus* is left behind, and this allows Teilhard to synthesize Christ, the church, and the cosmos, and to identify human progress with the coming of the kingdom. Farrow rightly insists that Scripture and church tradition have always seen Christ and the church “much in the way that the psalmists, say, spoke of Israel and her king—as distinct if inseparable” (Farrow 2011: 54), a distinction that is, he again rightly argues, wholly compatible with the *totus christus* theology of Augustine and with what he calls the “new ontology” of communion.

Against the Reformers, especially Calvin, Farrow argues that transubstantiation is not only compatible with Ascension and Pentecost—that is, with Jesus’s real *absence* and his presence by the Spirit—but that transubstantiation is *necessary* for retaining the dialectic of presence-in-absence. He accomplishes his aim, but only by shining up transubstantiation in a somewhat novel fashion. Citing Herbert McCabe, Farrow insists that transubstantiation does not involve a chemical change within this world. Rather, it is an *eschatological* fact. Instead of speaking of Christ dropping down from heaven on altar after altar, Catholics should consider that “in converting bread and wine into body and blood the Spirit brings forward the regeneration of all things and in some fashion redeems spatio-temporal reality as such.” With this insertion into creation of what Benedict XVI calls “a radical change, a sort of ‘nuclear fission,’” transubstantiation aims at the conversion of the communicants and through them of the cosmos. Benedict says that the transformation of the bread and wine ignites “a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all.” Armed with this eschatological transubstantiation, Catholics can keep their substance and accidents, their bell-ringing marking before-and-after, their mastication of Christ, but under the proviso that Eucharistic conversion is subject not to a philosophical theory but “to the truth of the resurrection and ascension.”

There is a good deal to admire in this formulation, but it is not the way transubstantiation has typically been explained, and Farrow (2011: 73) knows it: “transubstantiation, rightly understood, is an eschatological concept,” but he concedes (49) that the debates about transubstantiation in western theology pay insufficient attention to eschatology, and that this failure “left room in practice for the tendency . . . to fetishize pure presence.” The Reformers are right to be worried about the fetishization. Joyce’s “caricature” of the Mass in *Portrait of the Artist* rests on “the most severe mistakes and willful misrepresentations,” but whose mistakes were they? Joyce’s? Not only: “the tradition supplies considerable evidence . . . that mistakes abounded” (73). So the question is: Who, before the twentieth century, “rightly understood” transubstantiation?

There is something very odd at work: Transubstantiation must be defended partly for the sake of the tradition; but, since the tradition often misses the point, we must rework transubstantiation in an eschatological framework, which the tradition has suppressed. Farrow would do well to ask whether or not transubstantiation would have become dogma at all if the eschatological character of the Eucharist had been suitably highlighted in the first place.

Farrow (2011) rightly emphasizes that transubstantiation is not the end point of Eucharistic transformation, but aims at the “still more wonderful *conversio*” of the here and now of the communicants into the “glorious there and then of Jesus Christ” through the Spirit. This final conversion is a “consubstantiation” (73). Nicely done, that coopting of a Lutheran term into a Catholic Eucharistic theology. Yet the rhetorical triumph wilts in substantive defeat. Farrow takes note of *Lumen Gentium*’s traditional claim that by receiving the body and blood we are “transformed into that which we consume,” but explains this as the “Spirit’s work of generating and perfecting a communion of being with Christ.” The church is *not*, in short, transubstantiated into Christ, but *why not*? The bread and wine turn into the substance of body and blood, and this because the stuff of the old creation is taken up into the life of the new. Why then do *communicants* not become the substance of Christ’s body and blood? If the final transfiguration of the cosmos is not a substantive transformation of trees and bees and granite and slugs into Christ, why should the *proleptic* transformation involve substantive transformation? If bread and wine are the firstfruits of the transfigured cosmos, why is not *everything* destined to be transubstantiated? On Farrow’s argument, it should be, and his refusal to push his argument in this direction leaves one suspicious that transubstantiation is not necessary to the accomplishment of the Eucharist’s ecclesial and eschatological aim.

Farrow (2011) claims that the Protestant refusal of transubstantiation ends with Erastian confusion of church and world. I disagree, but I cannot find anything to complain about in this argument:

Without adequate recognition of the real absence of Christ ... [the church is] prone to self-glorifying and to illusions of worldly power ... [But] where absence goes unchallenged by an eschatologically decisive presence—head and members in true communion of body and soul—“presence” will eventually be found wherever we choose to find it, even in secular principalities that demand conformity from the church and the silencing of its gospel. (69)

Which is to say, confession of Jesus’s presence-and-absence in ascension is decisive not only for the Eucharist, but for the church’s health and mission as a whole.

If Revelation 5 portrays Jesus’s ascension, it is his investiture as Davidic king, the one qualified to take the vacant throne at the right hand of the Father. Aune (1997: 278, 331–8; cf. Smalley 2005: 112) makes a good case for “investiture” as opposed to “enthronement” or “coronation.” The Lamb does not sit on the throne (though cf. below), though he is authorized to act. In OT terms, the Lamb takes the role of *nagid*, the announced one, the prince who will one day fully enter into his kingdom and sit on the throne of his Father. Within Revelation, that enthronement takes place only *in association*. Jesus does not enter fully into the kingdom until the saints are enthroned, until the Bride is made queen at his right hand, as he is the king at the Father’s right hand.

The Davidic atmosphere of the scene is obvious. When Jesus first appears in heaven, he is introduced with an overload of Davidic imagery: ὁ λεων

ὁ ἐκ τῆς φυλῆς Ἰούδα, ἡ ρίζα Δαβὶδ. The scroll fits neatly into this Davidic context. Joash receives a “testimony” when he becomes king (2 Kgs 11:12), the book of the kingdom (1 Sam. 10:25) that he should study throughout his reign (Deut. 17:18–20). A king with a book in his hand is another Josiah, who casts down the idols of Judah (2 Kgs 23:4–20), as does Joshua before him, also equipped with a book (Josh. 1:8). Previous Davidic kings fail to keep the book near. They are not worthy to sit with the One Enthroned, but the Lion of Judah *is*, and he is given the book and testimony as a part of his adornments as king.

Beyond this Davidic context, various proposals have been made regarding the book, both its physical form (scroll or codex) and its significance or purpose (Boxall 2006: 94–5; Koester 2015: 373; Smalley 2005: 127–8). MacLeod (2007: 324–8) argues for a scroll form and provides a concise summary of the options: The scroll may be the book of the new covenant, the Lamb's book of life, the Torah fulfilled in Christ, a record of the future tribulation, a bill of divorce, a record of human sin, a “book of destiny” that contains the script for the remainder of human history, and a will. MacLeod argues that “in the first century a scroll sealed with seven seals was a testamentary disposition, that is, a testament or will ‘that names an inheritance to be received’” (2007: 328, quoting Beale 2015: 340). Russell (1958) cites a specific parallel in Roman law, the *mancipatio* by which an inheritance was distributed among the plebeians, and Reddish (2001: 107) compares the scroll to certain Roman legal documents that were folded, enclosing the contents within.

For Victorinus (2011: 9), the scroll is the OT, whose meaning is hidden until unsealed by the slain and standing Lamb: “Now the face of Moses is uncovered; now it is revealed, and therefore the apocalypse is called a ‘revelation’; now his book is unsealed; now the sacrifices of the victims are understood; now the offerings and duties of the Anointed, the building of the temple, and the prophecies are clearly understood” (see also Apingius 2011: 54; Caesarius 2011: 70). The new is in the old concealed, the old in the new revealed. It is, Oecumenius (2011: 25) says, sealed because God's purposes have been hidden from all men since Adam.

Joash stands with a book at his coronation because Yahweh has done so before him. The scene in heaven is a temple and court scene, also a view of the heavenly Sinai. As at Sinai, the Lord's throne reverberates thunder and voices, flashes with lightning. At Sinai, elders and priests gather on the mountain to eat and drink before the Lord, and look up at him from beneath the crystal sea, a pavement of sapphire (Exod. 24:9–11). As King of Israel, Yahweh comes with a book, which he hands to Moses. That “book of the covenant” (Exod. 24:1–8) records the Lord's commands, but it is more than a rule book. It contains promises of blessings and threat of curses, and by swearing allegiance to Yahweh Israel becomes a witness against herself that she will keep his commandments.

Deuteronomy too is a book of kingship, full of warnings and curses as well as commandments (Deut. 28:61; 29:20–21, 27; cf. Jer. 25:13). Israel's kings are supposed to have the “book of this law” before them to read all the days

of their life (Deut. 17:18). Priests are commanded to read out the book of the law to the whole assembly every seven years at the Feast of Booths, at the beginning of year of remission (Deut. 31:9–13). As a book of kingdom, the heavenly book is, like Deuteronomy, linked with remission, Sabbath year, the year of Jubilee, all of which are dimensions of the story of Revelation. The book of the law is also the book of conquest, the book that Joshua is to study and keep, so that he will prosper and conquer (Josh 1:8; 23:6). Since the book of the King contains both blessings and curses, it becomes a book of destiny. The fortunes of the world—the times marked by the lights of the firmament—depend on the actions of the Lion who opens the book.

Heaven itself is a book, a scroll that can be rolled and unrolled (Isa. 34:4). Since the book in the Lamb's hand is sealed, rolled up and not displayed, it is a firmament that has not been spread out, a sky whose stars and signs cannot be read. As the Lamb opens it, he makes the signs of the scroll-heavens visible.

A text also figures into the rite of jealousy described in Numbers 5. A husband who suspects his wife of adultery was to bring her to the tabernacle for a ritual of exposure. Curses are written on a parchment, and the priest washes them off into water. If the woman is guilty, the water of cursing will cause her to bloat with a false pregnancy. Revelation is a rite of jealousy, the cursed water is the blood of the saints which publicizes the guilt of the harlot. As she drinks it down, she is exposed as an adulteress. Similarly, a man divorces his wife by writing a “book” of divorce (βιβλίον ἀποστασίου; Deut. 24:1, 3; cf. Isa. 50:1; Jer. 3:8). This is also possible background to Revelation, since the book depicts a prophetic divorce between Yahweh and Jerusalem, followed by marriage to a new bride. Within the ark are the tablets of the covenant and the book of Deuteronomy (βιβλίον τοῦ νομοῦ τοῦτου) is placed beside the ark of the covenant as a witness (μαρτύριον) against the people (Deut. 31:24–26).

So many books, so much symbolic overload. The heavenly scroll is a book of kingship, to be conferred on a worthy descendant of David. It is a book of curse and blessing, about to be unleashed against the land and the *oikoumene*. It is a book of law, delivered to a new Moses. It is a book of conquest, ready to be handed to a new Joshua. It teaches the king to purge the idols, and heaven is waiting for a new Josiah.

We can, however, pinpoint the significance of the book. It is sealed, and the closest parallel to *that* is the sealed book at the end of Daniel (12:4; so Wesley and Isaac Newton, cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 71). Daniel's book is sealed because the events it reveals are still in the distant future: “Conceal these words and seal up the book until the end of time” (12:4; cf. 12:9). That a search is being made for someone to *unseal* the book means that someone greater than Daniel has arrived, and that the “end of time” has come, in the first century (*pace* Mounce 1997, who considers chapters 4–5 to be a depiction of *future* events in heaven). More specifically, it means that the specific prophecies of Daniel are about to be unveiled and completed—prophecies about beasts, horns, kings, and the Son of Man rising on clouds.

We do not hear or see the contents of the book until it is *completely* open, and only after angels trumpet out an introductory fanfare. Finally then, John himself receives this book from the Angel of Jesus, eats it, and speaks its contents (→10:1-11). The contents of the opened book are unveiled in Revelation 12–16, the final stage of the second “in Spirit” vision and the full disclosure of what the Lord reveals and seals to Daniel concerning the end of the time. Finally then the King takes his throne, Joshua throws down Jericho, and Josiah blasts the idols from the face of the land.

The Lion-Lamb of Judah

A “strong” angel “heralds” (the only use κηρύσσω in Revelation), like John the Baptist, a mighty preacher who heralds the arrival of Lamb of God. Like John, the angel is strong, but he announces a stronger one. Even a strong angel is not qualified to receive the book. It takes someone mightier. It takes a man. It is not to angels that God gives the world to come, but to a man; not to an “eagle” who flies across the sky but to a man coming from the throne of the north.

The phrase “great voice” is used 21x (3 x 7) in Revelation (1:10; 5:2, 12; 6:10; 7:2, 10; 8:13; 10:3; 11:12, 15; 12:10; 14:2, 7, 9, 15, 18; 16:1, 17; 19:1, 17; 21:30). Jesus’s voice is great, like a trumpet, so too are the voices of some angels, the voice of multitudes, the voice of the saints crying out from under the altar, the voice that summons the two witnesses to heaven, and the voice that finally announces that the tabernacle of God is with men. In the LXX, the Lord comes with a φωνὴ μέγαλη to Sinai (Deut. 4:11; 5:22), and Israel shouts with a great voice at various times (curses of the covenant, Deut. 27:14; greeting the ark, 1 Sam. 4:5). A great voice is often a cry of distress (1 Sam. 28:12; 2 Sam. 15:23; 19:5; Ps. 28:4; Dan. 6:21-22).

The angel looks for a “worthy” one (ἄξιος). In Greek as in English, the word has an economic connotation, signifying “precious” or “costly.” ἄξιος is used seven times in Revelation, first in 3:4 of saints in Sardis who do not soil their garments. Within chapters 4–5, there is a progression: The Father is proclaimed as worthy, then the angel asks, “Who is worthy?” No one is worthy, but then the Lamb appears and he is twice proclaimed as worthy. The last use of the word describes the saints who shed blood and thus share the worthiness of the Lamb who shed his blood for them (16:6). The seven uses are enclosed by two references to the worthiness of saints, and within that we have the Father and the Lamb as worthy ones. The Lamb’s worthiness rubs off on the saints, and so the saints become precious, as they do the worthy things that the Lion-Lamb does.

Morton (2001) observes that worthiness is not typical of ancient Hebrew hymns, but common in imperial praise. By introducing worthiness into heavenly praise, the vision indicates

again that there is an emperor in heaven worthier than the emperor of Rome. This sets up the contrast with the beast who proclaims his own worthiness. The beast is praised for slaying; the Lamb is praised for being slain (v. 6).

“Merit” or “worthiness” forms one of the dividing issues between Protestant and Catholic soteriology, but there are resources at the heart of the Catholic tradition that soften the conflict by enclosing the justice of merit within a theology of grace. Strict justice, Aquinas argued, is only possible between equals, and since God and man are not equals there is *never* strict justice in God’s dealings with us. God being God, he is never put in debt to his creatures, never *obligated* to give anything, unless by his own prior self-binding. According to Thomas,

Merit before God is based upon a divine ordination according to which God will reward a particular work with a specified reward. God cannot be thought of as being in debt to humanity, in any sense of the notion; God’s faithfulness, understood as self-obligation rather than obligation to humanity, is reflected in the divine ordination that God will reward such acts in this manner. Merit arises from grace, in that God can be said to bestow quality upon his creatures in an act of grace. Merit is therefore not based upon strict justice, but upon *iustitia secundum quid*, “a sort of justice,” which is based upon God’s decision to reward creatures. In effect, Thomas develops Augustine’s principle, that merit is based upon the divine promise, to the effect that *all* merit before God is “improper” merit, in the sense that it is not based upon strict justice between equals. (McGrath 2005: 144).

Later medieval theology degenerated from this Augustinian theology, with dramatic effects not only in soteriology but also in Eucharistic doctrine and practice. According to Roch Kereszty (2007: 138),

The proliferation and multiplication of Mass stipends necessitated reflection on the relationship of the one sacrifice of the cross and the many sacrifices of the mass. Duns Scotus and Gabriel Biel explained the need for the many Masses by pointing out that, while the value of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross is infinite, the individual Mass is only of finite value. The reason lies, according to them, in the difference of the subject of the sacrifice. While it has some reference to the sacrifice of the cross, the immediate subject of the eucharistic sacrifice is the Church whom the officiating priest represents. The priest offers Christ himself to the Father, yet the value of his offering depends on the merits of all the members of the Church at that time. Evidently, this sum total of the members’ merits is finite at every moment of the Church’s history.

Union with Christ is key to working through the Catholic-Protestant impasse. Jonathan Edwards defines merit as “anything ... in one person ... which appearing in the view of another is a recommendation of him to the other’s regard, esteem and affection.” Jesus, who has merit in the Father’s eyes, commends us as his friends. When one “that is very dear to any person, and of great merit in [his] eyes ... not only stands in a strict union with another, but also does particularly express a great desire of that other’s welfare ... it is agreeable to nature, that the welfare of the person united to him should be regarded ... as if it were his own.” Jesus in other words has “that which commends him to the Father’s affection,” and when he in turn commends us, his closely united friends, to the Father, the Father accepts us on the basis of Jesus’s “merits.” Edwards goes on to characterize the atonement to a rescue of a client by a patron: It is as “when the patron’s heart is so united to the client, that when the client is destroyed, he from love is willing to take the destruction on himself” (quoted in Jensen 1992: 124). Imputed merit is thus based on the close association between Christ and his people; theologically put, it depends on union with Christ. This is consistent with the picture that emerges from Revelation, where the “worthy” Lamb confers “worth” on his disciples.

The Father himself is worthy (4:11) to receive all glory, honor, and power. Yet when a search is made for the one who can open the books, no one mentions the Enthroned One as a possible candidate. The sealed book of Daniel will be unsealed not by the Father, worthy as he is, but by a human being. The destiny of the world is in God's hands, but he has given dominion to us, and a human king is needed to unseal the future. God's throne is a two-seated throne, and the right side of the seat, where the scroll is, is reserved for a child of Adam. This is the whole point of creation: God is not proud, God is not cheap or selfish; God created Adam to grow up into a Bride who will occupy his throne with him at his right hand.

Search is made in heaven, and none of the heavenly beings is worthy to take the book. There is no reference to the sea, and this shows that the job description fits only a certain *kind* of human being. Land and sea symbolize Jew and Gentile. The candidate must come from the earth or in/under the land, because this role can only be played by a Jew, a descendant of Abraham, either one living on the land or one who has been inserted into the land in death. The future is not just in human hands, but in *Jewish* hands. God sets up the world in such a way that the future of the human race can be realized only if there is a *Jew* found worthy to receive the book.

When no one is found worthy, John weeps, passionately (ἐγὼ ἔκλαιον πολὺ). It seems a melodramatic touch, more at home in the Shepherd of Hermas or *Pilgrim's Progress* than the Apocalypse. Yet it is an essential moment in the drama. This is not personal lament. John weeps because the world is not yet put right, because his hope of final justice is dashed (Boxall 2006: 96). *Sunt lacrimae rerum*, Virgil lamented. And if the book is not opened, such it will remain. Cries of distress will go unanswered, hopes unfulfilled, injustices unavenged. John's is a lament for a creation that has stalled to a standstill. If the world has gone wrong, peace is not a good thing. John wants the book's contents to be unveiled and fulfilled, because as long as there is no one to open the book then the world is not going to reach its destiny. John's lament echoes the lament of the angel of Yahweh in Zechariah 1, who objects to a report that the world is at ease (Zech. 1:12). John's tears echo the "how long?" of the lament Psalms and anticipate the cries of the martyrs from under the altar (→Rev. 6:9–11). John has risen from the altar-feet of Jesus to the throne room of heaven, an exaltation that foreshadows the exaltation of the martyrs from beneath the altar to thrones in heaven. His ascension seems fruitless, for in heaven as on earth he experiences the θλίψις of an unjust world. It is *not* fruitless: When he ascends, John carries the lament of the martyrs with him and presents it in the throne room. Heaven will respond to the lament. The drama moves from mourning to dancing, from lament to praise, from sackcloth to garments of praise, from darkness to light, from exile to the

giddy laughter of return, from death to new life. John's are the tears that Jesus promises to wipe away.

An elder tells John to stop weeping, one of several times John is told *not* to do something (do not fear, 1:17; do not marvel, 17:7; do not worship angels, 19:9–10). Someone worthy *has* been found (Rev. 5:5), the victorious lion who is from the tribe of Judah, the root of David. When John looks, he does not see a Lion or a root but a Lamb. ἀρνίον is originally a diminutive, “little lamb,” though it probably had lost that connotation by the first century. The jarring contrast between the angel's leonine announcement and John's ovine vision has fascinated commentators. Caird (1966) and others note that this one of John's “rebirth of images.” Old leonine Davidic imagery is replaced by the ovine identity of Jesus; the ferocious lion gives way to the passive sacrificial Lamb. That is only half true, and suggests that the new replaces and cancels rather than fulfills the old. This is a terribly leonine Lamb, a Lamb whose wrath terrifies kings and strong men, a victorious Lamb. Augustine attempts to maintain his balance: “Who could avoid encountering the teeth of this [Satanic] lion, if the lion from the tribe of Judah had not conquered. Against the lion fights a lion, against the world a lamb” (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 73). John Howard Yoder argues that a politics of the Lamb undoes the principalities and powers more powerfully than the usual politics of the lion, all teeth and claws (cited in Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 74). This Lamb is leonine precisely in submitting to death; he is a conqueror in his being-conquered, a victor in death, a lion who overthrows beasts by his willingness to give himself as a sacrificial Lamb (Mounce 1997: 129). His little flock will combat beasts in the same way.

John uses καὶ εἶδον for the second time in the chapter, linking the scroll with the Lamb that he now sees: “And I saw on the right of the Enthronement a scroll . . . And I saw . . . a Lamb.” The Lamb receives the book, but perhaps John intends us to see something more like an identity of book and Lamb: What the closed book conceals is what the Lamb reveals. The Lamb is ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου, the location the living creatures (4:6; ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ θρόνου; they are also κύκλῳ τοῦ θρόνου). The creatures *make up* the ark-throne (Knight 1999: 63–4)—they are in its midst; and they *surround* the throne, forming the outer structure. The Lord is enthroned on the beasts, and he is surrounded by the beast-guardians of the throne. Now, however, the *Lamb* is in the midst of the throne, and *also* in the midst of the four living creatures. He occupies the Enthronement's position (Boxall (2006: 98) is doubtful, and places the Lamb between the throne and the creatures; so too Koester (2015: 376)). Necessarily, the Lamb is also in the middle of the twenty-four elders. He takes center stage, replacing the four living creatures *as* the throne of God. We never again see beasts “in the midst of the throne” because another composite beast—a

multi-eyed, multi-horned Lion-Lamb—has taken their place. A voice comes from the midst of the four beasts (6:6), but that is the voice of the Father or the Son, and in 7:17 we read that the Lamb is in the midst of the throne. He is not seated enthroned, but “standing.” Jesus the Lamb is the ultimate Cherub, the new Throne of God, God’s human chariot and glory.

Many (e.g., Davis 1992: 135; Boxall 2006: 97) have pointed out that Revelation uses ἀρνίον 28x as a Christological title, 4 x 7, spatially and temporally complete. A 4 x 7 figure fills all time and space. The other time the word is used, it describes the land beast, a counterfeit Lamb.

Remarkably, Caesarius (2011: 71) claims that the Lamb is the church, not Christ, a view Bede (2011: 127) attributes to Tyconius. It is not right, but it is not as far-fetched as it may appear. After all, the body will conform to the head, precisely in being slain and standing; the body receives the seven Spirits from the Son, the seven Spirits that become the torches that illumine the church and roam to and fro throughout the world. The Lamb is Christ, but the Lamb, like every representation of the Son in Revelation, is a *totus Christus*, the pattern for the body and the pledge that the body will grow up into the head. As the heavenly man, Christ reaches full maturity *first*; but what is done in heaven shall be done on earth.

The “root of David” image goes back to Isaiah 11, where a Spirit-filled servant of Yahweh springs from Jesse (v. 1) and is also the “root of Jesse” (v. 10).

How does ἡ ρίζα Δαβὶδ fit grammatically? Is it an explanation of “Judah” or a description of the Lion? The latter seems preferable. The pattern throughout Revelation 4–5 (and elsewhere in the book) is to offer triadic (not dyadic) descriptions of Jesus and the Father. Here is another one: Lion, Judahite, Root-of-David. The triad moves from general to specific: He is the Lion who has overcome; what’s more, the Lion is from Judah; what’s more, the lion is the Root of David.

As Lion and Root, the Lamb is both seed and source, first and last, the Alpha and Omega of the Davidic dynasty. He is father of the father of David, yet David’s ultimate descendant. Before Judah was, the Lion can say, “I am.” The fact that the lion is not found in the search for a worthy one does not prevent him from being the root. First a fruitless search, then the discovery of a worthy lion, then the declaration that the Lion is “root”: This is all temporal play, a way of highlighting the Alpha-Omeganness of the Lion. It is also a straightforward way of talking about time and the priority of future over past: The Lion comes at the *end* of the Davidic line, but the end roots the beginning. There is no meaning to the Davidic dynasty at all unless it comes to *this* end, a Lion who can take the book and open its seals. The Davidic dynasty is unique precisely in being an *eternal* dynasty. If it has no future, it has no being. There is no source unless there is also supplement and finality. Ends are not predetermined by beginnings. Not: In the beginning is my end. Rather the opposite: In the end is my beginning.

The elder who speaks with John also informs him that the lion/root can open the book because he has overcome (ἐνίκησεν). Throughout Jesus's messages to the angels, he made promises to those who "overcome." Victors resist compromise, fight false teachers, stand fast under pressure from false Jews, refuse to bow at Satan's Roman throne, persevere through the tribulation that is coming. As a result, they inherit promises of rule and authority. Jesus follows the same movement: As Lion, he overcomes, and therefore proves himself a worthy conqueror. Like David, he battles and wins and then rules. As a conqueror, he is capable of receiving the book and ruling; he is worthy because he has overcome. (As discussed above, the promises to overcomers fill out the contents of the book.)

Commentators often associate the Lamb with Passover (see options in Aune 1997: 367–73), but in Leviticus 23, which structures Revelation, there is no mention of a Passover lamb. At Passover, moreover, Israel is permitted to eat either a lamb or a young goat, lamb or mutton. A lamb is mentioned later in Leviticus 23 (9–14), as part of the rite of the feast of "first sheaf." Israelites offer the first sheaf that springs from the ground as a wave offering, along with a "male lamb one year old without defect for an ascension offering" (Lev. 23:12). In Revelation, Jesus is the first sheaf that rises from the earth, the first seed that goes into the ground, dies, and springs up into resurrection life. He is the "ascension" Lamb of the first sheaf that goes up in cloudy smoke into the presence of the Father. We will eventually see the rest of "firstfruits" ascend to be with him (Jordan 1999a; ➔14:17–20).

Aries, the ram constellation, the first sign of the Zodiac, governs the vernal equinox and initiates the new year. In many depictions, Aries head is twisted backward, looking as if its neck is broken.

The Lamb stands but stands as if slain. ἐσφαγμένον does not necessarily imply sacrifice (cf. 1 Jn 3:12, though Cain's murder of Abel might well be conceived of as sacrificial; Rev. 6:9), but in the LXX it frequently does (Lev. 4:24, 29, 33; 6:18; 7:2; 14:13). The Lamb has been slaughtered as a sacrifice, as the saints will be (18:24). Though slain, he stands in the midst of the living creatures and the elders. He has risen, though he still bears the marks of his sacrifice. His seven horns are symbols of power (Ps. 89:17, 24; 143:17) over all creation, from beginning to end, from first day to last. Later in Revelation, the ten horns of the beast are ten kings (➔17:12; cf. Daniel 8). Horns are peaks of mountains, high places, and altars have horns too. Horned, the Lamb is the holy mountain and altar of seven peaks. Moses is "horned" with glory when he comes down from Sinai (Exod. 34:29; Heb.

keren). God in his glory has “horns” shining and radiating out from his bright hand.

That the *heavenly* Lamb is described as slain highlights the continuity of the humiliation and exaltation of the Messiah. Though raised in Spirit to heaven, the Lamb bears the signs of having been slaughtered in the flesh. This continuity has been expressed in different ways by different traditions of Christian theology. Medieval Catholics stress this point to underscore the sacrificial character of the Mass. For some medieval theologians, this is not a “re-sacrifice,” much less a repetition of the sacrifice in the flesh, but a sacrifice “according to the effect and representation” that communicates the “effect of the passion” (Nicholas of Lyra in Krey 1997: 76). Protestants have generally stressed that the wounds of the heavenly Christ are part of his ongoing priestly work. “Rich wounds, yet visible above / in beauty glorified,” as Charles Wesley put it. In the twentieth century, some Protestant liturgical theologians have suggested that the Eucharist is sacrificial insofar as it is a memorial of sacrifice, not primarily an aid to memory for the human participants but a ritualized commemoration to “remind” God of the promises sealed in Christ. The body and blood of communion are joined to the heavenly wounds of Christ as memorials of his death.

The seven eyes are the sevenfold Spirit of God. Earlier, the seven Spirits are be burning “before the throne” (4:5), but since the Lamb has become the throne he has taken the seven Spirits as his burning eyes. In coming to receive the scroll, the Lamb receives the Spirit from the throne and the Enthroned One. As Irenaeus notes, the eyes of the Spirit are given to the Son (*Demonstration* 9). This is the last reference to seven Spirits in the book, since they are henceforth the eyes of the Lamb. This confirms that John witnesses the ascension of Jesus. As Peter said at Pentecost, the Spirit poured out on the church is the Father’s gift to the Son, which the Son then shares with his disciples (Acts 2:33).

Eyes are organs of judgment, scrutiny, and surveillance. In giving the Son the seven lamp-eyes of the Spirit, the Father gives all judgment into his hands (Jn 5:19–24). The Spirit of the Son is poured out to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:8).

In Zech. 3:9, Joshua the high priest receives a stone with seven eyes, inscribed with an inscription. The phrase “seven eyes” does not appear in Zechariah 4, but there is a reference to “these seven” that are the “eyes of Yahweh which range to and fro throughout the earth” (4:10; link noted by Boxall (2006: 99) and Andrew (2011: 131)). That occurs in a vision of a great golden lamp burning with 7 x 7 lamps, supplied continuously with oil. It means that the Lord will give the Spirit that will enable Zerubbabel to erect the temple, which is built “not my might nor by power, but by My Spirit” (v. 6). In these two visions of Zechariah, there is a linkage between seven eyes, engravings on a stone, the Spirit, and eyes that range to and fro through the earth. Joshua’s stone is the gold crown of the high priest wears, engraved with the seven letters of “holy to Yahweh.” So too, the seven eyes of the Lamb mark him as the true high priest.

The Zechariah passages depend on the double use of the word “eye” in Hebrew. *ayin* means “fountain” or “spring,” the small “eye” in the ground through which water flows. It is a

part of many Hebrew place names (En-rogel, En-dor, En-mishpat, etc.), and various passages play on this double meaning. Seven eyes on the high priest's stone are seven springs, because the high priest, consecrated to Yahweh, is a source of living water for the people of God, like Yahweh himself, the Rock of Israel that flows with water in the wilderness. The Lamb is also a sevenfold spring of the Spirit, his seven eyes flowing from the Rock that is Christ the Lamb. The Lamb is the Rock from which the Spirit springs.

The fact that the Spirits are sent throughout the earth has a double significance. On the one hand, the Lamb is the source of the Spirit that flows to the corners of the earth. On the other hand, the Spirit functions as the “eyes” of the Lamb, carrying out the Lamb's surveillance. The Spirit fills human beings who become the eyes and ears of the Lamb's body that range throughout the world. Because the Spirit confers spiritual sense (Chretien 2006), we are able to see past appearances, through distorting veils and deceptive masks, in order to see the world as it is. Filled with the Spirit, we survey the world, assess and make judgments, and then report back to the Lamb, offering our counsel in prayer. The seven Spirit-eyes are sent (ἀπεστέλλμενοι) throughout the earth, sent with authority like apostles, sent out in the angels of the churches, who are the eyes of the Lamb in the church.

John sees a monstrous Lamb, the true form of the beast (12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7). With his two horns, the sea beast looks more Lamblike than the Lamb, but he speaks like a dragon. The heavenly Lamb roars like a Lion, speaks with a voice of trumpet and thunder, and even death cannot defeat him. We are heading to a cosmic battle greater than Predator v. Alien, but there is no doubt about the outcome of the battle of monsters that lies ahead of us.

New song

The promise of the final verses of chapter 4 is fulfilled. Everyone, including the living creatures, falls down before the Lamb, and, as promised, the elders join in to praise the worthiness of God. New tools of worship are introduced. No one had a harp before, but now all the Ancient Ones do. No one had a bowl of incense before, but now they offer incense that is the prayers of the saints.

Premodern commentators suggest the harps are cruciform. As the strings are stretched on a wood frame, so the flesh of the Son is stretched on the wood of the cross so that by the Spirit he might become a pleasing melody to the Father (cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 75; Victorinus 2011: 10; Caesarius 2011: 71). On the different containers used in Jewish and Greco-Roman worship, see Aune (1997: 356–8).

They ᾄδουσιν ᾠδὴν καινὴν, but the fact that they are singing at all is novelty enough. This is the first use of ᾄδω (cf. 14:3; 15:3). Earlier, the living

creatures “say” (λέγοντες, 4:8), and so do the elders (4:10, λέγοντες), but now saying has is elevated to singing (stressed by Douglas 1915: 167). The sequence from speech to song retraces the liturgical development of OT worship. Trumpets are used at the tabernacle, but so far as we know, there is no singing in the Mosaic worship. Temple worship, though, includes a choir and orchestra (Leithart 2003a). Heaven experiences the same shift, from continuous “saying” of worship to a sung liturgy, at the beginning of the Lamb’s reign as Davidic king. When David takes the throne, he introduces music and singing. When the Lion-Lamb of Judah ascends into the heavenly throne room, the angels break out musical instruments to hail his arrival.

The nexus of musical instruments, song, and kingship is evident in the Psalms. Psalm 33 is the first Psalm to mention musical instruments (*kinor*, *naval*, *‘shor*) in the body of the Psalm, and it is also the first “new song.” A new song is one accompanied by instruments. Similarly, Ps. 144:9 connects the “new song” with playing on a harp of ten strings, and in Ps. 149:1, the exhortation to sing a new song is immediately followed by references to dancing, timbrel, lyre. In a number of Psalms, the “new song” is a song of kingship, Yahweh’s kingship, which is accompanied by instruments (96:1; 98:1). Outside the Psalter, the only use of “new song” is Isa. 42:10. That chapter introduces Yahweh’s Servant, the chosen one who brings justice to the nations and opens the eyes of the blind and releases prisoners. Song erupts from the ends of the earth, from the islands, as far as Kedar Song breaks out at the Servant’s coming.

When Revelation comes to its climax in the war of the beast on the saints, when the saints’ blood is ready to be shed on the earth and an end made of the whole series of events, the *saints* sing a new song. For the saints too, song marks the beginning of kingship. The elevation of the saints fulfills the kingship of the Lamb; his investiture as *nagid*, announced one, becomes an enthronement as *melek* when his people are enthroned to sing with him. The weeping of exile, the weeping that was John’s response to the empty throne and closed book, is turned to joy, the joy of a Lamb *and his Bride* upon the throne of the Father.

The content of the song is new too. The first praises in chapter 4 were directed to God the Enthroned Father, worthy to receive all glory, honor, and power as Creator. Now angels sing to the Lamb who takes the book to break its seals. To make the obvious point: This is a monstrously high Christology; the same worship offered to the Enthroned One is now offered to the Lamb. The song begins with a praise of the Lamb’s “worthiness.” As noted, this is an economic term, and sets up the later economic terminology of the song. He is worthy because of his self-sacrifice, which is an exchange, a purchase (ἀγοράζω).

ἀγορ- terms are regularly used to describe Christ’s work. “You were bought with a price” (1 Cor. 6:20; cf. 7:23), and therefore must to glorify God in bodily action, avoiding sexual

immorality. A purchased people must resist the allure of the harlot's πορνεία. According to 1 Cor. 7:23, Jesus purchases us as slaves: "You were bought with a price" means "You have been purchased as God's slave, and are not to be subject again to slavery to any other." Peter warns against false teachers who deny the despot who purchased them (2 Pet. 2:1: τὸν ἀγοράσαντα αὐτοὺς δεσπότην ἀρνούμενοι). Gal. 3:13 uses a similar verb (ἐξαγοράζω), again alluding to the "slave market" of the "curse of the law" Paul explains that Jesus purchases us from the curse by becoming a curse. Gal. 4:5 uses this verb to describe our redemption from the law, and our transfer from slavery to the adoption as sons. This evokes the OT image of a household servant, born again at the door of the house by the piercing of his ear, which transfers him from slavery to sonship.

Jesus's blood pays for our release. It is sufficient payment because it is the blood of the Son of God, the human blood of the Son assumed in the incarnation. That blood is precious to God, and purchases a people from bondage. Martyr blood is also precious in Revelation, because it is the blood of the corporate body of the Son. The Son assumes human blood and makes it his own; those who are united to him, who drink his blood, have his precious blood in their veins. Their deaths too are worthy.

Passover lurks in the background. Israel is enslaved to Pharaoh, and Pharaoh refuses to let the people go. Yahweh warns Pharaoh that the infant blood he sheds will be paid with blood of his own children, and that happens on Passover. The blood of the lambs and goats of Passover "purchases" safety for those who spread blood on the doorposts. Jesus the Lamb has done the same in purchasing people from the slavemarket into the adoption of sons. Those purchased by the new Passover Lamb are made into a "kingdom, and priests to our God," a clear reference to the Sinai covenant (Exod. 19:6; LXX: ὑμεῖς δὲ ἔσεσθέ μοι βασιλῆιον ἱεράτῃμα καὶ ἔθνος ἅγιον; Rev. 5:10: καὶ ἐποίησας αὐτοὺς τῷ θεῷ ἡμῶν βασιλείαν καὶ ἱερεῖς; cf. Bauckham 2000: 327). The Lamb has made his purchase for God (5:9). It costs Jesus his life, his very life blood, but by that blood he buys a gift to present to his Father.

The gift is a company from every tribe and tongue and people and ethnicity (φυλῇ, γλώσσα, λαός, ἔθνος).

Bauckham (2000: 326–37) analyzes the seven uses of this phrase in Revelation, used here for the first time. A fourfold list suggests a universal extent in space; seven such lists suggests a universal extent in time. Multiplied, their product is 28, a number that represents temporal and spatial universality together. "Lamb" also appears as a Christological title 28 times. The Lamb's dominion is a 28, and thus extends to the fourfold nations in their sevenfold temporality. The phrase "seven Spirits" occurs four times, another twenty-eight, numerically underlining what is said in 5:6, that the seven Spirits are "sent out into all the earth" as the eyes of the 28-fold Lamb to judge and give life to the 28-fold nations.

As Bauckham observes, John's list alludes to Exodus 19, but with a twist. Exod. 19:5 states that Israel is Yahweh's "treasured possession out of all the peoples" (*mekal-ha'amim*), usually taken to mean that this one nation, Israel, is picked out from among the nations of

the earth. John rewords the passage to indicate that people from every nation have been brought together, purchased by the Lamb, to constitute the church. The church is not a nation picked from among the nations, but a new nation constituted by people gathered from every nation. As Bauckham says, John interprets Exodus 19 not in an ethnocentric fashion but to emphasize “the international character of the NT people of God.”

A similar listing of social types is found in Genesis 10, the table of nations. At the end of each section of the genealogy, we are told that the names are listed “by their families, their languages, their lands, and their nations” (10:5, 20, 31; LXX: ἐν ταῖς φυλαῖς αὐτῶν κατὰ γλώσσας ἐν ταῖς χώραις αὐτῶν καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν αὐτῶν). John replaces the LXX’s χώραι with λαοί. The table of nations is the original listing of Gentile peoples, the new postdiluvian humanity. The Lamb fulfills the Abraham promise of regathering those nations, after they had been scattered at Babel.

In Daniel, the phrase “all peoples, nations, and languages” (*kal ‘ammiym ‘ami’ vlashniy*) is used seven times (3:4, 7, 29, 31; 5:19; 6:25; 7:14). In the LXX of Dan. 3:4, a fourth term is added to conform it to the list of Genesis 10: ἔθνη καὶ χώραι, λαοὶ καὶ γλώσσαι. Early in Daniel, the list refers to those peoples and nations and tongues who are commanded to bow to Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, and in Revelation the fourfold list sometimes refers to nations and peoples that bow before the beast. By the end of Revelation, however, nations and peoples and tongues have been rescued from beasts and given to one like the son of man, so they can bring their treasures to the heavenly city (→21:9–22:5).

As Bauckham argues, the Daniel usage is the closest the background of the uses of Revelation from 10:11 on. In those passages, the list refers not to the church purchased and gathered from every tribe and tongue and nation, but to the nations themselves in various phases. Bauckham stresses that John’s “use of the fourfold phrase, recalling Dan. 7:14, implicitly indicates the expectation that all the nations, who currently worship the beast, are to serve Jesus Christ.” The phrase refers to those who conquer through suffering, those who come victorious from the strife with the beast. But John expects more: “the transfer of dominion over the nations themselves from the beast to Jesus Christ” (Bauckham 2000: 329–30; on this controverted claim, see McNicol 2011).

The Lamb reigns to gather from every tribe and tongue and people and nation in order to form a kingdom and priests, a new Israel. Verse 10 also adds that the purchased people will reign of the earth. The goal is not merely to constitute a kingdom in which the saints submit to the rule of the Lamb. The Lamb constitutes a kingdom where the saints rule *along with* the Lamb.

When the living creatures and elders fall on their faces and begin singing, other angels join in. They too surround the throne, like the living creatures and Ancient Ones, and they are exceedingly numerous. A myriad is 10,000, and μυριάδες μυριάδων is 10,000s of groups of 10,000. One myriad of a myriad would be 100,000,000, and here it is plural—*many* hundreds of millions of angels all speaking at once at the throne of God. It is another Daniel 7 allusion. When the Ancient of Days assembles his court, takes his seat, and opens the books, a crowd appears around him, numbering of thousands upon thousands, myriads of myriads (Dan. 7:10). From the opening vision of Revelation 1, we know that the Lamb has hair like wool, like the Ancient of Days. Surrounded by myriads of myriads, he is ready to open the book and

pass judgment in favor of the saints and to give them the dominion promised to them. He is ready to initiate the court proceedings.

The myriads of angels sing the worthiness of the Lamb that has been slain, but instead of speaking of what he purchases with his blood, they sing about the sevenfold blessing of the Lamb. Equipped with the seven Spirits of God as his burning eyes, he confers a sevenfold gift. In 5:12, this list is governed by a single article: “*the* power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and blessing.” When the seven gifts of the Lamb are enumerated later (7:12), they are distinguished by the repetition of the article and are listed in a different order: “*the* blessing and *the* glory and *the* wisdom and *the* thanks and *the* honor and *the* power and *the* strength.” While 5:12 grammatically emphasizes the unity of a complex gift, 7:12 stresses the diversity of gifts. Riches appear in the first list, but that is changed out for thanksgiving (εὐχαριστία) in the second. Both lists emphasize that *all* good things are found in the Lamb. He has received the Spirit from the Father, and with him he receives all power and riches and wisdom and strength and honor. He receives in order to give, to distribute his gifts to the saints.

The homily writes itself: If you are weak, the Lamb is strong; if you are poor, you are rich in the Lamb; if you are foolish, ask of God, because all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in the Lamb; if you are shamed or ignored, remember that you have all glory in the Lamb; if you are bereft, the Lamb is full of blessing (Jordan 1999a: 88–90; cf. Douglas 1938).

Eventually the circle of worshipers expands to include all creatures in the whole creation. Does everything *always* participate in a cosmic liturgy? Perhaps. But Revelation 4–5 depicts a *progression*. Initially, only the four living creatures worship (4:8), then the twenty-four Ancient Ones join in (5:8), then myriads of angels (5:11), then everything created in heaven and earth (5:13). Prior to the Lamb’s appearance, only the four creatures praise the Enthroned One. The Lamb is a pebble dropped in the heavenly sea that sets off concentric waves of praise. The four creatures and the elders do not worship *together* until the Lamb appears. Angels join in when the Lamb appears, and then the rest of creation follows. The Lamb fills the cosmos with worship. His ascent extends the heavenly liturgy out to the corners of creation.

As the choir grows, the objects of praise change. First cherubim praise the Father, then there are two canticles to the Lamb, and then finally, in the final hymn, praise is offered to both the One who sits on the throne and to the Lamb. The combined company of all angels and all other creatures offers praise to the combined rulers, the Enthronement and the Lamb. The ascended Lamb unites every creature everywhere in a single *leitourgia*. Creation is *at the last* a cosmic liturgy, and history is that liturgy’s long prothesis.

In the letter to the angel of Laodicea (3:14), Jesus is identified as ἀρχὴ τῆς κτισέως. In the second Song (4:11), the *Father* is praised for creating all things and for the will by which they were created (σὺ ἔκτισας τὰ πάντα, καὶ διὰ τὸ θέλημά σου ἦσαν καὶ ἐκτίσθησαν). The Son is the source and head of creation, and the Father is also identified as Creator. In the final song, πᾶν κτίσμα of which Jesus is the head and which the Father makes joins in praising both the Enthroned One and the Lamb. Everything created comes through the ἀρχή, Jesus, and from the Father, and every creature is fulfilled when it returns to the origin, in praise of God and the Lamb. That is the destiny of all things. Creation exists to praise; every created thing exists to join in the heavenly liturgy of angels and living creatures. Everything exists to enter into the Father's commendation of the Son and the Son's celebration of the worthiness of his Father.

The created things are divided into four zones: Heaven, earth, under the earth, and sea; that is to say, angelic beings and sky creatures, the sun, moon, and stars; all humans and earth-creatures; all dead beings that have been inserted into the earth; and now the sea and its inhabitants as well. Both Jews of the land and Gentiles will join in praise. This fourfold vertical axis matches the fourfold classification of human societies in 5:9. Jesus has purchased men from tribes, tongues, people, nations, and he will be praised for that by creatures from the sky, the earth, under the earth, and the sea. The Bible sometimes maps a three-decker universe: heaven above, earth beneath, and waters under the earth. The song sketches a *four*-decker universe, with the dead "under the earth" or "under the land" added. Jesus has descended under the earth and returned. Because of his death, burial, and ascension, the grave itself is filled with praise. "Can the dead praise you?" the Psalmist asks (Psalm 88). And Revelation's answer is a resounding, oceanic *Yes*.

That extension from three to four is evident elsewhere in Revelation. The first four trumpets bring judgments on earth, sea, springs and rivers (fresh water), and the sun, moon, and stars (→8:6-12). It is a judgment on earth, water, sky, but the water has been divided into sea and fresh water (→16:2-9). The triple decker universe stretches out to a fourfold. The vertical threeness of the universe is no longer set over against the fourfold horizontal extension of the earth. Instead, vertical and horizontal match; the triangular cosmos is remade to conform to the quadrilateral geometry of earth. Earth and cosmos are each a four, making an eschatological *eight* rather than a first-creation seven. In Revelation, then, creation is four high and four wide (cubic, like new Jerusalem; →21:9–22:5). Analogously, the Lamb himself takes the place of the fourfold living creatures, becoming the throne of the Father. There is a "fourfold God" on the throne, the Lamb

who, as priest, king, prophet, and man incorporates the living creatures into himself.

We might say: God created the world to fill it with his glory, so that earth will someday conform to God. Numerologically, that would mean that the fourfold creation will eventually be trimmed back to three. The incarnation disturbs, complicates, and glorifies this expectation. Earth will conform to God, but to fulfill that design, God the Son first conforms to earth. Earth is invaded by the heavenly Son, then heaven is invaded by earth when the glorified Lamb ascends. Earth will be heavenized, but its heavenization depends on a *prior* earthening of heaven. God makes us like himself by first making himself like us. One of the three assumes the fourfold earth, so that the fourfold earth might be filled with the glory of the three. But—ineffably, beyond thought—the ascension of the Lamb adds a fourth dimension to the world because it has given a fourth to *God*. God incorporates a creature into his own life, the humanity that is the humanity of the divine Son. But, with Jonathan Edwards, we must say more: The three of heaven expands to four when the Father gives the Spirit-adorned Bride to his Son, so that she may become a member of the divine family. With the ascension of the Lamb and the Bride, the Three-Personed God fills out his fourfold throne.

The vertical dimension of the world has turned into a four, and this fourfold is populated by “things in them” (τὰ ἐν αὐτοῖς πάντα). The list of zones is interrupted and dislodged by the phrasing of verse 13. Why the repetition of the things “in them” when we have already read about “what is in heaven”? There is a creational zone + filling pattern here. Four zones are listed, and then the “things that are in them” are mentioned. That hints back to the forming-and-filling patterns of Genesis 1. Creation comes to its fulfillment when it is no longer formless and empty, when it is no longer simply formed and filled with objects; creation is fulfilled when it is formed and filled with praise.

When we add “the things in them,” the fourfold creation becomes a fivefold reality: Four zones, and to those four zones are added a fifth, a host or a swarm of things that matches the fifth day. We might spy a seven here: Heaven, earth, under earth, sea, things in them, Enthroned One and Lamb, fourfold ascription of praise (“blessing and honor and glory and dominion”). That matches the days of creation numerically, and would put the Enthroned-and-Lamb in the sixth, Adamic position of fulfilling humanity and the fourfold ascription, which is “forever and ever,” in the position of eternal Sabbath.

Creatures from the four zones of creation offer fourfold praise to the Lamb and the One Enthroned. The elevation of the Lamb has made God “four.” To the Enthroned One, the living creatures sing in threes: Triple sanctus, Lord/God/Pantocrator, the Past/Present/Future one (4:8). Once they add the Lamb

to their praise, their *praise* becomes a four: Blessing, honor, glory, dominion to the Lamb and the one who sits on the throne.

The praise is reminiscent of acts of imperial praise in Daniel. When Nebuchadnezzar comes to his senses, he praises the God who has everlasting dominion (Daniel 4). And the glory, dominion, and kingdom of all the nations and peoples are given to the Son of Man in Dan. 7:14. The Enthroned One and the Lamb are the God Nebuchadnezzar praises; the Lamb is the Son of Man.

“Forever and ever” is an infelicitous translation of εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων, better rendered (as in some Eastern liturgies) as “unto the ages of ages.” “Forever and ever” suggests a smooth, silky temporality, a history without seams or breaks, a happily ever after ever after. The plural “ages” indicates that time *is* broken up into segments. God has all dominion and power and glory and blessing not over an unbroken surface of time but in and through all the breaks and breaches and chasms, all the humps and hills, of history. History is pocked with revolution, but the living God never passes out of fashion, never grows old. Unto ages of ages, he is the God who embraces it all because he is the God who is, was, and comes.

One of the Three
Entered our four
To add it to the Three:
So heaven could imitate earth.

To make us gods,
He first became man.
Earth will be heavenized,
But only as heaven is earthened.

The Father created the world
To make a Bride for his Son
And bring her into the divine family.

Spirit of the Living God: Catch us up to the throne of the Father and to the Lamb who is the Lion of Judah. Clothe us in your shining glory, that you may delight in the incense of our prayers and the sacrifice of our praise. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

IV.2. In Spirit in Heaven: Seven Seals—Rev. 6:1–8:6

The Lamb is in the midst of his Father's throne. Holding the book in his hand, he is ready to open the seals. He is worthy to open (note the alliterative ἀξιός ... ἀνοίξεν, 5:4) and see it. He has been acclaimed by the hosts of heaven as the one with dominion and blessing and honor and glory, the sevenfold graces of the sevenfold Spirit. Revelation 4–5 depicts the exaltation of the Lamb in his ascension, from the perspective of heaven. John lives and sees visions on Patmos *after* the ascension, but the visions take him back in time. As Ezekiel (43:1-5) is a visionary eyewitness to the return of the glory and Zechariah (3:1-10) a visionary eyewitness to the purification of Joshua the priest, so John witnesses the Lamb's investiture as king. The ascension sets fairly strict parameters on what John is about to witness: Whatever follows as the seals are opened are events that followed the ascension of Jesus (Victorinus 2011: 10; Bede 2011: 128). That is to say, in simple literary terms, chapter 6 follows chapter 5.

What *does* happen after Jesus ascends? The same thing that happens *whenever* the Lord ascends to his throne. When Yahweh descends from Sinai to take his throne above the wings of the cherubim, fire breaks out to light the bronze altar of ascensions (Exod. 40:34-38; Lev. 9:22-24), and sacrifices begin to ascend, accompanied by the blowing of trumpets (Num. 10:10). When Yahweh later fills the most holy place of the temple, fire falls from heaven to consume sacrificial flesh and turn it to smoke (2 Chr. 7:1). When Jesus ascends to heaven, he casts down Pentecostal fire to turn the disciples into living sacrifices, altars with tongues of flame on their heads (Acts 2). When the Lamb ascends, he opens the seals of the book, and when they are all open, an angel casts down fire from heaven to shake the earth (Rev. 8:1-5) and seven angels blow trumpets as the world is consumed in a cosmic sacrifice.

More prosaically (though still mysteriously): At his ascension, Jesus receives the Spirit from his Father, whom he pours out on his apostles on Pentecost. They proclaim the gospel and thousands receive it and are baptized. Almost immediately, Jewish leaders browbeat the apostles to make them stop preaching the risen Jesus. The apostles refuse, and keep making

converts. When a mob stones Stephen, the people of the Way flee from Jerusalem, dispersing as far as Antioch, where they evangelize receptive Gentiles. Through their preaching, they plunder the corrupted house of Israel to adorn a new temple, where Jews and Gentiles are knit together as one. By shedding the blood of prophets and apostles, the elites of Jerusalem and dispersed Judaism seal their own doom, setting themselves up for sword, famine, and pestilence, the end that Jesus predicts (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The seals depict the first stages of this history, not in straightforward prose but in apocalyptic symbol.

Several details of the sixth seal point to this Pentecostal and post-Pentecostal context. A mighty Pentecostal wind blows (6:13; 7:1-2), and the darkness, blood, earthquake recall not only the crucifixion (Oecumenius 2011: 32) but the “full coming” of Pentecost: “I will grant wonders in the sky above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord” (Acts 2:19-20, quoting Joel 2:28-32). When the Lamb opens the seventh seal, an Angel casts Pentecostal fire from the heavenly altar to earth, which brings down the throne phenomena of thunder, voices, and lightning to shake the earth (8:3-5; cf. 4:5).

As noted (→Introduction), each section of Revelation corresponds to an Israelite feast, and here we enter the third-month feast of Pentecost. For OT Israel, Pentecost is a feast of firstfruits, involving an offering of new grain fifty days after the first sheaf has been presented before the Lord (cf. Deut. 16:9-12). Leaven is purged during Passover, but returns at Pentecost. Two *leavened* loaves are offered with seven male lambs, a bull, and two rams as ascensions and a male goat for a purification, and two male lambs for a peace offering (Lev. 23:17-20). With the seals, the new leaven of the Spirit begins to grow in the church.

Embedded between the Lamb’s ascension and the casting of heavenly wind and fire, the seals thematically depict the events of the first chapters of Acts. The seals are arranged in a causal sequence, though not always in exact chronological order. First the white horse of the gospel rides out to conquer; the red horse of division and conflict follows, taking peace from the land as men slay one another; the black horse brings famine to those who cling to the old ways, unbelieving Jews and Judaizers, while the anointed community of wine-bibbers prospers. At the climax, the Lord unleashes Death and Hades, the green horse who kills with sword, famine, death/pestilence. The horsemen are indeed horsemen of the Apocalypse, horsemen who bring the Unveiling of Jesus. They play a role in the end, of *something*, but they do *not* bring the end of the physical universe. The horsemen follow the Olivet Discourse (Stefanovic 2009: 220; Reddish 2001: 124), but only the fourth represents punishments on the wicked. The first three signify God’s initiatives to stir up, shake up,

and shake down an old world to make way for the new. It is judgment like the one brought by Elisha—a judgment of *grace*. If we follow the sequence of the Olivet Discourse, the horsemen not represent signs of the end in any case. War, famine, earthquakes mark the “*beginning* of birth pangs.”

As the horses disrupt the peace of the world, and especially when sword, famine, and pestilence are released against God’s enemies, martyrs agitate for vindication. Their blood has been crying from the earth, but the Lord seems deaf, silent, asleep. Now, their request is answered: Vindication is imminent. With the sixth seal, the world begins to unravel. Heaven collapses and earth is shaken. Everyone runs for cover as the screen that protected them from God is torn in two. The great day of the wrath of the Lamb has come (6:17), and the blood of the righteous is about to be avenged. It seems to be *the End* (Koester 2015: 404).

It is *not* the End. Only a quarter of humanity is killed by the plagues of the horsemen. As the world begins to crumble, angels at the four corners are told to hold back the Pentecostal winds that would sweep away the world (7:1-3; cf. Gen. 1:2; 8:1). The horsemen have all the momentum, but things come to a screeching halt until the 144,000 are sealed. The cup of martyr blood, like the sin of the Amorites (Gen. 15:16), needs to be filled to the brim before Abraham’s seed inherits the land. Only after the 144,000 are sealed do we glimpse the End, an innumerable company from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people, gathered in tearless joy before the throne (7:9-17). Only then do the prayers of the martyrs ascend all the way to heaven so that fire can fall to earth (8:3-5).

The fortunes of that 144,000, a perfect all-Israel, become the focus of attention in the subsequent cycles of trumpets and bowls. The end comes only after their blood has been shed (→14:14-20) and poured out on the earth (→16), after trumpets and bowls, when the Rider on the white horse reappears to complete his conquest (→19:11-21). *The end*, the End of all ends, does not happen until heaven and earth themselves flee away (→20:11-15) to make room for a new heaven and a new earth (→21:1-8). None of that occurs in chapters 6–8:5. None of it *can* happen in these chapters because the book is not yet open. Heaven’s liturgy is just getting started when the book is opened. Until *all* the seals are broken, the scroll is still unseen and unheard (Mounce 1997: 139; Boxall 2006: 104). The liturgy moves on to dismissal only after the ministry of the trumpet Word, the testimony of John the prophet, and the chalice of the Sacrament. The travail of the world’s new birth begins with the seals, but it does not come fully until the “abomination of desolation” that Daniel spoke of.

Since the scroll cannot be read until it is full unsealed, the visions John sees in chapters 6–8 are *preparatory* to the unveiling of the book and not themselves the contents of the book. *Contra* Reddish (2001: 124), the content

of the book is spoken by John, after he eats the open book (→10:1–11:2). Thus, the overall sequence is: The Lamb opens the seals of the book; trumpets announce that the contents of the book are about to be unveiled; then John consumes the book and prophesies its contents, the visions of chapters 12–16. That is the heart of the book of Revelation, and everything prior to that is (among many other things) part of John's preparation as a prophet. The prophetic call scene from Ezekiel 1–3 stretches out over the first eleven chapters of Revelation.

Once the Lamb is on the throne, the church is unleashed and *simultaneously* judgment begins. Contrary to popular prejudice, the old covenant was not period of immediate and severe judgment. Paul describes it rather as a time of God's restraint and divine patience: "having overlooked the times of ignorance, God is now declaring to men that all everywhere should repent, because he has fixed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom he has appointed" (Acts 17:30). God displays Jesus as a *ἱλαστήριον* in blood "to demonstrate his righteousness, because in the forbearance of God he passed over the sins previously committed" (Rom. 3:25). God has *written* judgments down, fixed them in ink on parchment, but sealed them up for later, until the fullness of time when the Lamb-Lion from Judah has been qualified to open the seals and to see the book. Now, the Risen Lamb is about to judge the *οἰκουμένη*, the ecumenical world created after the exile, the world whose crimes the Lord has so far excused. He begins to judge the whole postlapsarian, postdiluvian world ruled by angels.

Judgments do not merely *accompany* or follow the unleashing of the church. The unleashing *is* the judgment of the world. The Spirit comes to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, to carry forward the divine lawsuit that Jesus initiated. Filled with the Spirit, the church is, by her sheer faithful existence in a world of oppression and injustice, God's agent for the prosecution (cf. Boxall 2006: 115). As the church carries out her mission in the power of the Spirit, the earth shakes, lights in the political heavens flicker and fall, mountains and hills whirl like banshees, and kings and great men run for cover. The church's mission is itself blood, fire, and vapor of smoke—the blood of martyrs, the fire of the Spirit, the smoke of living sacrifice. The church's mission itself brings sword, famine, pestilence, and death—she slays with the sword of the Spirit, eliminates all the bread that used to satisfy, and by the Spirit kills and makes alive. Wherever the church is, there is the Spirit. And wherever the Spirit is, things fall apart.

The seals review events of the *early* church, but not only that. The pattern of the seals is replicated wherever the gospel is proclaimed. The gospel *always*

conquers, *always* arouses opposition, *always* depletes the old world, *always* brings death to those who resist it (followed by resurrection to those who repent). Whenever and wherever the gospel rides out in the power of the Spirit, things fall apart, so they can be put back together (Stefanovic 2009: 230–5).

A hermeneutical reminder may be useful here. As noted (→introduction), the figures of Revelation *land* on actual events of the first century. Symbols have a target in the world of human experience. Because of their depth and flexibility, these symbols can also be applied in a secondary way to persons, events, and institutions throughout the history of the church. But they predict events that, for John and his audience, were “shortly to take place.” In terms of the medieval quadriga, tropologies rest on the original literal sense.

Structure

The Lamb breaks seven seals in succession. As each is opened, something happens. Like the other seven sequences in Revelation, this sequence is subdivided into two sections. The first four seals all reveal horses, and are written in a stereotyped format. The Lamb opens a seal, John hears the voice of one of the living creatures commanding, “Ἐρχου (vv. 1, 3, 5, 7), then (in most cases) John “sees” a horseman. As in the first apocalypse of Jesus (→1:9–20), hearing comes first, then seeing. A horse emerges, its color is mentioned, and John describes the one who sits on the horse. In three of the four cases, John describes something the rider *has*—a bow, scales, the name of death; the horseman of the red horse does not bring anything with him. Three of the four describe a gift to the rider—a crown, power to take peace and a sword, authority to kill; the horseman of the black horse receives nothing. In the second seal, the red horse is “given” two things—permission to remove peace and a sword.

Schematically:

First	Second	Third	Fourth
Lamb opened first	He opened second	He opened third	He opened fourth
I heard	I heard	I heard	I heard
Voice: a creature	Voice: second	Voice: third	Voice: fourth
Speak like thunder			
Come	Come	Come	Come
And I saw		And I saw	And I saw
Behold		Behold	Behold
	Came out		
White horse	Another, red horse	Black horse	Green horse
He who sat	He who sat	He who sat	he who sat

First	Second	Third	Fourth
Had bow		Had scales	Had name Death
			Hades followed
		And I heard	
Given crown	Given to take peace		Given authority to kill
Went conquering			
	Slay one another		
	Given sword		

The first four seals are described rapid-fire. The fifth scene is longer (6:9-11), the sixth longer still (6:12–7:17), before the series concludes with a seventh seal, a “Janus” text that both concludes the seals and opens the sequence of trumpets (8:1-6). Overall, then, we have a 4 + 3 pattern, similar to the pattern we noted when discussing the messages to the angels (→2:1). That 4 + 3 pattern has thematic significance. When the Lamb opens the first four seals, the living creatures, the cherubim, cry out. When the fifth seal is opened, we hear a *human* cry: No longer animals or cherubs, but Spirit-inspired human voices cry out for the unveiling of Jesus. Then we hear human shrieks as the sky begins to collapse, the human song of the innumerable multitude, and the prayers of the saints that ascend in smoke to heaven. That rhythm of angelic-to-human anticipates on a micro-scale the overarching movement of the book from an angelical and animal covenant to a human one. Human voices are subordinate to angels’ only “for a little while.”

This structural analysis can be refined further. De Villiers (2004b: 139–40) points to the similarities of the first and third seal, and the uniqueness of the second seal. In the first and third seals, the living thing’s call is followed by an identical phrase: καὶ εἶδον, καὶ ἰδοὺ ἵππος (vv. 2, 5). In the second seal, καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ἄλλος ἵππος follows the creature’s call (v. 4). The rider on the red horse, further, is not given anything until the end of the scene (v. 4). De Villiers observes, “The object that the rider holds is mentioned after the action ascribed to him in the concluding subsection. By switching instrument and action in this way, the middle seal is differentiated and thus further foregrounded” (140). Seals 1 and 3 form an *inclusio* around the second seal, and mark off the first three seals as a unit.

The last three seals are organized in a similar ABA fashion. Both the fifth and seventh seals refer to prayer, both feature an altar, and together the ascending smoke and descending fire of the seventh seal answer the plea of the martyrs in the fifth seal (de Villiers 2004b: 130–6). Thus the seven seals break down into a 3 + 1 + 3 pattern, placing the green horse at the center of the scene. I disagree with the conclusions de Villiers draws from this structure, but the structural analysis dovetails with the analysis I offer here: On my interpretation, the first three horsemen depict the apostolic mission and its results, and the fourth begins to bring fourfold judgment (sword, famine, death, and beasts) on those who oppose the gospel.

This 4 + 3 is also the form of the creation week—four days without “blessing,” and three days with. The seven seals follow the days of creation in other respects as well:

1. The first horse is dazzling white (λευκός), like the light of Day 1.
2. The red horse divides and separates, like the firmament of Day 2.
3. Grain and fruit trees sprang from the earth on Day 3, and the rider on the black horse depletes grains, though fruit trees and vines are protected.
4. The rider on the green horse is Death, and Hades comes with him. Like the sun and moon, Death and Hades have authority over the earth.
5. When the Lamb breaks the fifth seal, a swarm of martyrs appears under the altar, their prayers ascending like smoke. They are given robes. Swarming things, incense, and clothing are all linked with Day 5.
6. The sixth seal reveals humanity—humanity doomed, the firstfruits of a new humanity protected, the eschatological humanity doing what humanity was created to do, worshiping before the one who spreads his tabernacle over them. Like the account of the sixth day in Genesis 1, the sixth seal is considerably longer than the other seals.
7. The silence of the seventh seal, as well as the prayers of the golden altar, link it with the Sabbath of Day 7, the Sabbath that closes the week of the seals and simultaneously begins the week of trumpets.

Few things have distorted the interpretation of Revelation more than the mania for discovering interludes. 6:12–7:17 is not, as many have it, an “interlude,” but an episode in the sixth seal, embedded in the *inclusio* of the fifth and seventh seals (cf. de Villiers 2004b: 130–6). If we treat chapter 7 as an interlude, we miss the entire point of the narrative sequence, which, in brief, is: The end begins; the end is interrupted to make room for more martyrs; future martyrs are sealed.

Four horsemen of the Apocalypse

The four horsemen form a unit, and are the best-known vision of the Apocalypse, represented in paintings, drawings and woodcuts, poems, oratorios (Franz Schmidt’s *Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln*), novels, films, even cartoons. They sum up all that can go wrong in the world—war, civil war, famine, plague, death. Many of these cultural uses of the image are detached from the original setting of this vision in the book of Revelation. We want to grasp what these horsemen represent, but not in isolation from literary context.

Bede, Bernard of Clairvaux, and others take the horsemen as a preview of church history, with Constantine often playing a large role (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 80–3). After the

white horse of apostolic victory come the red horse of persecution and the black horse of apostasy. Bullinger points out that the calamities depicted in the first four seals ultimately aim for the healing of mankind (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 80). Nicholas of Lyra takes the rider of the white horse as Christ, but argues that the other three horses are ridden by Roman emperors—Nero, Titus, and Domitian. The green horse represents the Roman people themselves (Krey 1997: 83–7). For Nicholas, Constantine comes later in the sequence, symbolized by the “another angel” who holds back the four angels of the corners. According to Nicholas, Constantine’s (apocryphal) baptism by Pope Sylvester encouraged many others to receive the seal of protection (Krey 1997: 94–5).

Commentators often ask whether the horsemen are positive or negative images, whether they represent good or evil, angels or demons (Boxall 2006: 107; Aune (1998a: 393–4) lays out options, as does Smalley 2005: 148–51). The question is sometimes put rather crudely. The question, “Is social disruption good or bad?” cannot be answered without knowing something about the society being disrupted. Disruption *may* be a step toward social justice.

We can begin to sort through the issue by taking note of several obvious points, and one that is not so obvious. The obvious points are: Whatever the horsemen represent, they are released by Jesus the Davidic Lamb-Lion and announced by the cherubim. We are not told *where* they come from, but the fact that the Lamb and the cherubim together summon them shows that, whatever their origin or character, they are under Jesus’s control. Importantly, it is not that the horsemen are first rampaging about, and Jesus *brings* them under control. They are not visible or active at all until Jesus and the cherubim summon them. Whatever these horsemen are, wherever they come from and whatever they are to do, they are agents of Jesus and his angels.

The notion that the horsemen represent demonic or Satanic forces that God uses for good ends works only if we admit that God first unleashes those demonic forces in the first place. I suspect very few are prepared to swallow that implication.

The not-so-obvious, controversial point is the one I made above: Jesus sends out the four horsemen in the aftermath of his ascension. They are agents of the ascended Christ, sent to carry out the effects of the ascension. Jesus ascends on high and gives gifts to men. Jesus ascends on high and gives four horsemen.

Zechariah’s night visions provide important background (Zech. 1:7–17; 6:1–8; Mounce 1997: 140; Boxall 2006: 104, 109; Aune 1998a: 390). At the beginning of his visions (1:7–17), Yahweh’s horses are in a pasture, not out surveying the earth, not fighting Yahweh’s wars. These are the fiery horses of Yahweh’s cavalry, but they are doing nothing. That is a problem, because the world is not as it should be. Specifically, in Zechariah’s time, the temple project has stalled. Cyrus supports the temple, but later Persian rulers may

believe the lies of the people of the land. Zechariah laments for the same reason John weeps (→5:4-5), because the Lord's promised redemption has not yet been realized: *Pax imperium* can be a curse (Koester 2015: 395–6). Zechariah wants the horses to go out from the pasture and start shaking things up. By dawn, he gets what he wanted: The horses, now with chariots, charge out of the Lord's house, between the bronze pillars that have grown into mountains. The Lord is again at war, and that means that all the things that Israel has waited for are going to happen. John's visions correspond to Zechariah 6 rather than Zechariah 1: The four horses of the Apocalypse are not in pasture, but heading out into the fray. And that is very good news.

Zech. 10:3-4 provides a clue to the identity of the horses. The Lord visits the "house of Judah" in order to make them "His majestic horse in battle." The rider of this war horse has a bow (v. 4) to defeat the enemy and trample them underfoot (vv. 5–6). Whatever the specifics of this passage, and they are somewhat obscure, the relevant conclusion is clear: A horse can symbolize the people of God. Perhaps Yahweh himself is the Rider in Zechariah 10. Admittedly, this proves nothing. Interpreting the Apocalypse is not the sort of endeavor that easily yields to something so certain as "proof." Yet Zechariah opens a possible line of interpretation: John's horses are the people of God carrying on her mission.

Tyconius claims that the first horseman is Christ, and the horse a symbol of the church (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 84). Caesarius of Arles (2011: 72) cites Zech. 10:3-4 to support his conclusion that the white horse is the church on which Christ rides. For a number of premodern interpreters, the four horsemen are figures of the apostles carrying out the mission of the apostolic church (so Andrew of Caesarea in Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 79; Andrew 1997: 133; Bede 1997: 128; Lyra in Krey 1997: 82).

When the horses and chariots charge out from the temple, Zechariah asks the interpreting angel what the horses-with-chariots are. The angel replies that they are the "four spirits of heaven" or the "four winds" (*arba' ruchot hashashamayim*; 6:4). Earlier, the Lord said that the released exiles will be dispersed "as the four winds of the heavens" (2:6: *ke'arba' ruchot hashashamayim*). They are not dispersed to the four winds, but as the four winds (Jordan 2009: 369). God is Spirit and Wind and Breath, *ruach*, and his son Israel is also spirit and wind and breath. God blows his Spirit-Wind people goes to the four corners of the earth, the four points of the heavens. This is likely the meaning of the phrase "four winds" in Dan. 7:2, where the four winds stir up the sea (Bede (1997: 132) connects Revelation 7 with the four winds with Daniel 7). Israel is the created breath of the Creator who breathes with uncreated Breath. He makes clouds his chariot and walks on the wings of the wind, and Israel is his wind-chariot (Psalm 104; cf. Jer. 4:13).

We can fill out our earlier discussion of the connections between cherubim, tabernacle, and constellations, now with the addition of four horsemen. The living creatures who call out the horsemen are numbered: "one" of the creatures, the second, the third, the fourth, following 4:7. The first is the lion (Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 132), the second the ox/calf, the third a man, and the fourth a flying eagle. If we associate the living creatures with temple furniture (→4:7), and assume that the configuration of chapter 6 follows the heavenly scene of chapter 4, we have this arrangement: The sequence begins with the throne-lion, who

moves east from the throne; then comes the altar-ox, who moves from altar to throne; then the table-man, who moves south toward the lampstand, and finally the lampstand-eagle who flies north toward the table. The first horse, the white one that conquers, is leonine and royal, the throne horseman. The second horse, the red one, is bovine and priestly, appropriately red as altar blood (Andrew of Caesarea (1997: 133) links the combination of the red horse and the ox with sacrifice). The black horse announces scarcity of barley and grain, and that connects him with the man-face and the table of bread. The final horse, the green one, is associated with the eagle, perhaps a scavenger devouring corpses (→19:17–18).

Schematically:

Creature	Horse	Furniture	Direction
Lion	White	Throne	West to East
Calf/Bull	Red	Altar	East to West
Man	Black	Table	North to South
Eagle	Green	Lampstand	South to North

Jordan (1999a: 75–8) links the colors of the horses with the colors of the tribes of Israel. The “white” or “shining, brilliant” (λευκός) stone is perhaps a diamond, which Jordan links with Naphtali. Naphtali means “wrestle” or “twist,” and Naphtali is named this because by giving her maid Bilhah to Jacob Rachel was able to wrestle a second son (after Dan) from her husband. The red horse is connected to the red stone of Judah, the royal tribe. Called by the sacrificial ox but colored like royalty, the red horsemen combines ox and lion, and hence carries on a priestly war, a sacrificial combat. Joseph is the black stone, the onyx. Fittingly, the black horse brings famine, like the famine in the days of Joseph. In Joseph’s day, the world was divided between the deprived land and the Egypt of plenty. Joseph’s brothers suffered hunger, and had to go into exile, out of the land of grain and barley, to get food. So too, the black horse announces a deprivation of wheat and barley, but preserves a supply of oil and wine. The horse is χλωρός, linked with the emerald or turquoise that is the stone of Levi. The rider on the green horse is called Death Θάνατος, and the Levites were specialists in death. They were called to be Yahweh’s priests because of their zeal in carrying out the death penalty against idolaters at Sinai (Exodus 32), Phinehas was given an eternal priesthood because he curbed the plague by impaling a couple in their tent (Numbers 25), and Levitical priests spend their days killing animals and were to keep the people away from Yahweh’s presence by killing them if they go too near. Once again, identification of stones is tentative (Harrell 2011; →21:19–20). More importantly, the gemstones of the bridal city are not inscribed with the names of Israel’s tribes, but the twelve “apostles of the Lamb” (→21:14). Israel’s priestly gemstones have been transferred to the apostles. (Is John (1:42) still playing with πέτρος and Κῆφας?) If the horses are linked with gem colors at all, they colored *apostolically*.

The zodiac is again relevant. As we have noted (→4:7–8), lion, ox, man, eagle correspond to four major constellations of the Zodiac, Leo, Taurus, Aquarius, and (roughly) Scorpio, and the horsemen are also arguably linked with constellations. The equipment of each one is a clue to his identification. The most obvious symbols are the bow and the scales, the tools of Sagittarius and Libra respectively. Sagittarius is called out by the first beast, Leo the Lion; the black Libra constellation is called out by the third creature, Aquarius, with the face like the face of the man. In the zodiac, Sagittarius is four constellations away from Leo, and Libra four from Aquarius. If we stick with this pattern, the other constellations should

be Virgo (red horse), called by Taurus, and Cancer (green horse), summoned by Scorpio. Virgo does correlate with the red horse. In Greek mythology, Virgo is the goddess Astraea, daughter of Zeus and Themis, associated with the goddess of justice, Dike and portrayed with sword and scale. Pseudo-Hyginus's second-century *Astronomica* (2.25) states:

[Constellation] Virgo. Hesiod calls her the daughter of Jove [Zeus] and Themis. Aratus says that she is thought to be daughter of Astraeus and Aurora [Eos], who lived at the time of the Golden Age of men and was their leader. On account of her carefulness and fairness she was called Justice, and at that time no foreign nations were attacked in war, nor did anyone sail over the seas, but they were wont to live their lives caring for their fields. But those born after their death began to be less observant of duty and more greedy, so that Justitia (Justice) associated more rarely with men. Finally the disease became so extreme that it was said the Brazen Race was born; then she could not endure more, and flew away to the stars.

There is no obvious association between Cancer and the green horse.

The four creatures are associated with constellations that mark the four seasons. Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, Aquarius mark the beginning of spring, summer, autumn, winter respectively. In chapter 6, the creatures are listed in the opposite of seasonal order, moving from summer to spring to winter to autumn. Whatever is happening in the opening of the seals throws the clock of heaven into reverse. Each of these four constellations is also associated with a different element. Leo is hot and dry like fire; Taurus is cold and dry like earth; Aquarius is hot and wet like air, and Scorpius cold and wet like water (Beck 2006: 60). The links are summarized in the following chart:

Creature calling	Gift	Constellation called	Element	Season
Lion (Leo)	Bow	Sagittarius (four clockwise)	Fire	Summer
Calf (Taurus)	Sword	Virgo (four clockwise)	Earth	Spring
Man (Aquarius)	Scales	Libra (four counterclockwise)	Air	Winter
Eagle	Authority	Cancer (four counterclockwise)	Water	Autumn

Whether or not we can match the horsemen with specific constellations, we can say in general: The horsemen are part of a heavenly cavalry, the starry people promised to Abraham. Some suggest that the horses are comets (cf. Aune 1998a: 390; Malina 1995).

The horses may be the apostolic church. That will be the hypothesis that guides the following reading. As the reading moves along, the hypothesis will imperceptibly harden into a theory and then a certainty.

Who are the riders? We begin with a mundane observation: Each rider “sits” on his horse (καθήμενος, vv. 2, 4, 5, 8). This is the same verb that was used absolutely in chapters 4–5 to describe the Father (eight times, first in 4:2: ἐπὶ τὸν θρόνον καθήμενος) and the twenty-four enthroned Ancient Ones (4:4). The Father and Ancient Ones sit on the thrones of heaven; the Lamb sends

out riders enthroned on horses. A rider is lifted up. Horses are chariots with four legs; saddles are mobile thrones. The analogy between riding a horse and ruling a people was a stock political image in the ancient world. A great king tamed his people as he tamed a horse, and directed the power of his people as he directed his horse with bit and bridle. The Riders “sitting” on the horses are like the One “sitting” on the throne. Perhaps the Rider is himself a divine figure.

Nowhere in the OT is anyone said to “sit” on a horse. People “ride” horses, or do not ride, as the case may be (Gen. 49:17; Exod. 15:1, 21; 2 Kgs 18:23; Jer. 17:25; 22:4). In Revelation, many *sit* on horseback (6:2, 4, 5, 8; 9:17; 19:11, 18–19, 21). In Revelation, the word “horse” (ἵππος) is used sixteen times, nine times in the plural (9:7, 9, 17 [2x], 19; 14:20; 18:13; 19:14, 18), seven in the singular (6:2, 4, 5, 8; 19:11, 19, 21). The armies of heaven “follow” (ἀκολουθεῖω) on their horses, a term used throughout the NT for discipleship.

In three passages of Revelation, the one who “sits” on a “horse” is *undoubtedly* Jesus, the Faithful and True, who fights with a sword from his mouth (19:11, 19, 21). In 19:11, Jesus rides a white horse like the first horse in the seals (6:2). Since Irenaeus, Christians have cited this intertextual connection to identify the rider on the white horse of chapter 6 as Jesus.

The objections to this identification are weak. Mounce (1997: 141) and Koester (2015: 394) highlight the differences between the horsemen of chapters 6 and 19: The first wears a wreath, the last many diadems; the first has a bow, the second a sword; the first conquers, the second deals out “righteous retribution.” At one level, this is laughable. (“That *can’t* be Count Olaf,” says Mr. Poe to the Baudelaire children in Lemony Snickett’s *Series of Unfortunate Events*. “Count Olaf wears a bowler hat and that man is wearing a turban.”) The objection also fails to reckon with internal development within the Apocalypse: Jesus *begins* with a wreath; but *eventually* wears many crowns, after his slaves have followed him in conquest. Boxall (2006: 107), more plausibly though mistakenly, suggests that the rider is a direct parody of Jesus, the Antichrist.

Might the other horsemen be further unveilings of Jesus? Are the horsemen “manifestations of Yahweh or angels reflecting his character or actions” (Ford 1975: 103, 106)? The most daring interpretation is to say that the other three are all Jesus too (Jordan 1999a: 75): Jesus as Victor, as Divider, as Depleter, as Lord of Death; Jesus the White, Jesus the Red, Jesus the Black, Jesus the Green. If this does not seem Lambish behavior, we must remember that Jesus is no ordinary Lamb. He is a Lamb-*Lion*, King Lamb, a monstrous Lamb whose wrath is terrifying enough to drive the great men of the land into hiding (6:15–17).

Revelation 19 supports this identification. With exquisite subtlety, the unveiling of Jesus as the rider on the white horse repeats the sequence of the four horsemen. Jesus is on a white horse (19:11, the first horseman). He smites the nations with a sword (19:15), as the rider on the red horse divides

with a great sword (6:4). When the black horse appears, a voice from the throne warns, “Do no injustice to the oil and the wine” (6:6), but Jesus comes from the winepress where he has trampled out the grapes to make the wine of wrath (19:15). Finally, an angel invites the birds to strip the flesh from the slain (19:17–18), those who have suffered death at the hands of the rider on the green horse (6:7–8). Both at the opening of the seals and after the fall of Babylon, Jesus is unveiled as Jesus the White, Jesus the Red, Jesus the Black, Jesus the Green.

An overarching structural pattern also supports this interpretation. Ryan Leif Hansen (2014) observes that the command to “Come” frames the book of Revelation (cf. Boxall 2006: 106). As the Lamb opens the first four seals, each of the four living creatures calls for a horseman to “Come” (6:1–8). Revelation ends with three more commands to come: The Spirit and bride, and the one who hears the book, join in saying “Come” (2x in 22:17) and an unnamed speaker (John?) ends with “Come, Lord Jesus.” Presumably the Spirit, bride, and hearer are also asking *Jesus* to come. In sum, the commands to “come” form another 4 + 3. That equals 7, and makes a neat numerological frame. If seven calls to “Come” stretch from chapter 6 to 22, and if the latter three are (explicitly) calls for *Jesus* to come, then the first four are *also* calls for Jesus to come. Jesus comes in response to the calls, first on a white horse, then on a red, then on a black, finally on a green horse.

One of the difficulties with this interpretation is that it makes Jesus both sender and sent, releaser and released. If Jesus is the Lamb opening the book, how can he *also* be the rider on the white horse, much less the rider on the red, black, or green horse? To ask the question is to answer it: Jesus sends himself in the person of the Spirit. “I will come to you,” Jesus tells the disciples. “The Comforter will come to you.” That is: Jesus returns to his disciples through and in the Spirit.

Each of the horses is summoned by a living creature (Douglas 1915: 46–7). The Lion-Lamb displaced the living creatures as the throne (5:6); he is the true cherub. Now the Spirit is revealed cherubically, as a rider on the horse. Spirit and church form a series of terrifying centaurs.

According to John’s Gospel, the Spirit comes as παρακλήτος, an officer of the court, a friend of the accused, to complete the judicial work of the Son. Jesus sends the Spirit to convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (Jn 16:8; ἐλέγξει τὸν κόσμον περὶ ἁμαρτίας καὶ περὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ περὶ κρίσεως). Jesus came to prosecute Isaiah’s lawsuit against the nations, and after his ascension he continues that prosecution through the Spirit that fills his church. Jesus is witness, and the Spirit forms the church as a company of witnesses testifying to God’s faithfulness before rebellious nations.

So, Yes: Jesus is Conqueror, Divider, Depleter, Death; Jesus the White, Jesus the Red, Jesus the Black, Jesus the Green. But the Spirit is his double,

his Angel. He is Spirit the Conqueror, Spirit the Divider, Spirit the Depleter, Spirit of Life who also kills; the Seven Spirits come as White, Red, Black, and Green. This is why the Lamb *stands* in heaven, rather than taking a seat on his Father's throne. As chief liturgist, his work is not finished. He began to do and teach; now, through the royal Spirit who rides the church into battle, he continues his campaign.

The progression of horses follows the progression of Jesus' own ministry (cf. Oecumenius 1997: 28–32). He comes from heaven with the triumphant gospel of the kingdom, divides Jews against one another, those for and against himself, plunders an Israel who had come under the dominion of the Strong Man, Satan, and brings them into his own house. He warns that those who refuse fall on the Rock would be ground to powder, blown away like chaff, and their house would be left with not one stone on another. They will be destroyed by sword, famine, pestilence, and beasts. After Jesus ascends, he pours out his Spirit to replicate his own ministry, in nonidentical repetition, in the lives of his disciples. After Pentecost, the apostles too proclaim the good news of the victory of God, are opposed by Jewish elites, plunder the house of Israel, all of which prepares the way for judgment to fall in AD 70.

Andrew of Caesarea (1997: 133) notes that

some have interpreted the loosing of the present seal and all those that follow thereafter to refer to the incarnate economy of God the Word: the first seal refers to his birth, the second to his baptism, the third to the miracles after this, the fourth to his appearance before Pilate, the fifth to the cross, the sixth to the burial in the tomb, and the seventh to the plundering of hell.

While I do not agree with the correlations Andrew offers, the instinct to link the sequence of horses with the life of Jesus is a sound one. The view defended here has a patristic pedigree. Commenting on the first seal, Victorinus writes,

[A]fter our Lord ascended into heaven, he opened all things and sent forth the Holy Spirit. Through preachers, the words of the Holy Spirit penetrate into the human heart as though they were arrows and they conquer unbelief. The crown on the head is promised to the preachers by the Holy Spirit ... And, therefore, the white horse is the word of preaching when the Holy Spirit was sent into the world. (Quoted in Weinrich 2005: 82)

Caesarius of Arles takes the majority position in saying that the rider of the white horse is Christ, but also claims that "the white horse is the church" (83). Elsewhere, he suggests that "the white horse is the church and its rider is Christ or the Holy Spirit in whose hand is a bow that sends forth his commandments, as powerful, sharp arrows, to kill sins and to enliven the faithful. The crown upon his head is the promise of eternal life" (85). Caesarius, however, distinguishes the Christological white horse from the satanic red horse, which represents "an evil people whose rider is the devil" (85).

Thus, my suggestion: The Spirit of Jesus is the Rider on the four horses, the four winds, the church. The Lord visits "[h]is flock, the house of Judah" in order to make them "like his majestic horse in battle" (Zech. 10:3). Sheep to warhorse: That is a neat description of the Pentecostal transformation of

the apostles. Timid, treacherous sheep become the war stallion of the Spirit as they become followers of the Lion-Lamb.

The proof is in the pudding: Does this interpretation make sense of, is it at least *consistent with*, the details of the text?

Victory

And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard the first¹ of the four living things saying as with a voice of thunder: “Come.” And I saw and behold a horse, sparkling-white, and the one who sat on it had a bow, and a crown was given to him and the conqueror² went out to conquer.

—Rev. 6:1-2

The NASB translates ἥνοιξεν as “broke,” but the word means “open.” Translating it as “broke” detaches the seals from the multiple openings that take place throughout Revelation. Doors open, heaven opens, mouths are opened, mouths that contain secret words that come out only when the door of the mouth is opened. Finally books are opened to present evidence before the court that will pass judgment in favor of the saints. The open scroll is a symbol of the apocalyptic character of the apocalyptic, for in the open book God unveils his Son and, in him, his secret purposes.

As each seal is opened, one of the living creatures calls out to a horseman. The Lamb’s opening of the seal by itself does not bring the horses out. Lamb and lion work *together* to bring the white horse; lamb and ox to bring red; lamb and man to bring black horse; and lamb and eagle to bring the green horse. In the old covenant, God worked through angels, and he is still doing so through the final stages of the old order. Though the Lamb has ascended to take the scroll, he still operates by the principles of the old world. Cherubim work with the great Cherub to initiate the beginning of birth pangs.

The first horse is dazzling white (λευκός; cf. λευκά ὡς τὸ φῶς in Matt. 17:2). Early in Revelation, white is the color of heavenly glory, the color of Jesus’s crown of hair (→1:14) and of the robes of the Ancient Ones (→4:4). White is the color preference of conquerors, who wear white because their victory wins them a place in the heavenly temple. At the last, the conquerors who have been assembled in heaven descend as a white-robed Bride. The white horse is like the first day of creation, the beginning of light on the earth. When the Lamb sends his Spirit to decreate and make a *new* creation, he

¹ “One” here means “first” (Koester 2015: 393).

² Koester (2015: 395) takes the participle as a substantive and the subject of the sentence.

comes as dazzling light to conquer the darkness, as the bright Spirit who hovered over the dark void (Gen. 1:2). Like the Word who is light (Jn 1:1-5), the Spirit comes as the light of the world and the darkness cannot overcome him.

The lion speaks with a voice like thunder. Usually, the voice of thunder is the voice of God.

Yahweh thunders against his adversaries and judges kings (1 Sam. 2:10). Yahweh thunders at the Philistines and drives them away (1 Sam. 7:10). In the theophany of 2 Samuel 22/ Psalm 18, Yahweh comes in clouds with cherubim on the wings of the wind, fire burning before him, and thunders from heaven. Thunder is the voice of the Most High (2 Sam. 22:14; Ps. 18:13). "Listen to the thunder of his voice," Elihu says, "a voice roars; he thunders with his majestic voice" (Job 37:2-4). Can you thunder like God? Yahweh asks Job (40:9). Psalm 29 is the great Psalm of thunder: The thunderous voice of God breaks cedars and shakes the earth. Seas roar or thunder (*ra'am*), so the voice like many waters is a thunderous voice (Ps. 96:11; 98:7). It is this thunderous voice of Yahweh that chased the waters away to make dry land appear in the creation week (Ps 104:5-9). Yahweh's thunderous voice is the voice of creation, which is the Word or Voice of God himself, Jesus the Thunder of God.

Outside Revelation, the Lord's thunder voice is heard in the NT only in John 12. Jesus prays that the Father would glorify his name, and the Father responds with a thunderous announcement that he has glorified and will glorify the Son (Jn 12:28). Immediately after, Jesus predicts the judgment of the world that will happen at the cross. The thunder that speaks the Son's glory testifies to the Son as the judge of the earth, the one who will be lifted up to cast out the devil and to draw men to himself (Jn 12:20-32). When thunder speaks, he speaks of the glory of the Son, the glory of the Thunder-Word that became flesh, the glory of the Son of Man lifted up. In Revelation, thunder is first linked with the throne (4:5), and with the effects on earth when the angel throws coals from the heavenly altar to earth (8:5). Seven thunders speak when the strong angel comes from heaven (10:3-4), thunder rumbles when the heavenly temple is opened to unveil the ark (11:19), and saints will sing with a voice like thunder (14:2; 19:6). Thunder announces the coming of God's throne and kingdom. As one of the throne-angels, the lion speaks with the voice of the One Enthroned, and with a thunderous summons he begins a series of events that will bring heavenly thunder to earth.

God thunders because he comes in a storm as a storm, and other storm phenomena follow the lion's call. The first rider has a bow, and arrows are like lightning. Yahweh himself shoots arrows of lightning when he comes thundering in his thick, dark storm cloud (cf. Ps. 18:7-15; 144:6; Zech. 9:14). The bow reminds us of Yahweh's rainbow covenant with Noah (Chilton 1987: 186). In Genesis 9, Yahweh sets his war bow in the cloud as a sign to remember his covenant promise not to destroy the earth with water, but to preserve the cycle of days and nights and seasons. Hanging in the sky, the bow speaks

of God's patience and forbearance, a sign of judgment deferred. As the scroll is unsealed, the Noachic period of patience comes to an end. The warrior on the white horse is going to take vengeance, at long last, for all the blood that has been shed on the earth, from Abel to Zechariah the son of Berechiah and beyond. No wonder the martyrs get excited (6:9–11).

The Noachic covenant is ending in another sense as well. During the old covenant, Gentiles who worship Yahweh do not need to be circumcised or become Israelites. They are Gentile God-fearers, and some of them are Gentile priests (e.g., Melchizedek; Jethro). Throughout the old covenant, two distinct covenants operate: The broader covenant with every living creature that begins with Noah encloses the particular priestly covenant with Israel. The *oikoumene* is the postexilic form of this double covenant structure. Revelation unveils that this arrangement is coming to an end. In place of the Noachic/Mosaic distinction, all are bundled together as one new humanity. This is why the NT frequently speaks specifically of the flood generation's special role in redemptive history (1 Pet. 3:18–22; 2 Pet. 2:4–5; Jude 6). The flood generation has been held for the great coming day of judgment, when the Noachic covenant comes to an end. Not only the Mosaic covenant, or the temple, or the ecumenical arrangement of the post-exilic world, but the entire world-system that had existed since Noah is dismantled in the late first century.

Habakkuk also portrays Yahweh fighting with a bow (cf. Ford 1975: 102). Habakkuk's closing song, read at the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), describes a theophany. Yahweh comes raging at rivers and the sea, riding on "Your horses, on Your chariots of salvation" (Hab. 3:8). Like the rider on the white horse, he is equipped with bow and rod to cleave the earth with rivers (Hab. 3:9). When he arrives, mountains quake and shatter (Hab. 3:6, 10), and the sun and moon are removed by the arrows and spear of God (Hab. 3:11). It is a replay of the exodus, when Yahweh "trampled on the sea with Your horses, on the surge of many waters" (Hab. 3:15). While Pharaoh's horses drown, Yahweh opens the waters for his people. In Habakkuk's day, the Lord is doing the same for his people. In John's day, the white horse signals Yahweh's coming—in the person, as argued above, of the Angel-Spirit of the Ascended Lamb.

After Saul and Jonathan are killed at the battle of Gilboa with the Philistines, David chants a lament known as "the bow," mourning over Saul and celebrating the prowess of both father and son. David praises Jonathan's skill with a bow (2 Sam. 1:22). Jonathan is the son of Adamic Saul, but he is a faithful son who yields his place willingly to David. He even hands over his bow to his much younger friend (1 Sam. 18:4). John the Baptist is Jonathan to Jesus's David, but here in Revelation 6 the Spirit is the greater Jonathan, fighting with a bow so that the seed of David, the Lamb, might inherit the kingdom.

Nicholas of Lyra associates the arrows with the preached word (Lyra in Krey 1997: 82), shot by the apostolic rider to pierce to the heart. For Victorinus (2011: 10), the arrows are themselves the Spirit that enters the heart through the gospel. Aune (1998a: 394) cites Deut. 32:23–25 to prove that famine, plague, and war *are* the arrows of God.

Recent commentators have noted that the bow is an eastern rather than a Roman weapon, associated especially with the Parthians who threatened the empire from the eastern flank of the empire (Reddish 2001: 126). Mounce (1997: 142) and Koester (2015: 394–5) think a Parthian reference too specific. For Mounce, the white horse refers to conquest and militarism in general. For Koester, the Parthian allusion is strong enough for the image to imply that the Lamb releases forces that might threaten Rome. Boxall (2006: 108) notes that several pseudo-Neros were sponsored by the Parthians, and notes that Nero was sometimes depicted as the bow-wielding god Apollo. I find the Parthian theory unpersuasive.

The rider on the white horse is called out by the lion, a royal beast associated with the tribe of Judah. Fittingly, the rider receives a wreath as he rides out to conquer. He is already a conqueror, so the headgear is suitable. Crowns are usually worn by kings on the throne, *not* while fighting. David receives the crown of Rabbah *after* defeating the city (2 Sam. 12). Fighting with a crown does not seem particularly safe; better to wear a helmet. A king enters battle wearing a victory wreath if he is exceedingly confident of victory (Aune 1998a: 395). This is a battle whose victory has already been won. The Ancient Ones wear golden crowns, but they toss them before the throne when the Lamb appears (4:10). One of them is taken up by the rider. Later, Jesus wears a crown when he rides on a cloud to harvest his people (→14:14) and he is finally unveiled wearing *many* crowns (→19:11–16). As the Spirit rides the church into battle, Jesus is growing in glory, winning crown after crown, to become in fact King of kings.

Even when we translate νικῶν as a substantive subject (“victor”), the double phrase νικῶν καὶ ἵνα νικήσῃ constitutes a Hebraism. Like “dying you shall die,” it is a verbal testimony of two witnesses that emphasizes the truth of what is said, the certainty of what is predicted. There is an implied purpose clause: The Rider conquers in order to conquer. Conquest has already been a major theme of the messages to the churches, and here conquest is a means for further conquest. Territory won becomes a base for winning more territory.

The Spirit’s conquest is the conquest of the gospel, the victorious announcement of the kingdom by the apostles after Pentecost. At the very least, nothing in 6:1–2 refutes that view, and several details support it. If the bow is the bow of Genesis 9, then it seems only the Lord can take it from its place in the sky and begin to use it again. Yahweh rides with a bow (Habakkuk 3), shooting lightning-arrows from his thundercloud chariot. As long as the book is sealed, the world is at peace, but it is an uneasy peace. It needs to be shaken, and the first horseman, riding out with the gospel, starts an earthquake.

Conflict

And when he opened the second seal, I heard the second living thing saying, “Come.” And another horse, fiery-red, came out, and to the one who sat on it was given authority³ to take peace out of the land and that they should slaughter one another, and a great sword was given to him.

—Rev. 6:3–4

The ox summons a red horse, the color of blood and, especially, fire (πυρρός from πῦρ and πυρόω). Opening the second seal, Jesus sends out the Spirit on a horse of fire, the church burning with the fire of the Spirit. The church bears the fire of the Spirit that burns like tongues of flame on the heads of the disciples, the fire of the Spirit that convicts the world and defends the church, the fire of the Spirit that divides and consumes families. The seven Spirits are seven fiery eyes of the Lamb, now riding to and fro on the earth.

Jesus’s ministry is a ministry of fire. John the Baptist warns of a fire coming to burn fruitless branches, and identifies Jesus as the one who comes to baptize in the Spirit and fire (Matt. 3:10–11). Tares will be burned in the fire (Matt. 13:40, 42) and at the judgment, the goats will be cast into everlasting fire (Matt. 25:41). Jesus has a fire to throw to the earth, and wants it to be kindled now (Lk. 12:49–53). When the Lamb sends out the red horse, he throws down the fire he had been impatient to cast, and the church continues the ministry of Jesus in imitation of Jesus.

The rider on the fire horse is given a sword (Rev. 6:4). That too mimics the ministry of Jesus, who brings not peace but a sword that divides family members from one another (Matt. 10:34–36; cf. Andrew of Caesarea 2011: 133; Boxall (2006: 109) considers the reference “possible”).

The only sword mentioned previously in Revelation is the mouth-sword of Jesus, though the word is different (6:4 uses μάχαира while 1:16 uses ῥομφαία). Aune (1998a: 98) says that the former is a short sword or dagger while the other is a long-sword use for cutting and piercing, but according to Koester (2015: 396), the two words are used interchangeably in Revelation. In the mouth of Jesus, the sword is the word (Ps. 52:2; 57:4; Eph. 6:17; Heb. 4:12, the latter two use μάχαира; cf. Isa. 49:2). Is the Rider’s sword the same? It would make sense. It is the Word of God, after all, that sets men against one another. The sword in the mouth of Jesus is the sword of the Spirit, here the sword *wielded* by the Spirit. Aune (1998a: 396) observes that only Roman emperors were permitted to wear swords in public.

The baptism that Jesus endures divides houses, family members against one another, Jewish leaders against Jesus and his disciples, the people of God from the Messiah of God. It is a targeted striking, taking peace from the *land*

³ The word “authority” does not appear in the Greek text, which states “it was given to take peace out of the land.”

(ἐκ τῆς γῆς). When the Lamb sends the Spirit out riding the church, the gospel has the same effect it had during the ministry of Jesus: It divides *Israel* in two. If the white horse represents the gospel proclamation of the post-Pentecost ministry of the apostles, the red horse is specifically linked with the divisions that immediately arise within Israel (Acts 3–4), culminating in the slaying of Stephen (Acts 7).

The rider on the red horse does not slay anyone. Rather, with the coming of the fire-horse, men begin to slay *one another*, just the effect that Jesus says the apostolic mission would have (Matt. 10:34–39). Understandably, many commentators are horrified at this prospect, but throughout Scripture it is a *blessing* when the enemies of God fight each other. Indeed, setting his enemies against each other is one of Yahweh's prime tactics of war (Judg. 7:19–23; 1 Sam. 14:16–23; 2 Kgs; 2 Chr. 20:20–23; cf. 2 Kgs 3:13–27), savvily imitated by Paul during his trial before the Sanhedrin (Acts 23:1–10). The very presence of the Spirit-filled church in the world drives God's enemies mad, and they begin to slay one another.

Mounce (1997: 143) sees a reference to the civil strife that plagued Rome between Caesar's assassination and end of the first century AD, and Koester (2015: 395–6) nicely points out that the vision indicates that the *Pax* was not a pacific as the mythology and propaganda suggests. Cf. Boxall (2006: 109–10), who calls attention to the civil strife of 68/69 AD. Though I do not believe that is the specific referent of the vision, it is related. Revelation unveils the coming collapse of the Roman peace. Though the civil wars of Rome were not caused directly by the gospel, the gospel did split the Roman world as severely as it split Judaism.

More deeply, the effect of the red horse is to break the bonds that prevent the gospel from advancing, the ties that bind parents to children, sibling to sibling, citizen to citizen. Family and national loyalty is often at odds with faithful witness. An Iranian Christian keeps silent to protect himself from being disowned by his family; a North Korean convert hesitates to challenge the official atheism of the regime. By setting man against man, the Spirit weakens bonds of slavery and opens space for the formation of new bonds, the Spiritual ties that bind together the body of Christ. Before men and women are ready to join themselves to the Lamb as members of his Bride, the chains of their old network must be demolished.

Of course, the disruptions of the gospel also mean that people attack the church and slaughter her members. The second living creature who summons the red horse is the ox, the priestly cherub connected to the altar. It is a sacrificial creature. As Andrew of Caesarea put it, "[T]he second living creature is the bull to depict the sacred sacrifices of the holy martyrs, since the first [creature] signified the apostolic authority" (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 84). Sword and red-fire make for sacrifice. Sky is reddened

(πυρράζω) in the evening and morning (Matt. 16:2-3), the times of the daily sacrifices. Jesus's bronze altar feet glow red like metal heated in a furnace (1:15). Consistent with this sacrificial context, the rider causes men to "slay" (σφάζουσιν, from σφάζω) one another. The verb was already used to describe the Lamb slain (→5:6, 9, 12). The slaying is sacrificial in two senses. On the one hand, those who attack the apostles think they perform a cleansing sacrifice. Killing, they think they do God service (Jn 16:2). Jews and later Romans believe that killing Christians is fitting sacrifice to God, an outlook that Saul shares before Jesus confronts him. On the other hand, the Spirit stirs the spirits of the saints so they offer *themselves* for slaying, as living and dying sacrifices for Jesus, preparation for the transformation of Israel into smoke that ascends to heaven.

It may not appear to be, but the uproar and mayhem opened by the second horse are essential to the world's renewal. First comes the dazzling light of the white horse to conquer darkness, then he erects a firmament. First the Spirit bursts out as light, then the red horse of the firmament sharpens divisions, so that blood begins to flow, sacrificial fires burn, more martyrs are made, and the world moves closer to the End.

Plunder and preservation

And when he opened the third seal, I heard the third living thing saying, "Come." And I saw and behold a black horse, and the one who sat on it had a scale in his hand. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living things saying, "A choinix of wheat for a denarius; and three choinixes of barley for a denarius; and to the oil and wine do no injustice."

—Rev. 6:5-6

The third horseman is usually identified as famine (Mounce 1997: 144), and that is surely part of the image. The rider holds a scale for weighing out money or commodities. Prices *are* exorbitant. Scarcity and resulting inflation mean that a daily wage is just enough to buy food for one's self and one's animals. Prices have risen so high that people can only afford what is needed for the particular day; they live hand to mouth.

Aune (1998a: 397) gives details:

This statement suggests an exorbitant price for basic commodities during a period of famine caused either by drought or by war (about eight times the normal price for wheat and five-and-one-third times the normal price for barley) and indicates the relative value of wheat and barley. . . One liter of wheat and three liters of barley are mentioned together here because it is the appropriate ration for a cavalryman and his mount, or for an individual and his domestic animals . . . The author's emphasis on a *denarius* as the cost of a liter of wheat and three liters of barley presupposes that

this amount represents a daily wage for an average worker ... The normal cost for a *choinix* of wheat was about one-eighth of a Greek denarius or two Roman asses, while barley was about half the cost of wheat, i.e., one-sixteenth of a Greek denarius or one Roman ass.

See similar estimates of Reddish (2001: 127); Koester (2015: 396); Boxall (2006: 110).

The scene is *not*, however, primarily or simply a symbol of famine. The fourth horseman, not the third, brings famine (ἄνθος; 6:8). Besides, the voice from the throne distinguishes different foods. Wheat and barley are in short supply, but supplies of oil and wine are constant. Even in the midst of a bread famine, some goods are preserved (note the parallel with 7:3). The third seal reveals at most a *partial* famine.

ἔλαιον is among the goods available in Babylon's marketplace (Rev. 18:13), and οἶνος is the harlot's favored drink (14:8; 17:2), which she sells (18:13) and shares with the kings of the earth (17:2; 18:3). God too has wine, the wine of his ὀργή (14:10), pressed out of his wine press (14:19-20; 19:15), the wine-blood of the martyrs, which prosecutes the case against the harlot and the beast and brings justice to oppressed saints. It is wine of wrath to the wicked, wine of joy to the saints (cf. 19:1-10).

Commerce has already come up in the message to the angel of Laodicea (→3:17-18). He thinks he is rich, but Jesus advises him to go shopping for gold, garments, eye salve. As we have seen, these are gifts Jesus gifts to those who persevere and enter the heavenly city: Jesus clothes his people in garments of glory and authority; he trims and anoints the lamp of the eyes so that they can see and judge; he offers gold purified in fire so that they can be rich. These are not purely "spiritual," immaterial blessings. Jesus sets up his church as an open-source marketplace, and offers *real* goods. The naked receive real clothes; those who suffer blindness share the hands and eyes of the body of Christ; the poor receive alms. Even when we stretch Jesus's promises metaphorically, they do not become so attenuated as to lose all literal reference: Those who are spiritually and personally impoverished receive the wealth of audible word and edible communion; those who are exposed and vulnerable find love and kindness and forgiveness to cover their shame; those whose judgment has been clouded by sin and unbelief receive new eyes, sharper and keener sight than they had before. Jesus's gifts are *liturgical* and *ecclesial* gifts, which are always at once Spiritual and physical.

With this in the background, we are justified in suspecting that the famine of wheat and barley is not simply a famine of staple foods, and that the wine and oil represent something other or more than commodities (cf. Aune 1998a: 398).

The association of the black horse with the third living creature supports this suspicion. The third creature is an Adam with the face of a man. Adam is supposed to feed his bride, but instead watches her take poison. He is supposed to lead her to the tree of life rather than the tree of knowledge. As we have seen, the man face is associated with the table of showbread. The twelve loaves represent the twelve tribes of the new humanity of Israel, and on the table there are also libations of strong drink (Exod. 25:23-30). The third creature hints that the foods are *liturgical* foods.

Caesarius of Arles (2011: 73, 75) is on the right track when he suggests that the different foods signify contrasting spiritual conditions and communions: “The wine is to be interpreted as the blood of Christ, and the oil as the unction of chrismation” (cf. Andrew of Caesarea 2011: 134).

ἀδικεῖν means “oppress” or “do injustice” rather than simply “to harm physically.” Can one do an injustice to oil or wine? Yes, if the oil and wine represent people (see Aune 1998a: 398). Wine signifies the new covenant that cannot be contained in old wineskins (Matt. 9:17). In John’s Gospel, Jesus transfigures the water of purification into the wine of a marriage feast (Jn 2:1-11), a marriage feast fulfilled in the Apocalypse (Rev. 19:7). Israel’s priests are not allowed to drink wine in the sanctuary, but now we are commanded to drink wine in God’s presence (Leviticus 10). Wine is a royal drink. Joseph is the bearer of Pharaoh’s cup, and other kings in the Bible have cups of wine at their hand. Yahweh himself rules with a cup of wine (Jeremiah 25), and his servant-angels pour out the wine of wrath on the city so that it falls down (Revelation 16). Noah is the first to plant a vineyard, and also the first man who is given permission to carry out the death sentence. Judah will drink wine until his eyes turn fiery red, like the eyes of Jesus, the Lion of Judah, whose eyes burn with righteous judgment (Gen. 49:10-12). Isa. 1:21-23 links the unrighteousness of the city of Jerusalem with the fact that wine is mixed with water. Wine is poured out on the altar as a call for judgment, an “invitation for him to drink it and then judge the giver” (Rev. Arthur Kay, personal communication, March 23, 2012). Wine is a fitting symbol for the church that has entered into the joy of the new covenant, where God’s purposes come to full fruition.

Oil is used in the temple service, and serves as a symbol of the Spirit. It is the anointing of the Christ among and above his brothers (Heb. 1:9). Wise virgins keep oil close, so their lamps will burn when the Bridegroom arrives (Matt. 25:3-4, 8). As priests and kings, the saints are anointed in Christ the Anointed One. Jesus pours the oil of the Spirit into the lamps of the church so they shine like a city on a hill. More concretely—liturgically—oil is used in rites of healing (Mk 6:13; Lk. 10:34; Jas. 5:14). There is literal oil and literal Eucharistic wine among Jesus’s disciples, and the presence of oil and wine in the church points to the kind of community it is. When the voice

says the oil and wine will be preserved, it is declaring the preservation of the church.

We can make something, it seems, of the distinction between raw food (wheat and barley) and processed goods (oil and wine). Wheat and barley are ground into flour and baked into bread, but in the third seal they are named in their unprocessed state. Oil and wine come from natural products, olives and grapes, but in the text they are not named as natural products but as products of human processing and transformation. The two pairs of goods line up along a nature/culture axis: While the natural products are scarce, cultural products are preserved. They also line up along a temporal spectrum: Barley and wheat are early (both in the process of bread-making and in the cycle of harvests); oil and wine are late (because they are harvested later in the year and take time to make). For the purposes of Revelation, the key distinction is eschatological. Wheat and barley come at the beginning, oil and wine at the end. Wheat and barley are first things, oil and wine last things. Hence: Wheat and barley link with the first covenant, oil and wine with the new covenant; wheat and barley represent Israel, oil and wine the church.

There may also be a vertical contrast: Wheat and barley spring from the earth and remain low to the ground; to harvest them, you have to bend down. Olive trees and grape vines are rooted, but the fruit is elevated. Grapes hang down from the vine, and you have to stretch to heaven to pick an olive from a tree, or shake the tree so that the olives fall like manna from heaven or stars from the firmament. Wheat and barley are of the earth, earthy; oil and wine are, like the Last Adam, from heaven.

The only other black horse in the Bible is in Zech. 6:1-8, at the conclusion of Zechariah's night visions. Zechariah's black horse heads north, on the road to Assyria, Babylon, or Persia, and the white horses follow (v. 6), inverting the apparent order of Revelation, where the white horse leads out and red and black follow. Because of the black and white horses, the Lord's Spirit comes to rest in the north (v. 8; *el-eretz tzaphon haniychu et-ruchiyy beeretz tzaphon*).

The idiom "the Spirit rests" is used in various context in the OT and NT. Yahweh's Spirit rests on the 70 elders and they began to prophesy (*kenoach 'aliyham haruach*; Num. 11:25-26). Similarly, the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha (2 Kgs 2:15; *nachah ruach*) and Yahweh's Spirit rests on the Branch from David (Isa. 11:2). Peter assures his readers that whoever is reveled by the name of Christ is blessed because the Spirit of glory and God rests on him (1 Pet. 4:14).

Through the black horse the Spirit comes to dwell in Babylon and Persia. In Zechariah's postexilic context, that means that the Spirit stirs up the Persian rulers to rebuild the temple (2 Chr. 36:22; Ezra 1:1, 5), as the Spirit stirs the spirit of Zerubbabel, Joshua, and the remnant of the people (Hag. 1:14). The

black horse goes out to stir the spirit of those in the north, and the white horse follows to conquer. If we pull back and look at the text more generically, the message is that the Spirit has settled *outside* the land. Ezekiel receives a similar message. In Ezekiel 8–11, the Spirit leaves the temple and goes out to the east to settle down with the exiles in Babylon. The message to exiles is clear: If you want to be in the presence of the glory, you cannot stay in Jerusalem. The glory is no longer there. In Zechariah, the message is similar: Though the exiles are back in the land in Zechariah's day, the Spirit is resting in the North country, and submission to Persia is the way of the Spirit. The black horse of Zechariah points Israel outside the land to find the presence of God. When the black horse reappears in Revelation 6, the message is similar: Those who are starving should seek supplies elsewhere. To get the oil and wine, one has to depart in an exodus out of the famine-ridden land to a new Jerusalem.

"Black" only appears a few times in the OT. When a person has skin disease, the priest inspects the place where the skin disease is and looks for a black hair. A white hair in a spot (Lev. 13:3) or a yellow hair (13:30) is a sign of a stroke and the person must be isolated. White hair is glory, and when glory is juxtaposed with the impurity of open flesh, it defiles. If there is no black hair, then the priest confined the person for seven days (Lev. 13:31) before a reinspection. If the black hair has grown again in the area where the skin disease is, and the scale has remained the same size without spreading, then the person is clean (13:37). Black hair next to open flesh does not defile, so long as the area of flesh is not expanding. A new growth of black hair is the sign of health, and specifically of a return to health after a plague of skin disease. Hair on the head is a crown; hair on the body is a robe. Once the black "robe" grows over the scab, the "leper" is clean and can be restored to the priestly community. The lover of the Song has black hair, black as a raven (Song 5:11), and the Bride too is black but beautiful, an exotic beauty.

The Rider holds scales to measure weights and calculate prices. ζυγός alludes to the easy "yoke" Jesus offers disciples (Matt. 11:29–30), a yoke lighter than the law, which, the apostles say, was a burdensome yoke on the Jews (Acts 15:10). Paul rebukes the Galatians (5:1) for returning to this burdensome yoke after they have been delivered in Christ. The scales/yoke held by the rider point perhaps in both directions, the heavy yoke on the bread-people but the joyous yoke of Jesus for the wine-and-oil people.

The LXX of Leviticus 19:35 uses ζυγός when it commands Israel οὐ ποιήσετε ἄδικον ἐν κρίσει ... ἐν ζυγοῖς. "Justice" specifically has to do with weights and measures, but it is linked with judgment in court (v. 15). Maintaining a just balance means carrying out fair transactions in the marketplace, but the balance also represents justice in the courtroom. The rider on the black horse distributes justice.

A voice comes ἐν μέσῳ τῶν τεσσάρων ζώων (6:6), the very place where the Lamb appeared (5:6; Boxall 2006: 110). Why would the Lamb add to the

living creature's call in the third seal? The third seal matches the third day of the creation week, which is unique in having a double command. God spoke to separate the waters (Gen. 1:9), but then spoke a second time to make the earth fruitful (1:11) with grass yielding seed and trees bearing fruit, grain and fruit, bread and wine. The third seal matches the third day both formally and substantively. Formally, there is a second voice alongside the voice of the third creature. Substantively, the second voice has to do with grain and fruit. In the original creation, God spoke a second to command earth to bring forth grass and fruit trees; in the third seal, the Lamb speaks to announce that the earth is no longer producing an abundance of grain or barley, and to but to protect supplies of oil and wine. It is a partial inversion of Day 3.

The sequence of the first three horses is: The white horse goes out with the gospel of God's victory. Some receive the good news, others resist it, and so there is division, brought by the Spirit riding the red horse. Brother fights brother, but it is not an equal contest. One party is depleted, the other becomes fat. These are the beginnings of birth pangs, as the old world suffers shortages, while the eschatological people are well supplied. If you want to enjoy the good things of the earth, you need to find the oil and wine.

Historically, this portrays the dynamics of the early apostolic mission. The Jewish leaders resisted the apostles, threatened them, ultimately began to kill them. Israel was divided by news of the risen Jesus. Over time, the synagogue that opposed the church became impoverished, famine-ridden, short of wheat or barley. Jewish elites refused to hear the instructions from the throne, and they did injustice to the oil and wine. Those who slayed the saints saw their bread decreasing, and bread is all they have; they refused to enter Jesus's eschatological feast of wine. They suffered a famine of the word, and a growing famine of people, as thousands of Jews turned to Jesus. Those who did not have lose what they have, while the wine and oil are protected and preserved. To receive the wine and oil, one has to leave the synagogue to seek the new Joseph, the Spirit-Rider on the onyx horse, who has wine and oil.

Sword, famine, death

And when he opened the fourth seal, I heard a voice of the fourth living thing saying, "Come." And I saw, and behold a green horse, and the one who sat on it had a name "Death," and Hades followed with him. And authority was given to them over a fourth of the land, to kill with sword and with famine and with death, and by the beasts of the land.

—Rev. 6:7-8

The fourth seal is opened, and a green (Gr. *χλωρός*) horse rides out. The One seated on this horse is named, *Θάνατος*, but he is not given anything. With Hades, the One seated on the green horse is given authority to destroy a quarter of the earth.

χλωρός describes both the kelly green of leaves and grass and the green-gray pallor of the sick, the lovesick, or the dead (for citations, see Koester (2015: 397); Aune (1998a: 400)).

The seals open up the gospel and its effects in the first century: First the gospel is proclaimed, then it divides people against one another, then God begins to impoverish those who have not responded in faith. A depleted opposition intensifies its attack, and as violence increases, God brings judgment on those who have not received the gospel by confessing Jesus as Lord. When the land becomes filled with violence, he does what he did in the flood: He tears the world down. The Spirit enthroned on the green horse, whose name is Death, kills by sword, by famine, by death, and by beasts (v. 8), a fourfold judgment that goes to the four corners of the land. Still, we are in the beginning of birth pangs. The conflict of nation versus nation, the depletion of old Israel's resources, and the judgments that follow do not signify the end. The end will come later, when the abomination of desolation is revealed.

Pestilence is among the plagues that Yahweh brings against Egypt (Exod. 9:3, 15), and among the curses that he threatens to bring against Israel if they turn from him (Lev. 26:25; Deut. 28:21; 32:24–26; cf. Num. 14:12). Jeremiah regularly warns of sword and famine, or sword, famine, and pestilence (5:12; 11:22; 14:12; 14:13–18; 15:2; 16:4; 24:10; 27:8, 13; 29:17–18; etc.), directing the warning specifically to false prophets (14:12; 24:10). Ezekiel does the same, though less frequently (5:12, 17; 6:11–12; 7:15; 12:16; 14:21; cf. Mounce 1997: 145). A few times, beasts are mentioned, usually as scavengers who eat slain bodies (Jer. 16:4; Ezek. 5:17; 14:21). The four curses go together: An invading army brings the sword. In the wake of the sword comes famine, as invaders confiscate crops for their own use or destroy them. With famine comes sickness and plague. Because many die, few are left to bury the dead, and the animals eat the carcasses. Because there are corpses lying around, wild beasts come into the land and begin to attack living people.

The experience of the prophets during the last days of Judah anticipates Jesus and the early church: Prophets call Judah to repentance; the nation is divided between those who followed Yahweh's prophets and those who listen to false prophets; despite opposition, the faithful remnant is preserved and enriched. When Babylon invades, those who follow the counsel of Jeremiah and other true prophets are saved, transported to Babylon to settle in for a long exile. Those who listen to the lying prophets are slaughtered.

The correspondence between the time of Jeremiah and that of John is quite exact: The apostles preach the gospel, divide Israel, and plunder Israel's house. They are rescued by martyr death, or survive when the Romans demolish Jerusalem to move from old Jerusalem to the new. It is just what Jesus prophesied in the Olivet Discourse (Boxall 2006: 105). "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars; see that you are not frightened, for those things must take place; but that is not the end" (Matt. 24:6). Jesus predicts famines and earthquakes (24:7), but says that "all these things are the beginning of birth-pangs" (24:8). As there were false prophets in the time of Jeremiah, when sword, death, famine, and beasts devastated the land of Israel, Jesus says that there will be false prophets again (24:11).

The third term is not pestilence but death (ἐν θανάτῳ): Death and Hades kill by death. In the immediate context, that reminds us of the letter to Thyatira, where Jesus threatens to kill Jezebel's children "with death" (2:23: ἀποκτενῶ ἐν θανάτῳ), but this usage has roots in the LXX, where "pestilence" (Heb. *deber*) is translated with θανάτος (Reddish 2001: 127; Smalley 2005: 155).

This devastation destroys a quarter of the land (v. 8). When the trumpets blow, judgment falls on a wider swath: "a third of the trees were burned up ... a third of the sea creatures died, and a third of the ships were destroyed ... a third of the moon and a third of the stars were smitten" (8). The first reference to beasts in Revelation is found in 6:8, anticipating the unveiling of two far more threatening beasts from sea and land (→13:1-18). Judgments increase in intensity. They are staged. They do not come in to destroy everything all at once. During the seal phase of the first century, there is time to repent, time to turn, time for the gospel to continue to do its work, but the door of opportunity is closing.

The fourth horse is summoned by the fourth living creature, the "flying eagle." This is fitting, since birds of prey are among the beasts that pick over the corpses of the slain (Deut. 28:26; 1 Sam. 17:44, 46; Ps. 79:2; Jer. 7:33; 15:3; 16:4; etc.). Within Revelation, the eagle comes at the climax of various series of visions. Each of the last three trumpets has a woe attached to it, uttered by an eagle flying in midheaven (8:13). After the bowls of wrath-wine have been poured out, the birds of midheaven are invited to feed on the bodies of the kings and great men who have fallen before Jesus, the Rider on the white horse (19:17-18).

Andrew of Caesarea notes the connection between the eagle and the judgments: "The soaring flight and the swiftness upon its prey of the fourth living creature, namely, the eagle, suggests those plagues that come from above, from the divine wrath for the vindication of the pious and for the punishment of the impious, unless these should turn from their sins through improvement" (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 89).

The eagle's position is somewhat surprising, since the eagle represents the third of four stages. Ox, lion, eagle represent the three epochs of the old covenant—Mosaic/priestly, Davidic/royal, Isaianic/prophetic. Then the Son comes as Man and transcends the three cherubic ages. In Revelation, the sequence is bull, lion, man, eagle. That fits once we recognize that Revelation is the climax of the OT, the climax of the prophetic age of the *oikoumene*. The whole book is about the end of the eagle age, but when the eagles have finished, then the wedding is ready, the Bride appears and the Human Age comes in fullness.

Hades follows Death. Hades is the ruler of the dead, also the place of the dead, equivalent to the OT's Sheol. Hades has become a disciple of Death, following after death (cf. ἀκολουθῶ in 14:4, 13; 19:14). Authority is given to the One seated on the green horse and to Hades. Jesus has keys of death and Hades in 1:18. Jesus "kills with death." Death and Hades are eventually thrown into the lake of fire, along with all the wicked whom they have held (Rev. 20:13–14). With the fourth seal, the Lamb confers that authority on the Spirit.

Can *this* be the work of the Spirit and church? The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life: How can the Spirit of life bear the name "Death"? A wider biblical perspective will help answer the question. It is remarkable how often the Spirit grips men in order to make them instruments of destruction. Othniel, Gideon, Jephthah, Saul, David—all become warriors in the frenzy of the Spirit. Samson is the most Spiritual man in the OT, the man on whom the Spirit comes most frequently. The Spirit brings peace, but he does so by equipping holy warriors. With the Son, the Spirit is the Lord of life *and* death, with authority to open heaven *and* Hades. The authority to curse is the authority of Abraham's children, to whom Yahweh gave the covenant promise: I will bless those who bless you, and curse those who curse you. By her sheer defiant presence in the world, the Spiritual church brings curses on everyone who opposes her. These curses are intended, like most of the judgments of Revelation, to drive men and women to repentance. The Spirit kills flesh in order to bring the dead to life in Spiritual bodies. He is Lord of death so that he might be the Lord and Giver of life.

The second "in Spirit" vision is divided into four sections—seven seals, seven trumpets, an unnumbered narrative, seven bowls—that correspond to the four horsemen. The seals unveil the effects of the white horse, the horse of triumph. The trumpets blare out under the rubric of the red horse of division and conflict, depicting the conflicts between Christians and Jews, internal conflicts among Christians, heating up until we see the martyrdom of the two witnesses. Chapters 12–15 detail the story of the martyrs, climaxing in a harvest of grain and wine. The trumpets depict a sequence of plunder (144,000 plundered from the land) and preservation (harvest): "Do not harm the oil or the wine." The bowls pour out sword, famine, death, and destruction

on the land, sea, and city, and thus correspond to the green horse of death. Schematically:

White Horse: Victory	Seals, 6:1–8:5
Red Horse: Conflict	Trumpets, 8:6–11:19
Black Horse: Plunder and preservation	Dragon, beasts, and harvest, 12:1–15:4
Green Horse: Sword, famine, death	Bowls, 15:5–16:21

We are in the “victory” portion of Revelation, a section describing the gospel’s progress and its consequences. One of the chief consequences is to rouse the hope of the martyrs, the theme of the fifth seal.

The martyrs’ cry

And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those slain on account of the word of God and the witness which they had. And they cried with a voice great, saying, “How long, Lord, the Holy and True, do you not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the land?” And a stole, sparkling-white, was given to each, and it was said to them that they must rest yet a little time, until their fellow-servants and their brothers fulfilled also, those who are going to be killed as they themselves.

—Rev. 6:9–11

The fifth seal changes the pattern. There is no horse or rider, nor summons from a living creature. None of the final three seals have living creatures or animals. We still hear voices, but they are human voices. The first half of the “week” of seals focuses on horses and cherubs, the second half on humans. That replicates the large structure of Revelation, which depicts the transition from the old covenant mediated by angels to a covenant mediated by men. The fifth seal anticipates that larger theme on a small scale. We repeat: Revelation is a fractal, small segments sharing the complex shape of the whole.

On Day 5 of creation week, Yahweh made flocking birds in the air and swarming creatures in the sea. Swarms of living creatures symbolize swarming crowds of people or angels. The verb for “swarm” is used in various places to describe human fecundity (Gen. 9:7; Exod. 1:7). The saints under the altar are such a fifth-day swarm. In the tabernacle texts in Exodus, the fifth speech typically describes garments or clouds of swarming incense (→Introduction), and those motifs appears here as well, as the saints offer the incense of prayer and are assured of their eventual vindication with the pledge of a white robe (6:11).

These martyrs have been slain for the word of God and their faithful witness. A similar combination appears elsewhere in Revelation, with *μαρτυρία* typically qualified as the testimony *of Jesus* (1:2, 9; 20:4). That addition indicates a specifically NT reference. Perhaps those who are slain for the *Word of God* in 6:9 are saints of the old creation and those who are slain for *witness* are saints of the new creation. In any case, the fact that the qualifying genitive phrase is lacking implies that this company does not consist *solely* of witnesses to Jesus. It consists of all those who have been slain on the earth, and as well as the prophets, sages, and scribes Jesus sent after his ascension (cf. Matt. 23:34–36). Abel is there, and so is Zechariah the son of Berechiah (Douglas 1915: 169; Boxall 2006: 114; Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 135; cf. Smalley (2005: 157) and Aune (1998a: 406), who claim they are Christian martyrs, or that John is most concerned with Christian martyrs).

They cry out for vengeance. Some have waited a long time for it, but they are told to wait a bit longer. The success of the apostolic church makes it appear as if the angelic animal covenant is coming to an end, but it is not *quite* over, and so we continue to see angels acting throughout the remainder of the book. But the promise made here hangs over the entire rest of Revelation: “Rest for *a little while* longer,” and then they will be avenged. The “shortly” at the beginning and end of Revelation refers to the same period, the “short time” during which martyrs await vindication.

Koester (2015: 400–401) argues that the delay does not have to do with completing a preset number, but with the completion of the work of other martyrs. Boxall (2006: 115) takes the opposing view that the martyrs await a prescribed number of additional martyrs, as does Aune (1998a: 391, 412). Practically, the distinction may be immaterial, but exegetically Boxall and Aune have the better case.

The saints want justice and they look to the exalted Lamb to provide it. The fact that the Lamb has received the book and has begun to open the seals gives them hope that now is the time for vengeance for their blood. The very fact of the Lamb’s exaltation arouses the martyrs’ hopes. The Lamb looks like one slain (5:6), sacrificed. He goes to death for his people, and by his self-sacrifice ascends to the Father to open the book. Slaughtered on the altar, he ascends to the throne room, the Most Holy Place, to the ark-throne. Aware that the slain Lamb stands in heaven, the martyrs want to follow that same path to the throne of the Father.

The martyrs assume that the redeeming Lamb is an avenging Lamb. Both redemption and vengeance are necessary for the Lamb’s work to be completed. He has not fulfilled his work as Redeemer until he clears out the wicked in vengeance and opens up space where his people can live in faithfulness (on

imprecations, see Aune 1998a: 407–10). Behind this double work is the OT institution of the *go'el*, the “kinsman redeemer.” Kinsman redeemers buy near relatives out of bondage and pay off debts (Lev. 25:47–55; 27:9–25), but the *go'el* also avenges the blood of a murdered kinsman (Numbers 35). The redeemer is the avenger. These two things go together in God’s work for us, and also in the church’s ministry. It is not enough to liberate victims from their various bondages (to sin, to addiction, to oppression). While the church does not bear the sword, the church must advocate that justice be carried out against the oppressor (cf. Aune 1998a: 408, citing Ps. 9:13 and 72:14). At least, the church must appeal to the court of heaven to take vengeance against the wicked.

The saints are ὑποκάτω τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου. When John ascended to heaven in the Spirit, he saw a throne (ark), a lampstand and a sea, but no table or altar. The altar is not a heavenly item; heaven is the throne room, the heavenly equivalent of the inner sanctuary of Israel’s earthly sanctuaries. The altar is earthly, out in the open courtyard. It is the place *from* which the Lamb ascends to the heavens.

Commentators sometimes conflate this altar with the golden altar of chapter 8, and claim that both are in heaven (Reddish 2001: 129; Mounce 1997: 146; Koester 2015: 398; Boxall 2006: 113). Smalley (2005: 159) admits that the altars are distinct early in Revelation, but become conflated through the course of the book. If the sanctuaries of ancient Israel provide the template for the sanctuary arrangement of Revelation, however, those interpreters are mistaken. The bronze altar is in the “earthly” section of the tabernacle and temple, “under” the “firmament” veil that separates the court from the holy place. Blood is poured at the base of that altar, *never* at the base of the golden altar that stands in front of the second veil on the western end of the holy place. The martyrs, thus, are not yet in heaven, not yet clothed in white, which is why they are so frantic for vindication. See Aune (1998a: 405) for rabbinic evidence that burial in the land of Israel was equivalent to being buried under the altar.

The martyrs are sacrifices, slain (ἐσφαγμένων, 6:9) as the Lamb is slain (ἐσφαγμένον, 5:6). In the temple system, the place “under” the altar is the trough where the blood of a “purification offering” (*hattat*) was poured out after being sprinkled and smeared on upper parts of the altar (Exod. 29:12; Lev. 4:1–7, 18, 25, 30, 34; 5:9; cf. Reddish 2001: 130).

The Hebrew word for “base” is *yasad*, “foundation” (cf. Ps. 137:7 and Lam. 4:11; Mic. 1:6; Ezek. 13:14). The related word *yasad* is a common word for the foundation of houses, cities, the earth, or mountains. Having a foundation, the altar is like a house, a mountain, a temple, a city. There was a trench around Elijah’s altar on Mount Carmel, which he filled with water (1 Kgs 18:32, 35).

Life or soul (*nephesh*) is in the blood (Lev. 17:11–14), and John sees τὰς ψυχὰς of the martyrs under the altar (Reddish 2001: 130). They are under the

altar because that is where their soul-blood has been poured out. The martyrs are at the base of an earthly altar, their blood soaking into the land.

The purification offering comes first in every sequence of offerings (e.g., Lev. 16:5–14, 24; Num. 6:16–17). It cleanses the sanctuary furniture and opens up a path of blood into God's presence. In the purification offering, blood comes down from the top of the altar to its base. First the heavenly things are cleansed, then earthly things. On the basis of that purifying offering, the priest can offer an ascension offering (*olah*) and a peace offering (*shelamim*). Strange at the OT system may seem, the sequence of offerings makes intuitive sense: First cleansing, then ascent to enjoy the feast of the peace offering. It is the same sequence as Christian liturgy: First the cleansing of confession, then ascent by word and song to the Eucharistic feast. Revelation 6 assumes this system of offerings. Martyrs have been slain, but their sacrificial ascent has been aborted. They have not yet received the glory-cloud of white robes or entered heaven. But they do see the Lamb exalted to heaven, and so clamor to rise to join him to share the peace offering, the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Only the blood from purification or sin offerings was poured at the base of the altar, and that means that the martyrs are not “sacrifices” in a generic sense. They are offered, or offer themselves, as *purification* offerings, as Jesus was (περ' ἁμαρτία, Rom. 8:1–3). Like the death of Jesus, their deaths open doors, not only for their *own* ascent but for the ascent of the rest of the saints. Like the offering of Jesus, their deaths have a purifying effect. There is an order of ascent: *First* Jesus the Lamb offers himself and ascends to heaven, where his blood cleanses heavenly things; then he catches up the martyrs to join him on thrones. That *double* purification, that complete day of atonement, opens up the path for the rest of us who live and die in the Lord. The vision supports the patristic notion that the deaths of martyrs play a role in the *accomplishment* of redemption (cf. Koester (2015: 398), who rejects the idea; Boxall (2006: 115) notes that the deaths of martyrs play a critical role in overcoming evil).

We need to state this carefully. The fifth seal makes it abundantly clear that the martyrs' deaths do not, by themselves, qualify them to enter the throne room. If their deaths atoned in and of themselves, their souls would not be writhing in agitation under the altar. They are able to ascend *only* because the Lamb has ascended. Once the Lamb ascends, the martyrs are the first to ascend with him, the firstfruits of those who are brought to heavenly places. Until they are vindicated by ascent into heaven, no one else can enter. As the apostles and prophets form the foundation on which the church is built (Eph. 2:20), so the martyrs are the firstfruits of those who ascend. Blessed are those who die in the Lord *from now on* (→14:14–20), from the time the last martyrs are harvested.

Further, the deaths of the martyrs are necessary for the atonement to have an effect on earth. Jesus dies, rises, and ascends, yet the temple continues to stand in Jerusalem. He pours out the Spirit, yet the temple stands. The White Spirit rides the church to proclaim the gospel; the Red Spirit divides, and the Black Spirit depletes the enemies of the Lamb; the Spirit unleashes sword, famine, and death. Yet the temple stands, and the old covenant is not fully ended. The old covenant persists through the apostolic generation, and Jewish followers of Jesus continue to frequent the temple (cf. Lk. 24; Acts 21:26–29; 22:17). The old covenant does not come to a final end until the shadowy temple falls in AD 70, which is a vindication of martyrs and vengeance for their blood (→16, 18). On earth, the transition from old to new takes place through the deaths of Lamb-and-firstfruits. The early martyrs join in the Lamb's foundation sacrifice that forms the new city. Jesus the Lamb is the cornerstone, but apostles and prophets also form the foundation of the church (Eph. 2:20). The foundation of new Jerusalem is in heaven (→21:9–22:5), and these martyr-prophets are assembled in heaven to become the city's foundation. The deaths of the martyrs not only lead to the overthrow of the old city; the martyrs also follow the Lamb into heaven to become the firstfruit inhabitants of the new city.

Luke-Acts presents a similar theology of martyrdom, presented in terms of mission. Unlike Matthew, Luke's Gospel does not end with a Great Commission. Jesus instead sends his disciples back to Jerusalem to wait for the coming of the Spirit (Lk. 24:49–53). Even after Pentecost, the apostles and Christians remain in Jerusalem. They begin to spread out only after Stephen's death (Acts 7), and only because they have are threatened and chased out of Jerusalem. Philip goes to Samaria and meets an Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8) and soon enough Saul becomes Paul and is preaching the gospel to Gentiles. Paul's ministry often follows the same pattern: He preaches, meets opposition, is beaten and driven out of town, and goes to the next city. The Lamb's death alone does not initiate the church's mission to the world. The church expands because martyrs shed their blood *along with* the Lamb.

Martyrs offer *themselves* as sacrifice, but they also *are* sacrificed by their enemies. Enemies of God, enemies of the faithful, put them to death. The saints challenge the status quo of rebellion against God, and defenders of the status quo defend it murderously. God's enemies shed holy blood to keep their worlds intact. The world is built on the blood of the righteous. They sacrifice the saints for their own wicked purposes, but those wicked purposes are being undone by these same acts of defense. Wicked hands put them to death, but the martyrs' deaths accomplish God's purposes. Whatever their persecutors think, the earth is *God's* altar, and the blood of the saints prepares the way for an ascent to God. *Martyrdom is indefeasible*: Persecutors intend

to offer a sacrifice to please their gods and destroy the church, but martyr sacrifice cracks open the foundations of the world built on their blood. Worlds are *always* built on martyr blood. Some kill martyrs and build their worlds, hoping that they have eliminated the witnesses; but the blood of martyrs founds a new world. For good or ill, *every* world since Jesus is founded on martyr blood (→20:4-6).

According to Rene Girard, sacrificial blood is the foundation of every civilization. Human desire is mimetic. We want what we want because we mimic others wanting it. Our desires make us rivals. Rivalry breeds violence, and when society collapses into a Hobbesian war of all against all, a plague that Girard calls a “sacrificial crisis,” it casts about to find a cause, which will also be a solution. It soon fixes on an outcast—a foreigner, a cripple, a crippled foreigner—ready-made to bear the burden of society’s rage. Once its violent energy is spent on the scapegoat, the society finds itself miraculously whole again. The city welcomes the expelled scapegoat back home and acknowledges him as a savior, honored and elevated, perhaps deified. When another sacrificial crisis erupts, the process is repeated: another crisis, another scapegoat, another god. And another myth. The “scapegoat mechanism” survives by its own occlusion. All societies have violent origins, but they clothe their naked violence in the myth of the scapegoat’s guilt. This works until the Gospels unmask the mechanism by insisting on the utter innocence of the scapegoat, Jesus. The Gospels tear away the mystifications of myth, and, exposed, the machinery grinds to a halt.

Though the Gospels undo scapegoating, they do not cancel the need for blood to found a city. Jesus is the scapegoated Founder of the city of God, and the martyrs who shed their blood with him form the foundation stones of that city. The death and vindication of Jesus is replicated in the deaths of martyrs throughout the ages, renewing the church when it has fallen to ruins or founding it where it has never been founded before. The difference between the martyr and the scapegoats of antiquity has to do with their relation to power. Ancient scapegoats were expelled and executed to secure settled order, and were then incorporated into the mythology that supported those powers. Christian martyrs are killed for standing *against* power, and instead of being incorporated into the power structure, form an alternative structure of civic life in the church.

Girard summarizes his theory in most of his many books. For a mature presentation, see Girard 2001. Kovacs and Rowland (2004: 80) interpret Victorinus as a proto-Girardian on this portion of Revelation.

Their prayer is not whispered; it is a cry (v. 10; the verb ἔκραξαν itself screeches). The phrasing suggests a “cry for justice” and a judicial setting (Mounce 1997: 148). They appeal to the throne of God, which is a throne of judgment. They are witnesses and they want their evidence to be heard. Loud voices (φωνῇ μεγάλῃ) are common in Revelation—the voice of Jesus is a great voice like the voice of a trumpet (1:10), an angel cries with a loud voice seeking a worthy One to open the book (5:2) and when the Lamb is found there is a loud voice of acclamation, Worthy is the Lamb (5:12). It is a loud cry because it comes from innumerable voices: First Abel dies, and his blood cries out solo from the ground; over the centuries, others join him, and their blood cries out and the voice gets louder and louder until thousands cry

out from below the altar. All that blood, all beating against the door of heaven demanding justice

Their *ἕως πότε* indicates that God has not acted, apparently for some considerable period of time. God has hidden himself and has not kept his promise to protect and vindicate. The cries of the martyrs are provoked by the divine delay, and the cry intensifies as it becomes obvious that the time of restraint is coming to an end, as they see the Spirit take down the Noachic bow and ride out to battle. “How long?” is a common lament in the Psalms (6:3; 13:1-2; 35:17; 62:3; 74:10; 79:5; 80:4; 89:46; 90:13; 94:3), marking laments over the condition of the Psalmist, the interruption of the Davidic dynasty, the power of the wicked and the comfort of the unjust who go unpunished. Yahweh himself takes up a lament over Israel: “How long will this people spurn me? How long shall I bear this evil congregation?” (Num. 14:11, 27). From the martyrs, it is a plea for God to act to bring justice. Things are not as they ought to be, and martyr blood cries out to God to make them right. Though some Christians will recoil at such prayers, they are very common in Scripture, especially the Psalms, and are sound Christian prayers. The church’s prayers become anemic, sentimental, and ineffective when we hesitate to pray for justice. God is good, and his judgment is good. Judgment clears out the deadwood, blows away chaff, and thus promotes the good of humanity and the glory of God. We should pray for judgment, and rejoice when it comes (→19:1-8).

The martyrs address the Lord as the holy and the true *δεσπότης*, from which we get “despot.” The word is used a number of times in the NT of human masters in relation to their slaves (1 Tim. 6:1-2; 2 Tim. 2:21; Tit. 2:9; 1 Pet. 2:18). Jesus the “despot” bought his saints with his blood (2 Pet. 2:1). The word has a somewhat stricter connotation than *κύριος*, since *δεσπότης* is used in correlation with *δούλος*, slave. A despot is one who has servants over whom he exercises mastery. The souls under the altar are slaves addressing their master, and expect the master to make their cause his own.

The martyrs expect God to act because he is holy and true. God is holy, and the people he claims are holy. Any assault on his people is an act of sacrilege, a violation of holy space and a misuse of holy things. The phrase “holy and true” demonstrates the scope of the problem. If God is the holy, the true Master of the saints, the Despot of all things, then why does he not do something to staunch the bloodshed? He not only needs to *be* Holy and True, but has to *demonstrate* that he is Holy and True. Unless God avenges the blood of the saints, there is reason to doubt whether he is indeed holy and true, whether he is the Master of the Universe after all. If he does not avenge the martyrs, there is reason to doubt he is *God*. If God is true, then he will act. If he does *not*, then he is neither true nor holy nor God. The martyrs cry for their own vindication, but their plea is ultimately for the vindication of God.

What do the martyrs want the holy and true Despot to do? It has been too long and οὐ κρίνειῖς. God judges, with force, to put what is disordered back in order. They ask for “vindication” or “vengeance” (ἐκδικέω). The martyrs want a public demonstration that they suffered innocently, public vindication and elevation of their names and reputations. In the LXX, the word is used in connection with Cain (Gen. 4:15) and the exodus (Yahweh vindicates himself against the gods of Egypt—Exod. 12:12). The martyrs want to move from the base of the altar to thrones; they want to complete the sacrificial movement that they began by moving from the earth to heaven, from the courtyard to the Most Holy Place. They want to join the heavenly liturgy, and to sit on heavenly thrones. The martyrs gave their lives on the promise that God would make them kings, and they want to *rule*. That is all included in their cry for “justification,” which is also a cry for justice.

Jenkins (2008: 152) writes,

Preaching at the funeral of civilians killed by South African authorities, Desmond Tutu chose as his text Revelation 6, in which the martyrs cry out, “Lord, how long?” So burningly relevant were such texts that, as Tutu remarks, they “seemed then to have been written with our particular situation in mind.” Though the government exercised a draconian censorship, they had missed such incendiary items as Revelation: “the book they should have banned was the Bible.”

Each martyr receives a white στολή, a loose outer garment worn by a man, specifically a priestly garment (Boxall 2006: 116). In Revelation, this word is used only in the vision of the great multitude in 7:9–14. Though the word is different, there are other references to clean or white garments earlier in Revelation. In the message to the angel at Sardis, Jesus commends the few who have not soiled their clothing (ἱμάτιον) and promises white raiment to those who overcome (3:4–5). White garments are among the gifts that Jesus promises victors in Laodicea (3:18). The priestly connotations of these garments are clearer in Revelation 18–19, where the harlot city that wears βύσσινος is thrown down and the bride appears wearing clean and white linen (19:8; for linen as priestly garb, see Exod. 28:5–6, 8, 15; 39; 36:34; 1 Chr. 15:27). All these are linked to the vision of the heavenly worship service in 4:4: When John first enters heaven, he sees twenty-four elders sitting on thrones wearing white garments (ἱμάτιον). When the martyrs receive white garments, they are being promised a place in the heavenly liturgy before the Father’s throne. Martyrs are dying just to get into the choir. The gift of the stole is a pledge of elevation. The martyrs have shed blood, and the next step of the sacrificial procedure is to be clothed in fire and smoke so that they can ascend to God. The robe is a baptismal pledge that they will ascend, even though they are not going to ascend just yet. When we start the sacrificial

movement by offering ourselves as living and dying sacrifices, we can be confident that the Lord will complete the rite by raising us to heaven.

The martyrs are promised a little time to *rest* (ἀναπαύσονται; cf. Gen. 5:29). It is a Sabbath promise (Exod. 16:23; 31:15; 35:2; 16:31: a σάββατα ἀνάπαυσις). Does this mean that once the martyrs get into the heavenly Most Holy Place, once they take their thrones, rest *ends*? That seems to be the implication. Their rest continues only a little season longer, and their eventual enthronement is *not* described as rest. It is a sabbatical reality, since Sabbath means rule and judgment. Sabbath is more than cessation, and the fullest Sabbath is active rule, not passive recline. Once we reach final Sabbath, we will be like the Father and Son: “My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working” (Jn 5:17). Sabbath is climax. Work moves toward the fulfillment of rest. Sabbath is a day of enthronement, assessment, judgment. It is the Lord’s Day, the day of glorification.

Rev. 14:13, the other passage in Revelation that uses ἀναπαύω, complicates things. Before the harvest is gathered, a voice from heaven pronounces a blessing on those who die in the Lord from now on (ἀπ’ ἄρτι), and the blessing promised is rest from their work (ἀναπαύσονται ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτῶν, τὰ γὰρ ἔργα αὐτῶν ἀκολουθεῖ μετ’ αὐτῶν). This implies that those who die after a certain point go directly to a rest, and that those who died *before* did not enter the same degree of rest. The best way to handle this is by again noting the already-not yet dimension of the fifth seal. The martyrs have to remain in their current state of imperfection awhile longer. That is a rest because they are not in the world. It is *not* restful because they are not avenged or vindicated. They are in a state of rest but they will enter into a fuller enjoyment of Sabbath rest when the blood of their brothers has been added. Those who die *after* the harvest of the martyrs go directly to the enthroned position that the martyrs have been longing for, the fullness of Sabbath rest. Martyrs ascend first, but they do not ascend without us. The heavenly throne room, and heavenly thrones, become accessible only after the first Christian martyrs have died. For further discussion, →14:13.

We know that the martyrs’ own deaths are not enough to elevate them. They did not give their lives as spotless Lambs; their blood is not the blood of the Son, more precious than gold. But why is Jesus’s ascension not enough to elevate *them*? God operates by his own laws of evidence. Jesus witnesses against Israel, prosecuting the Father’s lawsuit against his people. He is a single witness, and God does not condemn except on the testimony of *two or three* witnesses. Jesus has witnessed and been rejected, so the Father and Son send a second witness, the Spirit, who witnesses to Jesus through the Christlike lives and deaths of the apostles and martyrs. Blasphemy of the Son of Man was forgiven, and they have a second chance with a second witness. Blasphemy against the Spirit will *not* be forgiven. That is what the martyrs are waiting for: How will Israel respond to the second witness? This two-witness requirement is not arbitrary. God testifies with two witnesses because he is Triune. The Father is Truth, and he demonstrates his Truth by the two witnesses of

the Son and Spirit.⁴ The one who speaks to them in 6:11 is sure that Israel will not repent at the witness of the Spirit, and that the city that has shed blood will continue to shed blood. By the time John is writing, Christian blood has already been shed—the blood of Stephen and James at least, and surely more. Yet more will flow very soon. Things do not happen all at once. God works in time, and his patience is as infinite as any of his other attributes. He is slow to anger, waits for things to ripen before he acts. Jesus waits forty days before ascending to heaven; he breathes the Spirit at Easter, but then waits fifty days to send the fullness of the Spirit on Pentecost. The Lamb is enthroned, and a new world has come. But the new world is still coming during the apostolic age, and before the new age comes in fullness there must be more martyrs.

God waits, waits long enough that the martyrs are agitated by his inaction. But the time is almost up. They have to wait only a little longer (χρόνον μικρόν). If we are correct that these are martyrs from all ages, the “little time” is a strong argument in favor of a “preterist” reading of Revelation. If the martyrs cry for vengeance, and are told that the vengeance will take place in a short time, then that vengeance must take place shortly after the book is written. If the martyrs are still unavenged, it is still in doubt that God is the “holy and true.” The entire book from the fifth seal to the elevation of the martyrs in the millennium is about God’s actions in response to the martyrs’ prayer. Through the trumpets and bowls to the fall of Babylon and the conquest of the Rider on the white horse, God the heavenly δεσπότης demonstrates that he is holy and true by avenging the blood of every Abel.

The end begins, and ends

And I saw when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the whole moon became as blood, and the stars of sky-heaven fell into the land, as a fig tree throws its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind, and the heaven split like a book rolled up, and every mountain and island was moved out of their place. And the kings of the land and the great ones and the chiliarchs and the rich and the strong and every slave and freeman hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. And they say to the mountains and the rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the Enthronement on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb. Because the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”

—Rev. 6:12-17

⁴ I learned this from James Jordan many years ago, and can no longer trace the source.

The sixth seal is opened in 6:12, but the seventh seal is not opened until 8:1, and that means that the sixth seal covers the entirety of chapter 7. Three scenes are revealed by this seal, a connected series of episodes. First, the universe begins to collapse (6:12–17). The heavenly lights go out, the sky rolls back, and the earth dances about dizzily. As the world begins to collapse, it seems that the martyrs' prayer is about to be answered, sooner than we expected. Then John sees four angels at the corners of the earth holding back the winds that would bring final destruction so that an angel with a seal can seal 144,000 from the tribes of Israel (7:1–8). In the final vision of the sixth seal, John sees an innumerable multitude standing before the throne and before the Lamb (7:9–17). There is no interlude. These visions follow on the fifth seal, follow one on the other, and lead into the seventh seal.

First the Lord darkens the firmament lights and shakes the earth. Then he removes the firmament itself, pulling back the veil that separates him from the creation. He shakes the world so that what can remain will remain, so that things that can fall, fall. Then we see the reaction of those who fear being brought face-to-face with the Lamb. The contrast with the martyrs is sharp: Martyrs want to ascend before the Lamb, but the people of the land can think of nothing more horrifying.

Throughout our study of the seals, we have been noting connections with the days of creation, and this again fits here. The obvious connection is to the creation of man. Men are driven into hiding, others are sealed and protected from the winds of heaven and gathered in the heavenly throne room as a great multitude beyond counting. The vision depicts the end of one humanity—kings, great men, rich, all the way to the slaves—and the protection and formation of another. Another connection is more subtle. In the chiasmic structure of Genesis 1, the light of Day 1 matches the Sabbath of Day 7. Day 3 matches Day 5: The third day is the first day of fruitfulness and the day on which the seas and land are formed, which are populated on the fifth day. By this structure, the firmament of the second day matches the creation of man on the sixth day. Adam is the mediating boundary between heaven and earth, and lights in the firmament are high and lofty people.

We can fold Genesis 2 into the batter: The “Day 2” slot of Genesis 2 describes the planting of the garden in Eden, which means that firmament and garden are parallel. When we read the sixth seal through this lens, we suspect that it unveils some garden firmament, a sanctuary setting, rolling up like a scroll.

The first panel of the sixth seal, verses 12–17, is divided into two sections. Verses 12–14 describe the shaking of the earth and the collapse of the heavens. It has an *inclusio*, and moves from the earth to a fourfold collapse in the sky and back to earth:

A. great earthquake

B. sun black as sackcloth of hair

B¹. moon like blood

B². stars fall like figs cast from tree in great wind

B³. sky split like a scroll rolled up
 A' mountains and islands move

The earthquake and the moving of the islands and mountains go together at either end of the structure of verses 12–14. Both are built on the same assumption, namely, that the earth is a place of fixity and stability: “You who laid the foundations of the earth so that it should not be moved forever,” the Psalmist says (Ps. 10:4-5). When the day comes that fixed place is unfixed. The Lord is making it as mobile and roiling as the sea.

David Chilton (1987: 196–7) points out that seven features of the creation are rendered useless when the sixth seal is opened:

1. Earth quakes.
2. The sun turns black.
3. The moon turns to blood.
4. Stars fall from heaven.
5. Heaven splits as it rolls up.
6. Mountains move.
7. Islands move.

Verses 15–17 describe the reaction of the people of the land. Verse 15a lists seven categories of people: kings, great men, commanders, rich, strong, slave, free. Verse 15b describes their scramble to find hiding places, and verses 16–17 records their cry to the mountains and rocks and their desire to be buried alive under rocks, to be stoned, rather than stand before the wrath of the Lamb and the One who sits on the throne. The description forms an incomplete chiasm and another sevenfold structure:

A. Hid
 B. in caves
 C. among rocks
 D. and mountains
 D'. and said to the mountains
 C'. and to the rocks
 A. “Fall on us and hide us!”

As the creation collapses heptamerously, a heptamerous humanity scrambles for refuge heptamerously. A decreation indeed.

Islands are outposts of Israel-land in the Gentile sea. At times, “islands” name the outer areas of the Gentiles. The OT envisions the world as centered on Israel, the one genuine “land.” At a distance are the “ends of the land,” also known as the “islands” (Deut. 33:17; 1 Sam. 2:10; Ps. 2:10; 22:27; 59:13; 67:7; Isa. 45:22; 52:10; 40:15; 41:5; 42:4; Jer. 16:19; Mic. 5:4; Zech. 9:10). The Gentile world forms the boundary of Israel’s land, the frontier of Yahweh’s empire

that had Zion as its capital. On the far end of the sea are island. Encompassed by distant islands at the edge of the world, the Gentile sea belongs to the land of the children of Abraham and will eventually share in their redemption as light and life spread from Zion to the frontier, from Jew to Greek.

Like many other collapsing-world predictions in the Bible, this is not a prediction of the end of the physical universe, but the end of a political universe. A world, not *the* world, is coming to an end. Yet the imagery has a literal dimension to it. According to Genesis 1, these heavenly lights were placed in the firmament for signs, seasons, days, and years. As signs, they send messages to human beings. In the OT, God uses the heavens to speak to people. Constellations are significant, and astral and solar events meaningful. Sun, moon, and stars are also for keeping time, for seasons, days, and years. They are astral, lunar, and solar clocks. The sixth seal predicts the end of the heavens as a book of guidance, and the end of their utility as time-keepers. Now that the Lamb has opened the seals of his book, there is no more need to read the book of the heavens. Heavenly signs are part of the world under the *stoicheia* (Leithart 2016), the elementary principles of the world, the world under angels. Now that human beings have reached majority in Christ, there is no longer any need for such portents, and the heavens no longer play this role. There is no mediator between God and man but the man Jesus. Jesus becomes the personal firmament between heaven and earth, and those who are in him are stars in the firmament. Those who are *not* in him are exposed and lack any guidance from the heavens. In the last days, he spoke in his Son, a Man, and now he speaks through his Word and Spirit, through the church. Since heaven came to earth in the Son and Spirit, earth is growing up toward heaven.

Several passages in the OT indicate that the sky tells about God. Psalm 19 says that the heavens “declare the glory of God” and the firmament shows his handiwork. Ps. 50:6 and 97:6 say that the heavens declare the righteousness of God. To the ancients, the heavens were a text to be deciphered, a natural Torah, mediating between heaven and earth. We can push this a step or two further. Made according to the pattern on the mountain, the sanctuaries also functioned as firmament boundaries between God’s throne and the people of God. The tabernacle and temple were heavenly scrolls in architectural form, word-made-building. To say that the sky is rolling up like a scroll is a way of saying that the temple is no longer functioning as a mediator between earth and heaven.

This is one reason we have paid some attention to the astronomical imagery of the book. It is fascinating in itself, but its thematic import is significant. Constellations symbolized Israel in the old creation; when new Jerusalem descends from heaven, the heavenly signs are brought to earth. The church is the heavenly people, the constellations and stars of the sky, the Abrahamic people who have become as abundant as sand and stars. The Spirit speaking in Scripture in the church is now our heavenly light, the only portent we need.

And in Christ the Lord we have become lords of time, no longer subject to the sun and moon but living in a world lit by the Lamb (→21:9–22:5).

When the sixth seal opens, the sun becomes black as it suffers a solar eclipse. A time is coming to an end, a shining ruler in the sky is losing his luster. Lights are going out all over the land. The sun is “black as sackcloth,” which of course connotes mourning (Matt. 11:21; Lk. 10:13). Sackcloth (σάκκος) was normally made of some form of animal hair (τριχίνοϛ). The tabernacle too was covered with a layer of goat hair (Exod. 25:4; 26:7; 35:6, 26; 36:10). When the moon goes into eclipse, it turns dark red, but the comparison of the red of the moon to “blood” conjures up other connotations in Revelation. The martyrs in the fifth seal ask how long it will be for their blood to be avenged, and now the moon is turned blood red. Bloody earth is mirrored in the firmament (Jordan 1999a: 82; cf. Bede 1997: 131). It appears that the moon itself is being sacrificed, itself martyred.

Stars fall like unripe figs when a fig tree is shaken by a great wind. When figs ripen, they drop to the ground *without* a great wind, but unripe figs cannot be cast to the ground unless the tree is violently shaken. The figs are not ready to fall, yet they fall before their time. Trees are ladders to heaven, stretching between earth and sky. Fruit is a gift of earth and heaven, the gifts of heaven dangling from the sky, the bread of heaven that drops to the earth for our nourishment. All fruit is manna. A tree forms a firmament-like canopy and its fruit are heavenly lights. Fruit on a tree is like stars in the firmament. Isaiah (34:4) writes that the host of heaven withers like a leaf from the fig tree (cf. Mounce 1997: 151). Israel is that cosmic tree that connects heaven and earth, and Israelites are the figs. (Jeremiah (24) sees different sorts of figs as representations of different groups of Israelites.) Israel has been planted in the land to be a fruitful tree, but the Lord is going to shake the tree with the great wind of his Spirit (cf. Ps. 80, using vine rather than fig tree image). He is about to shake down the stars/figs of Israel.

Fig leaves are Adam's first covering (Gen. 3:7), and figs are among the good things Israel's spies found in the land (Num. 13:23). The fig tree refuses to rule Israel in Jotham's parable (Judg. 9:10–11). Grapes or raisins and figs are elsewhere examples of the good things of the land that are shared (1 Sam. 25:18; 30:12). Sitting under one's own vine and fig tree is the great sign of prosperity in Israel (1 Kgs 4:25). Yahweh strikes down fig trees in Egypt (Ps. 105:33). First ripe figs are grabbed and eaten quickly (Isa. 28:4).

The temple is a tree, stretching between heaven and earth and lined with cedar wood. At the top is fruit, the bread of heaven, manna is hidden in the ark in the “topmost” most holy place. There are also star symbols within the temple, the lamps on the lampstand. The temple provides a covering and shade for those who worship there, under the leafy wings of God. In the

Gospels, the temple is signified by a fig tree. Jesus enters the temple looking for the fruit of obedience, but finds instead a den of thieves. Jesus then comes to a fig tree looking for fruit and finds only leaves (Mk 11:12-14). The fig tree in Revelation 6 is Israel and Israel's temple, an Israel that has produced figs but figs that are not yet full grown. These figs are not ready for God or man, and when the "great wind" of Pentecost comes, even the unripe fruit that the tree has born will be shaken off.

In the Song of Songs, the Lover calls his beloved out for a romp. It is the time of love, springtime, when everything comes back to life. He lists seven signs of the new creation of spring: winter past, rain over, flowers appear, pruning, turtledoves coo, unripe figs (ὄλυνθος) ripen, vines blossom and give fragrance (Song 2:11-13). Figs shaken down before coming ripe signify an aborted spring. The tree began to produce fruit, but its fruit never fulfilled the function of fruit, which is to feed those who grow it. If ripening figs signify consummated love, figs that fall before they ripen signify an abortive love, love cut short before consummated. In Revelation 6, this means: Some lover has called a beloved into the springtime world, into new creation, but spring never came. A great wind brought winter back, and littered the ground with the rotting fruit of unfulfilled love. And *that* may mean this: Stars (Israel as constellations) are figs (Israel as fruit of God, as beloved tree); Yahweh calls Bride Israel into the springtime of the new covenant, but she is shaken and sheds her star-figs before he tastes and delights in them. He comes knocking at her door, but she refuses to let him enter, refuses to dine with him.

It is one of those things everyone knows: The Bible talks a lot about falling stars. It turns out it is one of those things that everyone knows, but is wrong. There is a single fallen star in Isa. 14:12, and stars lose their brightness (Ezek. 32:7; Joel 2:109; 3:15). In the OT, only one passage refers to falling stars: Daniel 8:10, when stars are displaced from the sky and then trampled by a growing horn. Stars fall more often in the NT. When Jesus alludes to Isa. 13:10, he does *not* say, as Isaiah does, "the stars of heaven and their constellations will not flash forth their light" but speaks instead of stars "falling from heaven" (Matt. 24:29; Mk 13:25). This is not a misquotation but a conflation of Isaiah 13 and Daniel 8:10 (perhaps with Isa. 14:12 too). Whatever is happening in Matt. 24:29, it is analogous to, or fulfills, both the prophecy against Babylon (Isaiah 13) and the warning about the horn knocking the stars from heaven (Daniel 8). Like Jesus's Olivet Discourse, Rev. 6:13 also speaks of stars falling from heaven to earth, elaborating with a comparison of the stars a fig tree that sheds its figs when shaken by a great wind.

What do we make of the absence of falling-star imagery in the OT? Yahweh promises to multiply Abram like stars, and in Numbers we see that fulfilled, not only in the sheer numbers of Israelites coming out of Egypt but also in the frequent correspondence of tribal numbers with astronomical cycles. Moses has just numbered the people a second time (Numbers 26) when he reminds Israel that they have become what Yahweh promised: As numerous as the

stars of heaven (Deut. 1:10; 4:19; 10:22; 28:62, this last a warning that they might be reduced in the future). Elected as Yahweh's people and house, Israel is lifted to heaven. So Israel is a heaven of stars adorning Yahweh's firmament. These stars do not fall. Despite her many rebellions and failures, Israel remained in the heavens throughout the old covenant. Only with the coming of the new does she fall from heaven, shooting like stars across the darkening sky (on sky prodigies, see Aune 1998a: 416–19). The fact that stars now fall shows how unprecedented the coming judgment will be.

The apocalypse of the sixth seal begins at the cross, when there is an earthquake and darkness. At the cross, the Lord begins to shake the fig tree of Israel. Already when Jesus is baptized, the heavens split (σχιζω) as the Spirit descended; at the cross, the veil of the temple, the firmament between the holy and the most holy, is split (σχιζω) in two (Mark 1, 15). When Jesus dies, the barrier between heaven and earth is removed, and Yahweh is immediately present to the people of Israel. As this happens, Jesus cries, "It is finished." All that needs to be done is done, yet there is yet more to be done, a *more* that occurs in the next generation, the first generation of the Spirit. In response to the prayers of the martyrs, God begins to finish the work that was finished on the cross, the work of tearing down the old cosmos to make room for a new one.

Rev. 6:15 refocuses from the events in the sky and on earth to the reaction of the human beings who now stand exposed. Seven categories of human beings are named: kings, great men, commanders, rich, strong, slave, free. These are men who live on the "land," a specific reference to Israel. "Kings" of the land are priests, the great men and commanders the chief priests or other leaders, and so on. Leaders are highlighted because they are the protectors of the status quo who have slaughtered the martyrs to keep the peace (Reddish 2001: 133). Like Adam in the garden, they do not repent but hide. Instead of standing before Yahweh, Adam and Eve weave fig leaves together to cover their sexual organs, the focus of their shame. Hiding is the first instinct of sinful humans. When God shows up, we do not want to be exposed, and so we try to escape from him. We try to escape by avoiding Scripture or other believers; when we come under conviction, we try to hide from God by making excuses, or by making partial, safe confession of our sins.

Impenitent inhabitants of the land seek refuge in caves, like Lot and his daughters after the destruction of Sodom (Genesis 19). Caves are for burial and entombment (Gen. 23:9–11, 17–120; 25:9; 49:29–32; 50:13). In Joshua 10, five kings seek to hide from Joshua in a cave. It does not work; Joshua closes up the cave and kills them when the battle is done. In Jn 11:38, Lazarus dies and is placed in a cave but Jesus calls him out to new life. It is ironic that kings of the earth should seek refuge in caves. Faced with the collapse of their world, the great men of the land choose the grave over the penitent exposure

that brings life. To preserve their lives, they run to the grave. They could save their lives only if they were willing to lose them. Caves are not good places to hide anyway; Jesus can call out the dead to give new life and to judge. Jesus has the keys of death and Hades. He has been in a cave himself, and knows where the back door is.

Jesus uses σπήλαιον to describe the temple, a “den of thieves” (Matt. 21:13; Mk 11:17; Lk. 19:46). When the Lord begins to roll up the old world and bring in a new one, those who are in the land, in Israel, seek refuge in the den and cave that is the temple. They do not want to be exposed before the God who has torn the firmament of the temple curtain, and think they can find a safe haven by continuing to perform the temple liturgies. It is a bad move, since this is the very same den of thieves that Jesus said would utterly destroyed, not one stone on another. Even more unfortunately, they go into hiding in the temple *after* the veil has been split in two from top to bottom. They flee from the wrath of the one on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb, and they go straight into the place where they are most exposed, where there is no longer even a screen to protect them.

Mountains and rocks are also associated with the temple. The temple was built of stones on a mountain, and Jerusalem was on a series of mountains. The terrified people of the land look for safety in the temple mount. Again, it proves unsafe. Jesus said that when his disciples pray in faith that the temple mount be removed, it would be plucked up by the roots and cast into the sea (Matt. 21:21), and Jesus ends the Sermon on the Mount warning about the danger of building a house on sand, referring to the temple, Israel’s house, which is built on the sand of rebellion and Pharisaism. He warns them that the floods and winds will sweep that house away. They are not building on the rock, as they ought to be, the Rock that is Jesus and his teaching. The temple rock is no Rock. Yahweh is Israel’s Rock, and he has come near in the Son. Only the *living* temple is an immovable Rock. The only place to hide is the Lamb, and the men of the land are running away from him.

All this is symbolic, but quite literal too. Israel continued to perform their sacrifices as protection against the coming wrath of the Lamb. Agrippa II began renovations and improvements to Jerusalem’s temple in AD 66. When it was completed, some Jews regarded it as a refuge from the Romans. The completion of the temple gave them hope that the Lord would finally deliver them. Even when Roman troops invested the city, they remained confident of their deliverance, hidden as they were in their caves and dens and fortresses of stone.

There are some OT passages in the background here (Caird 1966: 89–90). Isa. 2:12–22 describes an earthquake where God shakes down all that is high and lofty and drives men lower and lower until they hide in the earth itself (vv. 20–22). In Hos. 10:1–8, the people

of Samaria call on the mountains to cover their shame (v. 6) when the Assyrians destroy their idols and shrines. Hosea 10 fits the situation of Revelation: When the sixth seal opens, another rebellious land is destroyed, its idols and shrines removed, exposing Israel to shame. Rather than suffering shame that leads to repentance, they call on the mountains to cover them. They ironically fulfill Torah, which requires idolaters to be stoned.

The “great day” of wrath has come. Since the Lamb has seven eyes that are the seven Spirits of God, they have nowhere to hide. The Son beams the fire of the Spirit into the dark corners to expose hiding places. The face of God is salvation. The Aaronic benediction is a promise of the Lord’s face and countenance upon us. It is a good thing to be before the face of God. When God shines his face on us, he lifts up our faces so that we can be face to face with him. It *can* be a good thing. Being before his face is also a position of exposure and scrutiny. That is what the kings want to avoid. They want to avoid the saving pain of judgment and self-examination.

M. Scott Peck observes that any sin can be “hardened into hell” (Peck 1998: 73, quoting Gerald Vann), but Peck also agrees with the Christian tradition in which pride holds pride of place among the vices. He unravels this claim with a psychiatrist’s eye. “The poor in spirit do not commit evil,” he says.

Evil is not committed by people who feel uncertain about their righteousness, who question their own motives, who worry about betraying themselves. The evil in this world is committed by the spiritual fat cats, by the Pharisees of our own day, the self-righteous who think they are without sin because they are unwilling to suffer the discomfort of significant self-examination. Unpleasant though it may be, the sense of personal sin is precisely that which keeps our sin from getting out of hand. It is quite painful at times, but it is a very great blessing because it is our one and only effective safeguard against our own proclivity for evil. (72)

He quotes Therese of Lisieux: “If you are willing to serenely bear the trial of being displeasing to yourself, then you will be for Jesus a pleasant place of shelter” (72).

Since the proud cannot bear the pangs of their own conscience, they project their guilt onto others. One of the most characteristic tactics of what Peck calls evil people is scapegoating. The proud have to keep themselves “above reproach,” and so they must “lash out at anyone who does reproach them. They sacrifice others to preserve their self-image of perfection” (Peck 1998: 73). This sometimes takes the form of imposing burdens on others. Peck defines “evil” as “the exercise of political power—that is, the imposition of one’s will upon others by overt or covert coercion—in order to avoid spiritual growth” (74). The proud “attack others instead of facing their own failures. Spiritual growth requires the acknowledgment of one’s need to grow. If we cannot make that acknowledgement, we have no option except to eradicate the evidence of our own imperfection.”

Unlike “psychopaths,” evil people *do* have a sense of sin and imperfection, but “they are continually engaged in sweeping the evidence of their evil under the rug of their consciousness . . . Evil originates not in the absence of guilt but in the effort to escape it” (Peck 1998: 76). The disguise, the cover-up, is sometimes more obvious than the evil itself. The masks of evil people (the “people of the lie”) are virtually impenetrable, but it is possible to catch sight of what Buber called “the uncanny game of hide-and-seek in the obscurity of the soul, in which it, the single human soul, evades itself, avoids itself, hides from itself” (76). Ernest Becker linked scapegoating with the fear of death; Peck glosses Becker by equating “the fear

of self-criticism with the fear of death. Self-criticism is a call to personality change. As soon as I criticize a part of myself I incur an obligation to change that part. But the process of personality change is a painful one. It is like death. The old personality pattern must die for a new pattern to take its place. The evil are pathologically attached to the status quo of their personalities, which in their narcissism they consciously regard as perfect,” and so they must perceive any criticism and call to change as a “total annihilation” (74, fn).

We can fairly easily connect all this to Paul’s concept of flesh. Flesh is vulnerability and weakness, and expresses itself in violent self-defense against threats. The people of the lie are those who live according to the flesh rather than by the Spirit. The people of the land who flee from the land have become a people of the lie.

As many commentators have noted, the “wrath of the Lamb” is an arresting phrase (Caird 1966: 92–3). Lambs do not typically have anger-management issues. There are wrathful and powerful rams and goats in the Bible (cf. Daniel 8), but no other wrathful Lambs. The phrase might be designed to make a striking point about the Lamb by bringing these two things into tension. The phrase also exposes the tragic irony of the reaction to the day of the Lamb: They hide from the God who is their salvation; now they hide from the anger of a Lamb who gives himself in meekness for the sins of the world. They flee a child’s pet.

“Great day” alludes to OT prophecies about the day of Yahweh (Sweet 1979: 146; Zephaniah is the great prophet of the “day of Yahweh”). The “day of Yahweh” is not any specific day, but rather a general term for Yahweh’s advent in judgment. It is rooted in the creation account where the first day is a day of light. On the day of Yahweh, Yahweh who is light comes as light to expose all that is hidden in darkness. Yahweh’s day is also linked with the Sabbath at the end of the creation week, where Yahweh is enthroned and enters the rest of judgment and adjudication. The most relevant OT prophecy is Joel 2. That chapter begins with a description of the day of Yahweh as a day of darkness and clouds rather than brightness for Israel (v. 2), and speaks of the day as a “great” day (v. 11). The day when the Spirit comes and the sun is darkened and the moon bloodied is also called a “great and awesome day of Yahweh” (v. 31), and Peter quotes this passage in his Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:20). That the sixth seal opens a vision of the “great day” of the Lord is another sign that we are in Pentecost phase of the Apocalypse.

The men who flee the Lamb are convinced that no one can stand before the face of the Father on the great day (cf. 1 Sam. 6:20). There is some basis for this conclusion: If the Lord marks iniquities, no one could stand (Ps. 130:3; cf. 24:3). Ultimately, they are wrong. There is forgiveness (Ps. 130:4) and therefore some can stand. In fact, Jesus has already told the seven churches *how* they can stand, and 7:9 describes a multitude without number standing before the throne and the Lamb, wearing white robes. There *is* a way to stand (cf. Reddish 2001: 141), but one must first be willing to fall—first at the feet of Jesus, then in death. Whoever insisting on standing will fall; those who prostrate themselves in worship and witness will be raised.

All this refers to the events of the early church, in the aftermath of the cross, ascension, and Pentecost. The apostles tear down the world of the *oikoumene*, calling people to follow the new Emperor Jesus into the new creation, challenging the Jewish leaders, splitting Israel, turning the Greco-Roman world upside down, proclaiming a King other than, greater than, Caesar. Jesus predicted there would be real earthquakes and portents in the heaven. And those physical events symbolize the social realities taking place in the land and among the Gentiles. God shakes the earth, and he shakes the land of Israel; portents appear in the heavens, and the lights of Israel's firmament-temple begin to go out. In response to the prayers of the martyrs, God begins to tear the world down, but then arrests the process midstream. The end is not yet. More martyrs must be made. All Israel must yet be sealed, slain, and saved.

Sealing of the 144,000

After this, I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the land, holding the four winds of the land, that they would not breathe a wind on the land nor on the sea nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God, and he cried with a great voice to the four angels who were given authority to harm the land and the sea, saying, "Do not harm the land nor the sea nor the trees, until the slaves of our God are sealed on their foreheads."

And I heard the number of those sealed, 144,000, sealed out of every tribe of the sons of Israel.

Out of the tribe of Judah, 12,000 sealed

Out of the tribe of Rouben, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Gad, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Aser, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Nephtalim, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Manasse, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Sumeon, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Levi, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Issachar, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Joseph, 12,000

Out of the tribe of Benjamin, 12,000 sealed

—Rev. 7:1-8

This is *not* an interlude (*pace* Farrer 1970; Reddish 2001: 141; Mounce 1997: 154; Smalley 2005: 177; and many others). To treat it as such is to

miss the critical progression from the end of chapter 6 to the beginning of chapter 7. True, the opening words of verse 1 mark a disjunction in the vision (μετὰ τοῦτο; in some texts, μετὰ ταῦτα; cf. 4:1), opening a section that continues through eight verses before a new section begins with a similar phrase (μετὰ ταῦτα, 7:9). Yet the sealing is also a continuation of the world-collapse episode begun in 6:12-17. It portrays heaven's answer to the martyrs about the "short time" of waiting. It shows us why the universe begins to collapse but does *not* collapse (Farrer 1964: 105). The 144,000 sealed are the "fellow servants and brothers" who must be killed before the martyrs can ascend. They are the answer to the martyrs' cry.

The land has four corners, with an angel at each corner. The land is an altar, the guardian angels are four horns. The altar was a symbolic mountaintop, a "high place" where the animal began its ascent into the heavenly presence of God. So too, the land is a sacrificial platform with four horns, where Israel was to carry out its life of sacrificial obedience to the Lord and his Torah. The angels at each of the corners are holding (κρατέω) the winds of the earth. The verb simply means to take hold or to hold, but the point here is clearly that they are *restraining* the winds, keeping the winds from doing damage.

"Four" is a prominent number in the Apocalypse. When John ascends to heaven, he sees four (τέσσαρες) living creatures, and in the scene in heaven they are mentioned five times (4:6, 8; 5:6, 8, 14). Five is the number of military formation, and of manual power (five fingers grasping a weapon or tool). The five uses of "four living creatures" hints that the living creatures are captains of the "five-in-a-rank" hosts of God (Exod. 13:18, where "military array" is literally "five in a rank"). That prepares for their role in the first four seals: The living creatures summon the horsemen as the Lamb opens the seals.

As the Lamb opens the seals, the four living creatures cry out in order. The sixth seal reveals four angels standing at four corners holding back four winds. Within the seals section, the number four is used by itself (that is, not as part of a larger number) seven times (6:1, 6; 7:1 [3x], 2, 11), three times of the four living creatures and four times to enumerate other things. The arrangement is fairly symmetrical:

- A. Four living creatures, 6:1, 6
- B. Four angels, 7:1
- C. Four corners, 7:1
- C'. Four winds, 7:1
- B'. Four angels, 7:2
- A'. Four living creatures, 7:11

One is tempted to point out that the sevenfold use of "four" in the seal section reinforces a creation or decreation theme. The four living creatures, with the four corner angels who control the four winds, are agents to bring sword, famine, death, and beasts into the land (6:8) and to "harm the earth and the sea" (7:2). Between 4:1 and 8:5, "four" is used twelve times. One is tempted to point out that twelve is the number of Israel, four the number of the land, so that a twelvefold use of the number four hints at an Israel-twelve in fourfold extension.

In the remainder of Revelation, "four" appears another seven times, reiterating the creation motif. There are four horns on the altar (9:13), four angels at the Euphrates (9:14-15); the

four living creatures put in a few more appearances (14:3; 15:7; 19:4); and finally the nations comes from the four corners of the land for a final battle (20:8).

The angels at the corners hold back the winds that could harm the earth, sea, and trees, but the winds have authority to harm only over the first two: earth and sea (Rev. 7:2). The trees will not be harmed in any case. Chapter 7 presents an unusual cosmology of “earth, sea, tree,” instead of the more usual “heaven, earth, sea.” Verse 2 starts in the middle of cosmos, with earth, moves down to the sea, and then, instead of the firmament or heaven, describes the vertical dimension of the cosmos as a “tree.” In the background, 6:13 is still echoing with its comparison of the canopy of a fig tree to the starry, starry sky. An ancient mysticism of trees shows through: Trees link heaven and earth, so temples, pillars, and righteous men are trees. The cosmos can in fact be figured simply as a cosmic tree, pressing its roots under the earth, stretching from the earth up to spread its branches in a leafy firmament.

The instructions to the angels indicate that while God makes war on the land and the people who dwell there, he does *not* destroy trees. Later, the saints are imagined as grain and vines (14), but they are *harvested*, not destroyed. God makes war according to his own rules of war: “When you besiege a city a long time, to make war against it in order to capture it, you shall not destroy its trees by swinging an axe against them; for you may eat from them, and you shall not cut them down. For is the tree of the field a man, that it should be besieged by you?” (Deut. 20:19). God tears down what is already dead, but does not destroy what is fruitful.

Earlier we noted that the four winds are the saints, the Spirit-blown people of God (→6:1-8; cf. Zechariah 2). Zechariah calls them the winds of heaven, but 7:1 they are the winds of the land. Perhaps the people of God are earthly winds as well as heavenly winds; inspired by the heavenly Spirit, born of the Spirit to blow wherever on earth the Spirit wishes. That would suggest that the winds symbolize the destructive power of the Spirit, borne by the church, perhaps against the “grove” of the temple. They are not yet unleashed to blow the land to smithereens because more martyrs have to be made.

We may compare this in a general way to 2 Thess. 2:6-8, where Paul speaks the restrainer who holds back the man of lawlessness. Lawlessness, Paul says, is already at work, but a restrainer keeps it back until the restrainer is taken out of the way. Then the lawless one will be revealed and the Lord will slay him with the breath of his mouth. If we may connect these passages, it appears that the lawless one will be *unrestrained* when the winds blow against the land and sea.

Later, when the first trumpet trumpets, some trees *are* harmed—a third of them (8:7)—but when the locust-scorpions are released from the abyss, they

are not allowed to harm grass, green things, or trees (9:4). In that last passage, the green things are contrasted with those who have not received the seal of God, suggesting that trees represent sealed saints (as in Psalm 1). So the restraint is taken away when the trumpets start blowing. The angels' blowing releases the wind; the blowing of trumpets is the blowing of the wind, which harms the land, sea, and trees. Insofar as the temple was made of wood, and constructed to resemble an architectural grove of trees, the trees might represent the house. Once the windy saints are released, they will huff and puff and blow the house down.

Verse 2 introduces another angel, ascending from the east, bringing a new day. Coming from the east, the angel is moving from the position of the bullcherub, from the place of the altar, ascending toward the throne. Moving in the direction of sacrifice, he comes to mark out the final sacrifice of martyrs. He comes like the Sun who rises with healing in his wings, a healing of the world that depends on the self-sacrifice of martyrs in union with the Martyr. He is the angel of Jesus, the "other" who comes to carry on Jesus's work and to be the present Jesus in the absence of Jesus. The angel, in short, is the Spirit, who comes, appropriately, to seal: For the seal is the seal of the Spirit (2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). He places the seal of the living God, the seal of the life-giving Spirit, on those who are to become living as Jesus is living, who become living by first becoming dead—and behold, they live! They are sealed by the Spirit for the first resurrection (→20:4–6), a baptismal image (*pace* Mounce 1997: 157). Specifically, the 144,000 are Jews (see below), already sealed in circumcision, now sealed with the name of God and the Lamb on their foreheads (→Rev. 22:4). But the seal holds implications for baptismal theology in general: Not every baptized person is slaughtered for his or her faith, but baptism marks the baptized as a martyr, as a witness embarked on the path of Jesus that may lead to a literal cross.

Εφράγισ was used in the previous chapter to describe the seals holding the book closed (on branding and sealing in the ancient world, see Aune (1998a: 456–9)). Once those seals are broken, the book is opened. Now not a book but people are sealed. In the old covenant, the *book* was the writing of God. Now the saints are the writing of God, written not with ink but by the Spirit on tablets of human hearts.

The seal is placed on the forehead, like the golden plate of the high priest (Exod. 28:36–38; noticed by Koester (2015: 416)). The priest's crown is engraved with the name of Yahweh, seven "eyes" that are the seven letters of *qadosh l'YHWH*. By this, the high priest is marked as holy, as one who may go before the King and present the petitions of the people, who may ascend to the altar to do table service to the Lord. With the seven "eyes" on his forehead, the high priest is like the Lamb with his seven eyes that are the seven

Spirits of God. Now an entire company is sealed as holy ones, inviolable ones, priests, *high* priests, with access to the Most Holy Place and the high King.

A more immediately recognizable connection is Ezekiel 9 (cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 102; Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 137; Boxall 2006: 122). A voice summons destroyers to come to destroy the city. Six men with destroying weapons appear, but before they are unleashed, a man in linen with a writing case intervenes. Yahweh instructs him to go through the midst of Jerusalem to mark the foreheads of all who mourn the idolatries and injustices of the city. When the destroyers are sent out, they are forbidden to touch any of those who are marked on the forehead. Various Passover events of the OT are also in the background (Boxall 2006: 122). When the angels come to Sodom, they inspect the city and “seal” and save Lot before the destruction comes. *The* Passover takes place in Egypt, when the angel of death goes through Egypt and kills the firstborn in all the houses where there is not a mark of blood on the lintel. Sealed houses are saved. In Revelation 7, the house built of people, marked on the lintel of the forehead so that they will be not be swept away but swept up by those winds to become part of the Spirit-people. Like those who mourn in Ezekiel’s Jerusalem, the sealed in Revelation 7 are spared when destruction comes, though they are “spared” by martyrdom. This is what the martyrs under the altar are waiting for: The sealing and the deliverance of those who are to be sealed.

First they are sealed, then numbered. It is a Passover-Exodus sequence, Exodus followed by a mustering in the wilderness.

The 144,000 is a symbolic number, but it does not symbolize *all* the elect. It signifies marked and martyred *Jews*. It is sometimes claimed that the Apocalypse does not recognize the distinction of Jew and Gentile. That is untrue.

For a summary of interpretive options, see Aune (1998a: 440–5) and Smalley (2005: 184–8). Mounce (1997: 158) and Koester (2015: 417) claim that taking the 144,000 as Jews introduces a distinction that no longer pertains in John’s time. In my judgment, that reflects a massive misreading of the entire Apocalypse, which is centrally about the transition from old to new, from an Israel- and Jerusalem-centered world to a world organized around new Jerusalem.

Several details indicate that the company is a Jewish one. The angel from the sunrise brings the seal to seal those who are slaves of God in the *land*, the land of Israel. The harm that is held back in chapter 7 is unleashed by the trumpets in chapter 8. And the trumpets do not unleash a universal final judgment, but foretell conflicts in the land, poisoning of the springs, and suffering of

the people leading up to the abomination that brings desolation. That is, the action takes place on the stage of the land of Israel. The only other two uses of “Israel” in Revelation refer to the OT people of God. Rev. 2:14 refers back to the incident with Balaam who “taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel,” and 21:12, in a vision of the new Jerusalem, speaks of the names on the gates being the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel (children of Israel in all three passages is υἱοὶ Ἰσραήλ). The numerology makes it clear that this is an Israel. The number 144 is the square of 12, the number of Israel. The tribes are enumerated, with 12,000 from each tribe. If this is symbolic of the saved as a whole, why list tribes? What do the references to the tribes mean? Is there some nation or people that corresponds to each? The most obvious answer is that John lists the tribes because this company is taken from the tribes of Israel.

Finally, though many identify the two groups, the 144,000 are clearly distinguished from the innumerable multitude. The multitude in verses 9–17 is innumerable (ὃν ἀριθμῆσαι αὐτὸν οὐδεὶς ἐδύνατο), and the 144,000 have just been enumerated. The number 144,000 is big, but any numerate human with enough time on his hands can count so high. More decisively, the innumerable multitude comes from every tribe and nation and people and tongue (7:9), while the 144,000 are from the φυλαί of the sons of Israel. John is not sloppy about terms. One group is from the “tribes of the sons of Israel,” and is enumerated tribe by tribe; the other is a broader group of Gentiles. The latter may include the former, but they are not identical.

In short, among the things shortly to take place is a large-scale sealing and suffering witness of a large number of *Jews*. Marked by the angel, they wear the name of the Lamb (→14:1–5), and thus are *Christian Jews*. In context, the 144,000 constitute the company of the “more” martyrs that need to give their lives before the Lord indicates the saints under the altar. They are marked as priests for sacrifice, the ultimate sacrifice of their own blood. Like Jesus, they priests of their own self-sacrifice in the Son by the Spirit. The perfect number symbolizes a perfected Israel, a $12 \times 12 \times 10 \times 10 \times 10$ Israel, Israel squared and raised to its highest power.

Irenaeus took the 144,000 as Jewish converts (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 102), and according to Oecumenius, the beginning of Revelation 7 describes “what happened to the Jews during the war against the Romans.” The four corners are the corners of the “land of the Jews” and the 144,000 are Jews, though the end of chapter 7 envisions a company of Gentile believers (Oecumenius 2011: 34–5). Andrew of Caesarea (2011: 137) similarly argues that the events of chapter 7 “occurred long ago to the Jews at the hands of the Romans” when “those who believed in Christ fled from the siege of Jerusalem by the Romans into very many destinations,” but Andrew sees a second fulfillment in the future history of the Antichrist. Victorinus (2011: 12) likewise distinguishes the 144,000 as Jews from the innumerable multitude of Gentiles.

Only holy things are measured and enumerated in Scripture. Noah's ark, a holy boat carrying the creation, is measured, as are the holy spaces of the tabernacle and temple. *Israel* is counted in the exodus, but the mixed multitude is not. The OT records general numbers for some of the armies that fight against Israel, perhaps to indicate that they are a false Israel, but Gentiles are never "measured" as the holy people is in Numbers or Chronicles. This is not decisive in determining the identity of the 144,000. After all, the church is also a holy people—measured, numbered (→11:1-2).

Literally, John is predicting that sometime in the late 60s, an "all Israel" of Jews will turn to Jesus and add their blood to the blood of the martyrs, fulfilling the hope of Paul that "all Israel" will be saved. Some of these Jews no doubt perished in the destruction of Jerusalem. When the Romans began to besiege the city, Jews remembered the strange Rabbi from Nazareth who prophesied this catastrophe. Many went to their deaths at the hands of the Romans not as zealous old covenant Jews but as Christ-followers. Some were considered traitors to the Jewish cause, and killed by their Jewish brothers. Some saw the slaughter and were struck to the heart; they looked on the one they pierced and they mourn. When Babylon is shaken, many repent (→11:1-13; →18:1-20; →21:24).

From the beginning, large numbers of Jews became disciples of Jesus. Three thousand were baptized at Pentecost (Acts 2:41), and another five thousand men believed a short time after (Acts 4:4). Paul is able to boast of the "many thousands ... among the Jews ... who have believed, and they are zealous for the Law" (Acts 21:20; πόσαι μυριάδες εἰσὶν ἐν τοῖς Ἰουδαίοις τῶν πεπιστευκότων, καὶ πάντες ζηλωταὶ τοῦ νόμου ὑπάρχουσιν; cited by Oecumenius 1997: 34; Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 138). That "all Israel" can refer to a restricted remnant within Israel is evident from various post-exilic texts (Ezra 2:70; 8:25; 10:5; Neh. 7:73; 12:47). In those contexts, the phrase probably refers to the reunion of Israel and Judah in the postexilic community. Though the number is symbolic, Zahn claims that 144,000 is close to the actual number of Christian Jews in the first century (cited by Aune 1998a: 441).

The 144,000 play a role in the accomplishment of redemption and the establishment of the new covenant order. During the first century, Jews and Gentiles are united in and as one New Man. That happens in principle at the cross, but the impact of the cross is worked out over the first generation. As martyred saints offer themselves as sin offerings, pouring their blood onto the altar of the land to make a way to the throne, so the martyred saints share with Jesus in the work of knitting Jews and Gentiles. They are the firstfruits of the entire church, who along with Jesus the first sheaf provide the foundation sacrifice and the founding blood of the new covenant.

Throughout the OT, censuses are conducted for military purposes. When Israel comes out of Egypt, Moses counted the men over twenty

(Numbers 1-2), and he counts them again at the end of the wilderness period before they enter Canaan (Numbers 26). David numbers the people at his coronation (1 Chr. 12). Israel's hosts belong to Yahweh, so the Lord becomes angry when David sacrilegiously mustered them without permission (2 Sam. 24; 1 Chr. 21). So too in Revelation 7. The 144,000 constitute a military host as well as a priestly company (→14:1-5). They are militant priests who fight by sacrifice, prayer, and praise. They battle by offering themselves, as Jesus did, in self-sacrifice. They are victors who share with Jesus in his victorious conquest.

Against this background, we can look in more detail at the tribal list in Revelation 7. This is one of several tribal lists in the Bible, summarized in the following charts:

Tribal Lists

Genesis 30 (horizontal: mother; vertical: birth order)

Leah	Bilhah (Rachel's)	Rachel	Zilpah (Leah's)
Reuben			
Simeon			
Levi			
Judah			
	Dan		
	Naphtali		
		Joseph*	
			Gad
			Asher
Issachar			
Zebulun			
		Benjamin	

*Joseph is often thought to be the second youngest child, but that does not fit the chronology of Genesis. See below for explanation.

Numbers 1	Numbers 7	Numbers 26	1 Chronicles
Reuben (Leah)	Judah	Reuben	Judah
Simeon (Leah)	Issachar	Simeon	Simeon
Gad (Zilpah; takes place of Levi)	Zebulun	Gad	Reuben
Judah (Leah)	Reuben	Judah	Gad
Issachar (Leah)	Simeon	Issachar	Manasseh

Numbers 1	Numbers 7	Numbers 26	1 Chronicles
Zebulun (Leah)	Gad	Zebulun	Levi
Ephraim (Rachel/Joseph)	Ephraim	Manasseh	Issachar
Manasseh (Rachel/Joseph)	Manasseh	Ephraim	Benjamin
Benjamin (Rachel)	Benjamin	Benjamin	Naphtali
Dan (Bilhah)	Dan	Dan	Manasseh
Asher (Zilpah)	Asher	Asher	Ephraim
Naphtali (Bilhah)	Naphtali	Naphtali	Asher

Numbers 2

→East

	Dan (Bilhah)	
	Asher (Zilpah)	
	Naphtali (Bilhah)	
Ephraim (Joseph)		Judah (new 1st)
Manasseh (Joseph)	TABERNACLE	Issachar (Leah)
Benjamin (Rachel)		Zebulun (Leah's last)
	Reuben (Leah)	
	Simeon (Leah)	
	Gad (Zilpah—replacement Levi)	

Revelation 7

Judah (Leah—4)
 Reuben (Leah—1)
 Gad (Zilpah—8)
 Asher (Zilpah—9)
 Naphtali (Bilhah—6)
 Manasseh (Joseph's son; Rachel)
 Simeon (Leah—2)
 Levi (Leah—3)
 Issachar (Leah—10)
 Zebulun (Leah—11)
 Joseph (Rachel—7)
 Benjamin (Rachel—12)

The narrative in Genesis 29–30 seems to be organized according to the order of birth, but that is not entirely the case (Jordan 1994). Joseph is born as the first seven years of Jacob's sojourn with Laban come to an end. If Joseph were the youngest of twelve sons, then Leah would have borne six children during the first seven years that Jacob is in Paddan Aram. That is an implausibly high fertility rate, and implies that the list is organized theologically than chronologically. Joseph is the first miracle child born to the barren Rachel, Jacob's first miracle child who, like Abraham's, is preeminent over his brothers. Theologically, he is the "youngest son" who replaces the older. In actual birth order, Joseph is the *seventh* son.

In Numbers 1, the tribes are listed in birth order: First all the children of Leah with Gad as the stand-in for Levi; then the Joseph tribes and Benjamin (note that the two Joseph tribes stand in the seventh position); then the other three children of the maidservants. In the second census (Numbers 26), the list is the same, except that Manasseh and Ephraim are switched. The list of tribes that bring offerings in Numbers 7 is different. In presenting offerings to the tabernacle, Judah comes first. The six sons of Leah are divided in two and turned around; the Reuben-Simeon-Gad sequence gets moved to after the Judah-Issachar-Zebulun sequence. This still places the six sons of Leah first, but with Judah in the lead. John's list also orders according to birth mother: alternating between Leah and Rachel, with the maidservants thrown in alongside. The pattern is 4-2-4-2, four Leah sons, two Rachel, four Leah, two Rachel.

Premodern interpreters sometimes etymologize the tribal names (following Genesis 29–30), and argue that the names formed a sequence of spiritual development (Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 138–9; Bede 1997: 133–5).

As with most of these lists, John's includes twelve tribes and includes most of the tribes that existed in ancient Israel; 12,000 from each of the named tribes are sealed.

I have argued that the 144,000 are Jewish believers and martyrs of the first century AD. How literal are the tribal designations? Are all these tribes represented within first-century Israel? Various sects and cults have theories of "lost tribes." Mormons believe the lost tribes ended up among American Indians, and British Israelites believe that ten lost tribes became the Anglo-Saxon races.

These mythologies rest on the fundamental myth that tribes were "lost" in the first place. They were not. Ten tribes left the Davidic dynasty at the time of Jeroboam, but those tribes remained in the land until the Assyrians deported them. Even after the deportation and the resettlement of non-Israelites in the northern areas, many Israelites remained. When Josiah called a Passover, he sent invitations to the far north of the northern kingdom, bringing all Israel together at a common feast and a common table (2 Chr. 35:18). When Nebuchadnezzar took Judah into exile, northern tribes were included, and the returnees included people from many tribes besides Judah and Benjamin. Up to the first century, tribal identities persisted. Anna the daughter of Phanuel from the tribe of Asher, one of the so-called lost tribes (Lk. 2:36). It is thus historically plausible that the 144,000 Jewish Christian martyrs come from every tribe in Israel. John's is clearly a symbolic census, so I would not press the point.

Jacob has twelve sons, but the tribes are not always counted as twelve. Joseph's double inheritance is divided between the two tribes named for his sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, so there is no "Joseph" region in the land Israel. When we count both sons, the tribes number thirteen. The tribe of Manasseh is geographically divided into a trans-Jordanian half and a Canaanite half,

so if we count those separately the number is fourteen. The Levites do not receive any land as inheritance, and so the tribal areas are only thirteen. In terms of land, the Levites are excluded, and if we combine the two halves of the tribe of Manasseh, the number is back to twelve. Whatever the actual political reality, “twelve” was the symbolic number of the tribes.

John includes “Manasseh,” one of Joseph’s sons, *and* a tribe of Joseph (Rev. 7:6, 8), the latter a designation for Ephraim. By using “Joseph” rather than “Ephraim,” John reminds the reader of the heroics of Joseph instead of the unfaithfulness of Ephraim. Further, by using “Joseph,” John forms a list of the sons of Jacob. Manasseh has to be included because there is in fact one tribe that is not included at all—the tribe of Dan, the Judas son.

Dan is the firstborn in Rachel’s house, not a son of Rachel herself but of her handmaid Bilhah (for the following, cf. Jordan 1999a: 134). Dan means “judge,” because by his birth Yahweh “judges” or vindicates Rachel (Gen. 30:6, woodenly translated: “*Danned* me has God and also heard my voice and given to me a son.”). Jacob’s blessing on Dan is seventh in the list of blessings (Genesis 49). After he blesses the six sons of Leah (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar), he blesses Dan, the first of the Rachel sons, saying he will “judge” (*‘adan*). Wise and deadly as a serpent, he will bite the heels of horses so that riders fall backward (Gen. 49:17). Though this might be a positive image, the only other uses of “serpent” (*nachash*) in Genesis are from chapter 3. There is thus a hint that Dan will prove a tempter. In Moses’s blessings on the tribes, Dan is already demoted to ninth position, as Rachel’s own sons, Benjamin and Joseph, take higher rank. Moses’s blessing itself is positive: “Dan is a lion’s whelp that leaps forth from Bashan” (Deut. 33:22).

Dan is prominent in the book of Judges. Samson is the son of “a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites” (Judg. 13:2). Samson is the true Danite who judges, sly as a serpent who nips the heels of his enemies, a lion’s whelp. At the same time, Judges describes Dan’s fall. Samson has his negative side, and, more importantly, Judg. 18:30 tells us that the Danites set up a graven image and are served by non-Aaronic priests (the first of whom was descended from Moses) “until the day of the captivity of the land.” Jeroboam naturally establishes one of his idolatrous shrines in Dan, where there is a history of false worship (1 Kgs 12:29–30). By the postexilic period, Dan has been expunged from Israel’s history. The genealogies of Chronicles make no mention of Dan (although, cf. 1 Chr. 12:35 and 2 Chr. 2:14).

The Danites are the “Judas tribe” of the Old Testament. Just as Judas is excluded from the Twelve because of his betrayal of Jesus, so the Danites are excluded from the list of tribes. He is another fallen “firstborn.” Dan’s name is removed from the Lamb’s book of life, his tribe excluded from the holy city of Jerusalem. His absence from the tribal list in Revelation 7 is a cautionary tale against the seductions of the harlot, *porneia*, and meat sacrificed to idols. Slaves of Jesus might end up like Dan.

For similar analysis, see Mounce (1997: 159). Boxall (2006: 123) suggests that the Galilean tribes of Israel have moved to the front of the list, a hint of Gentile inclusion.

John’s list begins with Judah. It is a natural position for Judah, who takes the position of firstborn because of the self-disqualification of his older brothers. Reuben sleeps with his father’s concubine Bilhah, the mother of his half-brothers (Gen. 35:22), and Simeon and Levi, the next two in birth order, slaughter the

circumcised residents of Shechem because of their sister Dinah (Genesis 34). That leaves fourth-born Judah as the leading tribe, the preeminent son and father of the royal tribe, who proves his worth as firstborn by offering himself in place of Benjamin (Genesis 43–44). Judah is the first in praise and worship, since his name means “praise” (Gen. 29:35). Joseph also has privileges of a first-born (1 Chr. 5:1-2), with the firstborn’s double inheritance through his sons and a royal lineage through the kings of the northern kingdom.

The last tribe named on John’s list is Benjamin, youngest of the sons of Jacob. He is last because he is the last born, but also because, like Judah, he is father of a royal tribe. Benjamin produces the first king, Saul, and Judah the tribe of the second king, David, and also the tribe of all the rest of the kings of the southern kingdom. By putting Judah first and Benjamin last, the list not only makes the 144,000 an “alpha and omega” of Israel, but also indicates that they are a royal assembly, a company of priests and kings ready to rule in death and life.

Given military connotations of a “census,” the list of tribes in Revelation 7 implies a square-camp setup. In Numbers 1–2, the list of tribes is followed by a description of their arrangement around the camp in groups of three. We may speculate that the sealed are gathered as an army of Jewish converts and organized around the throne of the Lamb (Aune 1998a: 436; Smalley 2005: 186).

How are they arranged? When we divide the list into four groups of three, we note that the middle tribe in each group of three has already appeared in Revelation, albeit quite indirectly. “Sealing” (σφραγιζω) takes us back us to the gems of the priestly garments, which are “sealed” with the names of Israel’s tribes (Exod. 28:11, 21). The gemstones of the middle tribe in each group of three perhaps match the colors of the four horses. According to Jordan (1999a), those correspond to the gemstones of Naphtali (white, diamond), Reuben (red), Joseph (black, onyx), and Levi (green, emerald/turquoise). Tribally speaking, the four horses are in the order of: Naphtali, Reuben, Joseph, Levi. In chapter 7, the tribal order is Reuben, Naphtali, Levi, Joseph.

The four main gemstones correspond to the living creatures and the furniture of the tabernacle. The order of beasts is: lion, ox, man, eagle. The lion calls out the white horse, the Naphtali horse; the ox calls out the red Judah horse; the man calls the black Joseph horse; and the eagle calls out the green horse, which signifies Levi. The lion corresponds to the ark; the ox to the altar; the man to the table of showbread; and the eagle to the winged lampstand. In chapter 7, Naphtali, with his white stone, is in the throne position, at the position of the ark, as lion; Reuben has a red stone, and is in the ox position by the altar. Levi has the eagle position and is the green stone. Joseph is the black stone and has the man position. Thus:

	Zebulun	
	Joseph (Ephraim)	
	Benjamin	
Manasseh		Judah
Naphtali	TABERNACLE	Reuben

Asher

Gad

Issachar

Levi

Simeon

In place of the earlier order of lion, ox, man, eagle, chapter 7 presents the order of ox, lion, eagle, man. (Astronomically, the order of chapter 7 moves according to the order of seasons, spring, summer, autumn winter, reversing the order of the horses.) The seals begin with leonine battle, the white horse called by the first creature, followed by sacrificial divisions of ox/red horse, depletion through the work of the black horse (connected to the man and table), which leads to the death of the old order, represented by the green horse and the eagle, linked with the lampstand. The order of sealing moves differently, from altar to throne, and then from lampstand to table; from Ox to lion to eagle to man; from east to west, then south to north. The horses throw the times out of joint, but when the 144,000 are sealed, time begins to be healed. For further reflections and alternative proposals, →21:19–20. Once again, I add the disclaimer: Identification of gemstones in ancient texts is very tentative (Harrell 2011).

Innumerable multitude

After these things I saw, and behold a great multitude, which no one was able to number, out of every nation and tribe and people and tongue, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with stoles sparkling-white and palms in their hands. And they cry with a voice great, saying, “Salvation to our God, the Enthronement on the throne, and to the Lamb.” And all the angels were standing around the throne; and the Ancient Ones and the four living things fell before the throne on their faces and prostrated to God, saying, “Amen! The blessing and the glory and the wisdom and the thanksgiving and the honor and the power and the strength be to our God unto the ages of the ages.”

And one of the Ancient Ones answered, saying to me; “These who are clothed with stoles sparkling-white, who are they and from where have they come?” And I said to him, “My lord, you discern.” And he said to me, “These are those who come out of the tribulation great, and washed their stoles and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb. Because of this, they are before the throne of God, and they worship him day and night in his temple, and the Enthronement on the throne will tabernacle over them. They shall not hunger again nor thirst again, nor shall the sun beat down on them nor any heat, because the Lamb in the center of the throne will shepherd them and will lead them to life’s spring of water. And God shall wipe every tear from their eyes.”

—Rev. 7:9–17

After the beginning of the dismantling of the old heavens and earth, the final judgment is held back. Four angels restrain the destroying winds until 144,000 Jews are sealed. They are not simply protected, but sealed to perform priestly service to the Lamb, the priestly service of martyrdom. By that priestly service of prayer and witness and blood, they will be instruments for the unleashing of the winds and the final judgment on the old world; their blood, poured on Babylon, will make the harlot so drunk she falls forever. Now we get a glimpse of another multitude, an innumerable company of Jews and Gentiles who worship before the throne (see Aune 1998a: 445–7, for interpretive options).

It is a liturgical assembly in the heavenly temple of God (v. 15), standing in priestly posture before the throne and the Lamb, before the throne who *is* the Lamb (v. 9). The seven Spirits are before the throne of God, burning like lamps (1:4; 4:5). They are in the same position as the crystal sea in 4:6 (note the comparison of the “great multitude” to the sound of the sea in 19:1, 6). Illumined by the torches of the Spirit, they roar like the sea. In many details, this scene anticipates the final state of the new Jerusalem (→21:1–8). The Lord spreads the curtain of his tabernacle over them (v. 15; cf. 21:3). They suffer no more hunger or thirst, sun or heat (v. 16) because they have access to the banquet of God in the garden city (22:1–3). The Lamb shepherds them to the rivers of the water of life (7:17; cf. 21:6; 22:1), and God wipes every tear from their eyes (7:17; 21:4). What is given in preview here is filled out at the end of Revelation, where the saints are crowned and take thrones. It is a vision of *the* End.

Who *are* they? And what is this vision doing *here*? Why is the end unveiled before the end? Part of the answer lies in the musical structure of the Apocalypse. Various sections end with glimpses of the end of the end. Just before the seventh seal is opened, John sees a vision of the final condition of the human race, redeemed and gathered before the throne of God. When the seventh trumpet blows, loud voices proclaim, “The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and he will reign forever and ever” (11:15). At that point, the kingdom of the world has not yet become the kingdom of the Lord and his Christ. Dragons, beasts, and harlots are still at large. The celebration seems premature; in fact, it is proleptic, the intrusion of the end before the end, an intrusion that assures the saints that the end is sure. At the conclusion of the narrative of the beasts and the saints, the victors stand on the fiery firmament singing the song of Moses and the Lamb (15:1–4). When the harlot falls, heaven rejoices with Hallelujahs because the Lord reigns (19:1–11). The cycles of seven and other musical movements of book are not identical, nor do they overlap or telescope. As argued in the introduction, they are distinct phases of the coming of the kingdom, but the distinct phases move to a common rhythm comes

to a similar crescendo. Each movement of Revelation pre-echoes the final crescendo. We are still in the season of Pentecost, but as a firstfruits feast Pentecost reaches ahead to the Feast of Booths, the harvest feast when the nations will be gathered. Thus: Seven seals ... the end; seven trumpet ... *the End*; the saints are harvested ... **The End!**; the harlot, beast, and dragon fall ... **THE END!!!**

Many identify the 144,000 with the innumerable company, but, as noted above, they *cannot* be the same. The multitude in verse 9 is not from every tribe of the *land*, but from “every nation, tribe, people, and tongue.” Yet a vision of Gentiles fits here, juxtaposed to a vision of sealed and saved Jews. John sees 144,000, a mustering of martyrs, organized like a war camp around the Lamb and his throne. This is a company of priests; it will become a choir. It is a choral regiment, a company of martyrs that rules by song and witness (Bauckham 1993: 76–80). When Israel first came from Egypt, they came as a “mixed multitude” of Israelites and Egyptians. A wilderness camp scene is naturally followed by a glimpse of the ultimate “mixed multitude” that will experience the great final first and second exodus.

At each stage of covenant history, Israel has a Gentile “sponsor” who appears. Melchizedek brings Abraham bread and wine after his battle with the kings (Genesis 14); Jethro meets Moses as Israel comes out of Egypt (Exodus 18); Achish of Gath gives the city of Ziklag to the fugitive David (1 Sam. 27:6); Hiram of Tyre sends material and experts to build Solomon’s temple (1 Kings 5). In this “exodus,” Sinai, and Pentecost setting, a Gentile host is fitting.

This scene is here also because the sealing of the 144,000 is a step toward the fulfillment of what will be fully true after the Son of Man harvests them (→14:14–20). The members of the innumerable multitude wear stoles, the same garment given to the saints under the altar (→6:9–11). The innumerable multitude is the company of old covenant and early Christian martyrs who have been clamoring at the base of the altar for vindication. They will receive their vindication when the 144,000 join them in self-sacrificial martyrdom. Those additional martyrs are sealed here, but nothing has happened to them yet. They are sealed for protection, also sealed to be priests, holy ones who are claimed by God (Reddish 2001: 143). They are sealed for the liturgical service of martyrdom. That sacrifice does not happen until chapter 14 when the Son of Man comes on a cloud to harvest the grain and the grapes, catching the 144,000 from Mount Zion above the firmament. But as soon as the 144,000 are sealed, the future of the martyrs under the altar is secure. As soon as the full number of martyrs is prepared, we glimpse the destiny of all the martyrs.

The worshipers hold palm branches, symbols of victory. In the OT, palms figure into the celebration of the Feast of Booths, the final harvest feast of the liturgical year, when Israelites live in booths constructed from tree

branches (Lev. 23:40; cf. Neh. 8:15; see Aune 1998a: 448–50, 469). We are in a “Pentecost” section of Revelation, in the third month, at the beginning of harvest; but the preliminary harvest is a foretaste of the final harvest. The marking of the 144,000 is an advance payment on the full gathering. Elsewhere in the NT, “palm” is used only in Jn 12:13, when crowds in Jerusalem greet Jesus with palm branches and cries of Hosanna, “Save!” They sing the Hallel of Psalm 118 (Boxall 2006: 126) and bless the King who comes in the Name of the Lord. In Revelation 7, the multitude with palm branches shouts praise to a king (one who sits on the throne) and the Lamb. It repeats Palm Sunday in two ways. On the one hand, it spells doom for the temple. The Synoptics tell us that Jesus rides into Jerusalem and immediately enters the temple, which he condemns as a den of thieves. Jesus is coming to disrupt the temple again, not in symbolic prophetic action but in final reality. On the other hand, though Jesus alone is the Lamb of God, those who are sealed will shed their blood in union with him. They are not the Lamb of God who redeems with blood, but when they suffer because of the testimony of Jesus and in union with him, they bring redemption to its historical climax. Hosts hold palms as the 144,000 make their way to the cross, where they will be lifted up with the Lamb.

The Hebrew “palm” is *tamar*, the name of Judah’s daughter whose husband die. Tamar disguises herself as a temple prostitute in a plot to plug herself into the line of Judah. She bears Perez and Zerah to Judah, and the Davidic line eventually emerges from the line of Perez (“Breakthrough”). Davidic kings are sons of the Palm Tree. Is fitting that a multitude would hold palm trees while shouting “Hail to the Son of David.”

Exod. 15:27 is the first mention of palm trees in the OT (cf. Num. 33:9). At Elim—another word for “palms”—Israel finds its first oasis in the wilderness, with twelve springs and seventy palm trees. Palms are thus initially associated with oases and water, also with the number 70, the number of Gentile nations (Genesis 10). The multitude in Revelation 7 is another Elim: Holding palm branches, they form a mixed multitude of Gentiles, fed by the streams of Israel (the 144,000). They come through the tribulation of the sea and receive a foretaste of the well-watered land of promise. The Tamar narrative is still in the background. As Judah makes the Canaanite Tamar fruitful, so the twelve (Israelite) springs of Elim make the seventy (Gentile) tamar-trees fruitful. The use of palms at the Feast of Booths fits with the symbolism of palms in Genesis and Exodus. Booths commemorates the wilderness period, when Israel lives in booths, but it is also a harvest festival that looks ahead to the gathering of the Gentiles, to the harvest from the seventy palm trees, the incorporation of Tamar-Gentiles into the line of the Davidic king, who descends from Tamar’s son.

Several times, Jericho is described as the “city of palms” (Deut. 34:3; Judg. 1:16; 3:13; 2 Chr. 29:15). The first city taken in the conquest is like Elim, a place of palms. Palm trees are also carved into the temple (1 Kgs 6:29, 32, 35, 36; 2 Chr. 3:5; Ezek. 40:16, 22, 26, 31, 34, 37; Heb. *timmorah*). The temple is the oasis where the twelve springs flow, but also a house of prayer for the nations, where the palm trees can flourish. The temple is a permanent “booth,” a true city of palms.

In the Song of Songs, the bride is Tamar, black but beautiful, an outsider incorporated into the royal line. In Song of Songs 7, the lover compares her to a palm tree that the lover climbs to get fruit. The temple is this tree, and the lover ascends like a sacrifice ascending to the

top of the bridal temple where he can enjoy its fruit. This is part of the background to Palm Sunday as well: Jesus rides the tops of the trees to the temple seeking fruit from his bride (Song of Songs 7:9). Finding nothing but rotten fruit, he goes away like a jilted lover.

The liturgy of the innumerable multitude is different from what John witnessed previously (→4–5). When John first sees the heavenly worship as he ascends to heaven, the four living creatures cry out an unceasing Sanctus. They are not singing, only “saying,” and they have no liturgical equipment or paraphernalia. After the Lion-Lamb of Judah takes the book, they break out in worship again. The living creatures fall down, and the elders, as promised, begin to prostrate themselves and cast their crowns before the king. Each now has a harp, and the company begins to sing. Speaking praise gives way to sung praise, because the Lamb takes the throne. Musical instruments and a sung liturgy are a musical confession that the Lamb is on the throne. When Christians worship without instruments, or when the service is more said than sung, the unintended implication is that the Lamb is not yet enthroned. Unmusical worship is a confession that “Jesus is *not* Lord.”

Once the 144,000 are sealed, John sees a further change in the heavenly liturgy, one that will be worked out more fully when the full company of martyrs (the 144,000 plus the innumerable multitude) enter the throne room above the firmament (→15:1-5; →19:1-8). The great multitude is already at the throne like the living creatures and Ancient Ones; they are not yet *seated*, but they are before the throne and there are unoccupied thrones for them to take. Here they “say” their praise, and have no instruments. After the harvest of the grain and grapes (the 144,000), however, saints stand on the sea of glass with harps to sing their praise (→15:1-3). They move through the same liturgical revolution as the angels. Already in chapter 7, the saints begin to *preside* in the heavenly liturgy. They cry out with a loud voice, and the angels, ancient ones, and living creatures respond to *them* (7:10-12). For a little while, we were lower than angels, following the angels’ lead in worship. With the full coming of the new covenant, the saints take precedence, and the angels begin to respond to *our* liturgical leadership. I do not take this as a metaphor: For two thousand years, the church, united to the Lamb who is Chief Liturgist, conducts the heavenly worship. For two thousand years, the angels praise in response to our praise, sing in response to our song, pray as we pray, trumpet when we trumpet, and pour out plagues on God’s enemies as we commune at the Lord’s table.

The multitude cries with a loud voice, a voice like the Lord’s own voice and the voice of the glory (Jer. 10:13; 51:16; Ezek. 1:24; 43:2). Jesus’s voice is a voice like many waters, like thunder (Rev. 1:15), and his “great voice” receives a resounding echo from the angels, living creatures, and elders (5:11-12).

Now it is echoed by *human* voices. God's thunder is met with human thunder. The voice of Yahweh that breaks cedars now comes from the multitudes. The voice that once came from the combined voices of angels, elders, and living creatures now comes from humans. Humans have taken up the angelic cry (→19:1, 6).

Their cry is “σωτηρία to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb,” a cry of praise offered to both the One Enthroned and the Lamb. As elsewhere in Revelation, the Lamb is an object of worship and praise along with the Father.

Salvation is declared, and then followed by four dative phrases, each beginning with τῷ. Four is typically the number of creation, but here the fourfold saints are praising God for his fourfold salvation that extends to the corners of the earth. The phrases are chiasmally structured, the outer phrases naming God and the Lamb and the inner phrases describing the Enthronement. The phrase “sitting on the throne” modifies “God,” but given the structure of the verse, it also implies that the Lamb is on or has become the throne (→5:6). The Lamb-Lion who has a human face, the true Cherub, has become the Father's throne.

-τῷ θεῷ
 -τῷ καθήμενῳ
 -ἐπὶ τῷ θρόνῳ
 -καὶ τῷ ἄρνιῳ

It is an odd way to praise God: *Salvation to God?* Does God need saving? We might say that the phrase is a condensation that does not strictly mean what it says. It appears to ascribe salvation to God, but since God does not need salvation, it must mean, “We praise you for saving *us*.” We cannot bless God, or bring him greater glory in a strict sense, but we can ascribe blessing and glory to him. That, I submit, is too timid. Neither God nor the Lamb needs to be saved from sin, but the Lamb at least needed to be saved from the grave. The One Enthroned did not go through death, but the state of the world damages his reputation. To be acknowledged as God, God must be justified and vindicated, by bringing justice, by deciding in favor of the innocent and against the guilty. Indeed, to *be* God, he must be vindicated, for a God who promises to do justice *but fails* is no God at all. By sealing the 144,000 and by preparing for their sacrifice and the renewal of the world that will take place through that sacrifice, he initiates the process that will vindicate his name and his justice. The sealing of the 144,000 will save them, but this is also the moment of God's own “salvation”—the salvation of his reputation as God, the rescue of his promises and commitments from failure.

It is worth noting that the Greek σωτηρία can mean “thank offering” (Hewitt 1914: 105).

John lists angelic groups that form a series of concentric circles around the throne (7:11). He moves from perimeter to center. The outermost circle

consists of myriads and myriads of angels (→5:11). Within that are Ancient Ones around the throne, then the living creatures at the center who constituted the throne until the Lamb displaced them. The angels fall on their faces, and presumably so do the elders and the four living creatures also fall on their faces. When the Lamb is enthroned, the angels say that the Lamb is worthy to receive a sevenfold blessing (5:12). Now that the saints are sealed, now that they are ready to follow the Lamb to slaughter, the angels respond to the human choir and again pronounce a sevenfold blessing to God. The liturgical parallel brings the union of Lamb and martyrs into high relief. Angels do not worship martyrs, but they worship the Lamb who is Head of a body and Bridegroom of the church.

These seven blessings can be read as expansions of the statement of verse 10. Salvation to God, says the human choir. Amen, say the angels: Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, might to God. To attribute salvation to God is to say that he possesses this sevenfold grace. Though the lists in 5:12 and 7:12 are similar in form, context, and substance, there are subtle differences. In 5:12, the angels alone praise God, pronouncing a single sevenfold blessing governed by a single article (τήν). The sevenfold blessing is, grammatically speaking, one complex thing. In 7:12, each attribution has a separate article (ἡ), indicating a collection of distinct blessings. Of course, we can see the compatibility of these two lists if we think pneumatologically: We receive one Spirit, but the Spirit is the “seven Spirits of God.” The One Spirit is the Spirit of power, the Spirit of riches, the Spirit of Wisdom, and so on. Six of the seven items on the two lists are identical. 5:12 speaks of *πλοῦτον*, while 7:12 replaces it with *εὐχαριστία*. What is wealth in the one becomes gratitude for gifts in the second (cf. 4:9, where “thanksgiving” are with glory and honor as the things that the beasts give to God).

The two lists are arranged in a different order (see Jordan 1999a; Douglas 1938). There is a musical logic to the rearrangement. If you “tune” the list in chapter 5 by fifths, the result is a list that is nearly identical to the list of chapter 7. To tune a list, begin at the bottom or top, go up or down to the fifth item, which becomes the second item on the new, tuned list. Continue with the next item on the original list, and count another five (wrapping around to the bottom or top of the list when necessary), to get the third item. Apart from the different order of glory and wisdom, the list of 7:12 is a tuning of 5:12, tuned by fifths. Thus:

Sevenfold blessing

5:12	7:12
Power	blessing
Riches	glory
Wisdom	wisdom
Might	thanksgiving
Honor	honor
Glory	power
Blessings	might
5:12	“Tuned” list
Power	blessing

Sevenfold blessing

Riches	wisdom
Wisdom	glory
Might	riches
Honor	honor
Glory	power
Blessings	might

Human voices harmonize with the angelic chorus in the heavenly liturgy. The angels sing, as it were, a single tone, the one complex blessing. When the human choir joins, they break out into a sevenfold harmonization, organized by fifths.

Tuning is common in ancient lists, most prominently in the shift from the order of the planets to the days of the week, as shown below.

Ancient order of planets from earth	Days (Planets)
moon	Monday (moon)
Mercury	Tuesday (Mars/Tyr)
Venus	Wednesday (Mercury/Wodin)
sun	Thursday (Jupiter/Thor)
Mars	Friday (Venus/Freia)
Jupiter	Saturday (Saturn)
Saturn	Sunday

The remainder of chapter 7 records a dialogue between John and one of the Ancient Ones. The elder initiates the conversation, though the text says that he “answered,” which assumes that he is responding to something. The dialogue is reminiscent of Zechariah, where the prophet is guided by an interpreting angel who explains the visions.

In the second of Zechariah’s night visions, the prophet asks of the four horns that he sees, “What are these?” The angel explains, and the Lord shows him another vision, one of four craftsmen, prompting another question: “What are they coming to do?” (Zech. 1:18-21). There is another dialogue in the third vision (Zech. 2:2). References to the “angel who was speaking with me” are scattered throughout Zechariah’s visions (Zech. 1:9, 13, 14, 19; 2:3; 4:1, 4-5; 5:5, 10; 6:4).

The Ancient One asks John two questions: Who are they? Where did they come from? John answers, “You know,” and the elder *does* know, as he goes on to explain. Why the pretense of ignorance? In part, the exchange takes us back to Jesus’s description of those born of Spirit are like the wind: Though audible, you cannot tell where they come from or where they are going (Jn 3:8). Jesus is the One born of the Spirit, as the rest of John’s Gospel makes

clear with its continuous repetition of the questions, “Where is he from? Where is he going?” John does not know the answer to the elder’s question, “Where did these come from?” And that is a clue that the multitude is one born of the Spirit.

As Gregory Beale (1999: 440–1) has pointed out, Revelation 7 contains various allusions to the LXX of Ezek. 37:24–26, where the Lord promises to set his sanctuary in the midst of Israel. Ezekiel 37 also starts with a Q&A: “Son of Man, can these bones live?” Like John, Ezekiel answers, “Master Yahweh, you know” (v. 3). As Ezekiel prophesies to the bones, they come to life by the power of the breath of Yahweh, forming a new-Adamic army (cf. Gen. 2:7). The scene in Revelation 7 is layered from Ezekiel 37 and John 3. (In my view, Jesus was alluding to Ezekiel 37 when he said, “You must be born again” (Jn 3:7; Δεῖ ὑμᾶς γεννηθῆναι ἄνωθεν). It is a statement about *Israel’s* need for rebirth, not merely about the individual Nicodemus.) Both passages speak of the rebirth of the dead, and Ezekiel envisions the formation of “an exceedingly great army” (37:10), perhaps an *innumerable* one. The saints of Revelation 7 have come through tribulation into joyous life. Now John sees them raised up in the glorified flesh of white robes. They form the liturgical army that Ezekiel envisioned, the new Israel born of the Spirit of which Jesus spoke.

The Ancient One answers the questions in reverse order. He first tells where they have come from, and then describes who they are and what they have received from God (7:14–15). They have come from the great tribulation. θλίψις is connected with persecution (Matt. 13:21; Mk 4:17; Acts 11:19), and can describe the anguish of a woman in labor (Jn 16:33). Stephen speaks of Joseph’s afflictions (Acts 7:10), and of the famine throughout Egypt and Canaan as an affliction (Acts 7:11). Final judgment brings tribulation and anguish on the souls of those who do evil (Rom. 2:9). The sufferings of the Christian that eventually produce patience and righteousness are tribulations (Rom. 5:3). Paul speaks of his apostolic sufferings as tribulations (1 Cor. 1:4, 8; 2:4; 4:17; 7:4). For followers of Jesus, tribulation is labor that results in new birth.

John himself is a companion in the tribulation of his readers (Rev. 1:9), and Jesus warns that the church at Smyrna is about to suffer tribulation when Jews from the synagogue of Satan cast them into prison (2:9–10). Jesus threatens to throw Jezebel the prophetess of Thiyatira into “great tribulation” (2:22). Rev. 2:22 uses a similar phrase, but in 7:14 there is an article, which specifies it as a particular tribulation (εἰς θλίψιν μεγάλην in 2:22; ἐκ τῆς θλίψεως τῆς μεγάλης in 7:14).

Apart from Rev. 2:22 and 7:14, “great tribulation” appears only once in the NT, in Matthew’s version of the Olivet Discourse: When the abomination of desolation appears, there will be a “great tribulation” (Matt. 24:21; θλίψις μεγάλη), greater than has ever been or shall be (Mk 13:19 does not use the modifier μεγάλη). The specific character of that tribulation is signaled in Matt. 24:9, where Jesus warns that the disciples will be delivered to

“tribulation” by people who want to kill them. It will be so intense, and the enticements of false Christs so great, that the elect themselves will seem to be endangered. That tribulation is followed by the collapse of the cosmos, the darkening of sun and moon, the falling of the stars (Matt. 24:29). It seems that the definite article in Rev. 7:14 alludes to Jesus’s discourse. The Ancient One appears to tell John that these are the ones who came from *the* great tribulation, you know, the one Jesus prophesied (see, e.g., Mounce (1997: 164), who projects it to the end of history; Koester 2015: 421–2; Boxall 2006: 128). On the interpretation offered here (→introduction), the great tribulation occurred during the 60s AD, when the saints suffered through the persecutions accompanying the collapse of the *oikoumene*.

Yet this is hard to fit into Revelation 7. The multitude is beyond counting (7:9). Is it possible that the tribulation of the late 60s AD could produce an innumerable multitude? That would be an exaggeration, but is it a *plausible* exaggeration? Even if we project the great tribulation to the eschaton, is it plausible that a great tribulation could undo so many in one generation? The alternative is to suggest that the period the Ancient One calls “the great tribulation” is much longer. Perhaps it describes the entire period from the cross to the consummation, and John’s vision includes all the saints who have ever lived.

There is an alternative that better fits the scope of Revelation. In Nehemiah 9, the Levites bless Yahweh and confess the sins of the people, review the entire history of the people of God, reminding Yahweh of his call of Abraham, the deliverance of the fathers from the affliction they suffered in Egypt (ταπεινώσιν, v. 9), their rebellions in the wilderness, and their continued rebellions in the land (vv. 16–31). Through it all, they confess, Yahweh proves faithful to deliver them from oppressors and from all distress: When they cry in the “time of their tribulation (ἐν καιρῷ θλίψεως αὐτῶν), You did hear from heaven” (v. 27). For the returned exiles, that history of affliction and deliverance is not over. In fact, the tribulation seems worse than ever: “we are slaves today,” even in our own land (v. 36), since kings take their produce, rule Israelite bodies, and lay claim to Israelite cattle. Even back in the land, ἐν θλίψει μεγάλη ἔσμεν (v. 37). That is the only use of “great tribulation” in the LXX, and it describes the condition of Israel *after the exile*, as they continue in slavery to the Persian kings. Even when Persia treats them well, they still see themselves in distress and great tribulation. Dan. 12:1 is another close parallel. When Michael arises, there will be a time of tribulation such as has never yet occurred since Israel was a people (ἔσται θλίψεως θλίψις οἷα οὐ γέγονεν ἀφ’ οὗ γεγένηται ἔθνος). In context, this again refers to the tribulation of Israel after the exile, during the time when the king of the North and the king of the South fight for the Beautiful Land.

The entire history of Israel is a history of affliction. Jacob worships the God who brings him out of his afflictions (ἐν ἡμέρα θλίψεως, Gen. 35:3). Joseph suffers distress at the hands of his brothers (40:11; 42:21). Israel suffers tribulation in Egypt, Yahweh hears and responds (Exod. 4:31), and these sufferings teach her to treat strangers in the land with kindness (Exod. 23:9; cf. Lev. 19:33). Yahweh promises to deliver Israel from tribulation when they turn to him in the future (Deut. 4:29). The curse of the covenant is distress from enemies, siege, plagues, and exile, which are described as distress and tribulation (Deut. 28:49–57). When Yahweh hides his face, his people suffer tribulation (Deut. 31:17). The period of the judges is a period of tribulation and deliverance (Judg. 10:10–16). Israel's choice of a king is an insult to the God who delivers Israel out of all tribulations (1 Sam. 10:19). David suffers distress, but is confident that Yahweh will deliver him (1 Sam. 26:24; 2 Sam. 4:9; 1 Kgs 1:29). Yahweh is with David when his enemies bring a day of tribulation (2 Sam. 22:19). When Israel prays toward the temple, Yahweh promises to deliver them from distress (1 Kgs 8:37). Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem is a day of tribulation, until the angel of Yahweh scatters the Assyrians (2 Kgs 19:3). Tribulation is David's regular experience in the Psalms. The Lord relieves in the day of tribulation (Ps. 4:1) and proves a stronghold for those who are in trouble (Ps. 9:9). Psalm 20 begins with a prayer that the Lord will answer in the day of tribulation (v. 1). When bulls and lions surround David, he knows that "tribulation" is near (Ps. 22:11). Tribulations afflict David's heart (Ps. 25:17), but he prays that the Lord will save him from his distresses (Ps. 25:22). The Lord sees David's afflictions and does what no idol can do—sets his feet in a large place (Ps. 31:6–9).

Along similar lines, Revelation 12 (→12:1–5) depicts the entire history of Israel as a birth story, mother Israel in travail to give birth to a male Child to shepherd the nations. The company of Revelation 7 consists of the children born through that long history of travail. They have suffered, many have been slain, they cry for vindication. Finally, when the 144,000 are sealed, sacrificed, and elevated, they enter before the throne, swaddled in white like newborns. They have been waiting to enter God's presence, and when the firstfruits are harvested they receive robes whitened by the blood of the Lamb.

Perhaps we can be more specific: Great tribulation characterizes the period after the exile, says Nehemiah, and that great tribulation comes to a climax in the tribulation of tribulations in the 60s AD, the sufferings of the church in the lead-up to the destruction of Jerusalem (Matt. 24:21). The multitude in Revelation 7 is innumerable because it is not only from the last period of the great tribulation, but from a longer period of tribulation, at least from the time of Nehemiah, more likely from the time of Abel until the end of days.

On my suggestion, “great tribulation” is used in much the same way as “last days.” In Daniel 2, the “end of days” begins with Nebuchadnezzar and ends with the Messianic kingdom. Yet the NT speaks of the “last days” as if it began with Jesus and the apostles (Acts 2:17; Heb. 1:2; arguably 2 Tim. 3:1; 2 Pet. 3:3). There is a long “last days,” the “times of the Gentiles”; and there is a more circumscribed “last days of the last days” that begins when the Son comes into the world. So too, there is a “great tribulation” beginning with faithful Abel and lasting to the end of the old covenant, finally in the collapse of the *oikoumene* in AD 70. And there is a “great, *great* tribulation” covering the last part of that period.

The saints have washed their garments (7:14). The only place in the LXX where this particular combination of verb, object, and prepositional phrase occurs is Gen. 49:11: Judah will “wash his garments in wine and his robes in the blood of grapes.” A company with robes washed in blood is a royal company, true Jews, true Judahites. It is a company of kings. And priests: During the rite of filling, blood is sprinkled on Aaron’s garments, and smeared on his person (Exod. 29:19–25; Lev. 8:30), consecrating him to come near. For the innumerable multitude, the ordination is not performed by blood from the ram of filling but by the blood of the Lamb that was slain.

Israel never appears before Yahweh with dirty clothes. They wash before they meet God at Sinai (Exod. 19:10, 14), and keep washing to cleanse from defilement of unclean food (Lev. 11:25, 28, 40), skin disease (Lev. 13:6, 34; 14:8, 9, 47), or emissions from the flesh (Lev. 15:5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 21, 22, 27). After the rites of the Day of Atonement, priests wash their clothing (Lev. 16:26, 28; 19:7, 8, 10, 18, 21). Clothing is a second skin. Just as a person has to be clean to appear before Yahweh, so do his clothes. White garments are garments of light, gleaming garments, garments that sparkle and shine. They are garments of glory and beauty, fit for a company of priest-kings. Jesus later appears in a robe that has been dipped (βάπτω) in blood (→19:13), which I will argue is the blood of the saints. There is a wondrous exchange: Saints are cleansed by the Lamb’s blood, but the Lamb wears garments stained by the blood of the saints, his martyr-stained robe the body of the *totus Christus*.

For Bede (2011: 135), the robe signifies baptism. Oecumenius (2011: 36) sees both sacraments in the vision:

According to the opinion of the all-wise Paul, baptism is accomplished into the death of the Lord and wipes one clean from every filth of sin, so that those baptized in him are made white and clean. However, the reception of the life-giving blood of Christ also gives the same grace, for the Lord said concerning his blood that it was poured out “for many” and “for the sake of many” and “for the forgiveness of sins.”

Having come through tribulation, the multitude receives a sevenfold privilege, which recapitulates the seven days of creation. They receive new creation:

Genesis 1	Blessings
Light	Serve day and night
Firmament	Lord's tabernacle spread over them
Land/sea, plants	No hunger
Sun, moon, stars	Not harmed by sun
Swarming things	Lamb is shepherd
Land animals and man	Springs of water of life
Sabbath	Wipe every tear

The tabernacle spread over the multitude is like the firmament covering spread above the earth (cf. Isa. 40:22: “He spreads out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in”). We live in a cosmic tent, the sky as our tent curtain above (Day 2). Day 3 was a day of separating water and land, but also a day on which the earth sprouted grains and fruit-bearing plants. Day 5 is often obscure. Swarming things create a cloud, which is like a garment. The priests’ garments are spread over them to mark them as shepherds of the people. Water is not mentioned on Day 6, but πῆγη appears in the LXX of Gen. 2:6. In the absence of a man, a spring arose to water the face of the ground. Once man is created, we hear no more of the spring. Adam becomes the spring of living water in the garden, the one who ensures that the shrubs and plants will sprout. John 7 is in the background, with its promise of the gift of the Spirit. Boxall (2006: 128) writes,

Both the Gospel and the Apocalypse describe a Lamb who becomes a shepherd (cf. Jn 1:29, 36; 10:11ff.). Moreover, John 7 is certainly set at Tabernacles, and there is a debate as to whether the Tabernacles context continues into the Good Shepherd discourse in John 10 ... Indeed, if we are to push these Johannine similarities, there may be Eucharistic ... as well as baptismal echoes here.

This is an indication that “participation in these eschatological blessings can be experienced by the churches now through their liturgical celebrations.”

The first privilege is to be admitted before the throne of God and the Lamb to offer round-the-clock priestly service in the house (Psalm 134; λατρεύω). The priests, like Yahweh himself, occupy the house day and night, offering a continuous sacrifice of praise and prayer, like the living creatures who were around the throne before the multitude got in. It is the service that Yahweh demands when he delivers Israel from Egypt (Exod. 7:16, 26; 8:16), and it anticipates the final state of things when the saints serve the Father and the Lamb (→22:3).

God pitches his tent over them. If an Enthronement spreads out a tent, it is a royal tent, and the multitude is housed under the tent curtain is a royal family.

Spreading out a garment is a marital image (Ruth 3; Ezekiel 16). Married couples share a single robe, a single garment, as they are one flesh. The One on the throne stretches his tent over his royal Bride. σκηνώω is used only five times in the NT, four times in Revelation (12:12; 13:6; 21:3). All are rooted in Jn 1:14, which describes the incarnation as the Word “pitching his tent” in flesh. In the incarnation, the Word comes to dwell within the tent of flesh; the promise of Revelation 7 is that the tent of the Father is extended to encompass the saints. The Word dwelt in the tent of flesh, so we might be overshadowed by the Spirit of the Father. The Word tented in humanity, so that humanity could be brought under the covering of a divine tent. The Word dwelt in humanity so that humans might dwell in God. The church is not, of course, the Word made flesh, but the church is that people over whom the Father has tented. We are back at Sinai, the Lord spreading the tabernacle over his people, a tabernacling that anticipates the final post-millennial condition of the creation (→21:1-8).

As often in the letters to the churches, God promises food to victors, those who persevere through the great tribulation. The multitude has passed through distress and tribulation, the distress sometimes involving hunger and thirst in the wilderness. But they have come to their destination. There is no more sun of affliction. They are led by a Good Shepherd to springs of water of life. They will suffer no more sorrow (→21:1-8).

In the context, all of these privileges and blessings come through the suffering sacrifice of the Lamb *and* the 144,000 who share his sufferings. The suffering of the firstfruits church is instrumental to the eventual gathering of all nations into the heavenly temple. The suffering of a great company of Jewish martyrs is as much a part of the establishment of the new world after the *oikoumene* as the death and resurrection of Jesus, his ascension and the gift of the Spirit, the preaching of repentance to all nations. Jesus’ death brings an old world to an end; but that ending is not finally ended until he is joined by a full number of martyrs. Martyr blood is not simply the seed of the church. It is the founding blood of a new world.

Coals from the altar

And when he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about a half-hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them. And another angel came and stood at the altar having a gold censer, and much incense was given to him in order to give the prayers of all saints on the altar gold that is before the throne. And the smoke of the incense ascended with the prayers of the saints out of the hand of the angel before God. And the angel took the censer

and filled it out of the fire of the altar and threw into the land. And there was thunder and voices and lighting and an earthquake.

—Rev. 8:1-5

The seventh seal is the Sabbath seal, and the silence is an appropriate Sabbatical theme. *What* is silenced? Perhaps it is total silence that lasts only from the time that the seventh seal is opened until the time that the first trumpet blows. Textually, it lasts only from verses 1 to 7. If we take a broader view and ask what kind of noise is being made when the seventh seal is opened, another option suggests itself. From the moment the Lamb ascends to take the scroll, the angels and Ancient Ones have been singing. After the 144,000 are sealed, saints join in. That singing has gone on throughout the opening of the six seals. It is operatic: After the crashing orchestral overture, after the thunderous voices of the four living creatures, after the lament chorus of the saints, after a scene of destruction, sealing, after a final crescendo of the innumerable multitude singing praises to God: After all this, a boom of *silence*. Perhaps the period of silence does not end with the blowing of the trumpets. The silence lasts until the singing starts again at the end of the trumpet series and John's prophesying (→15:1-4). The silence is not the silence *until* the trumpets, or a silence that excludes the trumpets, but a silencing of heavenly song that *makes room for* the trumpets (Jordan 1999a: 91).

The entire book of Revelation is a worship service. It takes place on the Lord's Day, when John is in the Spirit. It involves the reading of letters of exhortation, the opening of a scroll, the trumpets that prepare for the reading of the scroll, a prophetic reading, an outpouring of blood, and finally a marriage supper in the new creation. The sixth seal gives a proleptic vision of the saints ascended in song from the altar to the throne, and now they fall silent so that the trumpets can be sounded and the scroll can be spoken. On Sunday, after we have confessed sin in response to an exhortation, we are absolved and ascend in song to the presence of God, and when we get to the throne, where the Word of God will be read, we fall silent and let the trumpet-voiced reader of the Scriptures speak God's trumpet-word to us, so the prophet who has eaten the book can speak what he has consumed.

Though the silence may not be total, it *is* silence, and that is meaningful. Silence is expectancy. At the Red Sea, Israel kept silent to see what Yahweh would do for them (Exod. 14:14). Hab. 2:20 says: "Yahweh is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before Him." Zephaniah says the same: "Hold your peace in the presence of Master Yahweh, for the day of Yahweh is at hand" (1:7) and "Be silent, all flesh, before Yahweh, for he is raised up out of his holy habitation" (2:13). When Paul begins to speak, the people fall silent (Acts 23:40). When Yahweh arises to speak, the creation and especially his people should stand in readiness, silent before him.

We may be called to keep silence, but we do not want God to be silent (Ps. 35:22; 39:12). We want God to rebuke the wicked and pass judgment against them (Ps. 50:3). We want him to rumble out with thunder and scatter his enemies (Ps. 83:1). When we are attacked, we want God to speak on our behalf (Ps. 109:1). The difference between silence and speech is the difference between idols and the living God (Psalm 115). The Servant of Yahweh is silent like a Lamb before shearers (Isa. 53:7), having already entered into his three days in the heart of the land, but that silence ends with a burst of praise when he gives his life as ransom. Silence is the prerequisite to hearing, and hearing is central to the Christian life. We walk by faith in the word of God that we hear, rather than by sight. We are silent before Yahweh so that we can be invaded by his voice, so that his trumpet can sound in our ears.

Silence is an act of faith. Silence is a confession that our words are not determinative. Silence is a mute confession that God speaks the determinative, divine Word. Sound is a sign of life. Living things make sounds, dead things quickly fall silent. In Sheol, there is silence (Ps. 31:17; 115:17), and, when David is on the verge of slipping into Sheol, he also falls silent (Ps. 32:3; 39:2; 94:17). When we fall silent in the presence of the Lord, we bow our voices to the earth: We prostrate our tongues before the Lord, so he can raise us up to speak and sing. Silence is death, and hope of resurrection. Silence is an audible prostration.

Hansen (2014) sees silence as a participation in the coming of the kingdom, as important in the work of the church as the ministry of praise. Silence is the early church's *non*-participation and *non*-cooperation with the idolatry of mainstream culture in Asia Minor. This includes not only non-participation in the various imperial cults devoted to worship of the emperor and other Roman gods, but also self-extraction from the economy which served to buttress the cosmological discourse of the cult" (9–10). The silence of the saints breaks the social contract of Rome, a contract that depends on covenant exchanges with the idols of Rome. "The sacrificial and economic system functioned like a social contract: the gods sustained the world and the people sacrificed. The continuity of this arrangement functioned to keep the world in this stable condition" (8). Christians are silent, refusing to sustain the gods by pagan sacrifice: "if John's communities refuse sacrifice, they will be seen as introducing anomie into the Roman social and cosmic order. Then John reports the breaking apart of the world through divine judgment, thus confirming this pagan suspicion. Once the world begins to break apart, the contract with the gods and with Caesar will have been understood to be broken as well" (65).

The silence lasts about half hour (ὥς ἡμῶριον). In the background is the Gospel of John, where "the hour" and "My hour" are a major theme. Jesus seems to rebuke his mother when she asks about the wine, because "My hour has not yet come" (Jn 2:4). The coming of the new covenant, when people will worship God neither at Jerusalem nor at Gerazim but in Spirit and truth, is the coming of "an hour" (4:21, 23). The time of resurrection is a coming "hour" (5:25, 30). Jesus escapes from those who hate him because his hour

has not yet come (7:30; 8:20), but eventually the hour does come (12:23), and it is the hour for the Son of Man to glorify the Father (17:1). This hour of glorification is also an hour of suffering from which Jesus hopes to be rescued (12:27), and the hour when he will depart to return to his Father (13:1). Beyond his own hour, Jesus speaks of an hour of persecution when the disciples will be cast out of the synagogue and suffer the birth pangs of the new age (16:2, 4, 21, 32). *The hour* is the hour of Jesus's suffering and glory, and the disciples' hour will recapitulate Jesus's own. They also will suffer an hour to bring glory to the Father, to return to the Father, and to share in the hour of Jesus.

Twice in the letters to the churches, Jesus speaks of an "hour" coming upon the church (3:3), or the entire *οικουμένη* (3:10). The "hour" of the church is a crisis-moment of martyrdom. Before the harvest is gathered up, an angel announces the "hour" of God's judgment (14:7), the hour of harvest (14:15). This harvest is the harvest of grain and grapes, a harvest of bread and wine, the harvest of the people of God, who will be gathered with the angels who are already singing before the throne. Their hour of harvest is an hour of witness and martyrdom. In time, it overlaps with the hour in which the beast and kings reign (17:12), but it leads finally to the hour of judgment against Babylon (18:10, 17, 19), the hour of crisis on the whole *οικουμένη*. The entire second half of Revelation is about the hour of crisis for the church and the world.

Silence lasts not an hour but a *half* hour. It is the brief time of silence before the trumpets blow, or while they blow, the first portion of the hour that the rest of the book warns about. The half-hour should be linked to the various half-times elsewhere in Revelation. The three witnesses are put to death for "three and a half days," a half-week (→11:9, 11). That is the same time period as the "time, times, and half a time" (→12:14; cf. Dan. 7:25; 12:7). To say that the witnesses remain dead for three and a half days is to say they are raised mid-week, as Jesus was, before the end of history or before the end of whatever time period is symbolized by the week. That the beast has authority to act for forty-two months (=three and a half years) means that his power is cut off mid-week. He cannot retain power for a full week of years. Split time periods suggest that there is a rescue or transition in the middle of time. A half-hour is an hour that has been split in two by some decisive event at the center. If there is silence in heaven for a *half* hour, then something must happen to break the silence before the hour passes.

We can understand it as follows: The trumpets inaugurate the hour of testing, the hour of trial for the disciples of Jesus. As soon as the trumpets blow, the clock starts ticking. After the seventh trumpet, John prophesies in a long sequence of visions that includes a successful persecution of the church. That

persecution is also the time of harvest, when martyrs are rescued to stand on the sea of glass and fire, and to break out in song (Revelation 15). When they begin to sing, the half-hour silence ends, but the “hour” is not finished. During the second half-hour, the blood of the martyrs is poured out, which eventually causes the city to split and the nations to fall (→16:17–21). Meanwhile, the saints are in a safe-heaven, praising God, saved by the very persecution that seemed to wipe out the church. The “hour” is broken in the middle, so that the martyrs do not suffer the full tribulation of the “hour” of crisis that comes on the *oikoumene*. There is, in short, a “rapture” after the half hour, in the middle of the hour, before the climax of judgment arrives. The martyrs are carried through the heavenly sea to be with God when the bowls are poured out to destroy the old world. Not all the saints are swept to heaven, as we shall see. Some remain Babylon and have to flee in a second exodus (→18:4). But the harvest of the martyrs brings the first half of the hour to an end.

The half hour is, finally, linked to the Hebrew idiom for midnight, “half-night” (*chatzy hala’lah*; Exod. 12:29). Half-night is the moment of transition in Egypt, the time when Israel escapes from the angel of death and leaves Egypt. Judgment continues on Egypt, as the firstborn are killed, but Israel is saved in the middle of the “hour” by the blood of the Lamb and then by their own exit from Egypt. Other deliverances take place at half-night too—Gideon’s attack on the Midianites, the shift in Israel’s fortunes in the book of Esther (6), the fall of Babylon (Daniel 5). Just so: the martyrs are saved by the blood of the Lamb, and by their exit (in their deaths) from the city that has become Sodom and Egypt.

Chapter 8 begins with a reference to seven angels (v. 1) and verse 6 returns to the seven trumpet angels who stand before the Lord (τοὺς ἑπτὰ ἀγγέλους οἱ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἑστήκασιν).

The definite article suggests that they have already been identified somewhere, somehow. Where? “Seven angels” are mentioned in chapter 1: The stars in Jesus’s hand are the angels of the seven churches (1:20). The lampstand shows up again in John’s initial vision of the heavenly worship service: Seven lamps burn before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God, and the seven eyes of the Lamb are also the seven fiery Spirits of God. Star-lamp-angel-Spirit-eyes are linked. Now, the seven trumpet angels are added. These seven angels are in heaven, and so are not identical to the angels of the churches, which are pastors and bishops and not spirit angels (→1:20). But they correspond, and that association hints that the trumpets correspond to some liturgical activity in the church, perhaps to proclamation of the word. When the word of God is preached, we do not see plagues unleashed, armies of locusts (locust-scorpions, also known as scorpusts, →9:1–11) rise from the abyss, but that is *in fact* what happens when the word of God is trumpeted.

They do not begin to trumpet their trumpets until verse 7, but the references to the seven angels at either end of 8:1–6 frames the scene of the other angel at the altar:

Seventh seal, 8:1

- A. Introduction of trumpet angels, 8:1
- B. Another angel offers incense with prayers, 8:3-5
- A': The trumpet angels begin to blow, 8:6

At the end of the trumpet section (→11:15), we find a similar pattern:

Seventh trumpet, 11:15–14:20

- A. Introduction of seven plague angels, 15:1
- B. Saints on the sea of glass singing song of Moses, 15:2-4
- A': Plague angels emerge from the temple, 15:5-7

The middle scenes in these sequences are related as promise and fulfillment. The prayers of the saints that rise from the altar in 8:3-5 are answered when they are rescued. Prayer to praise: That is the order of heavenly worship.

When the angels come out with their trumpets, they “prepare (ἐτοιμάζω) to trumpet them” (Rev. 8:6). It is not clear what that means. A warm up, with old jazz standards first improvised by Jubal? Cleaning the mouthpiece or valves? Whatever it means in context, it is part of a pattern of preparation that threads its way through the book. ἐτοιμάζω is used seven times, arranged chiasmally:

- A. Trumpet angels prepare to sound, 8:6
- B. Locusts like horses prepared for battle, 9:7
- C. Angels prepared to kill, 9:15
- D. The sky mother flees to a prepared place, 12:6
- C': The river dries so the kings of the east can cross, 16:12
- B': The bride is prepared, 19:7
- A': The prepared bride is revealed, 21:1

Several connections illuminate. The locusts in B have faces like men and hair like women (9:7-8), infernal anticipations of the heavenly bride in B'. The angels (C) are sometimes taken as demons, but the connection with the kings from the sunrise (C') who fight the frog demons suggests otherwise. Both the angels and the kings are part of God's army. And this, finally, may circle back to help us understand the preparation of the trumpets. Among other things, trumpets announce the arrival—the *parousia*—of a king. In the chiasm, the prepared trumpets announce the eventual appearance of the prepared *Queen* of heaven, who is the glory of heaven's king. The trumpets are part of the great mystery by which the bride is prepared for her husband. They begin to announce the unveiling of the Son of Man in his bride.

The angels are given seven trumpets, a divine passive. God places the trumpets of power in the hands of the angels, so that they can sound them. He plays First Trumpet, but also hands out trumpets so others can join the brass section. God comes with a trumpet sound, and yet he gives us the power to make sounds that replicate his sound. Two sorts of trumpets appear

in the OT. Priests blow silver trumpets to summon the people as Yahweh's congregation, and then again when the camp sets out. If only a single trumpet is blown, the leaders are supposed to gather. An alarum, on the other hand, is a call to break camp and move. Silver trumpets are sounded over burnt offerings and sacrifices at the appointed feasts, especially at the new moon festivals that occur each month (Num. 10:1-10). The other trumpet is the *shofar*, which announces the beginning of the Jubilee year and is used in warfare, specifically at Jericho (Josh. 6:4-20) and by Gideon (Judges 7). Trumpets sound a memorial before God, calling on him to remember his covenant and to act on it (on trumpets, →1:8).

Between the introduction of the seven angels and their preparation comes another scene with an angel at the altar, holding a censer. This is what we need for effective worship: Trumpet-words and censer-prayers. This is ἄλλος ἄγγελος, a phrase that elsewhere refers to the Spirit. Seven angels mentioned, then another angel, and then we are back to the seven angels. The Spirit is the eighth angel, the first angel of a new set of angels, the angel of the new week. By interceding along with the saints, he ensures that the trumpets will be effective.

The Angel-Spirit stands before the altar. Which altar? The two altars in the tabernacle are connected in the liturgy of sacrifice. In the court is a bronze altar for ascensions, where animals are burned to ascend to God's presence. Incense is placed on the animal offering so that, having ascended through the substitutionary and representative animal, the worshiper can offer the incense and prayer at the second, golden altar in the Holy Place. The angel of Revelation follows precisely this sequence (cf. Stefanovic 2006). He initially stands *on* the altar (ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου) of ascension. In the LXX, the phrase describes the placement of sacrificial flesh on the altar (Exod. 29:38; Lev. 1:8, 12, 3:5; 8:30; 9:24; cf. Stefanovic 2006: 83). The angel stands, in short, on top of the same altar at whose base the blood of the saints has been poured. Their cries come up from the bottom of the altar, and he catches them in a golden censer (6:9-11), which he takes from the court altar to the golden altar (v. 3b) to offer to God. He is like a sacrificial animal ascending in smoke, carrying the prayers of the saints into heaven (cf. Judg. 13:20, where the Angel of Yahweh ascends in the fire of an offering; also, at the temple dedication, Solomon kneels on a platform of altar dimensions to pray; 2 Chr. 6:13). As soon as the angel completes his ascent, the trumpets begin to blow, a response to the prayers of the saints that have just been offered.

The chiastic structure of verse 3 is consistent with this interpretation:

-ἐστάθη
-ἐπὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου

-ἔχων λιβανωτὸν χρυσοῦν
 -καὶ ἐδόθη αὐτῷ τῆμίματα πολλὰ
 -ἵνα δώσει ταῖς προσευχαῖς τῶν ἁγίων πάντων
 -ἐπὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον τοῦ χρυσοῦν
 -τὸ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θρόνου

That structure links the two altars, but distinguishes them by the phrase *το χρυσοῦν*. The gift of incense is at the center.

If the prayers of the saints are already going up, why does the Angel-Spirit need to add incense? What does incense add that the prayers themselves do not accomplish? We might say, *Everything*. At the end of this Pentecostal section of Revelation, we are assured that the Spirit's presents the prayers that the saints have been offering under the altar in heaven. Without incense, the prayers do not have any effect. The saints are "beneath" the altar, at the base where the blood is poured. That blood cries out, but to get all the way to heaven, something needs to be added at the *top* of the altar. Incense becomes a vehicle to carry the cries of the saints before God. Prayers arise from earth, but incense turns these earthly cries into a *heavenly* form of prayer. (Compare the addition of censers and incense after the Lamb's ascent, →5:8.)

Once the Spirit's intercessions are added, the earth is affected even more dramatically. The smoke arises out of the "right hand" of the angel to God, and then he flings coals to the earth, producing thunder, voices, lightning, earthquakes, a fourfold reaction that reaches the four corners of the land. Lightnings, thunder, and voices are phenomena of God's throne (→Rev. 4:5), and the fact that they are now sent to earth, along with earthquakes, means that God's throne is descending to earth, shaking it as it arrives. It is Sinai, when Yahweh descends on the mountain in a cloud of lightning, thunder, and earthquake (Exod. 19:16; 20:18). It is Sodom, fire from heaven to consume the wicked. It is Yahweh's descent to the tabernacle in a pillar of fire and cloud, a fire so intense that Moses cannot remain. It is the beginning of the descent of God's throne to earth, a descent that will be worked out in the sequence of seven trumpets (→11:19; →16:17-20).

When the Spirit casts coals to the earth, the Pentecost section of the book comes to an end (cf. Bede 2011: 138). The Lamb is in the midst of the throne, and, as always, when the Lord takes his throne, fire breaks out to ignite a sacrifice. The Spirit throws down coals from heaven, convicting the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment, bringing the fiery throne of God and the Lamb down to earth. Angels are given trumpets to accompany the sacrifice as it begins to ascend. As the trumpets sound, more judgments fall. Still, it is not yet the end. Only when the last trumpet blows is the scroll read out, only *then* is the mystery inscribed on its pages unveiled by the prophet John.

The Rider on the white horse of victory will appear again (→19:11-16) and when he does, he will initiate a series of events that parallel those of the seals. All four horsemen are implicitly there: Victory, conflict and division, plunder and preservation, death. And the other seals too: Martyrs who were once under the altar rise to reign for a thousand years (→20:1-7), the world that started to end when the Lamb opened the sixth seal actually ends (→21:1), and the bride descends with a promise that God will wipe away all tears and lead his people to living water (→21:2-8). When the white-horse rider descends from heaven again, all that the seals began—victory, division, depletion, death—will be completed.

Rest awhile,
 Children of wretchedness! More groans must rise,
 More blood must stream, or ere your wrongs be full.
 Yet is the day of retribution nigh:
 The Lamb of God hath opened the fifth seal:
 And upward rush on swiftest wing of fire
 The innumerable multitude of Wrongs
 By man on man inflicted! Rest awhile,
 Children of wretchedness! The hour is nigh.
 —S.T. Coleridge, “Religious Musings”
 (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 87)

*Holy God, Judge of all the earth: Hear the cry of martyrs' blood, judge
 and avenge them, raise them by the breath of your Spirit and enthrone
 them with Jesus the Witness. Through Jesus Christ your Son, our
 Lord. Amen.*

IV.3. In Spirit in Heaven: Seven Trumpets—Rev. 8:6–11:19

John has been caught up to heaven by the Spirit (→4:1-2), and sees visions of things that must shortly take place. The visions start in John's past. He sees Jesus ascend to heaven as the Lamb slain and standing, who receives the book and opens the seals. The book of kingship contains God's script for the end of the old age and the beginning of new creation, and by his obedience Jesus is worthy to take the book and open the secrets it contains. In the scenes of the seven seals, John sees a review of the Pentecostal ministry of the apostolic church: The Spirit rides out victoriously to conquer the *oikoumene*, meets with opposition, and sends God's enemies into murderous conflict with one another. Those who resist the Spirit experience a famine of basic goods, while the anointed people who celebrate a feast of wine are preserved. All these are the beginnings of birth pangs, preparing for sword, famine, pestilence, death. Aroused by the goings-on in heaven, the martyrs think their time of vindication is at hand, and intensify their cry for vengeance.

It is *not* the end. The secret of the gospel is that victory comes through suffering. The secret embedded in the Lamb's book is the same secret: The martyrs will not be vindicated until there are *more* martyrs. The iniquity of the Amorites must be made full, the cup of martyr blood must fill to the brim: *Then* the end will come. When the Lamb first begins opening the seals, we expect to see the kingdom come, because the Lamb is worthy to receive all honor and glory and dominion (5:13), because the Lamb was invested as king. *What more could the world need?* To the agenda of bringing in the kingdom has been added the agenda of making more martyrs in order to vindicate the martyrs. We *will* see the kingdom come, we will still see the beast-and-harlot of the *oikoumene* replaced by a holy city, but the path to that eventual outcome runs through a graveyard of martyrs.

Those agendas converge in the trumpet sequence (8:6–11:19) and its aftermath (chapters 12–15; see volume 2), which form the heart of the book of Revelation. The trumpet section progresses from the seals, not only because these chapters depict and predict more intense judgments, but because they

predict later events and describe the advance of God's people and purposes. These chapters depict both the completion of the full number of martyrs *and* the further deconstruction of the world that began to collapse at the sixth seal. The end that began in the sixth seal is not completed until the bowls are poured out, the city falls, and the martyrs are elevated to thrones. The firmament is not shattered until the end of the bowl sequence. Yet by the end of the trumpet section, the sky is beginning to splinter in a plague of hail, and heaven splits open to reveal the throne-ark of the covenant (11:19).

Above (→6:1-8) we noted that the first four seals, the “four horsemen of the Apocalypse,” provided the template for the four great visionary sequences in chapters 4–16, John's “in Spirit in heaven” vision. It is yet another illustration of the “fractal” pattern of the book, small-scale sections foreshadow the shape of larger sections. The seals depict the white-horse victory of the gospel and its consequences. When we enter the trumpet section, we are in the realm of the red horse. The rider on the red horse bears a sword to divide man from man, to set mothers against daughters and fathers against sons and brother against brother. This is an inevitable consequence of the church's mission, since the church bears the sword of the Spirit.

The seals follow the ascension of the Lamb (→5:1-6), and depict the earliest post-Pentecostal progress of the church. The trumpets depict subsequent events—the corruption of Judaism in its opposition to the church, the conflicts between church and synagogue, early schisms within the church itself, ultimately leading to the tale of two witnesses, which is a tale of martyrdom. *These* are the “plagues” that the Lamb throws down on a Jerusalem and Israel that have become an Egypt, dismantling the *oikoumene* so that the martyrs can arise to join the heavenly liturgy (→11:1-14; →14:17-20). Some are punishments inflicted on the land because of Israel's rebellion, but in most of the visions God releases Israel to her own rebellion. These judgments come from God, but fundamentally they are self-inflicted. The Jewish leaders rejected Jesus and the gift of his Spirit, and so they are given over to other spirits. They refused the gently flowing waters of the Good Shepherd, so they drink poison. Temple elites cling idolatrously to the temple, and the Lord gives the temple over to demons.

The trumpet conflicts are intended to drive sinners to repentance. When the Lord allows demonic locorpions to torment the men of the land, they are supposed to wake up and realize what they have done, that they have pierced their own Lord, and pierced him again by persecuting his church. Some few repent, but many, like Pharaoh, are hardened in their idolatries and prepared for worse idolatries (→13:1-10). That is part of the divine logic of “a little time”: God waits to avenge and gives the gift of time, a gift that opens possibility of repentance but also the possibility of hardening. By the time the

final judgment falls, the wicked are irredeemably hardened. God does not destroy people who are softened by his disciplines; he crushes those with hearts as hard as rocks, barely alive, barely human. By the end of the trumpet section and its sequel, the martyrs are safely above the firmament (→15:1-4), and they watch rejoicing as the Lord sends the final plagues onto the city of Babylon (→16:1-21) and makes way for a second exodus of the rest of the saints from the harlot city (→17-18) into the holy city that descends from heaven (→21:9–22:5).

Chapters 1–11 form a large, coherent unit of Revelation, telling the intertwined tales of the unveiling of a book and the commissioning of a prophet. John is initially commissioned to write messages to the churches, dictated by Jesus (→1:9-20). Whisked to heaven, he witnesses the Lamb opening a book, but the book is not completely open until the seventh seal is opened (→8:1-5). Still the contents of the book are unread and unheard; a seven-trumpet fanfare (8:6–9:21) prepares for the completion of John's commission as a prophet (10:1–11:2). After he eats the Lamb's now-open book and receives a reed to measure the temple, John is ready to prophesy. The contents of the book are disclosed in chapters 12–15 (or 12–16, with chapters 17–18 detailing the judgment of 16:17-21). That John's commission takes eleven chapters is evident in the way the Apocalypse uses the commissioning scene of Ezekiel 1–5. Bits and shards of Ezekiel appear in chapter 1 (cf. Rev. 1:13 with Ezek. 1:26; Rev. 1:15 with Ezek. 1:7, 24). Ezekiel comes back into play with the four living creatures of Revelation 4 and the book of Revelation 5. Finally, John eats the scroll in Revelation 10, completing the Ezekielian commission (cf. Ezek. 2:8; 3:1-3). At that point, like Ezekiel, he is prepared speak to the house of Israel about cities fallen and rebuilt, his face set like flint.

Seven trumpets

We have already examined aspects of the trumpet theology of the OT (→1:10). Israel uses two kinds of trumpet. The *shofar* is made from a hollowed-out animal horn, and Numbers 10 requires Israel to make two silver trumpets used to summon Israel to worship (as in the Feast of Trumpets) and to announce that the Lord is setting out. The *shofar* announces war; the silver trumpets announce worship (Koester 2015: 432). Trumpets are connected with key moments of Israel's history. Israel heard a deafening trumpet voice from Sinai, so loud and intense that the people asked that the Lord be silent. Priests blew trumpets as Israel marched around Jericho, announcing that the God of Sinai had come to claim his land, carrying on their liturgical war until the city walls collapsed (cf. Gage 2001: 147;

Bede 1997: 138). Before Revelation is over, another Jericho, Babylon, will fall before the trumpets. When David brought the ark into Jerusalem, the priests announced the Lord's enthronement with trumpets, and the trumpets of Revelation culminate with the declaration that "the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (11:15). The trumpet sequence prepares John's prophecy that foretells how God becomes king. Trumpets announce the beginning of the year of Jubilee, when the land returns to its original owners. That too is happening in Revelation 8–11, as Jesus takes possession of the earth and distributes it to his saints. The seven trumpets fit into the Levitical calendrical structure that runs through Revelation. Trumpets are blown on the first day of the seventh month, the "Feast of Trumpets" (Lev. 23:24), announcing that the Day of Atonement is coming. By the time we get to the end of the trumpet section, the heavenly sanctuary is open, the ark is visible, and the preparations for a great Yom Kippur are under way (→11:19). Chapters 12–16 move toward a great, mysterious Day of Atonement, followed by an ingathering of nations that fulfills the Feast of Booths.

In Revelation 8–11, the first four trumpets call out judgments against the land (Israel), the sea of Gentiles, the springs of the temple, the stars that represent kings and rulers. In the fifth trumpet, demons are released to plague men, and in the sixth the witnesses are vindicated (cf. Jordan 1999a: 93). More prosaically, we can summarize the trumpets as follows:

1. First trumpet (8:7): hail, fire, blood falls from heaven to earth, destroying one-third of earth, grass, trees.
2. Second trumpet (8:8–9): a burning mountain is thrown into the sea, and the sea becomes blood, which kills one-third living things and ships.
3. Third trumpet (8:10–11): The star Wormwood falls into fresh waters and turns one-third bitter.
4. Fourth trumpet (8:12): Sun, moon, stars are smitten and darkened.
5. Fifth trumpet (9:1–12): A star from heaven opens the abyss and releases locorpions.
6. Sixth trumpet (9:13–11:14): An army comes from the Euphrates, an angel gives John a book to eat, the two witnesses.
7. Seventh trumpet (11:15–19): Opening of the heavenly Most Holy Place.

Like the seals, the sequence of seven is asymmetrical. The first four seals revealed four horses in rapid succession. The visions opened by the last three seals were different in substance, with the fifth and especially the sixth seal being much longer than the first four. The 4 + 3 pattern of the seals

reverses the 3 + 4 pattern of the messages (“let him who has ears” is not at the end of the first three, but it is at the end of the last four messages). That same 4 + 3 recurs with the trumpets (Boxall 2006: 136; on connections of seals, trumpets, bowls, see p. 104). The first four trumpets occupy only twelve verses, the fifth trumpet covers eleven verses itself (9:1–11), the sixth about two chapters (9:13–11:14), and the seventh trumpet arguably covers three (11:15–15:5). The extended seventh trumpet fits the Jericho typology. On the seventh day of siege, Israel marched around the city seven times before blowing trumpets and shouting. Within the seventh trumpet, or subsequent to it, is a sevenfold description of the battle of the saints against the beast (12–15).

With the trumpets, the 4 + 3 pattern is reinforced by “three woes” associated with the final three trumpets (8:13). The fifth trumpet contains the first woe (9:12), the sixth is the second woe (11:14), and the final woe must be linked somehow with the seventh trumpet (exactly how, we investigate below). This inverts a pattern from Genesis 1. On the last three days God pronounced blessings on the sea creatures and birds, the land animals, and the Sabbath (Gen. 1:22, 28; 2:3). Instead of blessings, the trumpets pronounce woes.

That 4 + 3 structure, with three woes, suggests further analogies with the days of creation. At a very general level, that is certainly what is happening: Creation is being undone, and that is reinforced by the numerology and structure of this section. More detailed correlations are necessarily more tenuous.

1. Day 1 is the day of creation of light, and the separation of light and darkness. The first trumpet involves hail and fire and blood thrown to earth, which destroys the earth and the vegetation. There is no obvious link.
2. Day 2 is the day of the firmament, the separation of the waters above and below. With the second trumpet, a burning mountain is thrown into the sea and it turns to blood. Both have to do with the sea, and the mountain is connected to the firmament. When we mix in the septet of Genesis 2 (Introduction), the connection is clearer, because the mountaintop garden-sanctuary occupies the “Day 2” slot.
3. Day 3 divides the land from the sea, and on that day the land produces grain plants and fruit trees. In both the trumpets (8:10–11) and the bowls (16:4–5), the third is a judgment against fresh water. Fresh water sources were formed on the earth on Day 3, supplying life to the grain and fruit trees that sprang up on that day. In Genesis 2, the “Day 3” section explicitly mentions rivers.
4. Day 4 was for the creation of the sun, moon, and stars, and the fourth trumpet wipes out one-third of the heavenly bodies.
5. On Day 5, sea creatures and birds appeared. It was the first day of blessing. The fifth trumpet corresponds to that as the first trumpet of woe. On Day 5, God made swarming things in the sea, and the fifth trumpet unveils a cloud of creatures from the abyss, a combination of locust and scorpion—which I shall call “locorpions” or “scorpusts.”

6. God created Adam on Day 6, and the sixth trumpet reveals an army, a prophetic commission, and two witnesses who are killed in the city. This is a new Adamic humanity, a humanity that reaches its maturity in prophecy and martyrdom.

7. Day 7 is the Sabbath day, when God sits as judge. The seventh trumpet reveals the process by which God becomes king, by which he demonstrates his righteousness to the nations. The seventh trumpet begins with, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ” is the way the seventh trumpet section begins (11:15). And the extended visions after the seventh trumpet end on the same note: “Righteous and true are Thy ways, Thou King of the nations” (15:3).

This is the theme of these chapters: A deconstruction of the old creation, which is simultaneously a reconstruction of a new creation.

The section after the seventh trumpet closely parallels the first six trumpets:

Trumpets	Chapters 12–15
1. Blood, fire, hail	Hailstorm, 11:19
2. Mountain into the sea	Dragon thrown down, 12:7-13
3. Star into rivers and springs	Dragon spews water like river, 12:15-16
4. Stars and sun and moon	Beast from the sea, 13:1-8
5. Locorpions from abyss	Beast from the land, 13:11-18
6. Army from Euphrates and witnesses	Harvest of 144,000, 14:17-20
7. Kingdom becomes Christ's	Kingdom becomes Christ's, 15:1-4

The first trumpet is a plague of hail and fire that falls from heaven, mixed with blood. When they hit the earth, they cause a fire (8:7). Hail is next mentioned in Rev. 11:19. At the second trumpet, a burning mountain is thrown into the sea and turns the sea blood (8:8-9). In chapter 12, a dragon is thrown down from heaven with great wrath, putting earth and sea are in danger (12:1-12). When the angel trumpets the third trumpet, a star falls from heaven to the springs of water, poisoning the springs (8:10-11). In the continuation of the story of the dragon and the woman, the serpent (who has fallen from heaven) pours water from his mouth to drown the woman (12:13-17). In both scenes water is deadly though in different ways, and both scenes mention a “river” (ποταμός; 8:10; 12:15-16). The fourth trumpet reveals a judgment against the heavenly bodies, which represent rulers (8:12). After the dragon fails to drown the woman, he stands at the edge of the sea and calls up the beast from the sea, a Gentile imperial beast (13:1-11).

The fifth trumpet begins with the vision of a star falling from heaven, who opens the door to the abyss and releases locorpions (9:1-11), matching the beast from the land who deceives the people of the land and exercises authority (13:11-18). The sixth trumpet is a long section that includes the revelation of a great army at the Euphrates, an angel who comes from heaven to give John a book to read, and the vision of the two witnesses who are slain in the city (9:13–11:14). In the corresponding section in chapter 14, a series of angels flies across heaven announcing judgments. A harvest follows. This is a portrait of martyrdom, and thus corresponds to the scene of the two witnesses who are slain in the city then raised to heaven. The connection between these two passages supports the notion that the harvest is not merely destructive, and that the blood is not the blood of the wicked but martyr

blood. The story of the two witnesses ends with an earthquake that destroys a tenth of the city (11:13), and in chapter 14, one of the angels announces the fall of Babylon (14:8) and after the harvest the blood drenches the city and its outlying areas (14:20). Finally, the seventh trumpet curves back on itself. At the beginning of the seventh trumpet, loud heavenly voices announce that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of the Lord and of Christ (11:15). After the grain and grapes are harvested, John sees into heaven again, where saints praise God as “King of the nations” (15:3). This forms an *inclusio* around the extended “seventh trumpet,” but it also completes a sequence that matches the seven trumpets with the seventh trumpet.

The trumpet section advances beyond the seals. The most obvious evidence is that the trumpets affect a larger portion of the land and its inhabitants. The fourth seal sends out the green horse, who has authority over a quarter of the earth (→6:8), but in the first four trumpets one-third of things are destroyed. In the middle of the sixth seal, four corner angels hold back the four winds and are instructed not to harm the earth and trees, but when the first trumpet sounds earth, trees, and grass are burned (8:7). The word τρίτος appears twelve times in verses 7–12, once used of the third angel but otherwise used as a fraction, one-third. The twelve points to a judgment on Israel, and the fact that there are twelve-thirds means that the total is a four (Smalley 2005: 220). The numerology thus points to a more complete judgment than we witnessed in the seals.

The trumpets do not follow the *order* of the Egyptian plagues, but many of Egypt’s plagues are included in the sequence (often noted; Boxall 2006: 136; Mounce 1997; Aune 1998a: 500–503 compares OT plague lists): Hail and fire from heaven, the seventh Egyptian plague; the sea turns to blood, as did the Nile; spring water turns bitter, which recalls the incident at Marah when Israel was coming from Egypt; the fourth trumpet brings darkness, like the darkness of Egypt. The fifth trumpet brings a double plague of darkness and locusts. The trumpets announce and enact a series of plagues on a new Egypt, identified in 11:8 as the city where the Lord was crucified. The trumpets prepare for a double exodus from old Jerusalem, the exodus of the martyrs, depicted after the seventh trumpet (→12–15), and the exodus of surviving believers from Babylon (→18:4).

Like the original plagues, these reveal the truth of things as much as they impose curses. Filled with the corpses of Hebrew infants, the Nile was a river of blood before it turned red; the plague merely made visible what was already true. Egypt was already in darkness, worshipping the sun god, before it was afflicted with darkness thick enough to feel. Pharaoh was already impotent before Yahweh before he lost his son; Passover night was not only an eye-for-eye, son-for-son judgment, but an unveiling of the truth about Pharaoh. As we examine the trumpets in detail, we will find evidence of a similar logic:

The trumpets unveil as much as they punish, because the unveiling of Jesus Christ is the unveiling of light that exposes things hidden in dark corners.

As noted, the trumpets match the second horseman of the Apocalypse, the red horse of division. In an important sense, the events unveiled by the trumpets are not merely different from those of the seals, but different in kind. The seals depict the early triumphant progress of the gospel; the trumpets focus on the divisions and conflicts that necessarily ensue. When God begins to make the world new, anyone with investments in the old world fights to keep it intact. It is true that the seals reveal the “beginning of birth pangs,” and that the trumpets begin to move toward the turmoil that comes just before “the end” (Matt. 24:8), up to the unveiling of the abomination of desolation. But the trumpets move forward by creating, sharpening, intensifying divisions. Conflicts between Jews and Christians, between Jews and Jews, are the “plagues” that fall on Israel. As Gentiles are admitted to the church, some (though, of course, far from all) Jews react vigorously, viciously, violently. By the time we get to the sixth trumpet, we are on the edge of the “abomination of desolation,” the abominable shedding of holy blood that will devastate the city Babylon. What Acts 8–28 tells in historical prose, Revelation 8–11 describes in apocalyptic poetry. The divisions between Jew and Christian, the internal divisions of the church, ultimately the conflicts between Rome and the church—these are the events portrayed under the cover of Egyptian plagues.

A key shift occurs in the aftermath of the seventh trumpet, as we move from the red horse of division to the black horse of deprivation and deliverance. Satan calls up the beast from the sea, who allies with the beast from the land, to make war on the saints and defeat them. In one moment of harvest, the earth is deprived of the riches of the firstfruits who are martyred and the martyrs are protected from further harm. The land is deprived of its barley and wheat, while the oil and wine are gathered into heavenly storehouses. This combined assault on the saints from the Gentile Romans and the Jews is the climax of the age, and the slaughter of the saints brings the end of the age. In short, the trumpets describe the period between the early ministry of the apostles and the beginning of Roman persecution of Christians in the 60s AD.

Interpreters have often linked the trumpets to specific events of later church history. For some, the locusts of Revelation 9 are the Saracen hordes rising from the east. Some Franciscans saw the falling star as Thomas Aquinas; Luther thought it represented allegorists like Origen who distorted the gospel with their interpretive ingenuity; Bellarmine thought the star was Luther himself (for varieties of interpretation, see Kovacs and Rowland (2004: 109–32)). In the interpretation offered here, the trumpets do not correspond in simple one-to-one fashion with historical events or persons. But they do symbolize specific *complexes* of historical events or trends, involving historical persons and events of the first century. The historicizing interpretations are wrong not so much because they attempt to link Revelation with history as because they operate in an erroneous time frame. Instead

of seeking fulfillments in the thirteenth or sixteenth centuries, they should have focused on the first.

Between Rev. 8:5 and 11:8, *γῆ* appears some seventeen times. The first six trumpets describe plagues specifically against the land of Israel, carried out from heaven. In the sequence after the seventh trumpet, the focus shifts to assaults on the saints, carried out by the two beasts. In the first trumpet, hail, fire, and blood burn the *land*. Ignited, the land becomes the burning mountain of the second trumpet, thrown into the sea, picturing the deadly infection that Israel spreads in the Gentile world, the bloodthirstiness of violent Jewish elites who oppose the Christian movement (on Revelation and Judaism, →2:9).

Wormwood poisons the waters of the *land*, the springs and rivers, the fifth trumpet releases locusts that afflict men in the *land* (9:3-4), and the sixth trumpet reveals an army poised at the edge of the *land*, at the River Euphrates, the easternmost boundary of Israel. The two witnesses are in the city where the Lord was crucified. In the aftermath of the seventh trumpet, it becomes clear that Satan is himself behind the attacks on the church, and from there the scope of the visions broadens out. Instead of locorpions tormenting people of the land, Satan summons a beast from the Gentile sea, a Roman imperial beast. Instead of inhabitants of the land (Jews) tormented by scorpions from hell, the saints themselves are overcome, pouring out their blood. The scene of the two witnesses anticipates this shift: The punishing judgments of the trumpets do not turn them away from idols, but the death and vindication of the two witnesses turns some to fear and praise God. Witnesses who witness by death soften hearts hardened by judgment.

From plagues on the land to attacks on the people of God: That is the mark of a new epoch in history. There is always blood and violence and destruction, wars and rumors of wars, nation and kingdom against kingdom and nation, but until the violence turns against the people of God, we have not yet hit the crisis point. Then comes the abomination that brings desolation. Once we reach that point, things get serious.

Hail and fire

And the seven angels who have the seven trumpets prepared to trumpet them. And the first trumpeted. And hail and fire mixed with blood were cast into the land. And a third of the land burned, and a third of the trees burned, and all grass green burned.

—Rev. 8:6-7

Seven trumpet angels prepare to sound, heavenly archetypes of the trumpet priests of the temple (cf. 1 Chr. 15). When an angel blows the first trumpet, hail, three things are “thrown” (ἐβλήθη) from heaven into the land: hail, fire, and blood. The effect is doubly triple, a triple burning (κατεκάη repeated three times) of three things, land, trees, and grass. The last half of the verse repeats essentially the same phrase three times: καὶ τὸ τρίτον τῆς γῆς κατεκάη (the final clause begins with καὶ πᾶς instead). The symmetry of three and three and three is disrupted at one point: Three things are thrown to the earth, but hail is isolated from the fire-and-blood combination (πῦρ μεμιγμένα ἐν αἵματι). We might translate, “Hail and a fire-blood mix.”

In the OT, anything that comes from heaven to earth is said to “rain.” God sends flood rain to cleanse the earth (Gen. 7:4), and rains fire onto Sodom (Gen. 19:24; cf. Ps. 11:6). Manna comes from heaven like rain (Exod. 16:4; Ps. 78:24), and the Lord promises the Israelites a land watered with the rain of heaven. Rain is blessing and life from God, but God also sends destructive fire and hail. He sends water that makes plants grow; he sends ice that crushes plants.

Hail is one of the plagues of Egypt (Exod. 9:18–34), the first time hail is mentioned in Scripture. Egyptian hail is discriminating (Exod. 9:26): The Hebrews in Goshen do not suffer from the hail. The burned land is an Egypt, plagued with Egyptian plagues, with one-third of the trees and land targeted. In Egypt, hail “rains” down from God’s cloud (Exod. 9:18), accompanied by thunder and fire: “there was hail, and fire flashing continually in the midst of the hail” (v. 24). Psalms emphasize the lightning (Ps. 78:47–48; 105:32–33). In Egypt, hail strikes the land, killing people and animals in the field, flattening every plant and shattering every tree (Exod. 9:25). This matches very closely the first trumpet’s triple target and helps us guess what “land” refers to: In Exodus 9, land is the location of people and animals. Though the plague turns the land from garden to desert, it is *aimed* at living things. People and animals are made of earth, and hail from heaven pummels them when it pummels “earth.” Thus, we might gloss Rev. 8:7 as: The hail burns one-third of the people and animals of the land, one-third of the trees, and all the green grass. God rains fire on Sodom and hail on Egypt; the first trumpet anticipates the later designation of the great city as Egypt and Sodom (→11:8).

Other hail texts come into play. When Joshua defends the Gibeonites from five kings of the Amorites, the Lord confounds the Amorites by throwing “stones” from heaven (‘eben), hailstones (Josh. 10:11). Yahweh “stones” his enemies with heavenly hail as Israel stones capital criminals. Job 38:22 speaks of the Lord’s treasury of snow and hail. As Yahweh’s storm cloud comes near,

he breathes fire, thunders, and throws ice stones (Ps. 18:12–13; 148:8; Isa. 28:2; 30:30). Ezek. 1:22 describes the firmament as a “crystal,” using the Hebrew word for “ice” (*qarach*). Cosmologically, hailstones are chunks of firmament, falling like stars, a portent of the world’s end. Ezek. 38:22 is a particularly close parallel. In judgment against Gog, the Lord comes with “pestilence and with blood” to rain on Gog “torrential rain, with hailstones, fire, and brimstone.” Fire, hail, and blood all in one passage, just as in Revelation 8. In the more immediate context, when the Lamb opens the sixth seal, inhabitants of the land wanted the mountains and rocks to cover them. When the Lord rains down hail with the first trumpet, they get what they asked for—falling stones that will bury them.

God stones the wicked, and *burns* them, a double penalty reflected in Torah. A girl who plays the harlot in her father’s house is stoned (Deut. 22:13–21), but when she is the daughter of a *priest*, she is also burned (Lev. 21:9). God throws stones and fire to punish the wayward priestly daughter that Israel has become. This is another in a series of evangelical and apocalyptic fire-bombings. The Lamb casts fire to the earth, fulfilling the purpose of his mission (Lk. 12:49). The Angel-Spirit of Jesus casts fire from the altar (8:5), and now fire falls again (8:7), together with a double dose of heavenly fire. As fire falls, the phenomena of God’s throne—thunder, sounds, lightning—shake the land (8:5). Trumpets announce the king’s Parousia, who comes to establish his reign on earth as it is in heaven.

Blood is the key to the vision. It is the blood of the martyrs (6:10), charged against the land. Enemies of Christ watch the blood of his followers seep into the earth; what they do not know is that they become guilty in the court of heaven. They do not see that the blood they shed is heavenly blood. More blood is coming, the blood of the 144,000, but the first trumpet already initiates the devastation that the bowls will complete (→16:1–21). The blood of the saints is mingled with the fire of God’s heavenly judgment. Martyr blood is combustible. Fire and blood point to sacrifice, when blood is splashed against the sides of the altar or sprinkled or smeared on the horns. After blood is distributed on the altar of earth, the priest stokes up the fire and piles up animal parts to turn them to smoke. With the first trumpet, fire is thrown down from heaven, along with a rain of blood, and the land begins to burn like an altar. This is a sacrificial judgment that destroys and transforms, burning off flesh by turning flesh into smoke. Combining fire and blood, the first trumpet indicates that we have moved from the white horse of victory to the red horse of sacrificial conflict. Throughout this section, the weapon of choice will not be the bow but the sword of division.

In Lk. 13:1, Jesus comments about an incident where Pilate mingled (μίγνυμι, μίσγω) blood of Galileans with their sacrifices. In context, Jesus is warning about the future judgment, when the Romans will complete Pilate's work and slaughter Jews in the temple.

Blood connects the first two trumpet visions. First blood is thrown on the altar-land, then the land, looking like a smoking mountain, is tossed into the sea and turns the water to blood (8:8-9). The mountain turns the sea to blood because the mountain is already drenched in blood from heaven. The land is a sponge soaking up martyr blood and then releasing it into the sea of Gentiles.

The one-third fractions connect the first trumpet with Ezekiel 5. Yahweh instructs Ezekiel to cut his hair and beard, weigh it, and divide it into three equal parts. One-third he burns, one-third he strikes with a sword, one-third he scatters to the wind (Ezek. 5:1-2). Yahweh explains the sign: A third of the inhabitants of Jerusalem will die by the plague, a third by the sword, and a third will be scattered into exile. Hair is glory, a crown. Israel is Yahweh's bridal crown of glory (Prov. 12:4). Like the prophet, Yahweh goes into mourning. He will shaving the glory-hair of his people, burn part of it, cut part of it, and then scatter a third of it to the wind.

That intertext hints that the three things burned in Rev. 8:7 represent groups of people. In the OT, the righteous are like trees—stretched between heaven and earth, stable and rooted, bearing fruit (Psalm 1)—while the wicked who grow rapidly but wither quickly and are thrown into the fire (Psalm 37; 92). If we decode the first trumpet against this background, it implies that the righteous suffer with the wicked. That partially fits the exodus typology. Israel suffers the early plagues, but then Yahweh distinguishes Israel from Egypt in order to target Egypt. That distinction does not seem to work here. As noted above, the plague of hail does not affect Israel. Besides, Rev. 8:7 says that *all* the grass is burned.

A more promising hint lies in the phrase “green grass.” We know grass is green, so why do we need to be told? Perhaps to emphasize that *living* grass is burned, not merely chaff-like mown grass. More importantly, the phrase takes us back to Gen. 1:29-30, where God lays out “green grass for food” (LXX, πάντα χόρτον ἁλωρὸν εἰς βρώσιν). Gen. 1:11-12 does not use the word “green,” but it is the Bible's first description of food from the earth, which takes the form of fruit trees and grasses. The first trumpet, in short, burns up the food supplies. Some trees survive the plague of hail and fire, but the grasses that feed animals and human beings are burned. The plague of hail and fire brings a *famine*. Though the trumpets enact the divisions of the second seal, they also anticipate the third seal with its famine of wheat and barley (→6:6). Things have moved forward, since now even the trees that produce oil are burned. The exodus typology may also come back into play:

The first trumpet affects both Israelite and Egyptian, Christian and Jew, but the plague has a more devastating effect among the grain-and-barley people than among the people of oil and wine.

We are still at the “beginning of birth pangs,” when there are “famines and earthquakes” (Matt. 24:7; Mk. 13:8; Lk. 21:11). There is a literal famine in Jerusalem in the time of the apostles (Acts 11:8), and one of Paul’s great projects is to gather famine relief from Gentile churches. A judgment on the food supply fits the Egyptian typology. Hail destroys plants so that there is no food, and what the hail leaves behind locusts consume. Blood is the key to the vision. Because the people of the land shed the blood of the saints, the land refuses to serve up bread. The destruction of green grass points to a *metaphorical* famine. Because the people of the land have begun to kill the saints, they suffer a famine of the gospel. When they begin to kill Christians, Christians pack up their gospel and leave town. The inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judea are deprived of the abundant life Jesus offers, life in the Spirit. Refusing the bread of heaven that comes down for the life of the world, they begin to starve. But the divisions revealed by the first trumpet are about to get even bloodier.

Sea of blood

And the second angel trumpeted, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea. And a third of the sea became blood, and a third of the creatures in the sea died, things having souls, and the third of the ships sank.

—Rev. 8:8-9

As we move from first to second trumpet, we move from land to sea, from Israel to the Gentile world. We move from a heavenly sprinkling of blood to a sea of blood. The first trumpet set the land on fire, and now the burning mountain is cast into the sea. The red horse brought fire and blood to the land; now that same division and conflict spreads among the Gentiles.

A burning mountain is most immediately reminiscent of Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:18; 24:17; Deut. 4:11; cf. Carrington 1931: 156, who draws different conclusions from the connection).

Many commentators suggest a connection with first-century volcanic activity, whether Vesuvius or Thera, the latter within view of Patmos (Boxall 2006: 138; Aune 1998a: 519; on Thera, Bent 1888). The burning mountain certainly looks like a volcano, but my assumption throughout this commentary is that John’s visions are more fully stocked by the Bible than by clips from some first-century MSNBC.

When Yahweh meets with Israel at Sinai to cut covenant, the mountain burns with the smoke and fire of his presence. Every altar is a holy mountain, a portion of earth extending up to heaven, capped with fire and smoke, a small, portable Sinai. It is Har-el, the holy mountain of God (Ezek. 43:15). As Moses ascends into the cloud to meet with God and to be transfigured by the glory, so the animal enters the fire of the mountain-altar to be transfigured to smoke, to become a part of the cloud that surrounds the throne of God at the center of the glory. The temple mountain is also a smoking mountain, capped with the smoke of sacrifices. The second trumpet unveils an altar and temple mount, burning with sacrificial flame, now cast into the sea. According to Paul, “Sinai” represents a people, a bride, Hagar, a covenant of slavery under Torah (Gal. 4:24–25). Throughout the OT, the sea is the sea of Gentiles (Boxall (2006: 138) notes Roman dominance of the Mediterranean). Thus, the second trumpet vision shows Sinai or the temple mount or the people of Israel thrown into the sea of Gentiles. Speaking of the temple mountain (“*this* mountain”), Jesus assured his disciples that they could pluck up mountains and throw them into the sea with their prayers (Matt. 21:21; Mk 11:23; Bede 2011: 139; Smalley 2005: 221 notes parallel with Rev. 18:21).

When the Sinai-people, the inhabitants of land, are cast out among the Gentiles, they turn the nations to blood. The vision might reach back to the exile. Israel is dispersed among sometimes hostile Gentiles, who incarnadine the green sea with Jewish blood. More likely, we should connect the vision of the second trumpet with the first-century situation. When the first trumpet sounds, fire from heaven burns (κατεκάν) the land, trees, and grass. When the second trumpet sounds, a πυρὶ καίόμενον, a smoking mountain, is cast into the sea. The verb in verse 7 has a κατ- prefix, but it has the same root as the verb in verse 8. The burning land of the first trumpet is the burning mountain of the second, and that burning mountain/land is cast out into the sea, among the Gentiles. The land starts burning because it is sprinkled with martyr blood, and when the land/mountain is cast into the sea the blood defiles the world. It is not accidental that Satan is able to call up a bloodthirsty beast from the blood sea (→13:1–5).

The first Egyptian plague turns the Nile to blood. Everything that has life in the sea dies (Rev. 8:9), as everything in the Nile died (Exod. 7:18). The first Egyptian plague unveils the truth about Egypt. Egypt has already turned the Nile into a defiling river of blood by killing Hebrew infants there, and the first plague makes visible what is already true. Similarly, the second trumpet does not make the Gentile world bloody. It unmasks the bloodiness of the sea, especially when infected by the smoking mountain. As trumpets unveil the truth about the land and sea, they throw the two into internal conflict and

conflict with one another. No one likes his sin exposed, and we often prefer violence cover-up to peaceable confession.

Perhaps the burning mountain is not Sinai and the people attached to Sinai, but the *new* Sinai, the burning mountain-altar of the church. ὄρος μέγα occurs only once in the Septuagint, in the explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's vision (Daniel 2). The stone cut without hands crushes the imperial statue and grows into a "great mountain" that fills the earth. This great mountain is no longer a small Sinai, but a world-encompassing holy mountain, the earth turned into a temple mount. Perhaps the second trumpet shows the church, the mountain whose head burns with Pentecostal fire, dispersed among the nations. As the church pursues her mission, Gentiles oppose her and kill her children. Martyr blood spreads and turns a third of the sea into martyr blood. Romans kill Christians to purify Rome and pacify the gods. What they accomplish is the opposite: They pollute the sea and call up the divine Avenger. Or, Christians are plunged into the Gentile sea and drive Gentiles mad, so that they slaughter one another (→6:3-4, the second seal).

Whether the burning mountain represents Jews or Christians, the effect on the sea is devastating. One-third of the creatures that live in the sea, those that have ψυχάς, die, and one-third of the ships are destroyed. Fish are people who live in the Gentile sea. The great fish that swallows Jonah represents the Assyrian empire gulping down Israel, then vomiting them back to the land (Jon. 1–2). Nebuchadnezzar is a great sea monster (Jer. 51:34), and so is Pharaoh (Ezek. 29:1-8). Enlivened fish in the refreshed sea are refreshed Gentiles, baptized into life by the river flowing from the temple (Ezek. 47:3-12). Jesus eats fish, a sign that he incorporates Gentiles into his resurrection body (Lk. 24:42). In the second trumpet, Gentiles shed the blood of the saints, but instead of killing off the saints, they die. Martyr blood destroys the destroyers.

What are the ships that are "corrupted" or "destroyed"? Israel occasionally engages in sea-faring in the OT (e.g., Gen. 49:13; Judg. 5:17). Solomon built a fleet, a symbol of his authority and reputation among Gentiles (1 Kgs 9:27). Mastering the sea requires wisdom and courage. To ancient Israelites, it is a mysterious process, one of the wonderful things that elude the understanding of Agur (Prov. 30:9). Ships are most often associated with the Gentiles, especially Tyre and Sidon (Deut. 28:68; Ps. 48:7; Isa. 2:16; 23:1, 14; 60:9; Ezekiel 27). Ps. 104:26 draws a parallel between ships and Leviathan, suggesting that ships are man-made sea monsters, symbols of advanced nations, empires, civilizations. Constructed from wood, ships are floating bits of land. Full of land animals and human beings, Noah's ark is a new creation floating on the sea, a sign of human ingenuity and genius triumphing over chaos. The ark is a cultural forest in the ocean, complete with forest animals. The notion that a nation is a "ship of state" and its leader is a "pilot" goes back at least to Plato's

Republic (Book 6). In the NT, there is a dramatic shift in setting and symbolism. Jesus is frequently near or on the Sea of Galilee, and his followers are fisherman rather than shepherds. Paul travels on ships during his missionary journeys to the Gentiles. From old to new covenant = from land to sea.

Jew and Gentile together put Jesus on the cross, but the Jews take the lead. Many among the Jewish elites hate Jesus, and try to condemn him using Torah. To accomplish their purposes, they enlist Roman authorities. They manipulate and intimidate Pilate into acting against Jesus. The second trumpet indicates that Jesus's suffering is recapitulated in the suffering of the church. What happens to Jesus happens again to the saints: The Sinai Jews defile the Gentile sea, inciting multiple Pilates against the followers of Jesus and turning the *oikoumene* into a sea of innocent blood, a cursed Egypt. But the second trumpet is also assurance: It will not work. Fish cannot live in a sea of blood, and ships of state run aground or sink when they try to stamp out the church. Cultures and civilizations collapse when they spill martyr blood. And ultimately there is hope for the sea, because eventually another Edenic river like Ezekiel's will flow from the temple to give life to the nations (→22:1-5).

Poisoned springs

And the third angel trumpeted, and a great star fell out of heaven burning like a lamp, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of the waters. And the name of the star was "Apsinthos." And a third of the waters became as absinth, and many men died from the waters, because they were embittered.

—Rev. 8:10-11

The third angel trumpets, and something else comes from heaven. It too is burning, and it falls on the living, fresh waters of the land. It is a star whose name is Wormwood, and it turns fresh waters poisonous.

Stars rule and keep time (Gen. 1:14). Falling stars are failed rulers and nations, or broken clocks, or both. A general collapse of the sky occurs when the fourth trumpet blows, already anticipated by the sixth seal (→6:13). With the third trumpet, a *single* star falls from heaven. In Isa. 14:12, the king of Babylon is a star falling from heaven, Lucifer the star of the morning. Lucifer is not Satan, but a human ruler of Babylon, though it is not surprising that the passage has long been applied to Satan. With the fifth trumpet, a demonic star falls from heaven to earth, eventually all the way to Sheol (→9:1-11). The third-trumpet star is also Satan (or a Satanic representative) falling from heaven (cf. Bede 1997: 140). Later, the dragon, explicitly called

Satan, is “thrown down” (→12:9) when the child ascends, and he tries to drown the child’s mother with a river that comes from his mouth. In both passages, something falls from heaven and becomes a source of deadly water. Neither passage describes a Miltonesque pre-fall fall of Satan. Instead, as in the Gospels, Satan falls because of the Lamb and the success of the mission of the apostles (Lk. 10:18; →Rev. 12:11).

In the third trumpet, a satanic star falls from heaven and poisons the fresh water of the land.

Since stars can symbolize human rulers, perhaps Wormwood is a person. Presumably, a single star must represent an individual, a king or prince. Within first-century Judaism, the most likely possibility is one of the Herods. Even if the third trumpet refers to a human ruler, the vision reaches ahead to chapter 12, where the falling dragon is explicitly the devil.

Springs rise from the depth of the earth to turn the desert into a fertile oasis. Springs do not bring water from above, but from below, from the womb of the earth. Wells and springs are associated with women, and the rivers that mothers produce are their descendants. Because of their association with fertility and life and abundance, springs signify the presence of God: All my springs are in you (Ps. 87:7). Rivers form boundaries, and because rivers are full of “living (flowing) water,” they are cleansing agents. Rivers are land-water, in contrast to the salt sea-water.

Rev. 14:7 speaks of the cosmos as made up of heaven, earth, sea, and the fountains (πηγὰς) of waters. If the list moves from top to bottom, the fountains are beneath the sea, perhaps springs of the sea. Similarly, Gen. 7:11, speaks of flood waters rising from αἱ πηγαὶ τῆς ἀβύσσου. In Revelation 8, the springs may represent water under the sea. Translating this into political terms: The springs feed the Gentile sea, as the twelve Israelite springs watered the seventy Gentile palms at Elim (Exod. 15:27).

Springs and rivers take us back to creation: A spring arose in Eden and flowed into the garden, where it split into four rivers (Gen. 2:6, 10–14). This is part of the “Day 3” section of Genesis 2 (→Introduction), and helps us to unravel the symbolism of the third trumpet. The garden is the original sanctuary, and the temple is a well-watered grove or orchard of God, with its giant sea of water and ten water chariots in the courtyard. As in Ezekiel 47, rivers and springs flow from the temple-garden, where Israel receives the water of life and cleansing (cf. Nicholas of Lyra who takes the springs as a symbol of baptism, Krey 1997: 106). Now Ezekiel’s temple river is polluted. The Satan star falls into the garden of the temple and turns its springs deadly.

What are supposed to be life-giving waters turn into the opposite. The star's name is wormwood (Gr. ὤψις), and he turns the water to wormwood. Wormwood is unpleasant, but not fatal (Boxall 2006: 139), yet in the OT wormwood (Heb. *le'anah*) symbolizes the deadly corruptions of idolatry. In Deut. 29:18, it describes an idolater whose heart turns away from following Yahweh and he becomes a "root" of gall or wormwood in Israel, producing poisonous fruit. The strange woman leads to wormwood, a "bitter" end (Prov. 5:4; Heb. *mar*). Representing Israel, Jeremiah laments that he has been filled with the bitterness (*marar*, bitter herbs) of wormwood (Lam. 3:15, 19). The bitterness of wormwood is connected to the bitter herbs that represent the bondage of Egypt. To drink wormwood is to return to the bitterness of slavery. Twice Yahweh threatens to feed the Jews Egyptian wormwood (Jer. 9:15; 23:15). In the next breath, he warns them that he is sending them among the nations (Jer. 9:16). Because they worship Baal, Judah becomes like Sodom and Gomorrah, and pollution spreads through the land, instead of cleansing living water (Jer. 23:15). Idolatry poisons Israel's life sources. That is what happens with the third trumpet. Satan falls from heaven and infects the waters sources of the land. Filled with idols, the temple becomes a source of death rather than life. The vision fits the exodus framework of the plague trumpets. At Marah (Exodus 15), Israel came across bitter waters in the desert, and Moses threw a piece of wood into the waters to make them sweet (Boxall 2006: 139; Mounce 1997: 181). Instead of the wood of the cross making bitter water drinkable, the star of Satan turns the temple into a factory of idols makes its water deadly. As in Jeremiah's day, the chief idolatry is worship of the temple itself, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord. The temple has become a den of brigands because corrupt Jewish leaders treat it as a safe haven, which protects them from the consequences of their injustice.

This continues a narrative thread that starts in the synoptic Gospels. Jesus exorcises Israel, but he warns that if the Jews do not receive his Spirit, seven worse demons will come to inhabit the house. A generation that does not repent at Jesus's preaching is worse than the generation of Ninevites during the time of Jonah. Their last state is worse than the first (Matt. 12:38–45). The third trumpet reveals that worse state: Israel no longer infested with *lesser* demons at the periphery, but by Satan at the center, at the central spring of the temple. This is why Jesus speaks in Revelation of "synagogues of Satan" (→2:9). The religious establishment of Israel had become a company of satanic slanderers, accusers against the followers of Jesus. Everything about the temple is inverted.

The law that was intended to give life kills. Cleansing rites pollute. Sacrificial smoke and incense stink in God's nostrils. The temple of life that is supposed to be available to the nations becomes a source of death. Like the synagogue, the temple becomes a habitation of demons. Many Jews, thirsting

for life from their God, are poisoned by the elites who serve up wormwood. They will receive sweet water only when the kings and merchants of the land are cast down. The temple destruction will be a liberation, a new exodus, for Israel.

The first three trumpets unveil the condition of first-century Israel: Shedding martyr blood, the land suffers famine. Hostile Jews spread blood-lust among the Gentiles, polluting the Gentile sea. With the third trumpet, the veil is pulled back further, revealing the demonic source of this madness.

Awareness of the devilish inspiration behind political conflicts is more common in global South Christianity than in softly secularized Western churches. Jenkins (2008: 132) writes, Images of the devil and hell are common during times of persecution or armed conflict, especially when other religions are involved. This need not imply that those other religions are themselves evil or diabolical, but rather that they have become tools of evil. Following the savage Muslim/Christian rioting of 2003, the Anglican bishop of Jos in Nigeria remarked, “Only God can help us now. In September [2001] ... I said that Satan had unleashed hell on us. I was wrong. What he did then was to release only a sting of hell. Now we are having some form of a blast of hell.” The persecution of Christians in southern Sudan has often been termed “hell on earth,” and not just in the conventional Western sense of an extremely bloody or chaotic situation. Responding to the parlous situation in the Congo, theologian Musiande Kasali has urged, “We need Christian leaders who will serve God’s reign. Surely we have seen enough of Satan’s hand in our land.”

Christians of Africa and Asia take Paul with utter seriousness: “We wrestle not against flesh and blood.”

Israel has become an unclean land because the temple has been corrupted. Historically, the third trumpet points to events like those recorded in Acts 3–5, when the temple authorities, chief priests, and leaders of Israel attempt to suppress the gospel. The apostles come to the temple to proclaim good news of resurrection life, but the high priest tries to silence them, stuffing Jesus back into the tomb (Acts 5:21–25). Life flows from the apostles, but the priests instead spread a poisonous teaching in opposition to the Way of Jesus. The Jewish leaders dam up the springs and rivers, and turn the sources of life to poison. The temple authorities poison Israel against Jesus and the apostles, and the divisions between them sharpen and conflict increases. No wonder the God of Israel intends to dismantle this house, until there is not one stone upon another.

Plague on the sky

And the fourth angel trumpeted, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were plagued, to darken a third of them, and the day did not shine for a third of it, and the night likewise.

And I saw and heard an eagle flying in midheaven saying with a voice great, "Woe! Woe! Woe! to those who dwell on the land, from the remaining voices of the trumpet the three angels are going to trumpet."

—Rev. 8:12-13

On Day 4, God created heavenly lights. The fourth trumpet destroys them. Not totally. They remain in the sky, but are darkened for a third of the night and day. Heavenly lights are timekeepers and rulers. When stars fall, kingdoms collapse and times are out of joint. Israel was a heavenly people, set in the firmament like stars. Now they, and especially their rulers, are tumbling down. In general, the fourth trumpet announces that those star-sons of Abraham who refuse to repent and follow the Lamb will be judged. The trumpets have affected the land, the sea, and the springs of water. Now God judges rulers and authorities, those who set times and brighten the land, those who are supposed to bring dark things to light and shine as a light along the path of their subjects: They are going dark, and if the lights become dark, it will be a dark age indeed.

Acts 13 records a star-darkening episode. Herod puts James to death and imprisons Peter. Shortly after, in an audience with the people of Tyre and Sidon, Herod appears in his "royal apparel" and takes "his seat on the rostrum." As he begins his address, the people acclaim, "The voice of a God and not of a man." Immediately, "an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died" (Acts 13:20-23). Priests are also lights in the temple-heaven, "kings of the land." They will be thrown down when the Lord tears apart the firmament of the sanctuary. The Lord vindicates apostles and martyrs by throwing down the chief lights from Israel's heavens, down to the earth to be devoured by worms. He vindicates his saints by blotting out suns and raising his people to shine like stars in the heaven.

The fourth trumpet is followed by a vision of an eagle flying in midheaven, across the face of the firmament, mediating the message of heaven to the people of the land.

With the eagle's appearance, we are able correlate the first four trumpets with the first four seals. The first seal was the seal of the lion and revealed the rider on a white horse going to conquer with his bow. The first trumpet unleashes a storm of hail and lightning that burns up the land. This is the lion trumpet, the royal trumpet. It is the first day of creation because it is reversing the forming and filling that began to take place on that first day. The second seal is the seal of the ox, and it reveals the rider on the red horse who brings division with sacrificial fire and blood. The second trumpet is an ox trumpet; we see an altar-like mountain thrown into the sea, turning the sea to blood as it provokes violent conflicts. The third seal reveals a partial famine on the land, and the third trumpet, the trumpet of the man and the table of showbread, affects the water of the land, turning the water bitter. The fourth trumpet is the eagle trumpet, and fittingly involves the lights of heaven, represented in the lampstand that is associated with the eagle. It is not coincidental that an eagle cries out from midheaven as soon as the fourth trumpet has sounded.

The eagle speaks three “woes” that will be carried out by the last three trumpets (8:13). Two of these woes are explicitly marked. The release of the locorpions is the first woe (9:12), and the long sequence of the sixth trumpet constitutes the second woe (11:14). The final woe is not explicitly identified, and does not appear to be associated with the seventh trumpet, which is not woe but praise (11:15–19). But the seventh trumpet is extended, and οὐαὶ does appear in 12:12, when the dragon is cast out of heaven to earth: “Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath.” The woe of 12:12 is directed against land and sea, though the target is the woman (Israel) and the land where the beast comes to reign (→13:1–8). Thus, the third woe is pronounced in 12:12 (cf. the similar view of Knight 1999: 80; against view that the third woe is dropped, Boxall (2006: 141)).

οὐαὶ is used fourteen times in the book, and in all but one instance is doubled or tripled. The only single pronouncement of woe is in 12:12. A double seven of woes, nearly always pronounced doubly, is a double witness of woe. Double woes are pronounced three times in the laments over the harlot city Babylon (→18:10, 16, 19). The eagle warns that the woes are coming on land-dwellers (οὐαὶ οὐαὶ οὐαὶ τοὺς κατοικοῦντας ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς), that is, on Israel. That fits with the fifth trumpet, which releases locorpions to torment land-dwellers, and the woe of the two witnesses, which comes against the great city (11:13).

According to Jesus, the Pharisees and scribes say that they would *not* have shed the blood of prophets as their fathers did (Matt. 23:30). This sounds like penitence, but Jesus draws another conclusion: By acknowledging that the prophet-killers are their fathers, the Pharisees and scribes acknowledge that they are the sons of prophet-killers (v. 31). They should follow Jesus’s stern call to discipleship instead: “Anyone who does not hate his father or mother is not worthy of Me.” True repentance would involve renunciation of ancestry. It is not enough to say, “Our fathers sinned.” Jesus calls to something more radical: “They are not our fathers; we are not their sons.”

The Pharisees and scribes say they would not have been partakers (κοινωνοί) of prophet-blood. Prophet-killers form murderous communions, and the phrase “partaking/communing . . . in the blood of the prophets” hints at a sacrificial sacrament. What binds the prophet-killers is their common share in the chalice of prophet-blood. We inevitably think of the harlot city of Revelation 17–18, drunk on the blood of the saints.

Jesus tells the Pharisees and scribes to fill up the measure of their fathers. They are sons of prophet-killers, and their fathers left the chalice half-full. The Pharisees and scribes of the first century will finish filling and then drink it down. Again Yahweh’s statement to Abraham comes to mind: The iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full. Jerusalem is the new Jericho, Jews the new Canaanites, and a Joshua is coming to conquer the land—but only when the time is ripe. Finally, Jesus describes the scribes and Pharisees as serpent and a nest of vipers (v. 33). They claim ancestry from prophet-killers, but the original prophet-killer is the great serpent, Satan. He is a murderer from the beginning, and he is their true father. Jesus anticipates what he makes explicit in verse 35: Abel is the first prophet, Cain the prophet-killer. In the first century, the primal murder is played out again, with Jesus and the prophets he sends (v. 34) standing in the role of Abel and the Pharisees and scribes cast as sons of Cain.

That observation has important structural implications. The first woe obviously correlates with the fifth trumpet, and the fact that the second woe

comes at the end of the three scenes of the sixth trumpet shows that there is no “interlude” (*pace* Mounce 1997: 199). The sixth trumpet begins in 9:13 and ends in 11:14; it is all one woe. Further, if the three woes are unleashed at the “remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to trumpet” (8:13), and if the last of these woes occurs in 12:12, then chapter 12 must be part of the seventh trumpet/third woe. And if chapter 12 is part of the seventh trumpet, so is chapter 13, which follows hard upon it, and so too chapters 14–15 (or 14–16). As we will see below, we can be more specific: The seventh trumpet encompasses the prophecy that the Angel commissions John to speak (→10:1–11:2), recorded in chapters 12–16. The theological import is as significant as the structural: Chapters 12–15 elaborate the seventh trumpet’s announcement of the coming of the kingdom of God and his Christ (11:15) by describing *how* God becomes king. If we separate those chapters from the seventh trumpet, we miss one of the crucial teachings of Revelation: *God* becomes king when his martyr-saints join him on the throne.

The fourth trumpet brings us to a point analogous to the sixth seal—the darkening of heaven and the collapse of the sky. As soon as that end began, it ended, leaving time for the angel to seal the 144,000. With the fourth trumpet, there is no intervention, no angel to arrest the process. The judgment is not total. Only one-third of the sun, moon, and stars are blotted out. It is not total, but it is carried out without interruption, a sign that soon there will be no more time (→10:6).

The seals unveil the heavenly source of the apostolic ministry, and the immediate effects of the gospel in heaven and on earth. At the beginning of chapter 8, the Spirit brings the prayers of the martyrs to heaven and throws Pentecostal fire on the earth, so God can begin to take up an earthly throne. Everything since has been a response to the martyrs’ prayers. When the trumpets sound, another sequence starts (the verb σαλπίζω, “to trumpet” is used ten times in chapters 8–11, the trumpet sound of the ten words). When the gospel is trumpeted in the power of the Fire Spirit of God, God rides out with his sword to divide and turn his enemies against each other. He stones the opponents of the gospel and burns up their grain and barley. When the gospel is trumpeted in the power of the Angel-Spirit, God throws the burning altar out into the world, and the whole world becomes infected with the blood that was sprinkled on the land. The sea becomes a third blood as the world begins to persecute the saints, inspired by apostate Jews; the sea turns bloody when God neutralizes his enemies by turning hostile Jews and Romans against one another. When the gospel is preached in the power of the Fire Spirit of God, God throws down demons to turn water bitter and poisonous. He gives the springs over to Wormwood, Satan who falls from heaven. He shakes the heavens, darkening the light of rulers and authorities.

Riding on the red horse, the Spirit is unmaking the old world that has been corrupted by the blood of martyrs.

Locorpions from the abyss

And the fifth angel trumpeted, and I saw a star fall out of heaven into the land, and the key of the well of the abyss was given to it. And he opened the well of the abyss, and smoke ascended out of the well like the smoke of a furnace great, and the sun was darkened, and the air, from the smoke of the well. And out of the smoke came locusts into the land and authority was given to them like the authority of scorpions of the land. And it was told to them that they might not harm the grass of the land nor any green-thing nor any tree, except the men who do not have the seal of God on the forehead. And it was given to them that they might not kill them, but that they might torment them five months. And their torment is as torment of a scorpion when it stings a man. And in those days men will seek death and they will not find it. They will long to die, and death will flee from them.

And the likeness of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle, and on their heads crowns like gold, and their faces like the faces of men, and they have hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like lions' teeth, and they had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the voice of their wings was like the voice of chariots, like many horses rushing into battle. And they have tails like scorpions with stings, and in their tails is their authority to harm men for five months. They have over them a king, the angel of the abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Hellenic his name is Apolluon.

The first woe has passed. Behold: the second woe comes after these things.

—Rev. 9:1-12

The first four trumpets have brought curses on land, sea, springs, and sky; God is turning the blood of the martyrs against the bloodthirsty. The frenzy of murder turns the murderers against each other, as the second seal predicted. With the fifth trumpet, the Lord permits hell to be opened so that demons are released to torment the people of the land. We are moving toward a violent climax to the red horse series of trumpets, as conflicts intensify. Though the trumpet sequence as a whole is directed from heaven, by angels blowing trumpets, the movement is from heaven to earth, from cosmos to land. Beginning in chapter 9 and continuing on for a number of chapters, John's focus is almost entirely on earth, in the land, in cities, with empires and their propagandists

taking the lead roles. This trajectory indicates on a small scale the movement of the entire book, which moves from Patmos to heaven, but then to the wilderness and a high mountain. Earth, not heaven, is the final location. Things happen in heaven first, but they happen in heaven to be replicated on earth. Once again we may remark on the “fractal” character of the Apocalypse.

The fifth trumpet occupies the opening section of chapter 9, and the text is arranged as a neat chiasm.

- A. A star falls and is given a key to the Abyss, vv. 1–2
- B. Locusts with authority like scorpions come from the open abyss, v. 3
- C. Instructions not to hurt green things or kill, vv. 4–6
- B'. Description of locusts, vv. 7–10
- A'. Their king is the angel of the Abyss, v. 11

This structure is reinforced by the *inclusio* of 6:13 and 7:12, which pronounce the woes of the last three trumpets. The outer sections of the structure indicate that the star who receives the key should be identified with the king, the angel of the Abyss, Abaddon, or Apollyon. Stars are symbols of rulers, and a fallen star is a ruler displaced from his high place. More evidently than Wormwood, Abaddon is a Satanic star, anticipating the later vision of the dragon who is thrown from heaven to the land to persecute the woman. The center of a chiasm is usually the central point of the passage, and here the center states a limit on the activity of the creatures that come from the pit. They are permitted to torment men, but they are not allowed to kill anyone. They drive them to desire death, but they do kill them. The torment is all the worse because they cannot find relief in death. (Oecumenius (2011: 41) strangely sees this as an image of eternal punishment.) There is a fate worse than death: *Wanting* to die and not being able to.

As we have observed before, the creation account in Genesis 1 is chiastically structured, and at least at this point there is a hint of that chiasm in the trumpet sequence. In both the third and fifth trumpets a star (ἀστήρ) falls from heaven (8:10: ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἀστήρ μέγας ... καὶ ἔπεσεν; 9:1: ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ πεπτωκότα εἰς τὴν γῆν). In both, the star is personified and named. In both, there is a reference to men dying, though here there is a contrast. The bitter water kills men, but the creatures from the abyss are not permitted to kill (9:6). The fifth trumpet also contrasts to the fifth seal. The fifth seal unveils a swarm of martyred saints under the altar crying out for vengeance. When the fifth trumpet sounds, a horde of locusts emerges from the abyss in a cloud of smoke. It is a swarm of infernal anti-saints that cause pain rather than suffer pain.

Fire from heaven can be good or bad, transforming or destructive. Heavenly fire destroys Sodom, but the fiery Spirit turns the apostles into Pentecostal altars and living sacrifices. Satan mimics God. As the star falls, demonic forces erupt from the abyss and infest the earth. At the same time, the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost provokes the demonic reaction. When the Spirit came on Jesus, there were suddenly demons everywhere, and when the Spirit is poured out on the apostles, the Jewish leaders go crazy. When the star falls from heaven to earth and unleashes a cloud from the abyss, the result is an upside-down Pentecost. The angel of the abyss comes to the abyss to release a roaring storm cloud of demons.

The Spirit fills the church as the glory filled the tabernacle and temple. In Revelation 4:1, a door opens so that John can ascend to witness heaven's liturgy. At the end of the trumpet sequence, the temple of God will be opened (→11:19). In between, the abyss in an infernal temple. Solomon's temple filled with smoke; the infernal temple is filled with smoke. Angels swarm in the temple; scorpion demons swarm out of the abyss. Instead of a heavenly army, we see a demonic host, prepared for war. Like the third, the fifth trumpet is a spiritual portrait of the temple in Jerusalem. Jerusalem's temple opens into the abyss rather than serving as a pillar to heaven; it is a habitation of demons rather than a heavenly place for angels. The temple is supposed to be a connection point between heaven and earth, a ladder to heaven. When the king of the abyss takes up residence, it becomes a connecting passage between earth and the abyss, a stairway to hell.

As the star falls to the land, the key to the pit is given to him. Jesus has the keys of death and Hades (→1:18), and is able to open and close at will (→3:7). Jesus is David, also the steward of David's house, the one who admits to and excludes from the king's court. If the star receives a key to the abyss, Jesus must give it to him. He is the Lamb on the throne, and what happens on the earth is at his disposal.

The abyss is the bottommost region of the biblical cosmos (Jordan 1987; cmp. Koester 2015: 456). The visible world has a three-story structure: The firmament of the heavens above, the earth beneath, and the waters of the sea under the earth. Beyond the visible world are other regions, heaven, earth, and hell. John has already seen a heaven above the heavens, the heaven of God, where the Father is enthroned among the living creatures and Old Ones. Here he unveils an abyss deeper than the visible sea.

τὸ φρέαρ τῆς ἀβύσσου can be translated as the "well of the abyss." φρέαρ typically means "well" in the LXX (Gen. 16:14; 21:14, 19, 25, 31-33, etc.), and is often qualified as a well "of water." This is the meaning in the few places the word is used in the NT (Lk. 14:5; Jn 4:11-12). This suggests a further link with the third trumpet, where the star Wormwood falls on a water source, the springs of fresh water that are the foundation of the land.

ἀβύσσος, on the other hand, often refers to the sea. In Gen. 1:2, the Spirit hovers over the abyss, and the abyss is the source of the waters of the flood (Gen. 7:11; 8:2, LXX; the English

is the “fountains of the deep,” *παγαὶ τῆς ἀβύσσου*). As noted above, the sea has springs, just as the land does. *ἀβύσσοις* appears seven times in Revelation, three times in chapter 9, at the beginning and end of the fifth trumpet (vv. 1-2, 11). Rev. 11:7 predicts a beast that comes up from the abyss, and this is fulfilled in 13:1-2, when the dragon calls a beast from the *sea*. That beast is said to ascend from the pit (17:8). During the millennium, the serpent is cast into the abyss and chained until the thousand years end (20:1-3), so the millennial reign of the saints is the antidote to this release of demons.

The pit smokes like a furnace, darkening the sun and air. Earlier, we have seen the smoke of incense ascending to God (8:4). Smoke is sacrificial, but this is an infernal sacrifice. This smoke does not rise from the altar to God, but ascends from the pit and obscures the light. When Yahweh cut a covenant with Abraham, he appeared like the smoke of a smoking oven and a flaming torch (Gen. 15:17). Yahweh descends on Sinai in smoke like the smoke of a furnace (*ἀνέβαινεν ὁ καπνὸς ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου*; the phrase in Rev. 9:2 is *ἀνέβη καπνὸς ἐκ τοῦ φρέατος ὡς καπνὸς καμίνου μεγάλης*). Yahweh comes in smoke on a high place, but this smoke rises from the lowest pit. Yahweh is surrounded with the smoky cloud of his glory, but this is a false cloud of glory, an inversion of the glorious throne room of chapters 4-5. There, all is bright and shining, a crystal sea, creatures and Ancient Ones. Here, smoke turns everything black instead of bright.

Sun and air are darkened by the smoke. It is another plague of Egypt. When darkness comes over Egypt, it is palpable, a darkness that can be felt in the air (Exod. 10:21-29). The darkness of the fifth trumpet is just as thick. In Revelation, the sun is first of all associated with the face of Jesus: His countenance shines like the sun in its strength (1:16), but the angel of the abyss releases smoke that obscures the sunlight of the heavenly Son. The entire cosmos of Israel is cursed. The first trumpet pollutes the land, the second the sea; in the third trumpet, fresh waters are polluted by Wormwood. Here air is polluted. Earth, sea, rivers, and air: All elements become noxious, the whole cosmos cursed with the curses of the covenant, all cursed because the people of the land have spilled the blood of saints.

Furnaces are sometimes associated with judgment (Gen. 19:28), but they can also be places of testing. Yahweh brings Israel from the iron furnace of Egypt (Deut. 4:20), and Daniel's three friends are thrown into an actual furnace (Dan. 3; cf. Isa. 48:10). The plague of boils begins with Moses taking ashes from a furnace (Sweet 1979: 168).

Creatures emerge from the smoke, as if they were themselves part of the cloud. The sequence is like the initial vision of Ezekiel, who first sees the glory cloud and later discerns it is made up of cherubim. Initially, the demonic creatures are described as locusts. It is yet another Egyptian plague. Locusts cover the ground so that no one can see the land, they eat and eat,

eating everything that is left behind after the plague of hail destroyed all the green plants (Exod. 10:5, 12-15). In Joel too, locusts bring devastation of a particular kind. Locusts are voracious. Joel classifies locusts into “gnawing” and “stripping” locusts. All of them leave black destruction behind. They come to a garden and leave it a wilderness. Before the locusts, the land is like Eden; behind them it is a blackened wasteland (Joel 2:3). They are a fire that consumes the land. They are anti-Edenic, anti-glorification.

Joel already links a locust plague with an army (Joel 2). The comparison is apt. Armies burn and pillage, destroying crops that would support enemies; they invade and leave a wasteland behind them. Locust armies leave nothing for anyone to eat or drink: No wine for drunkards (Joel 1:5), no grain for bread (1:9). With famine, gladness and joy disappear (1:16). Locusts devour the necessary goods for the temple worship. “Grain offering and libation are cut off,” and therefore the ministers of Yahweh mourn (1:9). They are not merely hungry; they are deprived of the means of worship. The locusts of Revelation 9 are coming from the temple, but, like all locusts, they destroy the very material that keeps their system going.

Almost as soon as these creatures are introduced as locusts, they are denied the authority of locusts. Locusts have the “authority” to consume every green thing in sight. These are specifically *forbidden* to attack the grass or the trees or any green thing. When these locusts are done, the only thing left *unscathed* are the green things! Though locust-like, these creatures possess the authority of scorpions. They look like locusts, but have authority of scorpions; they are locorpions, or scorpusts. It is not until we get to the very end of the passage that fully grasp what this means: They have the authority of scorpions because they have tails like scorpions (9:10). There is a subtle artistry here: A swarm of locusts passes and everything is still green! What a relief! It looks as if the plague has been averted, but as the locusts pass they strike with their scorpion tails. The passage leaves the information about the tails to the tail end. Some commentators have seen a further twist in this structure: Dallying with these demons can seem harmless at first, but in the “end” you get stung.

Joel also connects locusts with darkness: The day of the locust is a day of “darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness” (2:2). In the Egyptian plagues, the locusts darken the *earth* (Exod. 10:15). In Revelation 9, the sun and the air are darkened, not by the locusts so much as the smoke from which the locusts emerge (Rev. 9:2).

Scorpions may have a specific significance. In Ezekiel 2, the Lord assures the prophet that he should not fear “them or their words,” even though thistles and thorns are with them and he sits on scorpions (v. 6). Those who harm Israel with words are portrayed as thorns and scorpions. Thorns are unproductive and dangerous plants, plants that sting, a sign of the primordial curse. Scorpions are stinging crawlers, animate thorns. The words of the rebels are like a scorpion’s sting, which hurts but cannot kill. False teaching torments and poisons, but cannot bring the relief of death. Jesus assures his disciples that they should not fear

scorpions. When the seventy return and report on what the Lord had done through them, Jesus rejoices that “Satan fell from heaven like lightning” (Lk. 10:18), and promises to give authority to tread on “serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy” (v. 19). Like Ezekiel, the disciples will be spared the stinging words of their enemies.

In referring to scorpions, Revelation may be continuing to track with Isaiah 14. The star from heaven recalls the fallen king of Babylon in Isaiah 14, who falls, like Abaddon, all the way to Sheol. The next section of Isaiah 14 issues a warning to Philistia that the rod that struck them may be broken but will still be dangerous: From the root of a serpent a viper will come (Isa. 14:29). In Revelation, a star falls from heaven and scorpions (like vipers) come from the smoke he releases. If we can equate vipers and scorpions, we are back in the realm of Jesus’s woes against the hypocrites, whom he describes as a “brood of vipers.” Vipers and scorpions are devil’s spawn, and their lying words are their poisonous sting. The association of serpents and scorpions is important (compare Lk. 11:11–12 with Matt. 7:10). The serpent is Satan, and his bite is deadly. Scorpions do not kill but only cause pain and torment. They are Satanic agents of torture, and cause their victims long for death.

Verse 5 gives an initial description of the scorpions:

1. Torment for five months
2. Torment of scorpions
3. Sting

Verse 10 recapitulates this description in roughly reverse order:

1. Tails like scorpions
2. Stings
3. Hurt men for five months

Within this framework, the description is neatly chiasmic (vv. 6–9):

- A. horses prepared for battle
- B. crowns of gold on head
- C. faces like faces of men
- D. hair like women
- C': teeth like lions
- B': breastplates of iron
- A': wings sounding like horses rushing to battle

It is a macabre *wasf*, a head to tail description in seven sections (→1:12–20). As in the Song of Songs, each feature is described with a simile, moving from head and face to tail. The connections of A/A' are obvious: Both sections mention horses prepared for battle, A focusing on appearance and A' on sound. The B/B' both refer to gear made of metal—gold crowns on the one hand, iron breastplates on the other. Faces of men and teeth of lions are not obviously parallel, but we can imagine man faces with bared, vampiric teeth.

Revelation 9 continues to employ astronomical imagery (→4:1-11). The locorpions resemble horses, but with human faces, wings, and tails like scorpions. Robert Brown (1899–1900: 2.44-45) says that Sagittarius the archer is sometimes depicted as a Centaur, a man-horse, who carries a bow and sometimes has wings. Brown notes that in one depiction he “holds a sword in his right hand, and his tail is that of a Scorpion.” On a stone from Babilu in the British Museum, Sagittarius is “a winged man-horse with bow and arrow drawn. Behind his human head is the head of a Gryphon, his tail is that of a Scorpion, and beneath him, with its claws toward the genitalia, as in Mithraic representations of the Bull and Scorpion, is a large Scorpion.” Malina (1995) points out that the Greek Sagittarius is sometimes crowned, as are the creatures that are unleashed in the fifth trumpet, and Koester (2015: 459) suggests a fusion of Scorpio and Sagittarius.

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 locorpions. 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 locorpions torment those they sting.

In the ancient conception of the sky, the giant Ophiuchus stands just above Scorpio (this is the view of Aratus; see Ryan 2012: 140). Ophiuchus has subdued the scorpion, placing one foot on its eyes of the scorpion and the other on its chest. The “serpent’s head” is crushed, but with the release of the locorpion army, this subjugation is reversed. The giant man does not trample the scorpion; instead, the scorpion turns on the man and torments him: “the human-figure’s subjection of the scorpion will be inverted by a sustained period of torturous retribution directed against unsealed humanity on the planetary sphere of the earth” (141).

Virgo (Greek, Parthenos) is likewise relevant. Greeks depicted her as a “horizontally oriented young woman, flying across the ecliptic, clutching an ear of corn.” She marked the beginning of the September harvest (Ryan 2012: 139). Importantly, she is sometimes identified with the goddess of justice, Dike, an appropriate allusion in a section describing a judgment on the people of the earth. Given her association with harvest, and the locust plague that is described initially, one would expect a plague on grains. Unexpectedly, it is a plague on men.

The angel releases the locorpions from the abyss, and they plague men. That appears to be taking place on earth, but the astronomical hints indicate that the battle is also taking place in the heavens. These are principalities and powers in heavenly places, who attack the old covenant people of Israel, the land dwellers, and seek to subdue those who tabernacle in heaven, the church.

At the center of John’s description, the scorpions are said to have hair like women. These creatures form a false glory, and a false *bride*—which is why they are described with a *wasf*. They have long hair because they are infernal Nazirites (Numbers 6; perhaps, as a distant allusion, Parthians, Boxall (2006: 145)). In ancient Israel, men went to battle as Yahweh’s warrior bride, their hair long because they were under Nazirite vows. Nazirites are consecrated holy warriors, devoted to God’s works, determined to pursue God’s calling until it is completed, refusing to enjoy the rest of wine-drinking until the battle is won. These demons are similarly devoted, fanatical terrorists who take vows to grow their hair and refuse wine until their attack is successful. They are like the assassins who vowed not to eat or drink until they killed

the apostle Paul. The demon horde inspires the early, fanatical opposition to the apostolic church, a hellish fanaticism carried out in the name of God. The trumpets are implementing the divisive work of the red horse, inspiring zealot-warriors to attack the inhabitants of the land.

Horses “rush” only a handful of times in the LXX, and in three instances the phrase is used in connection with kingship. Samuel warns that Israel’s kings will have rushing horses (1 Sam. 8:1), and sure enough Absalom hires an entourage of horses and chariots to rush ahead of him as he travels through the city (2 Sam. 15:1). Adonijah, a less successful Absalom, does the same (1 Kgs 1:5). In the last two instances, rushing horses are part of a coup attempt: Absalom briefly displaces David, and Adonijah’s rushing horses are part of an attempt to slip in ahead of Solomon. Both oppose a Davidic king. There is a king in Revelation 9 passage too, Abaddon/Apollyon, and he too attempts to overthrow a Davidic king, the Lamb on the throne. His rushing demon cavalry is, like Absalom’s and Adonijah’s, as much for show as for battle. Abaddon/Apollyon—even the name perhaps conjure some distant whisper of David’s rebel sons.

Like the living creatures of heaven and the creatures of the sixth trumpet (→9:13–21), locorpions are composite creatures (Oecumenius (1997: 40) and Andrew of Caesarea (1997: 146) identify the locusts with the undying worms of Isaiah 66). Initially locusts, they are horses, with human faces and feminine hair and leonine teeth, wings like birds and tails like scorpions. We have seen composite creatures before, composite creatures emerging from a cloud—the glory-cloud of Yahweh, which consists of composite creatures, the cherubim with faces of ox, lion, eagle, and man. The sound of wings like the sound of an army echoes with the sound of the wings of the living creatures of Yahweh’s cloud kissing one another (Ezekiel 1). Yahweh comes in smoke burning like a furnace, and the cloud that surrounds him consists of the hosts of heaven, the angelic hosts of glory. When the angel of the Abyss appears, he also has a cloudy entourage filled with ugly demonic creatures that kill. Breastplates suggest an army, but priests also wear breastplates. Coming from the inverted temple, this is an infernal priestly company. The battle lines are forming: We know that Yahweh has a host, and now the devil is forming one of his own.

The locorpions are forbidden to harm three categories of things: vegetation of the earth, green things, and tree (χόρτον, χλωρόν, δένδρον). These match the things burned in the first trumpet: the earth, the trees, the green grass (γῆ, δένδρον, χόρτον χλωρόν). These represent groups of people, who contrast with the “men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads” (v. 4). Those marked with the seal of God are not harmed by the powers of the abyss; they are the living grass and trees and green things of the earth. This throws some light back on the first trumpet, where green things were burned and destroyed by hail from heaven. In Egypt’s plagues, the locusts finish what the hail starts. The locorpions do *not* finish what the hail starts.

A third of green things have been destroyed by hail, but the locusts leave the two-thirds of the green things behind. If those are also the sealed of God, it means that they too suffer when fire comes on the earth. Yet they are sealed against demonic torment.

The locorpions torment for five months (v. 10). The five-month period fits the Levitical structure at work throughout the book. If we count inclusively, there are five months between Pentecost and the feasts of the seventh month: Pentecost is a third-month feast, and the Feast of Trumpets and Day of Atonement take place early in the seventh month. Hence: months 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 = five months of torment between Pentecost until Yom Kippur. Throughout that time, those who are stung long for a death that eludes them. They are like the seven categories of men in the sixth seal who, exposed to the wrath of God and the Lamb, ask the mountains to bury them (→6:16-17). Literally, this describes the period between the Pentecostal gift of the Spirit and the beginning of Roman persecution, which begins the Day of Atonement, when heaven sprinkles earth with blood seven times (→11:19; →16:1-21).

At the tail end of the passage, John identifies the star. He is the king of the abyss, the king of the locorpions, not to put too fine a point on it: Satan. His name is given in Hebrew and Greek. Both names mean “destruction” or “destroyer.” Abaddon is linked with Sheol and death (Job 26:6; 28:22; 31:12; Ps. 88:11; Prov. 15:11; 27:20). The angel Abaddon is Sheol personified, death himself. Apollyon is perhaps a parody of Apollo, the Olympian god who presided at Delphi, the “Vatican” of ancient paganism. The possibility of an allusion to Apollo is strengthened by the fact that the locust was a symbol of Apollo (Mounce 1997: 191) and by the fact that Nero was sometimes depicted as Apollo. The star king is given names in both Hebrew and Greek because his abyssal reign is to the Jew first, but also to the Greek. He is an Antichrist with a suitably universal domain. These names highlight the devil’s role as a destructive agent. Here, he is not described as an accuser or a slanderer, as “Satan” or “Devil” (→12:9). Rather, he torments the unsealed, but not because they are his enemies. They are not. They are enemies of God. Yet he torments his allies because destruction is his name.

The abyss is an inverted temple, a stairway to hell, and portrays the “thieves’ den” that the Jerusalem temple has become. The temple elites are inspired by Satan and torment ordinary Jews as well as Christians. While he is still Saul, the apostle Paul is authorized by the temple (Acts 9:1-2) to “destroy” those who call on the name of Jesus (Acts 9:21; Gal. 1:13, 23; 2:18). He is one of the locorpion Nazirites rushing from the temple, hair flying and lion-teeth bared for prey, tail ready to sting and torment. More particularly, this vision portrays the Destroyer’s effort to destroy the church from within. He sends out false apostles (→Rev. 2:2) from Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 2:11-13) to corrupt

the gospel by redividing Jews and Gentiles and reimposing Torah. This vision unveils the spiritual combat behind the events of Acts 13–15, the beginning of the Judaizing opposition to the gospel. That conflict breaks out in response to the Gentile mission in Antioch, because “some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15:1). Paul and Barnabas have “no little dissension and debate” with them. In Acts, that series of events might look like an honest disagreement about the implications of the gospel. John does not see it so: The Judaizers are a horde of demons, or a company of fanatics inspired by a demonic horde. Judaizing is the sting of the locorpions’ tails, causing torment without relief, spreading the poison of hell.

The fifth trumpet unmasks what is happening behind the scenes in places like Smyrna (→2:8-11). The threat to Smyrna come from a synagogue of Satan, from false Jews who slander the church. The demon horde arises from the temple, the center of the diaspora’s synagogue network. In the fifth trumpet, John sees behind the veil of the conflicts among Jews, Judaizers, and Christians. These debates were not politely academic. Judaizing was a demonic assault on the people of the land and on the church.

To this extent, I agree with the common premodern view that the locorpions are heretics or followers of heretics (cf. Nicholas of Lyra in Krey 1997: 112; Bede 1997: 140–1). As Nicholas says, heretics torture the saints, though they do not kill them (Krey 1997: 114). Along similar lines, the *Geneva Bible* identifies the locorpions as false ministers (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 114). As usual, premodern interpreters mistake the time frame of the vision.

Suffering from the scorpion sting of Judaizing, land-dwellers look for relief, look for death, look for someone who will kill them. Fortunately, the Lord obliges and sends a sixth angel to blow a sixth trumpet that releases an angelic army that does just that.

Hippolion cavalry

And the sixth angel trumpeted, and I heard a voice out of the horns of the golden altar that is before God, saying to the sixth angel who has the trumpet, “Loose the four angels bound on the river great, Euphrates.” And the four angels who prepared for the hour and day and month and year were loosed, that they might kill one-third of men. And the number of the armies of cavalry was two myriads of myriads. I heard their number. And I saw the horses in appearance, and those seated on them: They had fiery breastplates of hyacinth and brimstone, and the heads of the horses were as heads of lions, and out

of their mouths came out fire and smoke and brimstone. From these three plagues they killed a third of men, with the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which comes out of their mouths. For the authority of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails. For their tails like serpents, having heads, with which they harm.

And the rest of men, who were not killed by these plagues, neither repented of the works of their hands, that they might not prostrate to demons and idols of gold and silver and bronze and stone and wood, which neither are able to see nor to hear nor to walk. And they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their harlotry nor of their thefts.

—Rev. 9:13-21

The sixth seal was divided into three large sections (→6:12–7:17): First there is an earthquake and eclipse chasing men into caves, fearing the world's end and the wrath of the Lamb; then an angel arrests the catastrophe while the Spirit seals 144,000 Jewish saints, a company of martyr-priests; then John sees a vision of eschatological church, an innumerable multitude from every nation worshiping before the heavenly throne. The sixth trumpet is also very long, and also divides into three scenes. Initially, John hears a voice from the altar, four angels are released, and the angels kill a third of mankind accompanied by a cavalry two hundred million strong (9:13-21). Then John sees an angel coming from heaven in a cloud, a rainbow around his head, who gives John a little book to eat (10:1-11). Finally, John is given a rod to measure a temple, two witnesses prophesy, are killed, raised, and exalted, and an earthquake shakes down a third of the city (11:1-13). These three events constitute the second of the three woes (11:14). In each stage of the sixth trumpet, we see the Red Spirit at work: The cavalry comes to fight; John eats a book and speaks, and his speech clarifies and sharpens divisions between holy city and profane court; finally, John hears a preview of what he will speak, as the divisions come to a murderous head in the martyrdom of the two witnesses.

If we are following the days of creation, the sixth trumpet should have to do with land animals and men. The two witnesses are raised after three and a half days when the Lord puts the "breath of life" in them (πνεῦμα ζωῆς), a phrase that recalls Adam's creation (Gen. 2:7; LXX, πνοήν ζωῆς). The two witnesses are a new Adam and Eve in the city and then in heaven. When the seventh trumpet blows, we see a serpent preying on a new Eve, a seventh-day temptation scene. In contrast to the first Eve, the mother in the sky resists temptation (initially at least) and flees the serpent, while the saints stand firm against the beasts that the serpent raises to attack them. They are faithful witnesses, a new Adamic humanity.

John sees two scenes in Revelation 9: A swarm of macabre, demonic cherubim arises from the anti-temple of the abyss, and then four angels release a massive army from the Euphrates. I have called the former “locorpions,” and I will call the latter lion-horse creatures “hippolions.” Both are described in some detail, and each description is intricately structured. Both descriptions begin and end by speaking of the creatures’ resemblance to horses. Each description ends with a coda (!) that refers to the tails of the creatures: The locorpions have tails with stings (9:10) and the hippolions have tails like serpents with heads that can bite (9:19; Smalley (2005: 241) suggests an allusion to the Parthian practice of braiding horses tails). A detailed comparison is found in the chart:

Locorpions, 9:7-9	Hippolions, 9:17-19
Horses prepared for battle	Horses and those who sat on them
Crowns of gold	Breastplates of fire, hyacinth, brimstone
Faces like men	Heads like heads of lions
Hair like women	Mouths breathing fire, smoke, brimstone
Teeth like lions	One-third of men killed
Breastplates of iron	Fire, smoke, and brimstone from mouths
Horses rushing to battle	Power of horses in mouths

The description of the hippolions is structured as interlocked, overlapping chiasms; 9:13-21 is generally chiasmic.

- A. Release of the angels at the Euphrates, vv. 13–15
 - B. Number of horsemen, v. 16
 - C. Description of horsemen, vv. 17–18
 - B'. Power of the horses, v. 19
- A'. Rest of mankind does not repent, vv. 20–21

The description of the hippolions in 9:17b-18 at the center forms an incomplete chiasm:

- A. The heads of the horses as heads of lions
 - B. And out of their mouths
 - C. Proceed
 - D. Fire and smoke and brimstone
 - E. From the three (τρίων) plagues, these,
 - F. Are killed
 - E'. A third (τὸ τρίτον) of men
 - D'. Out of the fire and the smoke and the brimstone

- C'. That proceeds
- B'. Out of their mouths.

The structure, while precisely chiasmic down to the word, is missing an A'. There is no second reference to lions or lion heads. Instead, verse 19 moves into a description of the creatures' mouths and tails:

- A. For the authority of the horses
 - B. Is in their mouth (note the singular)
 - C. And in their tails
 - C'. For their tails are like serpents
 - B'. Having heads
 - A'. And with these they harm.

The missing “head” from the first chiasm does not appear until after the description of the serpentine tails. The creatures have a head at each end, and the description uses the word *κεφαλή* at each end. In the description of the locorpions, the tail is left to the tail end of the text. In the description of the hippolions, the end recalls the beginning, the tail is a head. Perhaps we are to scent a slight aroma of alpha-omega-ness.

One of the large issues in interpreting the sixth trumpet is the character of the hippolion legions, a gigantic army that kills a third of mankind. Is this another demonic army or is it a good army? In my judgment, the reasons given for viewing it as a demonic army do not hold up under scrutiny. That they are hybrid creatures may indicate they are demonic (Boxall 2006: 148), linking them with locorpions. But hybrid creatures make up the Lord's heavenly throne in chapter 4, so the fact that they are combo-critters does not prove they are evil. The fact that they kill does not seal the case either, since the Lord kills and makes alive (1 Sam. 2:6).

Hippolions are the *antidote* to the locorpions rather than their allies. All of the trumpet visions are initiated from heaven, by the trumpeting of the trumpet angels who stand before the throne. This vision is doubly initiated from heaven, not only by a trumpet but by a voice “from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God” (9:13). The golden altar is mentioned in 8:3, where the Angel-Spirit of Jesus takes the incense of prayer up to heaven, and then casts coals from the altar to the earth, causing thunder, lightning, and an earthquake. It is as if the altar of incense has become animate, vocable, Spirit-filled. The voice from between the horns must be the voice of the same Angel (Boxall 2006: 146). That is, the hippolion army is released on order of Spirit of Jesus. In itself, that does not prove that they are goodies, but it does mean that they are operating under orders of heaven.

We can press further, though: The Angel brings the prayers of the martyrs to heaven, and coals from heaven bring the throne of God down to earth. The turmoil caused by the coals answers the martyrs' prayers. There will be another earthquake at the end of the sixth seal, after the two witnesses are raised and translated to heaven (→11:13), also an answer to the martyrs. Like the coals that quake the land, the army of hippolions is an answer to the martyrs' prayers. They are agents of God's justice and vengeance, by which he avenges the blood of the martyrs. Not only is the army deployed by orders from heaven, but the captains of the host are angels. *Angels* at the Euphrates kill a third of mankind (9:15), the 200 million-man army is with the angels (9:16), and we are finally told that the *angels* kill a third of mankind through the army (9:18). Under angelic direction, this is an angelic host. (Admittedly, ἄγγελος might refer to fallen angels, →12:4.)

Further, the overall context of the sixth trumpet is positive, primarily depicting the prophesying and faithfulness of the persecuted church. John eats a little book and is told to prophesy; two witnesses prophesy. It would seem odd to start off the sixth trumpet with a scene of demonic affliction—another one!—and then go on to describe the prophesying of John and the faithful martyrdom of the two witnesses. The hippolion cavalry resembles and anticipates the two witnesses in a number of particulars. Both are associated with the number two (another hint that we are operating with the “duality” of the red horse). The army consists of two myriads of myriads (δισμυριάδες μυριάδων) and there are two witnesses (δύο, 11:4). The horses breathe fire, smoke, and brimstone that kills a third of mankind (vv. 17–18), and the two witnesses are fire-breathers who consume enemies by flame from their mouths (11:5). The plotlines of the two scenes run in opposite directions. Fire-breathing horses kill a third of mankind, but the rest do not repent of their idolatry and sin (9:20–21); fire-breathing witnesses are killed by the beast from the abyss, but eventually some of the people of the city glorify God (11:7, 9–10). Repentance comes after the witnesses die and rise.

The position of the angels and the army also suggests they are the Lord's army. For much of Israel's history, the Jordan River is the eastern boundary of the land, but the Euphrates is the ideal, promised boundary (Gen. 15:18; Exod. 23:31; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4). An army massed at the Euphrates River could be a Babylonian army of Babylon ready to invade the land, and that is certainly part of the allusion (Boxall 2006: 147, with additional reference to Parthians). Even so, the Babylonian army that invades and destroys Solomon's temple is doing the Lord's will; Nebuchadnezzar is Yahweh's servant, a new Adam with dominion over all the nations (Jeremiah 29), who drives out the idolatrous people of Judah and destroys their den of thieves

(cf. Jeremiah 7). An army amassing at the Euphrates could, however, be more than an agent of providential discipline. After all, *Israel* crosses the Euphrates when she returns from exile and reconquers the land. In fact, the hippolions are following Abraham's original path from beyond the River into the land of promise. As the Angel of Yahweh leads Israel into the land in the first conquest (also led by one named Jesus; Exod. 23:20; Josh. 1:11), so the Angel-Spirit of God and the four angels at the Euphrates lead the hippolion army. The other Euphrates passage in Revelation supports this interpretation. The sixth bowl—structurally parallel to the sixth trumpet—targets the Euphrates. The river dries up so that the kings from the sunrise can cross over to Har-Magedon to fight the three frogs that came from the dragon's mouth and are identified as "unclean spirits" (→16:12-16). If the kings from the sunrise fight the frog demons, they must be saints or angels. Goodies, in any case. And they are in the same position as the army, on the banks of the Euphrates and ready to cross into the land.

There are a lot of hippolions, "myriads" of them. Rebekah is blessed as she leaves home with the hope that she would become "thousands of ten thousands" (εἰς χιλιάδας μυριάδων; Gen. 24:60). When the glory cloud settles on the tabernacle, Yahweh returns to the myriad thousands of Israel (Num. 10:36). Yahweh comes to his mountain amid myriads, thousands of thousands of chariots (Ps. 68:17). Only saints and angels are describes as "myriads" in Scripture. Indeed, the fact that the hippolion cavalry is *numbered* at all is strong evidence that it is a holy army. Only Israel's armies are numbered in the Bible, since only they are holy people, measured, bounded, counted as God's own possession (→7:1-8). The locorpions are numerous, but not numbered because they are *unholy*.

The hippolion army, in short, is the Lord's response to the torment of the locorpion stings. As always, the Spirit who rides the red horse brings conflict and vision—*recreative* division and conflict. They are authorized to kill one-third of the land-dwellers (9:15), one-third of those who have been stung. Those who are killed cease to worship idols (9:20). Afflicted by the poison water and demon horde from the temple, Jews long for death, and God provides it, sending an army of fire-breathers who bring blessed relief.

Though rare among early interpreters, this is not an unprecedented view. Oecumenius writes,

The hyacinth reveals that these who are sent are of heaven, for the sky is similar to hyacinth. The sulfur indicates that they are pleasing to God, since they are delightful to God—for to delight is to please. And who would please God more than the holy angels? Then the vision changes imagery and exalts the power of the holy angels, comparing them with lions and to fire, smoke and brimstone and snakes. In all

of these analogies their fearsomeness and irresistibility is signified (quoted in Weinrich 2005: 143).

The voice from the altar—the breath of the living Voice that is the Son of Man—speaks to the trumpet angel, authorizing him to release four angels bound at the Euphrates. The angels need to be loosed (λύω) because they have been bound (δέω). “Bound” can be used metaphorically, as in English, to refer to obligations and demands that someone must fulfill, but in many passages it refers to actual binding—the binding of the strong man that is accomplished in the ministry of Jesus (Matt. 12:29), the binding of sheaves (Matt. 13:30), the arrest and binding of someone in chains to be cast into prison or taken to execution (Matt. 14:3; Jn 18:12, 24; Acts 12:6; 20:22; 21:33; 22:5, 29). The church has authority to bind and loose, that is, power or authority to prevent things from happening, of chaining up and limiting, and of loosing and letting go. Earlier, it is not yet time to release the cavalry, as it is not time to release the winds from the four corners (→7:1–2). Now it is time: The hippolions have been prepared precisely for this hour and day and month and year. Repent! For the time is fulfilled.

The specification of “hour, day, month, year” recalls Passover (Jordan 1999a). The Passover occurred 430 years “to the very day” after Israel had gone into Egypt (Exod. 12:41). Passover is a particular day of a specific month, *and* at a specific hour—midnight (Exod. 12:29). The release of the angels begins a new Passover. In keeping with this, the hippolions are angels of death.

Four is the number of geographic extent. These four angels are linked with the corner angels of the land (→7:1), an altar platform, not only for sacrifice but for the incense of prayer. In answer to request from the voice on the altar, the angels are released. ἐλύθησαν is a divine passive. *God* releases the angels who gather an army of invasion. It is a sizable cavalry. In heaven there are “myriads of myriads” (→5:11, μυριάδες μυριάδων) of angels. A myriad is 10,000, and so a myriad of myriads is 100,000,000; 10,000 times 10,000. In the hippolion force, there are two myriads of myriads (δισμυριάδες μυριάδων) or 200,000,000.

As in the first four seals, John describes the horses, their colors and accoutrements, and riders who sit on them. The riders “sitting” on the four horses are kings, exalted on mobile thrones in imitation of the Father who sits on his throne. Specifically, I have argued, the rider is the enthroned Angel of the Son, the Spirit (→6:1). A distinction between the horses and the ones who sit on them is made in 9:17. The army is led by angels, and the riders are angelic figures too. As in the seals, the horses are the church guided and

driven by the angels of the Spirit. The OT phrase “chariots and horsemen of God” is analogous. When Elijah ascends to heaven, Elisha declares him to be the chariots of Israel and its horsemen (2 Kgs 2:12). When Elisha dies, Joash of Israel declares *him* to be Yahweh’s chariots and horsemen (2 Kgs 13:14). Though usually invisible, the chariots and horses of God surround Elisha as if he were the traveling glory of God (2 Kgs 6:17). Prophets are the bearers of God’s presence, the chariot and horse on which the Lord and his angels ride out to conquer.

The NASB adds “the riders” in verse 17, on the assumption that the riders have breastplates of fire and hyacinth, but the Greek says εἶδον τοὺς ἵππους ἐν τῇ ὀράσει καὶ τοὺς καθημένους ἐπ’ αὐτῶν, ἔχοντας θώρακας πυρίνους καὶ ὑακινθίνους καὶ θειώδεις. *Both horses and riders have breastplates of fire, hyacinth, and brimstone.* Angelic riders and ecclesial steeds wear matching outfits. Breastplates are armor, but also part of the garb of the high priest, a liturgical warrior who specializes in killing animals and offering sacrifice. The high priest’s breastplate is covered with precious gems, flashing with light and fire, and woven of gold thread, along with purple and scarlet. It is a breastplate of fire. Priests are human glory-clouds, traveling, like God, in a cloud of fire and smoke. This angelic army is ready to carry on a liturgical combat, knowing that they fight not flesh and blood but principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in heavenly places. It is an army ready for battle with locorpions from the abyss. The locorpions are locusts, scorpions, horses, lions, people, demonic cherubim from the abyss. The horses of the sixth trumpet have lion heads that breathe fire and serpent tails that bite. They are a cherubic church, doing on earth what the living creatures do in heaven.

The army wears breastplates of “fire, hyacinth, and brimstone” (v. 17a) and breathes out “fire, smoke, and brimstone” (v. 17b), with which it kills a third of humanity (v. 18). ὑακινθίνους is a purplish, smoky grey, and links with other scenes of smoke in the book of Revelation (Oecumenius (1997: 43) says it is the color of the sky, a clue that this is a heavenly army). With the golden altar in the immediate vicinity (9:13), we think of the smoke of incense and the ascending smoke of prayer. On the Day of Atonement, the priest ascends to God in a cloud of incense smoke, a robe of prayer. As he labors every day in the Holy Place in his normal garments of glory and beauty, he is robed in a smoky robe and breastplate. As a priestly army, this is an angelic-human *prayer* army.

“Hyacinth” is repeatedly used in the LXX to describe the color of one of the threads of the high priest’s robes and other fabrics in the tabernacle (Exod. 25:5; 26:4, 14; 28:31; Num. 4:6, 8-11). It sometimes refers to the garments of royal officials (Ezek. 23:6).

The breastplates are *θειώδεις*, an ancient name for sulfur and associated with volcanic activity. Fire and brimstone erupt from the earth to destroy and remake the landscape. The word for brimstone is *θειον*, perhaps a pun on the Greek “divinity” (*θειότης*). Outside this passage, brimstone describes the torments of wrath that come upon the wicked (14:10; 19:20; 20:10; 21:8). The other reference in the NT is to the story of Sodom, which Jesus says will be repeated within the generation of the apostles (Lk. 17:29). The word is used in the LXX to describe Sodom (Gen. 19:24) and also the threat of Sodom-like judgment against Israel (Deut. 29:23 [LXX v. 22]; cf. Job 18:15; Ps. 11:6; Isa. 30:33; 34:9; Ezek. 38:22). The army wears and breathes brimstone because they warn of wrath to come. Their very appearance and preaching give a foretaste of the lake of fire.

Essentially, the army wears what it speaks, and its speech is its weapon. It wears what it says and it says what it wears; the army wears what it has come to do. Fire, smoke, and brimstone conjure up the image of sacrifice. As they breathe sacrificial fire and smoke, they kill men and turn them into living sacrifices. At the beginning of Revelation, John sees Jesus with a sword coming from his mouth (→1:16) and sees him again in the same way at the end of the book (→19:21). This is the sword of the Spirit that is the word, and from the mouth of his war-horse saints comes fire and smoke and brimstone. These creatures are again like the God whom they serve, who comes breathing smoke from his nostrils and fire from his mouth (Ps. 18:8).

The horses are described in the last part of verse 17. With their lion heads, they are related to the Lion of Judah who is also a Lamb. Though horses and riders wear priestly breastplates, they have royal heads. When the locorpions were released, they had no authority to kill men and no authority in their mouths. That is a limitation on a locust, who damages precisely by eating. The angelic army has power in their lion mouths. They destroy and kill by prayers and words and preaching. But the hippolions have power in their tails too; their tails are not tormenting scorpion stings but deadly serpents. The serpents themselves have heads, so the angelic horses have heads at both ends—lion heads that pour out fire, smoke, and brimstone and serpent heads at the other end, which have authority to hurt. The serpent (*ὄφις*) was the tempter in Eden (Gen. 1:1, 3, 13; LXX), and the dragon, Satan, is described as a serpent later in Revelation (→12:14–15; 20:2). This might seem to damage the case that these are angelic army, but perhaps it alludes to Jesus’s instruction to imitate the wiliness of a serpent (Matt. 7:10). The angelic army does not lead with the serpent bite; it leads with the word of fire and the smoke of fire and the warnings of brimstone, and only at the end is the bite of the serpent brought into play. Those who are not killed to their idolatry by the fire and brimstone are bitten by the serpents, poisoned.

The closing verses of the chapter indicate the goal of this angelic army: To drive men away from idols to repentance. It is not entirely successful. One-third die and find relief from the plague of false teaching coming from the infernal temple. They die to their idols in hope of new life. The remaining two-thirds do not repent. The sentence structure in verses 20–21 is intricate.

- a. The rest of men who were not killed with these plagues
 - b. did not repent of the works of their hands
 - c. to not prostrate themselves before demons
 - and idols
 - of gold
 - of silver
 - of brass
 - of stone
 - of wood
 - which cannot see or hear or walk
 - b'. and did not repent
 - c'. of their murders
 - nor sorceries
 - nor harlotry
 - nor thefts

There are two main focal points, each marked by the verb *μετενοέω*: The survivors do not repent of idolatry, nor do they repent of other evils. Of these, the first is elaborated most extensively. Idols are human cultural products, the works of men's hands, yet bowing to idols is an act of demon worship. Demons and idols are both objects of prostration, and they are identified: To bow to demons is to bow before idols, and vice versa. As Paul says, those who sacrifice to idols sacrifice to demons (1 Corinthians 10). The hippolions intend to drive men away from the old-fashioned idolatry of wood and stone and gold and silver. Idolatry appears in another form later, in the worship of the beast. That too involves the worship of an image, the image of the beast (an *εἰκὼν* rather than an *εἶδωλα*; cf. Biguzzi 1998).

Idols are constructed from five substances, arranged in descending value, from precious metals to wood. The list is reminiscent of the vision of Daniel 2, where Nebuchadnezzar sees a statue made of gold, silver, and bronze and then descending to iron and iron mixed with terra cotta. The OT mentions these materials (*χρυσᾶ*, *ἀργυρᾶ*, *χαλκᾶ*) most often in connection with the tabernacle and temple (cf. Exod. 25:3; 31:4–5, 32; 1 Chr. 29:2, 7; 2 Chr. 2:6). This supports James Jordan's notion that the statue of Daniel 2 is an image of the temple (Jordan 2007: 155–94).

In Revelation 9, the list moves from the gold of the Most Holy Place to the wood that burns on the bronze altar of ascensions. Revelation 9's idol polemic is not merely directed against idols in general, but specifically against the idolatry of the temple. The hippolion army invades the land to "kill" those who have turned the demon-infested temple of Jerusalem into an idol.

Again we can see a connection with the fifth trumpet: The locorpions emerge from the abyssal temple, the hellish sanctuary that Herod's temple had become. A horde of demons excites a Judaizing horde sent from the temple to afflict Jews and Christians. In the sixth trumpet, an opposing army appears, breathing fire designed to drive land-dwellers away from their idolatry of the temple, their idol of gold, silver, brass, stone, and wood, away from the frenzy of demons. Angelic hippolions come to fight against the demons that have turned the temple into a stairway to hell.

Gold has generally positive associations in Revelation. Jesus is among golden candlesticks (1:12, 20; 2:1) and wears a golden belt (1:13). The Ancient Ones in heaven have gold crowns (4:4) and offer their incense in golden censers (5:8; cf. 8:3), and a gold altar is before the throne of God (8:3; 9:13). When the Son of man harvests, he wears a gold crown (14:14), and the saints in heaven after the harvest wear golden belts, like Jesus (15:6). Bowls of blood are gold (15:6–7), and new Jerusalem has streets of gold (21:15, 18, 21). Only twice is gold used negatively—here in describing the idols that men cling to and in 17:4, where the harlot carries a golden cup in her hand. That suggests a link between the idolaters of chapter 9 and the harlot who appears later. As the harlot represents the unfaithful city of Jerusalem, so the idolaters are idolaters of Jerusalem's temple.

Idolatry is the first evil, but idolaters are guilty of murders, sorceries, immorality, and thefts. These specific sins defile the land and cause it to vomit out the people. They are the sins of the postexilic community (cf. Zech. 5:1–4). Because the people do not repent even after being afflicted and tormented by demons, even after hearing the fiery gospel of Jesus and being warned of brimstone to come, they will be expelled. The final witnesses, martyrs, are about to appear, and when the Jewish leaders refuse to hear them, they cross a line. Time is just about up; the birth pangs are nearly over, and the real travail is about to begin. The movement from the fifth to the sixth trumpet thus shows a progression in the work of God:

1. God permits demons to afflict his rebellious people. Demons make the people of the land miserable, ready to die.
2. God releases the angelic army. Conflict intensifies.
3. They kill people, giving them relief from demonic torment.
4. Most do *not* repent.
5. Instead, they cling to their idols (=the temple) in hope that it will save them.
6. Their very idolatry of the temple will finally lead to their expulsion from the land.

If the fifth trumpet is the plague of demonic Judaizing that afflicts the church from within, the angelic army is the Lord's response to that affliction. When Judaizers from Jerusalem lead even Peter into hypocrisy, Paul (erst-while locorpion turned hippolion) comes—equipped with hyacinth armor, baring his lion teeth, breathing fire, issuing solemn warnings of brimstone—to beat back the demonic advance. We are making progress if we can see in the lurid, lively vision of Rev. 6:13-21, the face of the apostle, former destroyer of the church, now zealous to kill the destroyers, so that they may live again.

It is the first phase of a Woe. Worse is coming; worse, and also better.

John the prophet

And I saw another strong angel descending out of the sky-heaven clothed in a cloud, and the rainbow on his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire, and he had in his hand a book opened. And he placed his right foot right on the sea, and the left on the land. And he cried with a great voice like a lion's roar. And when he cried, the seven thunders spoke their own voices. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write. And I heard a voice out of heaven saying, "Seal the things which spoke the seven thunders and do not write them."

And the angel, whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land, raised his right hand to the sky-heaven and swore by the One Living unto the ages of ages, who created the heaven and the things in it, and the earth and the things in it, and the sea and the things in it, that time no longer shall be. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, who is about to trumpet, the mystery of God will be finished, as was proclaimed by his slaves the prophets.

And the voice which I heard out of heaven, again spoke with me and said, "Go, take the book opened in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land." And I went to the angel saying to him to give to me the book. And he said to me, "Take and eat it. And it will embitter your entrails but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey." And I took the book out of the hand of the angel and ate it, and it was in my mouth as sweet honey, and when I ate it, my entrails were embittered.

And they say to me, "It is necessary for you again to prophesy to peoples and nations and tongues and many kingdoms."

—Rev. 10:1–11

Revelation 10 has a clear surface structure, divided into sections by references to the angel's stance straddling the shoreline between sea and land. First the angel descends to stand on sea and land (v. 2) and roars like a lion. Then the angel standing on the sea and land lifts his right hand to heaven to swear an oath (v. 5). Finally, a voice from heaven instructs John to go to the angel standing on the sea and land to take the book in his hand (v. 8). Schematically:

- A. Angel descends to stand on sea and land, vv. 1–4
- B. The Angel standing on sea and land swears an oath, vv. 5–7
- C. A voice tells John to take a book from the Angel standing on sea and land, vv. 8–11

Chapter 10 also has a modified chiasmic structure.

- A. Angel descends from heaven with book, vv. 1–2
- B. Angel's cry, thunders echo, heavenly voice, vv. 3–4
- C. Oath of the angel, vv. 5–7
- A'/B'. John eats book, vv. 8b–10/11

The corresponding sections share verbal elements. The Angel has an open book in his hand (ἐν τῇ χειρὶ αὐτοῦ βιβλαρίδιον ἡνεωμένον, v. 2), and at the end of the passage John takes the same book from the Angel's hand (τὸ βιβλαρίδιον, v. 9; ἔλαβον τὸ βιβλαρίδιον ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς, v. 10). The final section also picks up verbal elements of B. John prepares to write the thunder's words, but a voice from heaven (ἤκουσα φωνὴν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, v. 4) stops him. After the angel swears, the same voice from heaven (ἡ φωνὴ ἣν ἤκουσα ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ, πάλιν λαλοῦσαν μετ' ἐμοῦ, v. 8) instructs him to take the book from the Angel. At the center is the Angel's oath, the message he was sent from heaven to deliver. Verse 11 stands somewhat outside the structure, apparently introducing a new speaker, "they," and leading into the command to measure in 11:1–2.

A and A' do not appear to be closely linked, but they are. The strong Angel is a cosmic figure: Descending from heaven, he stands with his fire-feet on the land and sea (v. 2). Heaven, land, and sea constitute the whole three-decker cosmos, and the Angel stretches out over the whole (cf. Boxall 2006: 155). He is a ladder and tower between heaven and earth, straddling land and sea. His oath is likewise in the name of the God who created heaven, earth, and sea. Earth/land and sea are a common figure for Israel and the nations, for Jews and Gentiles, and at the end of the episode, John is told that he will

prophesy to the nations (10:11). It is fitting that he receives this universal mission from an angel straddling Israel land and Gentile ocean.

The B sections are more clearly related, though mainly by way of contrast. John first begins to write down what the thunder said, but is forbidden to do so. The thunder's words are sealed for later or different release. When John eats the book, he is ready to prophesy, speak and, in 11:1, to write. He does not write the thunder words, but passes on the words of the book that he consumes. Yet the structural link suggests that the book and the thunder have the same contents: The thunder's words are the words of the book. John does not record what the thunder says. He speaks it.

At the center, the Angel swears that χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται (v. 6). When the Lamb opened the fifth seal, we learned that there would be an interval of time before God answered the prayers of the martyrs (Aune (1998a: 568) rightly challenges the notion that this is strictly a "delay"). Throughout the seals and the first five trumpets, we have witnessed a partial decreation intended to drive the people of the land to repentance. They do *not* repent, and now the Angel swears that the jig is up and the mystery of God will shortly be completed. Like Pharaoh, the people of the land harden their hearts, and an Angel appears, like the Angel of Yahweh who led Israel from Egypt, to announce the final plagues against the hard-hearted and to lead a new Israel out of Egypt (Sweet 1979: 175). Now that the boundaries between the church and her opponents have been clarified, it is nearly time for another Passover and another exodus, a Passover sealed with martyr blood and an exodus through the heavenly sea.

There are two key interpretive issues in chapter 10. The first has to do with the identity of the book in the Angel's hand. Though controverted, the premise of the interpretation that follows is that it is identical to, or at least closely identified with, the scroll that the Lamb received and opened (Bauckham 2000: 243–66; Boxall 2006: 153; *contra* Mounce 1997: 202).

Commentators sometimes reject this equation because the word for "book" is different. In the earlier scene, the Lamb opened the seals on a βιβλίον, but the Angel comes from heaven with a βιβλάριον. Technically, the second is a diminutive form of the first, often translated as "little book" for that reason. This is not a weighty reason to differentiate the two. There are other diminutives in the book of Revelation (ἄρνιον, "Lamb," for example) but they do not have a diminutive force. The Lamb is *not* a "little Lamb." Even if we stress the diminutive form of the word, there are good reasons for linking the two. After all, the scene of the angel descending connects in a number of ways with the heavenly scene when the Lamb received the book. The Father's throne, from whom the Lamb receives the book, is surrounded by a rainbow (4:3), as is the head of the Angel (10:1). The angel with the book is a "strong angel" (εἶδον ἄλλον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρον, 10:1), like the angel who asks who is worthy to open the book (εἶδον ἄγγελον ἰσχυρον, 5:2). In chapters 6–7, the Lamb opens the book, and here the angel descends with an open book (10:2).

As Bauckham and others argue, John draws on Ezekiel’s call (cf. Bede 1997: 145). Rev. 5:1 shares a number of details with Ezek. 2:9–10. Ezekiel sees a book in the hand of heavenly personage, written on the front and the back. Later, in Ezekiel 3, he is given this book and told to eat it (3:1–3), and informed that the book will be honey in his mouth but sourness in his stomach. All of this is replicated in Revelation, with John occupying the role of Ezekiel. A book appears, written inside and out, and it is opened. Five chapters later, the Angel brings a book from heaven and John eats it. It is sweet as honey in his mouth but bitterness in his stomach (Rev. 10:9–10). The sequence of Ezek. 2–3, which occupies a handful of verses, is stretched out over Revelation 5–10:

Ezekiel	Revelation
Book from God, 2:9–10	Book from Father to Lamb, 5
Eat book, 3:1–3	Eat book, 10:9–10

Given this intertextual connection, there can be little doubt that the book the Lamb opens is the same one John eats.

This confirms our suspicions about the organization of chapters 6–10: The Lamb opens the seals of the book, but a scroll cannot be seen or read until *all* the seals have been broken and the *whole* of the contents is visible. After the Lamb has opened the scroll, there is a complicated angelic fanfare and, with the sixth trumpet, the fully opened book is delivered from heaven to earth. The contents of the book are proclaimed *after* the book is delivered in chapter 10. Chapters 11–15 (or 11–16) unveil the contents of the scroll. This is the Top Secret story, sealed since the time of Daniel, now being released. It is the mystery of God now being unveiled as part of the unveiling of Jesus Christ.

The second major question is the identity of the angel. Many details suggest that the Angel is divine (Beale 2015: 200–201), identical to the Son of Man from chapter 1. Five features of the Angel’s appearance are mentioned: His clothing, his head, his face, his feet, and his hand. If we add his feet placed on land and sea, and the voice that speaks like a lion, we have seven features, numerically echoing the seven features of the Son of Man. As in chapter 1, John’s description begins with his clothing—his robe and crown—and then moves to features of his body, a literary replication of the movement of a priest into the sanctuary, through the “clothing” of sanctuary curtains, veils, and coverings toward the glory within. The glory takes a human and then an angelic form. The parallels of the two visions are summarized in the chart:

Revelation 1	Revelation 10
Clothed in robe reaching to feet	Clothed in cloud
Girded with golden belt	Rainbow around head
1. Head and hair	

Revelation 1	Revelation 10
2. Eyes like flame	(7) Face like sun
3. Feet like burnished bronze	(3) Feet like pillars of fire
4. Voice like waters	(5) Hand with book
5. Right hand—stars	(3) Feet on land and sea
6. Mouth with sword	(4) Voice like lion
7. Face like sun	

The description in chapter 1 moves from head to feet to head to hand to head. The pattern is symmetrical: 2:1:1:1:2; two features of the head, followed by a description of the feet, another head feature, then hand, and finally two more features of the head. Chapter 10's description of the Angel also begins and ends with features associated with the head—face and voice. In between, the description focuses on the feet and hands. Because there are two references to the feet, the description is more obviously chiasmic than the description in chapter 1. In any case, the structure of the description in chapter 10 naturally centers on the *hand*, which holds the book.

If we use the sequence of Revelation 1 as the template for chapter 10, the pattern of the latter is 7-3-5-3-4. John does not describe the Angel's hair or eyes (though it does describe the head, on which is a rainbow). There is also no analogy to the mouth-sword, though the Angel speaks with a lion voice. Alternatively, if we move the rainbow crown into the description, we have something similar to white head and hair and the pattern is: 1-7-3-5-3-4. Chapter 10's description thus moves from beginning to the end of the description from chapter 1, and then moves toward the center. This is something like a "tuned" version of the *wasf* of the Son of Man (on tuning, →7:12).

Do the seven items in the description match the days of creation? The cloud links with the light of Day 1, or perhaps with the hovering Spirit of Gen. 1:2. Rainbows appear in the firmament, the creation of Day 2. We would expect a face like a sun to be in the fourth position, but here it is in the third. Similarly, we would expect the feet that straddle sea and land to be linked with Day 3 rather than 4. Days 3 and 4 seem to be reversed. The fifth item on the list is the Angel's hand that holds the open book, and in the Day 6 position we find another reference to the feet of the Angel between heaven and earth. The voice like a lion might be a Sabbatical theme, the roaring of the Spirit in the cool of the day.

The angel's face is like the sun (10:1, τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος), like the face of the Son of Man (1:16: ἡ ὄψις αὐτοῦ ὡς ὁ ἥλιος φαίνει ἐν τῇ θανάμει αὐτοῦ), like the face of Jesus at the transfiguration (Matt. 17:2; Chilton 1987: 260; Victorinus (1997: 13) takes it as the light of resurrection). John description of the Angel begins with his face and twice mentions his feet, reminiscent of biblical theophanies that stress Yahweh's shining face and his feet that rest on the firmament or earth, his footstool (Isa. 66:1; cf.

Ps. 99:5; 132:7). The Angel's face and feet burn, resembling the God who is a consuming fire. The theophany of Revelation 10 is also a cosmophany. In chapter 1, the voice of Jesus is central; in chapter 10, the book occupies the central slot in the structure. The two are related, since the book gives literary form to the voice of Jesus. The fact that the book is in the "hand" of the angel suggests a link to the "stars" that are in the hand of Jesus. The stars are the angels of the churches, and correspond to the lamps on the lampstand in the heavenly temple. The book is not only a literary form of the voice, but a literary lampstand, a light source, a lamp to the feet and a light to the path.

In Revelation 1, the voice of Jesus is the chiasmic center of John's description, but here the voice comes at the climax of the description. Both make the same point in different ways: Jesus *is* voice, and the Angel is Voice. (Recall John's "I turned to *see the voice* speaking to me, and having turned I saw ... *one like a son of man*, →1:12-13.) In Revelation 1, the Voice that Jesus is stands at the center of the description of his Person. He is voice as the hinge and middle of things. This is Jesus as the Son-of-Man Voice. In Revelation 10, the Voice comes at the end of the description: The Angel speaks the last word of the Father, as the Omega Voice of God. If the Son of Man is the Voice that speaks in the midst of things, the Angel is the Voice that speaks at the end of things. Given the content of chapter 10, that structural shift is fitting, since the Angel comes to swear that *χρόνος* is no longer and the mystery of God is fulfilled (vv. 6b-7).

The Angel is a personalized tabernacle or temple descending to earth (Jordan 1999a: 114). The cloud clothing is the clue. When Jesus is transfigured, a cloud covers him and the Father speaks from the cloud (Matt. 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk. 9:34-35). When Jesus ascends to heaven, he also takes on a cloud that "receives him out of their sight" (Acts 1:9). Both passages allude to the OT portrait of Yahweh as enclosed and enveloped by clouds. Yahweh leads Israel from Egypt traveling in a cloud, comes to Sinai in a cloud, descends to the Most Holy Place in a cloud, visits Ezekiel in a cloud. Clouds are a "canopy" around him, his tent curtain (Ps. 18:11-12), and form a covering (105:39). Yahweh's cloud is his robe of glory, and this Angel with the book is clothed in a glory-cloud as Yahweh is. When he speaks there is thunder, suggesting that he comes clothed in a *storm* cloud.

Chilton (1987: 260) points out that the glory-cloud is replicated in architectural form in the tabernacle; the Angel is wrapped in the tabernacular robe. Jordan observes that the Angel is a tabernacle/temple figure from top to bottom: He is clothed with a cloud, like the tabernacle, and his feet are pillars of fire like the altar of bronze in the courtyard. When the tabernacle was set up, fire slared out from Yahweh to light the altar hearth. When we consider the tabernacle as an architectural human, that fire-stream represents legs stretching down to the feet, the altar itself.

The rainbow alludes to Genesis 9, where Yahweh sets his "bow" in the cloud (in the LXX, not ῥίς but τόξος). There is a turquoise rainbow around the throne of the Father (→4:3), through which the Father gazes out at the world. The rainbow is a sign of God's covenant of patience, a promise of regular cycles of *χρόνος*. *That* time is ending. (Koester (2015: 475) notes the Noachic allusion but downplays its importance.)

The similarities between the scenes highlight the fact that the strong angel completes John's commissions. Jesus dictates messages to John; the Angel in chapter 10 does not dictate, but gives John an edible book that will become so much a part of John that his speech will express the content of the book. Since he entered the courtroom through the door in the sky in chapter 4, John has been in the "council of the Lord," the position of a true prophet. John has been an amanuensis and a reporter. He has barely spoken in his own voice. After chapter 10, he is commissioned to prophesy (10:11). In chapter 1, Jesus lays his star-filled hand on John to raise him up from the ground as a scribe of the kingdom. In chapter 10, the Angel gives John a book from his right hand to eat, elevating him to the status of prophet. John has been a seer; now he becomes a prophet. John the seer must become John the prophet. He will speak the contents of the book in his own accents.

Once again, Revelation recapitulates on a small scale a transition within the history of Israel. Prior to the monarchy, people consulted "seers" (1 Samuel 10), but what was called a seer becomes a prophet in the days of kings. In Revelation, with the Davidic Lion-Lamb on the throne and other kings being prepared to receive authority, being a "seer" will no longer do. John must graduate to become a prophet.

We may take all this as evidence that the Angel is the Son of Man, now represented as Angel rather than Son. We may be tempted to identify the Angel with the Lamb who receives and opens the book in the first place. The Father gives the book from his right into the right hand of the Lamb. Now, it seems, Jesus the Son brings the book down from heaven to give it to John.

Despite the strong resemblance to the Christophany of Revelation 1, there are reasons for caution (Fee 2011: 140–1; cf. Smalley 2005: 257).

Mounce (1997: 201) oddly argues that the angel cannot be Christ because it would be "highly inappropriate for Christ" to swear, apparently forgetting Hebrews 6:13 (cf. Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 150) and the OT scenes where Yahweh swears.

Chapter 10 reaches not only to chapter 5, and not only to the manifestation of Jesus in 1:9-20, but all the way back to the opening verse of the Apocalypse where the order of Jesus's unveiling is described: God gave to Jesus an unveiling, which Jesus showed through his Angel to John. That has *not* been the order of unveiling in chapters 1–9 because John has not yet been fully initiated into his prophetic role. Only in chapter 10 do we finally see Jesus signifying something to John *through an Angel*. The book, now open, is brought to John from heaven as food. Boxall (2006: 152) is right that "he is most likely Christ's angel," explaining that "[t]he giving of that revelation to Christ the Lamb was described in Revelation 5; here the second part of that revelatory process is

now being described with the appearance of his angelic messenger. He looks like Jesus because he represents him ... but the two are not identical.” Boxall does not draw the further conclusion: The “Angel” is Jesus’s second self, the Spirit (→1:1). That makes sense of all the details of the passage. The Angel comes clothed in a cloud, the cloud of Yahweh’s Spirit-presence in the OT (cf. Kline 1999). His fiery pillar feet recall the pillar of fire that led Israel through the wilderness, the pillar that represented the presence of the fiery Spirit. The fire of the Spirit links heaven and earth. The temple and tabernacle were architectural embodiments of the Spirit, made in the image of the Spirit, so it is fitting that the Spirit comes in the form of a temple-man. Nor is it surprising that the Spirit would so closely resemble the Son of Man whose Angel he is. “I will come to you,” Jesus promised, and he *does* in the person of the Spirit.

In Daniel 12, a man dressed in linen hovers above the waters of the river and raises his hand to take an oath in the name of the One who lives forever. Like the oath of the Angel-Spirit, his oath has to do with timing and completion (v. 7). For now, we simply note that his position hovering above the river is parallel to the position of the Angel who straddles earth and sea, and in the background of both is the creation account of the Spirit (Gen. 1:2). The Angel of Jesus is the creating Spirit, the Spirit who hovers over the waters of the original creation to form it into the cosmos. Now he straddles earth and sea and swears in the name of the living God that the time has come for new creation.

Revelation refers ten times to another angel (ἄλλος ἄγγελος). Is it always the Spirit? It is not impossible. As we noted, the Spirit ascends from the sunrise to seal the 144,000 (→7:2; cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:13; 4:30). “Another angel” presides at the altar of incense, delivering the prayers of the saints to heaven and then casting fire and coals to earth (→8:3-5), and that too is the Spirit. Chapter 14 positively teems with “another angel” figures. Three separate ones fly across midheaven (vv. 6, 8, 9), each with a message for the inhabitants of the land. *Another* another angel calls the Son of Man to reap the harvest (v. 15), and yet *another* another angel harvests the grapes (v. 17). A distribution of labor between grain/Son and grapes/Spirit makes theological sense: The Son is bread from heaven, and the Spirit brings the fire-wine of Pentecostal joy. The fire-angel reappears in 14:18, instructing the angel of the grape harvest to get busy, and he appears to be the same figure we first saw at the golden altar. There may be too many angels crowding the harvest to be sure who is who. The last “another angel” descends from heaven in 18:1, crying out with a great voice that Babylon is fallen and that the city has become a haunt for detestable birds and demons. Given the parallels with 10:1-2, this seems to be the strong angel of chapter 10. It is not impossible that “another angel” is code for “Angel of Jesus,” but it seems unlikely, given the proliferation of angels in chapter 14. Perhaps, though, we are to see in the “another angels” a signal of the seven Spirits of God (for further consideration, →14:6-20).

Angel of heaven, earth, sea

With these two conclusions set—that the “little book” is the Lamb’s book and that the Angel who delivers the book is the Spirit—we turn to a more detailed examination of the passage.

The angel who descends from heaven is a “mighty” angel, the second “strong angel” in Revelation. The first appeared in Revelation 5 when the book was first introduced, and another casts a millstone representing Babylon into the sea (→18:21). The three are linked: The first looks for someone worthy to open the book, the second delivers the opened book, and the last completes the overthrow of Babylon, which is one of the things unveiled by the book.

The Angel-Spirit is the first character to descend (καταβαίνω) from heaven in the Apocalypse. In the letter to Philadelphia, Jesus promises that the new Jerusalem will descend from heaven, but nothing has yet descended. Two stars “fall” to earth (πίπτω; →8:10; →9:1), but falling is not the same as descending. The Angel opens the floodgates. In the following chapters, a *lot* of things fall or descend from heaven to earth: The dragon falls from heaven (12:12), the land beast makes fire fall from heaven (13:13), an angel descends to announce the fall of Babylon (18:1) and another angel comes down to chain the dragon in the abyss (20:1). Finally, new Jerusalem does descend (21:2, 10). Prior to chapter 10, there has been no stately downward movement from heaven to earth. When the Angel-Spirit of Jesus descends, the path between heaven and earth opens, and traffic between the two begins to pick up. As we will see, this fits a broad trend in the book: In the closing chapters, all movement is toward earth. Heaven is where things happen first; earth is the end.

The fact that he can “place” his foot on the sea is another indicator of his divine status. Yahweh walks on the waves, and so does Jesus, the incarnate Yahweh. Land and sea have political connotations, so the position of the angel indicates that what he has to say will pertain to both Jews and Gentiles. Placing a foot on someone or something is an assertion of mastery. Conquerors place a foot on the neck of the conquered, and walking the boundary of a land is a way of asserting ownership. In Israel, property transactions took place by an exchange of sandals (Ruth 4), since the sandals that walked the property represented the land itself. The Angel claims the sea, because he alone can stand upon it.

We are told which foot goes where: His right foot is on the sea and his left on the land. The right side is typically preferred. Priests are consecrated with blood on the right ear lobe, thumb, and big toe (Leviticus 8), and the Son takes his position at the right hand of the Father. If the right foot carries the

same connotations, the Angel gives preference to the sea over the land. The sea is going to take up preeminence over the land, as Gentiles rush into the kingdom before the sons of the kingdom. If the land is, as I have said, the land of Israel, then the Angel has taken a position on the coast, one foot on Israel and the other on the Mediterranean. With his left foot is on the land and his right on the sea, he faces south. Presumably, he has come from the north, from the celestial pole that is the location of God's throne.

As we have noted (→4:1-7), the orientation of Revelation is taken from the orientation of the tabernacle furniture and the arrangement of Israel's tribes around it. The south-facing Angel-Spirit stands at the table of showbread, associated with the man face of the living creatures. Coming from the table, he naturally offers John something to eat. Having eaten the book, John turns into a prophetic eagle-lampstand that illuminates the church and the world.

Once the angel is positioned on land and sea, he speaks with a loud voice, a voice like the roar of a lion. Yahweh roars as a lion as he rouses himself for judgment (Amos 1:2; 3:4-8; Hos. 11:10; Jer. 25:20; Joel 3:16; Sweet 1979: 178), and the lion voice takes us back to the first of the seals, which was opened when the lion roared with a loud voice. Lions initiate, as eagles conclude things. The Angel speaks with the voice of the first creature; his Voice is the voice of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The Spirit speaks with the voice of the Lion-Lamb, whose Angel he is. Lions appear in some form in each section of the sixth trumpet. Hippolions have heads like lions, the angel roars like a lion, and the two witnesses speak fire, like the lion-headed hippolions. In Revelation 5, the lion's voice is like thunder, like the voice of the Lord himself (cf. Psalm 29, which uses "voice" seven times; Smalley 2005: 261). The lion voice of the Angel is also thunderous. When he speaks, sevenfold thunder answers. The one voice of the Angel refracts into the seven voices of thunder; the seven Spirits speak seven thunders. The Angel comes to announce the contents of the book, and the thunder echoes that announcement.

John begins to write down what he hears the thunder say, but a heavenly voice prohibits him. The thunder is not going to be suppressed forever. John does not write what the thunder says because he is going to communicate the contents of the book in another fashion. John will consume the book and prophesy it, rather than simply hearing and recording. The thunders interpret the roar of the Angel, and John will thunder out the words after eating the book. John writes the words that the Son of Man speaks (→1:19-20). But when the Spirit delivers the book, John is no longer a secretary taking dictation. Made a prophet, the Lamb's book indwells him and he speaks God's words in his own voice.

According to Jordan (1999a: 115), there are seven “great voice” events that express the seven thunders.

1. 11:12–13—Witnesses called up to heaven; earthquake.
Day 1: heaven and earth
2. 12:10–12—Fullness of the kingdom announced.
Day 2: purification of the firmament?
3. 14:6, 9, 15, 18—Harvest of First fruits Church.
Day 3: fruit and grain.
4. 16:1&17—Bowls end Old Creation.
Day 4: heavenly rulers pour out wrath.
5. 18:2—Fall of Babylon, place of unclean birds.
Day 5: creation of birds.
6. 19:17—Destruction of Beasts and Kings.
Day 6: creation of beasts and men.
7. 21:3—Tabernacle of God among men.
Day 7: sabbath.

On this interpretation, what the thunder says is not hidden (as often argued; cf. Boxall 2006: 154), but revealed in the remaining chapters of Revelation. This is possible, but it is simpler to conclude that John speaks the contents of the thunder’s voice after he consumes the book. The two suggestions are not incompatible.

Raising a hand to heaven links heaven and earth and calls heaven to witness what is being said. In Daniel 12, a question is raised about when the events revealed in the previous chapters will be fulfilled: “How long will it be until the end of these wonders?” The answer comes from a “man dressed in linen,” dressed like a priest, hovering like the Spirit over the waters, who raises his right hand toward heaven and swears by the eternal God that it will be time, times and half a time (Dan. 12:7). That is, it is not yet time for these things to be fulfilled. They will be concealed and sealed until the last days (Dan. 12:9). Revelation indicates that the last days have arrived. The Spirit replicates the stance of the figure from Daniel 12, but he carries an *unsealed* book, a sign that the things recorded in the book will shortly take place. Daniel’s time, times and half a time are at an end.

The Spirit swears an oath to the Creator; the Angel of Jesus swears by Yahweh. God cannot swear by anything higher than himself, but God *can* swear by God, and so seal the truth of the oath with two unchangeable things (Heb. 6:13). The Spirit swears in the name of the Triune Creator, and elaborates with the threefold universe: He is the Creator of heaven, earth, and sea, and also the Creator of the *things* that are in heaven, earth, and sea. He is the Father of heaven, the Son who came to earth, the Spirit who hovers over the sea. He is the Father of the stars, the Son who became king of the Jews, the Spirit who gathers the Gentiles. The Angel-Spirit joins heaven to the earth and sea by his own gigantic presence. He is qualified to swear to a recreation of the entire cosmos, heaven, earth and sea. As the message of the book unfolds, all

three zones are involved. Heaven is changed by the expulsion of the dragon, a beast arises from the sea and then one from the land (cf. Fee 2011: 142).

The angel's oath stance—hand raised—also alludes to Ezekiel 20, where Yahweh reminds Israel of the day he chose them and lifted his hand (Heb. *'asa' yadiy*), making himself known to them as Yahweh their God (Ezek. 20:5). In raising his hand before Israel, he commits himself to “bring them out of the land of Egypt into a land that I had selected for them, flowing with milk and honey” (Ezek. 20:6). The oath in Ezekiel 20 echoes earlier promises concerning exodus and inheritance (e.g., Gen. 24:7; Exod. 13:5, 11; Deut. 1:8; the verb in each case is *shava'*), which sometimes use the same terminology of “lifting the hand” (e.g., Exod. 6:8). When Yahweh swears in the OT, it is typically about exodus and conquest.

The angel's oath echoes the fourth commandment (Exodus 20). Yahweh commands Sabbath-observance as a commemoration of his creation of heaven, earth, sea—the same three zones that the angel mentions in his oath—and adds that he created “all that are in them” (Exod. 20:11). In Revelation 10, the phrase “and the things in it” is repeated for each of the three zones in the angel's oath (v. 6). Ezekiel 20 and Exodus 20 deal with related concerns. The oath remembered in Ezekiel 20 promises deliverance from slavery and the gift of a good land, that is, a promise that restless Israel will be brought to Sabbath. The oath of Ezekiel 20 is, translated, Yahweh's commitment to give his people rest, commemorated by the Sabbath command of Exodus 20 (cf. the allusion to the exodus in the fourth commandment in Deuteronomy 5). The angel's oath is a promise that “time shall be no more” and that in the days of the seventh trumpet, the “mystery of God is finished” (Rev. 10:6–7). Whatever the mystery of God is, the echoes of Ezekiel and Exodus suggest that it involves deliverance, inheritance, Sabbatical rest, and enthronement. The fact that the angel hands John a book that tastes like the land—like honey—is a light reinforcement of the connection with the land. Martyrs who have been longing for a taste of milk and honey, longing for the Promised Land, longing for Sabbath, will receive it. They have been waiting to ascend in an exodus from the base of the altar to the heavenly temple, and now the time has come. When the mystery of God is finished, that exodus will take place.

The Angel swears ὅτι χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται (v. 6), literally, “time no longer will be.” This is not a promise (or threat) that human beings will one day cease to experience time, that we will be transfigured from temporal creatures into atemporal ones.

As suggested, for instance, by Andrew of Caesarea: “God swears by himself, since there is none greater than he. But the angels, being creatures, swear by the Creator, for due to our untrustworthiness, they are the guarantors of what is said by them. They swear that in the coming age there will no longer be time which is measured by the sun, since eternal life is transcendent to temporal measure.” He acknowledges an alternative explanation, that “there is not much time after the six voices of the angel before the prophecies are fulfilled” (Weinrich 2005: 149–50).

Nor does this imply the softer claim that, though we remain temporal, our temporality will be changed from a time of measurable moments and units to some form of seamlessly cyclical time.

As argued by Paul Griffiths (2014: chapters 15–16), who distinguishes “metronomic time,” characterized by units of time that come to an end, which Griffiths regards as “an artifact of the fall,” from “systolic time,” time concentrated, contracted, pleated, folded around the events of the cross and resurrection. Systolic time is the time of the liturgy, and the time of the Beatific Vision. Griffiths reaches this distinction, however, by ignoring the Bible’s account of *prelapsarian* time. He argues that all ends—including sunsets and seasonal changes—are the result of sin. Yet Scripture is clear that the rhythm of evening and morning is part of the good creation, and that human beings are plugged into that rhythm from the beginning, taught to dance their lives by according to the drumbeat of the sun and the strings of the moon. Griffiths might appeal to Rev. 21:23, 25, which state that there will be no need for sun or moon in the new Jerusalem, and that there will be no night. We will examine those texts below. But even if Griffiths is right to see this a promise of systolic time, it is a mistake to retroject that form of temporality back into Eden. Eden’s time was metronomic, and if it is designed to be fulfilled in systolic time, it is designed to “die.” Whatever we conclude about the final state of humanity and creation, Edenic time was inherently metronomic. And the Creator declared this to be good, very good.

Contemporary commentators are quick to deny that the passage refers to the cessation of time *per se*, and most English translations render the clause, “there will be no more delay.” Taking Rev. 10:6 as a statement about an eternal duration of time is a-contextual. The question raised by Revelation and the text is not whether we will be temporal eternally, but whether the sealed secrets will *ever* be unsealed. The issue is not the final state, but the fulfillment of God’s commitments within history. That line of interpretation certainly captures the import of the Angel’s oath. When the sixth seal is opened, the world begins to come crashing down, but the end is held off because “another angel” from the sunrise instructs the angels at the corners of the land to hold back the winds while the 144,000 are sealed on the forehead (7:1-3). That “another angel” is the same Angel of Jesus we meet in chapter 10. It makes for a neat symmetry: The same ascending angel who is responsible for the first delay descends from heaven to announce the end of the delay. In chapter 6, the initiation of final judgment comes in response to the prayers of the martyrs from the altar, and the time interval is the time between their prayer and their vindication (Beale 2015: 206). Now, the Angel who took the prayers of the martyrs to heaven descends to assure them that the interval is nearly done.

Farrer (1970) argues that delay determines the structure of the early chapters of the book. The sixth seal and sixth trumpet are both followed by what he describes as an “interlude,” a delaying device that holds off the final catastrophe. In the final sequence of seven, the vials, there is no interlude, because the end has finally come and there is no room for repentance. Farrer is wrong to describe these moments as “interludes,” but his point can still stand: The

extension of the sixth seal and trumpet creates an anticipation of a final end that has not yet come. By contrast, the septet of bowls is fast-paced, relentless, entirely *undelayed*.

That, as I say, is a reasonable interpretation of the passage. But the text actually *states* χρόνος οὐκέτι ἔσται. Whatever the Angel means by χρόνος, his announcement—sealed with an oath—is that it *is no more*. And this cancellation of χρόνος is, positively, the completion of the mystery of God, a fulfillment of the gospel preached by the prophets (v. 7). This fulfillment is what the Angel describes as the *end* of χρόνος. John is perfectly capable of speaking of micro-chrons (χρόνον μικρόν, 6:11) without implying the cessation of temporality. If he meant only that there was a short time before the fulfillment, he could have said so. Instead, he said that χρόνος would no longer be. Can we make some sense of that?

It has long been acknowledged by biblical scholars, philosophers, and theologians that time is not an empty, undifferentiated reality, but has varying qualities and contours. There is the time of the game, the time of liturgy, the time of the class, the time of boredom, the time of dinner, and the time of intense conversation, the long, long time during which young people long to grow up. There are extended periods of time, and there are moments when events rush together, pile up on top of one another. Many have used the Greek terms χρόνος and καιρός to express this last difference.

For Heidegger, χρόνος is a quantitative conception of time, the relentless passing of moments from the no-longer through the now to the not yet; καιρός, by contrast, is time in a qualitative sense as the opportune moment when the resolute, authentic person seizes the present in order to take over his past in a free action. In this *Augenblick*, this moment of vision, one can redeem time (Critchley 2009; Murchadha 2013: 26–38).

Tillich (1936: 50) brought Heidegger into a theological context, setting καιρός and λόγος in opposition to one another:

While time remains insignificant in that static type of thinking in terms of form, and even history presents only the unfolding of the possibilities and laws of the Gestalt “Man,” in this dynamic thinking in terms of creation, time is all-decisive, not empty time, pure expiration; not the mere duration either, but rather qualitatively fulfilled time, the moment that is creation and fate. We call this fulfilled moment, the moment of time approaching us as fate and decision, *Kairos*. In doing this we take up a word that was, to be sure, created by the Greek linguistic sense, but attained the deeper meaning of fullness of time, of decisive time, only in the thinking of early Christianity and its historical consciousness. The thinking in the Kairos, which is the determinant of the second line explained in our historical consideration, is opposed to the thinking in the timeless Logos, which belongs to the methodical main line. Thus the correctness of our original distinction becomes apparent, and at the same time the question of the essential relationship between Kairos and Logos becomes urgent. For it must become apparent that the consideration of reality in the sense of the timeless Logos is at best an immense abstraction which cannot do justice to the passing fate and decision of immediate existence. As soon, however, as this fact is realized, we stand in the midst of the problems of

the second line, to the systematic examination of which the subsequent arguments shall contribute.

Kairos is the eruption of a new theonomy beyond the dialectic of autonomy and heteronomy. It is not insignificant that Heidegger's initial ideas on the subject were formed by interaction with Christian writers—Paul, Luther, Kierkegaard. Might there be something similar in John's usage?

John uses both *καιρός* (1:3; 11:18; 12:12, 14; 22:10) and *χρόνος* (2:21; 6:11; 10:6; 20:3). What might we infer from his usage? We begin with *χρόνος*. Prior to 10:6, the word is used twice, first to describe the time that Jezebel has been given for repentance (2:21) and second with reference to the little time that the martyrs will have to wait for their vindication (6:11). In philosophical terms, both of these connote duration, as does the last use of the term in 20:3, the "short time" during which Satan is released after the millennium. If *χρόνος* is no longer, it seems plausible to conclude that temporal *duration* has come to an end.

That is too abstractly metaphysical. John is not concerned with durationality as such, but with the specific duration given to the wicked to repent or harden, the duration during which the martyrs wait for justice to be done. *That* duration is coming to an end. Chapter 9 ended with the grim declaration that even the punishing plague of locorpions and the angelic army from the east has not driven the people of the land to repentance. The plagues have so far been disciplinary, forming a body of time for repentance that is simultaneously a time for patience. The Angel swears, though, that this time is ending. Soon Jezebel and her followers will not have any time to repent. And the good news is that the martyrs will no longer have to wait for their robes and exaltation.

On the other hand, John sometimes uses *καιρός* in the sense of "event," perhaps even "decisive event." At the beginning and end of the Apocalypse, John writes that the *καιρός* is near (1:3; 22:10), the moment when the prophecy will come to fruition and fulfillment. This repeats Jesus's announcement of the kingdom: "Repent, for the kingdom of God is near. The time (*καιρός*) is fulfilled" (Mk 1:15). As the seventh trumpet trumpets (11:8), voices in heaven praise God for bringing redemption when the time to judge the dead came. Again, *καιρός* is not a segment of time with duration, but a decisive event. John's usage is not uniform. In Rev. 12:12, the dragon's rage is stirred by his knowledge that he only a short time (*ὀλίγον καιρὸν ἔχει*; a micro-kairon), and the woman who escapes from the dragon is nourished in the wilderness for three and a half *καιροί* (12:14). Yet, it is consistent with John's usage to say that *χρόνοι* are ended by decisive *καιροί*, which in turn initiate a new duration of *χρόνος*.

Again, that is a metaphysical extrapolation from John's text. What he is directly concerned about is the duration of time portrayed in his visions.

The Angel-Spirit of Jesus swears in the name of the Creator that this time is no more, because the moment, *the* event, has come near. When the χρόνος of discipline and patience ends, then the mystery of God will be finished (ἐτελέσθη). This is the word that Jesus speaks from the cross, when he proclaims that it is finished, often taken as a declaration that salvation is entirely accomplished by the death of Jesus. Yet the work of the cross is not completed without the resurrection, the resurrection is not completed without Pentecost, and Pentecost is not completed until the end of the old order in AD 70. The final completion of the mystery of God requires that the contents of the book be enacted, and this includes the persecution and vindication of the martyr church. Until *that* happens, the mystery of God is unfinished.

The following paragraphs are taken, with slight modification, from Leithart (2015).

Liberal Christianity dispensed with the primitive apocalypticism that confesses a real end of the world, but for Eugen Rosenstock-Huussy, the central affirmation of the creed is that “Christians believe in an end of the world, *not only once but again and again*” (1946: 61; emphasis added). This is not simply a statement about repeated catastrophes, but a confession of faith in the intervention of Last Judgment into history. For Rosenstock, faith in a final future judgment was of the essence of Christian faith and the motor of Christian energy. If there is a final judgment, then there is *a* trajectory to history, as it moves from the Alpha of creation toward the Omega point of the unity of the human race. These twin dimensions of judgment—the reality of real endings in the middle of history and the movement toward a final accounting—were essential to the Christian understanding of progress in history. Without a real final judgment, history is headed nowhere; without apocalypses in the midst of time, events simply accumulate one after the other, leaving no way to discern the beginnings and endings or shapes of epochs. Christian faith in a final judgment thus gave the world a vision of a unified but complexly articulated history. As that faith withers under the influence of liberal theology, the West is left only with a vision of “progresses,” technical improvements in the absence of hope for the progress of humanity as such. Rosenstock sees this failure of faith in the abandonment of the Christian division of time into BC and AD, which “signifies the capitulation of theology before ‘science’” and is “part of the suicide of Europe” (73).

Against this Christian creedal background, Rosenstock tells the story of Western history and the Christian church as a series of “apocalypses,” eruptive revolutions that remake time, language, and human experience. Revolution is not an odd anomaly in political history. Rather, “there is no Christian country and no national character which can boast that it is founded on evolutionary institutions alone” (quoted in Cristaudo 2012: 250). Again and again, Rosenstock says, the church has been dead, but it has always risen again, often with more brilliance than before.

Calendars reveal history as the “autobiography” of a race, ultimately the unified autobiography of the entire human race. Rosenstock-Huussy notes at the beginning of *Out of Revolution* that mankind would lack autobiography if human society had “always been like modern society: completely sensational, totally forgetful, and wonderfully devoid of memory.” But humanity has not always been so: “mankind has always, with the utmost tenacity, cultivated its calendar,” and this is in itself a cultivation of memory. “A day introduced into the calendar or a day stricken out of the calendar, means a real change in the education and tradition of a nation. Mankind writes its own history long before the historians visit its battlefields; days, festivals, holidays, the order of meals, rest and vacations, together with

religiously observed rituals and symbols, are sources of political history, though rarely used by the average political or economic historian” (Rosenstock-Huessy 1938: 8).

Again, this is a generalization from the few hints we find in Revelation. Yet Rosenstock-Huessy’s vision of the pattern of history—a pattern of endings and new beginnings—does seem analogous to John’s use of *χρόνος* and *καίρος*.

According to the Angel, the mystery of God will be finished in the time of the seventh trumpet (10:7). That gives us a clue to the meaning of “mystery of God.” When the seventh trumpet begins to blow, we hear that the kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ (11:15). That is the heart of the mystery. After Adam’s sin, the world was given over into the hands of the devil. He was the ruler of this world. In Job, he is among the sons of God, and in Revelation 12 the dragon is positioned in the heavenly places, ready to stop the work of redemption at the beginning. Once the events of the seventh trumpet and its aftermath occur, that will no longer be the case. This world will be given over to the Christ, and to the saints of the highest One who will rule with him. The new creation is fulfilled without delay when the seventh trumpet begins to blow. It is now *our* world, not Satan’s. That is the coming of *God’s* kingdom.

That could all be explicated at some length, but a few quick conclusions: First, the unveiling of the mystery of God is linked in Revelation to the saints’ inheritance of the new creation (→Rev. 21:1-8). The completion that the angel promises is *that* completion. Second, the force of the angel’s oath is that this completion will occur *soon*, without delay. Sometime shortly after John wrote Revelation, something that can be called the “finishing of the mystery of God” occurred, something to do with deliverance from slavery, inheritance, and rest. For John, the arrival of the new creation is not something past or in the distant future, but in the near future, before the first century ended. Finally, we need to recall the red-horse framework of the trumpet section. Time is about to end because first-century conflicts are coming to a final head in a witness of blood.

Paul’s understanding of “mystery” is also relevant. A mystery is something kept hidden and later revealed. Paul writes about the mystery of all things summed up in Christ, the Last Adam. At other times, the mystery is the formation of a new humanity in Christ, the breaking down of the dividing wall between Jew and Gentile and the formation of a new human race. The “great mystery” (Eph. 5:11-22) is the union of Christ with his bride. That is the mystery toward which the action of Revelation is moving, by the process unveiled in the events of chapters 12–15, the gathering of the firstfruits of the Bride so as to prepare the Bride for her descent from heaven to earth. That is the great

mystery that all Israel will be saved in the same sweeping divine act that saves the Gentiles.

The notion of “mystery” is rooted in the OT sanctuary system, where the gifts of God are hidden from the people of God until the people of God are ready for them. Within the Most Holy Place are the three gifts of God: The gift of Torah, the Word and wisdom of God to rule; the gift of Manna, the bread that gives life and power; and the gift of Person or ruler, signified by Aaron’s budding rod, with its hoary head of almond blossoms. Word, Sacrament, and Elder are locked away in the ark. Jesus opens the treasure chest of God to distribute his treasures (Jordan 1999a: 284).

The NT also speaks about the mystery of iniquity. Whenever God unveils a new dimension of the mystery of Christ, a new mystery of iniquity is unveiled as well. Later in Revelation (→13:1-8), we see the full unveiling of the mystery of iniquity, a counterfeit new covenant.

The phrase τὸ ... μυστήριον ... τῆς ἀνομίας comes from 2 Thess. 2:7, in a context where Paul sketches the order of events that will lead to the Parousia of the Lord Jesus. First there must be an apostasy (v. 3), as Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse. The man of lawlessness who brings destruction, a son of Belial, will be revealed (v. 3), a man who exalts himself and stands in the temple pretending to play God (v. 4). In the church, the mystery involves a man and a temple, a priestly Lamb and a bridal sanctuary; the mystery of iniquity is also focuses on a man and a temple, the false priest and the woman Wickedness, the false bride, the harlot (cf. Zechariah 2). This mystery of lawlessness, Paul says, is already at work (v. 7), but there is restraint on the mystery of lawlessness. When the restrainer is removed, the Lord Jesus will come. That fits the scenario presented in Revelation, where the demonically inspired Jewish elites rage against the church. Revelation pictures Jerusalem as a harlot who makes herself God, declaring an idolatrous “I am” (→18:7). For a time, the attack is restrained by Roman power, but once the Roman beast turns against the church, the restraint is removed and all hell breaks loose. Then the end of the *oikoumene* is near. Then the Lamb is about to come to rescue and judge.

Tertullian (*On the Resurrection of Flesh* 24) and Chrysostom (*Homily 4 on 2 Thessalonians*) both interpret the “restrainer” as the Roman empire standing in the way of the Antichrist (cited in Bruce 1982: 171).

Edible words

The Angel descends, thunders roar, a heavenly voice speaks. After the Angel swears, the same three speakers speak again, though in a different order. The heavenly voice tells John to ask for the book (10:8), the Angel tells him to “Take, eat” (10:9), and “they” commission John as a prophet (10:11). Schematically:

- A. Angel descends.
- B. Thunders roar.

- C. Heavenly voice speaks.
 A' Angel swears an oath.
 C' Heavenly voice speaks.
 A'' Angel says "Take, eat."
 B' "They" commission.

The command to take the book and its execution are structured in a chiasm (vv. 8b–9a):

- A. Go take the book
 B. that is open in the hand of the angel
 C. standing on sea and earth
 B' and I went to the angel
 A' saying, Give me the book.

The A sections both refer to the book, the B sections both mention the angel. Perhaps the C section should be seen as a clause defining the angel mentioned in B. Even so, it is the unique to this section.

Verses 9b–10 are likewise chiasitic:

- Frame: καὶ λέγει μοι, Λάβε καὶ κατάφαγε αὐτό
 -καὶ πικρανεῖ σου τὴν κοιλίαν
 -ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ στόματί σου ἔσται γλυκὺ ὡς μέλι
 -καὶ ἔλαβον τὸ βιβλαρίδιον ἐκ τῆς χειρὸς τοῦ ἀγγέλου καὶ κατέφαγον αὐτό
 -καὶ ἦν ἐν τῷ στόματί μου ὡς μέλι φλυκὺ
 -καὶ ἔφαγον αὐτό, ἐπικράνθη ἡ κοιλία μου
 -Frame: καὶ λέγοθσίν μοι, Δεῖ σε πάλιν προφητεῦσαι ἐπὶ λαοῖς καὶ γλώσσαις καὶ βασιλεῦσιν πολλοῖς

In each of the frame sections, someone talks to John. In the first, the angel tells him to take and eat the book, and at the end "they" command is to prophesy.

Eating the book is the prerequisite for prophecy to the nations, since the book contains the words John will speak. He speaks what he eats, as the spiritual food transforms him into itself.

Before John gets the order to take the book, he is told to approach the angel: ὑπάγε λάβε (v. 8). To approach the Angel-Spirit of Jesus is analogous to approaching the temple and glory of God. Like a priest, John is to enter the presence of the glory to take the book. John imitates the Lamb who earlier went to the Enthroned One and took the book from his right hand (ἦλθεν καὶ εἰληφεν ... ὅτε ἔλαβεν τὸ βιβλίον, 5:7-8). It is just as Rev. 1:1 described: God→Jesus the Lamb; Jesus the Lamb→his Angel-Spirit; the Angel-Spirit→John; John→the slaves of God. We anticipate that whatever

follows will be the unveiling of Jesus. It is: Jesus unveiled in the self-offering of the saints, unveiled in the unveiling of his Bride.

John approaches, asks, and receives. The unsealed book is handed over to those who ask. The secret things of God are unveiled to those who go and take, who ask for the book to be given. When we ask for a book, he does not give us a dead word. When we ask for his word, he does not give us a stone or a serpent but life-giving food. God gives the book to the prophet because he does not intend to accomplish his purposes without us. *Only* the Lamb is worthy to open the book. Once he opens the book, though, the Lamb delivers it to a δούλος, John, who will speak it to his συμδούλοι. The fulfillment of the contents of the book depends on John's prophesying and the saints' enactment. As Sweet (1979: 177) puts it, "Christ's victory depends for its earthly completion on Christians eating the message ... they must share his bitter cup."

The book is sweet as honey to John's taste. The land of promise flows with milk and honey, and a taste of honey is a taste of the land. Manna tastes like honey (Exod. 16:31), since it is a foretaste of the good things of the land. Even in the wilderness, John the Baptist eats honey because the land is with him, all the promised blessings are available in the desert where John baptizes. John the Seer tastes the honey of the promised new creation as he eats the book. The book reveals the completion of the mystery of God, disclosing the gifts of God hidden away in the Most Holy Place, the high point of the "land." By eating the book that contains the mystery, he receives a taste of the mystery itself.

The secrets of the book are not all sweet, and the bitterness John feels in his stomach links the rite of jealousy (Numbers 5). A man who suspects his wife of adultery brings her to the tabernacle for a test that reveals her guilt or innocence. Charges are written on a book, which is washed off into a pot of water, mixed with holy dust from the tabernacle floor, and given to the woman to drink. If she is an adulteress, the concoction causes bitterness in her stomach, and makes her stomach wither and her thigh to swell—a false pregnancy. No individual man ever carries out this rite in the Bible, but it comes up several times as a test for Yahweh's bride, Israel, most notably in the aftermath of the golden calf incident. Moses destroys the golden calf and forces a jealousy test on the people: He crushes the calf and the tablets of the ten words to powder, pours them into the water, and forces the people to drink it (Exod. 32:15-20). Levites slaughter those who are guilty of spiritual adultery (Exod. 32:25-29).

John eats the book, and it is bitter in his stomach, but his thigh does not swell and his belly does not wither. He passes the test. He is not an adulterer, not a faithless prophet, not a practitioner of πορνεία or a consort of the

πόρνη, Babylon. Having consumed the book, John *becomes* a jealousy test for the people to whom he prophesies, exposing their hearts as he speaks the word he has consumed. A woman who passes is promised children (Num. 5:28), which implies that a woman who fails is cursed with barrenness. John swallows the bitter book and is still fruitful. The book goes down into John's womb (κοιλία, cf. Matt. 19:12; Lk. 1:15, 41, 42, 44) and gives birth to prophecy, making John a prophetic father-mother of many children.

When the Son of Man appeared to Jesus on the Lord's Day, he commissions John to record messages to the angels of seven churches of Asia. That commission comes by word and a touch, a touch that raises John from the ground to write. His commissioning as prophet comes by word and meal, by a command to prophesy and the gift of an edible book. He is made a seer by a baptismal touch, a prophet at a Eucharistic meal. As Thomas Aquinas said, spiritual food does not become the eater but transforms the eater into itself. Having eaten the heavenly word as a gift from the Angel of Jesus, John speaks the Word because he becomes a word of the living Word.

Strictly, however, the *Angel* does not commission him. Rather, "*they* said, 'You must prophesy'" (v. 11). Who are *they*? The nearest plural antecedent is "the seven thunders" (10:3-4; Aune (1998a: 573) considers various possibilities, but not the thunders). The thunders commission John to speak to speak with the voice of thunder. The strong Angel roars like a lion (10:3), the lion of Judah (5:5), because he is the Angel of the Lamb-Lion. The thunders echo the lion voice of the angel, who speaks what he receives from the Father and Son. The seven speaking thunders echo the voice of the sevenfold Spirit.

That thunderous voice fits with the wider phenomenology of the Spirit in Scripture. When Adam sins, Yahweh comes roaring into Eden "in the Spirit of the day" (Gen. 3:8). The Spirit descends to Sinai with thunder and a deafening trumpet sound (Exodus 19) and enters the upper room with the sound of a wild, rushing wind (Acts 2). The Spirit's voice is the voice of many waters, tornado winds, thunder. Revelation itself signals a connection between the Spirit and thunder in John's description of the Father's throne (→4:1-11). Flashes of lightning, voices, and thunder come from the throne, to which John immediately adds, "and seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God" (4:5). If we take that *kai* epexegetically, the connection is even stronger: "lightning and peals of thunder, *even* ... the seven Spirits of God." When John mentions the seven Spirits in Revelation, they have become the seven eyes of the Lamb (→5:6). Initially, seven Spirits proceed from the throne, but now that the Lamb is the Father's throne, the Spirit is seen to proceed from him. John is commissioned by the seven Spirits that proceed from Jesus, which *are* the Lamb's lightning eyes and the echoing thunder of his voice. John is commissioned by Jesus,

whose voice is vocalized by the sevenfold Breath of God, and so reverberates as seven thunders. After being commissioned by the Son of Man to record messages and visions, John is commissioned by the thunder of the Spirit to prophesy.

The angel gives the book saying, λάβε καὶ κατάφαγε αὐτό (v. 9), nearly identical to Jesus's Eucharistic offer (λάβετε φάγετε, Matt. 26:26). The book is a Eucharistic gift (Boxall 2006: 157; Aune 1998a: 572). The word of God is a sacrament, given as food to eat and digest. As Augustine and the Reformers were fond of saying, sacraments are visible words; the word, in turn, is an audible sacrament, an audible communication of the presence of the living God. Word and food are brought seamlessly together here. John *eats a book*, making a Eucharist of the Word. Jesus gives himself, the edible Word, through the agency of the Spirit. When John eats the book, its contents are grafted into his "inmost parts" (Bede 1997: 145) so that the words of the book become also *his* words. John's position is unique, but we can draw a general Eucharistic conclusion: Having received the edible Word from the hand of the Spirit, *we* eat and inwardly digest it in order to keep and speak it.

Jesus himself is commissioned as a prophet at his baptism by a thunder voice from heaven and the Spirit's descent like a dove. Like Master, like slave: John is made a prophet by the Angel, through a heavenly voice of thunder and a meal. It is a *Triune* commissioning. The Angel is the Spirit; the voice from heaven is the Father; the thunders echo the voice of one like the Son of Man. John becomes a prophet through the voice of the Father, the thunder of the Son, and the food of the Spirit. It takes a Trinity to make a prophet.

Measuring the temple

And a reed like a rod was given to me, saying, "Arise and measure the temple of God and the altar and those who prostrate in it. And the court outside the temple cast out, and do not measure it, because it is given to the nations. And the holy city will be trampled forty-two months. And I will give to my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy 1260 days, clothed with sackcloth. These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands which stand before the Lord of the land. And if anyone wishes to harm them, fire comes out of their mouths and burns their enemies. And if anyone wishes to harm them, thus it is necessary for him to be killed. These have the authority to key-shut the sky-heaven, that rain might not fall during the days of their prophesying,

and they have authority over the waters to turn them into blood and to smite the land with every plague as often as they wish.

“And when they will finish their witness, the beast who ascends out of the abyss will make war with them and will gain victory over them and kill them. And their corpse will be in the square of the great city, which is spiritually called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. And some of peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their corpse three and a half days, and they will not permit their corpse to be laid in a memorial. And those who dwell in the land will rejoice over them and make merry, and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell in the land.

“And after three days and a half, the Spirit of life from God entered in them and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. And they heard a voice great out of the sky-heaven, saying to them, ‘Ascend here!’ And they ascended into the sky-heaven in the cloud, and their enemies marveled at them. And in that hour a great earthquake happened, and one-tenth of the city fell and seven thousand names of men were killed in the earthquake, and the rest became afraid and they gave glory to the God of heaven.”

The second woe has passed. Behold the third comes quickly.

—Rev. 11:1-14

Having passed the jealousy test, John prophesies to peoples and tongues and nations and kings. After he eats the book, the thunders command him to speak the things that John is about to speak are what the thunder said.

T. S. Eliot to the contrary, it is *not* “Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata,” nor “Shantih, shantih, shantih.”

The thunder talks about two witnesses who prophesy in the great city, speaking with fire, bringing plagues, and doing signs. A beast arises from the abyss to kill them, and their bodies are left exposed in the street while the people of the city rejoice over them. The Spirit gives them life and raises them to heaven in a cloud. An earthquake shakes the city and kills 7,000, and the rest are terrified of God. Many repent, mourning because they see the *One* they pierced (→1:7) in the two they slayed. That is the second woe, or the conclusion to the second woe that began with the blowing of the sixth trumpet.

Before he records the story of the witnesses, John has another job, a prophetic one. He receives a measuring reed like a rod and is told to “rise” to

measure. This might simply be a command to get up and do, but given the fact that John was suffering gastrointestinal bitterness, it is possible that he has been lying down. In his first commission, he falls before Jesus like a dead man and is raised by a touch. Here, he is raised from the ground to prophesy. Death comes first, then prophesy. The call of a prophet is always a slaying. Genuine prophesy is always post-mortem.

The chapter break at chapter 11 obscures the connection between the command to prophesy and the gift of the reed. The speaker in 10:11 is plural (the thunders), but then, according to many translations, “someone” tells John to rise and measure. The Greek does not justify this insertion. It is not until 11:3 that a new speaker is introduced: “I will grant.” Woodenly translated, verse 1 reads, “And was given to me a reed like a rod, saying.” The thunders tell John to prophesy, he is given the reed like a rod and told to measure, and the thunders commission him to use the reed. The reed is the tool he needs to prophesy concerning peoples, nations, tongues, and kings. The reed is a prophetic gift from the seven thunders.

John has been tracking with Ezekiel throughout chapter 10, eating a book as Ezekiel did and suffering pain as a result. The reed is also Ezekielian. In Ezekiel 40, Ezekiel sees a man like bronze with a measuring line and a reed (v. 3, *κάλαμος*) who begins measuring the temple, its walls, guardhouses, and gates. Ezekiel watches the man measure; John is commanded to do the measuring himself. Ezekiel (43:10–12) records the measurements so that the people of Israel will be ashamed of their sins. The temple’s clean lines and symmetrical measurements and strong guardhouses are a portrait of an ideal Israel, the kind of “house” the house of Israel is called to be. When they realize that they do not “measure up,” the Israelites will be ashamed. John’s measurements are also intended to construct and convict.

Measured things—the bronze altar, the table of showbread, the lampstand and the golden altar, the ark—are *holy* things. Measured spaces are holy spaces, and measured furniture is holy furniture. Measured people, that is, *counted* people, are holy people. As many commentators have noted, John’s measuring parallels the counting of the 144,000 in chapter 7 (e.g., Chilton 1987: 273; Aune 1998a: 604). The two scenes match structurally. The sealing of the 144,000 is the second vision in the sixth seal section, and the measuring of the temple is part of the final episode of the sixth trumpet. A measured thing, measured space, counted person becomes Yahweh’s property, which is why he can take a census of Israel or count up those who are sealed, but plagues Israel when David does the same (2 Samuel 24). In Revelation, both the sealed company and the measured temple are separated off as holy, as the Lord’s property.

Measuring distinguishes holy and profane. It bounds off a holy space, and therefore marks it off from the common space outside. That is what John's *prophesying* will accomplish. Prophesying, like priestly measuring, is an art of division. Jesus warned that he brought a sword not peace, and he said that the preaching of his disciples would likewise divide their hearers. Some hear and believe, some hear and hate Jesus. Every time a prophet speaks, he attracts some and repels others. Every time a prophet speaks, he measures and draws lines to divide holy from profane. Having received the book from the Angel-Spirit of Jesus, John becomes an agent of the Red Spirit of division and conflict. His Isaiah-commission advances, as he prophesies to a people already deaf and blind in order to deafen and blind them, in order to draw the line between idolaters suffering from sensory deprivation and true worshipers who will constitute the holy city.

If there are *not* clear lines, it is because the word is not being faithfully prophesied, because those who have been given the reed do not measure straight. Much of the church's murky confusion in the early twenty-first century is a failure of prophetic topography, and the world's confusions are a natural product of the church's. How can anyone tell the difference between marriage and an abomination if no one speaks the word of God with force and clarity, if no one measures off the holy from the profane and detestable? Only when the Word is eaten, digested, and spoken do boundaries become clear. Preachers and teachers need to speak with the sharp straightness of a yardstick.

Κάλαμος can refer to a writing implement, a pen (3 John 13; cf. Farrer 1964: 128–9). Having eaten and digested the heavenly book, he is ready to take up the other tool of the prophetic scribe, the pen. It would be a mistake, however, simply to replace “reed” with “pen,” since John is instructed to use it to “measure” (μέτρησον) the temple, altar, and people. If he uses a pen to do it, the measurement is metaphorical. It is best to let the ambiguity of the word stand. John's implement is “literally” (in his visionary experience) a reed, metaphorically a pen. Which means: To write is to measure; with pen as well as with reed, we distinguish holy from profane, clean and unclean. Like prophetic speech, writing is an art of differentiation, distinguishing true and false, holy and defiled.

Though told to prophesy, the work he is given seems more suited to a priest. Priests were commissioned to distinguish and separate the holy and the profane, the clean and unclean. They were specialists in purity and holiness. The conflation of priestly and prophetic tasks is not as anomalous as it might appear to modern readers. In the aftermath of Enlightenment attacks on priestcraft, and the Weberian theorization of the distinction between institutionalized (priestly) and charismatic (prophetic) leadership, the two offices have been played against each other. In the Bible and the biblical

world, the two are much more intimately connected. Priests are often caretakers of oracles, and many of the OT prophets are priests (Ezekiel, Jeremiah, possibly Isaiah). John's prophetic ministry, like all prophetic ministry, is priestly.

John's reed is like a *ῥάβδος*. A rod is *not* a measuring device, but an instrument or symbol of rule and power. Shepherds use rods (Genesis 30), and Moses's rod is the instrument of his power in Egypt (cf. Exodus 7). The son installed by Yahweh on his throne bears a *ῥάβδος* of iron (Psalm 2), and the shepherd king of Psalm 23 leads his flock with a *ῥάβδος* and a staff. Jesus wields a rod of iron, and promises the same authority to victors (Rev. 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). John *measures*, but the fact that his reed is like a rod means that, as prophet, he shares the rule of the royal Son. John is a victor who, like the Servant of Yahweh (Isa. 11:4), shatters with wicked with the rod of his mouth. The Word rules by a rod, sharpened into a mouth-sword; John's rod is also a means of communication, an implement for measuring and writing. Because John speaks and writes as a prophet-priest, he rules. As prophet, John is also priest and king.

This may seem gauzy and nebulous, but it is quite practical. A priest in OT Israel is a teacher of Torah, and spent his life applying Torah. Yahweh's word describes certain conditions as impure, and a priest is commissioned to repeat those pronouncements and judgments in specific situations. Seeing a spot on a man's arm, he judges it "skin disease" or "scab," and his application of Torah categorizes the man's condition in relation to the tabernacle. If the priest pronounces him "unclean," unclean he is, and he will remain unclean until he performs the prescribed ritual or the priest pronounces him clean. A priest's speech is a reed that measures and distinguishes and draws boundaries. And the priest's words are a *rod*, an instrument of rule, insofar as he exercises authority over entry and exit into the tabernacle and, more broadly, configures and arranges the people of Israel by his pronouncements.

Likewise, John eats the book, and is ready to speak and write. In speaking and writing he makes pronouncements about his hearers, sometimes explicit ("generation of vipers"), sometimes implicitly (every call to repent separates the penitent from the impenitent). Perhaps he really does preach a sermon in the temple courts, measuring out a holy place (those who hear and respond) within the holy place by speaking the word he has eaten. In whatever setting, he takes dominion—extends Jesus's dominion—over his hearers, mapping the world of his hearers by his words. His reed is a pen is a rod of rule and judgment. This is one of the miraculous powers of human language. By the mere vibration of vocal chords and columns of air, by pressing marks of ink on paper or manipulating pixels on a screen, we measure and change and

organize the world around us. The reed is mightier than the sword; it is more a shattering rod than the rod itself.

John's reed produces a prophecy, and the Apocalypse (or at least the following few chapters) is the prophecy he produces. In the first century, John's book divides between the holy ones who keep the things written in it, worship God, and witness to Jesus, and those who cling to their idols, drink the poison water of the temple, worship the image of the beast, and dally with the whore. By their faithful witness, the saints expose the poison of the temple, bring evidence against the enemies of the Lamb, and contribute to the lawsuit that God is carrying on against the world. The book, the very book we are commenting on, is the reed like a rod, which performs the priestly work of distinguishing the holy and the profane. That book still exists, and it still performs the same function. Through the reed that is Revelation, the Angel-Spirit of Jesus still measures *us*; through the rod that is Revelation, Jesus the Shepherd rules. "Commentary" on this book is fundamentally backward, involving an arrogant claim to measure the measuring rod. Yet we speak back to the words spoken, mindful that the book measures the reader, not the reader the book; mindful that we can never master the book written to master us.

Temple, altar, court, city

John is told to measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who prostrate in it. Taken at face value, this traces the basic zones of the temple. Israel's temple consists of the holy place and the most holy place, and outside the temple were non-priestly worshipers, connected with the temple by sacrifices at the altar. Worshipers ascend from the court to the temple, using the altar as a stepladder. Within the holy place is another altar that allowed priests to ascend from the holy to the most holy. Literally, worshipers offer animals on the bronze altar, and priests offer incense on the golden altar. By these rites of turning-to-smoke, worshipers and priests ascend to the Lord of the temple through their sacrifices and prayers. Smelling the animal turned to smoke, Yahweh's nose cools and he accepts the worshiper; in the incense smoke, the Lord hears the prayers of the priests.

The syntax of 11:1 suggests something more unusual. The Greek is: μέτρησον τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τὸ θυσιαστήριον καὶ τοὺς προκθινούντας ἐν αὐτῷ. Given its position in the sentence, the antecedent of the pronoun in ἐν αὐτῷ is "altar" rather than "temple." As it stands, the text hints that the worshipers do not worship in the temple but in the *altar*. It is possible to untangle the grammar, but the oddity may intentionally point to a feature of the temple. While the tabernacle is made of curtains strung on wooden frames, the temple is stone, like the altar. The interior walls of Solomon's temple are covered with cedar wood, flecked

with gold trim, which reflects the flickering light of the lampstands. A priest walking into the temple enters a stone structure whose interior is wood and fire. The temple is a gigantic altar, the priest himself being the sacrifice (cf. the parallel of priest and sacrificial animals in Leviticus 21–22). We might even translate Revelation 11:1 as “measure the temple of God, *even* the altar and those who prostrate in it” (taking *kai* *epexegetically*). Whatever the literal referent of “altar,” it is possible that it refers to the location *within which* the people worship, not merely the altar *at which* they worship.

Smalley (2005: 272) observes that the use of “altar” to describe the church points to the church as a people characterized by suffering sacrifice.

John is told *not* to measure the outer court (τὴν αὐλὴν τὴν ἔξωθεν), which means that the court is profane, outside the measured holy space of the temple and altar. John’s prophetic measuring is targeted: It is intended specifically to distinguish between the holy temple-altar-people and the outer court. Again we see a parallel between the measuring and the mustering, between the sealed 144,000 and the sanctified temple/altar. Outside are the ones who are not measured, by definition the ones who are not holy, not in the company of οἱ ἅγιοι. By his prophetic measuring, John clarifies the difference between holy and not-holy. By prophecy, he draws the line that marks the difference.

Once we venture further than, however, we run into controversy. What, after all, *is* the temple, altar, and people? What is the *court* that is not measured? Is it the literal temple and altar in Jerusalem, and, if so, does the text imply that the temple and altar are still standing? Some preterists have taken 11:1–2 as proof that John prophesied prior to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. I agree with the dating, but 11:1 is—pardon the pun—a thin reed on which to lean. This is clearly a visionary moment for John, and, besides that, Revelation as a whole is written in pictures. None of the other uses of *váoc* in Revelation refer to the temple in Jerusalem, but to an eschatological or heavenly temple (3:12; 7:15; 11:19; 14:15, 17; 15:5, 6, 8; etc.). Here too the temple signifies the spiritual temple of the church, the holy people that tabernacles in heaven (so Hippolytus, cf. Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 126; Tyconius, cited in Koester 2015: 440; Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 151; for options, see Boxall (2006: 160–1); Aune (1998a: 598–603); and Smalley (2005: 269–70)). “Holy city” has the same referent. The NT sometimes uses the phrase “holy city” to describe old Jerusalem (Matt. 4:5; 27:53), but in Revelation, the holy city is *always* the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city (21:2, 10; 22:19). The very fact that Rev. 11:2 speaks of a *ἅγιος* city indicates that it is a measured, sanctified space. In context, the “holy city” and the temple must be identical, both describing the measured space and both anticipating the sanctuary-city of Revelation 21–22 (Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 151; Boxall 2006: 162; Mounce 1997: 215). John is pre-measuring the city that will eventually descend from

heaven. By prophesying, he marks off the holy ones who will eventually reside in the holy city.

If this is a spiritual temple, what are the referents of the various zones of this temple? Some (Sweet 1979; Caird 1966) argue that the temple and the court represent the church in two aspects. As spiritual and heavenly reality, the church is safely measured off and protected in heaven. The court represents the bodies of the saints, which are trampled under the feet of Gentiles. And this, it is said, is what the remainder of the chapter describes: The martyrdom of the saints, which does not touch the inner reality of the church but advances the triumph of the Lamb. “The body they may kill,” but the spiritual heart of the church remains inviolable.

That is unsatisfactory for two reasons. The first is ecclesiological. On this interpretation, the church is a dual entity, with an inviolable spiritual core encased in a vulnerable carnal body. Martyrdom affects the latter, not the former. But the church *is* body, the body of Jesus. It is, of course, animated by the Spirit of Jesus, but that animation does not exist except as embodied in the many members of Christ. When the church is persecuted, the *church* is persecuted; when she is overcome, the *church* is overcome. The hope of the church is not that there is some hidden sanctuary our enemies can never touch. Our hope is not in the immortality of our ecclesial soul. Our hope is *resurrection of the body*. Jesus—not his “soul” or “spirit”—but *Jesus* died, and the church dies. Because the church dies as the body of the one who became dead and now lives, her death is not the end. But death is a moment in the church’s life cycle. *Necessarily* so, since she is the bride of the Crucified Lamb.

The other objection to this dualist interpretation is exegetical. Despite what some translations imply, the court is not simply *left* out. John is not told to *ignore* the αὐλή ναοῦ but to ἐκβαλε ἔξωθεν. (Mounce (1997: 212) cannot, then, be right to say that the temple and court *both* refer to the church). The language is used to describe the casting out of something unholy or defiled, often of persons (Aune 1998a: 607). Cain is “cast out” from the land (Gen. 4:14), Ishmael from the house of Abraham (21:10), Israel from Egypt (Exod. 6:1; 11:1). Yahweh casts out the nations from the land to make room for Israel (Deut. 11:23). In the sacrificial system, the crop of a bird is cast away from the altar (Lev. 1:16) and the stones of a leprous house are cast out of a city (Lev. 14:40; this is one of the rare places in the LXX where ἐκβαλω is used with ἔξω; it is never used with ἔξωθεν, as in Revelation 11). In the NT, it is the normal verb for exorcising demons. Jesus casts the money-changers from the temple (Jn 2:15), the Jews drive the blind man from the synagogue (Jn 9:34–35), and the prince of the world is “cast out” (Jn 12:31). John not only measures holy space, but *expels* the

unholy, as Jesus did the money-changers from the temple. By prophesying with his reed-rod, John measures off the church and simultaneously casts out another group as unclean or unholy.

Who or what is cast out? Perhaps they are believers who depart from Jesus under the pressure of persecution (cf. John 6). John's red-horse prophesying sharpens divisions and forces choices. Some find his sayings too hard and return to the world, and so are "given to the nations" (Rev. 11:2). It is better to say that the "court" of the temple represents the old covenant people, Israel as the people of the temple court. That fits the liturgical situation of the first century. Jewish worshipers never entered the presence of God, never ate the bread of heaven or drank wine in the sanctuary. They remained in the courtyard, while priests mediated between God and Israel. By contrast, the church gathers in a temple with a rent veil, where the way into the Most Holy has been opened. *All* are priests by union in the Spirit with the heavenly Priest. The hidden treasures of the sanctuary are distributed to all. John's prophesying thus separates the holy city of new Jerusalem, the church, from the old people of God.

The chiasmic structure of verses 1–2 supports this interpretation, associating the temple, altar, and worshipers with the holy city, and the court with an area that is neither temple nor holy city:

- A. Rise and measure the temple, altar, and worshipers, v. 1b
- B. Cast out the court outside the temple, v. 2a
- C'. And do not measure it, v. 2b
- B'. It has been given to the nations, v. 2c
- A'. And they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months, v. 2d

The court and the measured area are distinguished. The holy city is the temple, altar, and worshipers (A/A'); the court is the common thing that is handed over the nations (B/B'). The nations have a different relation to each. The nations take charge of the cast-out courtyard; as we will see, land-dwellers worship the beast (→13:3–4), and the city Babylon sits on many waters (→17:1, 15). The old city of Jerusalem is requisitioned by the Roman beast.

Meanwhile, the holy city, that is, the measured portion that encompasses the temple, altar, and worshipers, is *trampled* by the nations. The portion of the temple that gets trampled *must* be the measured portion, because that is the only part that qualifies as ἅγιος. The court cannot be the trampled "holy city," precisely because it has been "cast out" as *unholy*. Old Jerusalem is no longer a holy city but merely a "great city," another Babylon. The courtyard is the leprous house that needs to be dismantled and thrown aside. John's prophesying sanctifies new Jerusalem; it simultaneously profanes the old. The opening verses of chapter 11 describe a migration of the holy, from the

old temple to the new. Those who are cast out will not take kindly to the insult: They will kill the messengers.

In the process, inside and outside change places. Jews cast believers out of the temple or synagogues (cf. John 9), but in reality they are themselves cast out. In the very act of casting out followers of Jesus, the courtyard people of Israel make themselves outcasts. When they put Jesus to death outside the gate, the exurban place of the cross becomes the new most holy place, the center of a new holy city; when they kill Jesus outside the gate, they profane and pollute the old holy city with the blood of the innocent Lamb. So too here: When the Jews cast believers out of the temple and expel them from Israel, they are not protecting holy space but casting aside the holy things and constituting themselves as unholy. They are throwing out the holy ones whose presence would consecrate their house. That self-profanation is underscored by a more sobering divine inversion: *God* casts them out through his prophet.

If this is right, then the prophecy of trampling (πατήσουσιν) is *not* about Romans wrecking the city of Jerusalem but about the church's enemies—Jews and Romans together—trampling down the church. They treat a holy thing as unholy, a pearl thrown to pigs. In Revelation, grapes are “trampled underfoot” outside the city (→14:20) and Jesus “tramples” the wine press of God's wrath (→19:15). Jerusalem is cast out; but the saints are outside the camp, suffering with Jesus. Like the 144,000, like Jesus, the holy city is measured off, consecrated, in order to be treated as *unholy*. John's prophesying sanctifies the temple and altar so that they might share in the Lamb's profanation. This is the hope of the church—*not* that the holy city will make it through *untrampled*, but the city will be restored after trampling. The only protection is the protection of martyrdom, of rescue *through* death, of elevation through suffering witness. The hope of the church is: Die to live, like Jesus.

A larger numerological pattern comes into play here. Πόλις is used twenty-seven times in Revelation (3³). In the final visions of chapter 21–22, the word is used twelve times to describe the “holy city, new Jerusalem” (21:2, 10, 14, 15, 16 [2x], 18, 19, 21, 23; 22:14, 19). It is a neatly hidden numerological buttress in John's literary architecture, a reinforcement of his explicit indications that the new Jerusalem is the new Israel, the new twelve-tribed people.

Eleven uses refer explicitly and directly to the πόλις μέγαλα of Babylon or associated cities:

11:8: the “great city”

11:13: a tenth of the “great city” falls

14:20: the wine press is trodden outside the city

16:19: the “great city” was split, and “cities of the nations” fell

17:18: the “great city”

18:10: the “great city, Babylon, the strong city”

18:16: the “great city”

18:19: the “great city”

18:21: “Babylon, the great city”

Eleven uses of πόλις, all referring to the city that is being overthrown. The old city is reduced, now something less than the holy city. Old Jerusalem is no longer a full twelve, but an eleven.

The time period is specified: The city will be trampled underfoot for forty-two months, or three and a half years. Daniel prophesies that Jerusalem will be desolated for the same time period (Farrer 1964: 127). In both Daniel and Revelation “3 ½,” half of seven, is a broken week, a symbol of incomplete destruction, of a judgment arrested before it reaches full maturity. Jesus goes to the grave for three days, then rises again. Death cannot hold him for a week. The mid-week resurrection points to the pattern of history as a whole: Eschatological, resurrection life breaks into the middle of history, arresting the progress of sin and death before they reach their end. Like Jesus, the holy city will be trampled for a 3 ½ period, then rise again. This is why the holy city must be the church, for the harlot city does not suffer demolition for a mere not three-and-a-half days, or forty-two months. She experiences the full weight of destruction for a full week, until she is nothing but smoke and ashes. For the holy city, as for the two witnesses, the destruction is partial and temporary, death broken in the middle by resurrection life.

This is the first of several time references in chapters 11–13, each of them a variation on three-and-a-half. Chilton (1987: 274) notes a chiastic arrangement:

- A. 42 months, 11:2 (3 ½ years, calculated in months)
- B. 1260 days, 11:3 (3 ½ years, calculated in days)
- C. 3 ½ days, 11:9
- C'. 3 ½ days, 11:11
- B'. 1260 days, 12:6
- A'. 42 months, 13:5

The number 42 is not only 3 ½ years, but also reminds us of the genealogy of Matthew 1, which counts of 42 generations between Abraham and Christ (Chilton 1987: 275). The period of waiting for the fulfillment of promise was long, but now we learn that there is no longer any delay, that the end will come within a mere forty-two months.

Sweet (1979: 183) observes that each time period in this portion of Revelation is modeled on Jesus's ministry. Jesus ministers triumphantly for about 3 ½ years, then he is cut down, but after 3 days he is raised, vindicated,

and exalted. The two witnesses go through the same sequence: They prophesy for 1,260 days/3 ½ years, then they are killed and their bodies remain in the street for 3 ½ days until they are raised up. Forty-two *months* is a three and a half year period reckoned by the moon (Jordan 1999a: 117), while 1,260 *days* is the same period reckoned by the sun. In 12:6, the 1,260-day period is a period of the heavenly mother's protection in the wilderness; despite the dragon's best efforts, she remains in the daylight. The periods reckoned by the moon (11:2; 13:5) are both periods of persecution. During the first, the holy city is trampled by the nations, and during the second the beast exercises his power to blaspheme God's name and tabernacle and to make war against the saints (→13:6-7). These are the dark nights of the church's life. In biblical reckoning, however, evening is always the first stage of day, yielding to dawn. In chapter 11, the forty-two months of trampling are immediately followed by a description of the triumphant daytime ministry of the two witnesses (11:2-3), and the saints who are killed by the beast end up on thrones. There are also times when the church ceases to exist (or seems to). Such was Elijah's perception during the reign of Ahab, when he complained, with some justice, that he was the only one left who served Yahweh. As we shall see, the Elijah narrative forms a major part of the background to the witnesses. But that disappearance is never permanent. Jesus too, the true Israel, died for a period of three days. Out of those brief cessations, the Lord brings new life.

The time periods are primarily symbolic, but in Revelation 11–13, they have a close-to-literal reference.

Biblical prophecy mixes literal and figurative without much regard for modern standards of consistency. Daniel's seventy weeks prophecy begins with the decree of Cyrus and ends with the Messiah (Dan. 9:24-27). That period is symbolized as 7 x 70 weeks, representing 490 years. By contemporary chronology, that is not the *actual* time period between Cyrus and Christ. Yet in some details the chronology is exact. The seventy weeks are divided into three subunits—a seven-week period, a 62-week period, and a final week. The first period of forty-nine years represents the time between the decree of Cyrus and the completion of the walls of Jerusalem, and that half-century is literally true (following the chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah). A near-literal chronology is embedded within a symbolic one.

More generally, it seems that any apocalyptic allegory must mix literal and the figurative. If it is wholly literal, it is not allegorical; if wholly allegorical, it has no hooks to real events. If there is no literal hook, how can we begin to recognize allegory *as* allegory? Alexander the Great is not a goat, but he *does* rush across the surface of the earth, does beat down a great empire (the Persians, represented by a ram), is shattered and broken into four parts (Dan. 8:5-8). To insist on a reading that vision as consistently literal or consistently figurative is to destroy the music and dance of reading.

The saints are literally trampled underfoot for 3 ½ years between the outbreak of the Neronian persecution (AD 64) and Nero's suicide (AD 67). Later in the decade, the Romans besiege Jerusalem for roughly 42 months, from 67 to 70, under Vespasian and then under Titus. Literally, there are two successive 3 ½ year periods—first the holy city is trampled, then the great city is destroyed. The saints experience a half-week of trampling, but the city receives the end of the week of judgment, the full weight of God's wrath. John is most interested in the forty-two months of persecution of the church. And that is what the story of the two witnesses preview.

Two witnesses

The transition from verse 2 to verse 3 is puzzling. There is no change of speaker or break in the speech. The thunders tell John to “rise and measure,” but at the beginning of verse 3, another speaker breaks in, without introduction, speaking in first person. Who is “I”? And, if this “I” begins talking in verse 3, where does the speech end? Most English versions assume that the speaker stops after verse 3, and the remainder is narration, apparently from John. That is certainly not required by the Greek, which has no quotation marks. And it does not make much sense. Verse 3 begins the account of the two witnesses, and verse 4 describes the two witnesses. Why would the “I” stop just as he (or she) begins his (or her) story?

We can start by identifying the “I.” It must be a divine voice, since only God can “grant” a ministry to two witnesses, and only he can speak of the witnesses as his own: δώσω τοῖς δυσὶν μάρτυσιν μου. In context, the speaker may well be the Angel who delivered the book to John. The two witnesses are witnesses of Jesus, but in Revelation the “witness of Jesus is the Spirit of prophecy.” They witness to Jesus, but they do so in the power of the Angel-Spirit of Jesus.

As for punctuation: It is best to take everything in 3–13 as a single speech, spoken by the “I.” This may seem a small point, but it greatly clarifies chapter 11, and, just as importantly, how chapter 11 fits with what follows. The sequence from chapter 11 to the following chapters is *not* sequential. It is not that there is first a series of events involving two witnesses, and then a series of events involving the dragon, the woman, the beasts, the saints, and a great harvest. Instead, the voice describes what John will see in the visions recorded in following chapters, using different terms but predicting the same events, the same story of suffering and glory that was previewed by the Angel. First the Angel-Spirit prophesies what is to come; then John the prophet, who has eaten the Spirit's book, offers a second witness. Jesus speaks, then the Spirit; the Spirit speaks, then the apostolic prophet. And so the saints are

taken up by the Spirit into God's own self-witness, as witnesses in the great trial of history.

That basic paradigm clarifies some of the details of the two witnesses episode. The king of the abyss released locorpions to torment the land-dwellers, but they were not permitted to kill. Now another enemy comes from the abyss, and this one *does* have the authority to kill. The red horse's work is almost done, since it has brought divisions to a murderous climax. In chapter 13, the beast from the sea will do just what the beast from the abyss does in chapter 11: He makes war on the saints and overcomes them (13:7). The two witnesses are equivalent to the 144,000 who appear again at the beginning of chapter 14, as the saints ready to be harvested as the firstfruits of God's new covenant harvest of martyrs. The 144,000 are "harvested" in death, their death simultaneously an exaltation. The witnesses die, and then are caught up to the "cloud"; the 144,000 are harvested by a Son of Man riding on a cloud, and then stand above the clouds on the firmament sea, praising God (15:1-5). As a result of the death and exaltation of the two witnesses, the city is shaken and begins to collapse (11:13). In the aftermath of the harvest of the 144,000, bowls of martyr blood are poured out, the throne of Satan is shaken, and the city is destroyed (chapters 16–18). John *hears* the account first from the Angel, and then, having eaten the book, he *sees* and *speaks* it in detail.

We again glimpse one of John's theo-stylistic tics—11:7 refers to a "beast from the abyss" that makes war against the witnesses. This is Revelation's first reference to the beast from the abyss. We have been introduced to a king from the abyss, but we know nothing of a beast. That beast eventually appears, and John describes him in detail in chapter 13. As he often does, John introduces a character without fully explaining who or what he or she is, and fills out the portrait later. First he mentions a beast, then we see the beast; first there is a brief allusion to a drunken harlot (14:8), then, several chapters later, we get a full-scale portrait. It is an eschatological style that orients to the *end*, an apocalyptic style that veils, partially unveils, then, at the last moment, fully unveils.

The ministry of the two witnesses lasts as long as the trampling of the holy city (11:3), though the period is expressed in days rather than in months. That suggests that the trampling overlaps the ministry of the two witnesses. The two witnesses are martyrs, trampled underfoot. They *are* the holy city trampled by men but vindicated by God. Given our conclusion that 11:3-13 are a preview of chapters 12–16, the witnesses are parallel to the 144,000 firstfruits martyrs. The parallel between the witnesses and the holy city strengthens this suggestion.

Questions remain: Why are the martyrs represented by *two* witnesses? Does John have anyone particular in mind? In brief: Who *are* the witnesses?

Commentators have offered many identifications. For Quodvultdeus, they are Peter and Paul (Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 126). For Protestant interpreters, they are Protestant preachers persecuted by bestial Papists (126). For Blake, they are Wesley and Whitfield (130). Lyra's identification is charmingly obscure—the two witnesses are Silvenius and Menas (Krey 1997: 128). Earlier interpreters, and some contemporary commentators, link them with biblical characters, prophets who would reappear in the time of the end—Elijah and Jeremiah, according to Victorinus (1997: 14; Kovacs and Rowland 2004: 127), Elijah and Enoch (mentioned but not endorsed by Bede (1997: 148)).

Structural considerations may also be of some help. From 10:11–11:3, we have this structure:

- a. Prophecy concerning peoples and nations, 10:11
 - b. Given a measuring rod, 11:1a
 - b'. Rise and measure, 11:1b–2
- a'. Two witnesses will prophesy, 11:3

The structure connects John's commission to prophesy with the prophesying of the witnesses. The Angel-Spirit informs John of the future of his own prophetic ministry, his own future suffering. It would overstate the point to say that John sees a preview of his own death, but the point stands: John's prophetic measurement divides between holy and profane, sharpens the division within Israel, which is precisely what the two witnesses do, sharpening division to the point of violence.

John's suffering as prophet, though, is not unique. He is a *συγκοινωνός ἐν τῇ θλίψει* ... ἐν Ἰησοῦ (→1:9), sharing the suffering of all prophets and witnesses to Jesus. So, the two witnesses should not be understood as two individuals. There are many "dynamic duos" in the Bible (two angels at Sodom, Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, John and Jesus, Peter and Paul), but the witnesses are symbolic characters who and function as the Lord's "double witnesses" against city (Smalley 2005: 276). Their ministry, death, and exaltation form a legal testimony in the Lord's lawsuit against Israel and the Gentiles. As noted repeatedly throughout this commentary, "witness" is being transformed into the Christian notion of "martyr." The two witnesses prophesy, providing verbal witness to God and his gospel and against the inhabitants of the city. Their verbal witness is confirmed by their deaths. They are eventually vindicated, and so it is through their death and vindication, by sharing in the affliction and accent of Jesus, that their witness is completed. Their faithfulness to death, and God's vindication, is their testimony against the nations in the great lawsuit of history.

Their ministry is modeled specifically on Elijah and Moses. Jordan (1999a: 123) charts the parallels:

Elijah	Moses
Power over fire	Water to blood
No rain	Plagues on earth
Fire—Sodom	Blood—Egypt
Kingly period	Priestly period
Trumpets	Bowls
Kingly judgment comes first	Priestly judgment is final

Further, the two witnesses are two trees which are also two lampstands before the Lord of the earth (11:4). In the tabernacle and temple, the *menorah* is before the Lord's throne, molded to resemble trees, with buds and blossoms and branches. It has almond blossoms, and so is a "watcher" tree, but also associated with olive trees because the lamps are fueled by olive oil. As the lampstand lights the holy place, the witnesses are lights in the dark city.

The more immediate allusion is to the vision of Zechariah 4 (often noted; Victorinus 1997: 15; Caesarius 1997: 83; Andrew of Caesarea 1997: 152), where the prophet sees a multiplied lampstand with 7 x 7 lamps that are continuously supplied with oil flowing from trees through golden pipes. In Zechariah's vision, the trees are "sons of oil." Zechariah prophesies during the restoration period, during a time when the work on the temple has ceased. With Haggai, he urges the people to get back to work, and assures them they will be able to complete the construction project Yahweh has given them. The message of the vision is that the Spirit equips Zerubbabel to complete the temple all the way to the capstone. Once that happens, Israel will shine like a light, the temple a burning bush, a city on a hill. The LXX of Zechariah 4 (3, 11) uses the very phrase used in 11:4, δύο ἑλαῖαι. In Zechariah and Revelation 11, the trees are linked with lamps (λυχνία). In Zechariah, the trees supply the lampstand, but are not identified with it. But the original lampstand is a stylized tree, and the two witnesses are tree and lampstand combined, as if each lampstand were given its *own* continuous internal supply of oil. The two witnesses, supplied with the oil of the Spirit, burn continuously.

The original "sons of oil" are the "oil-wood" cherubim in the Most Holy Place of the temple (1 Kgs 6:23-28). In the vision of Zechariah 4, the two trees appear to be cherubim who supply golden oil through the prophets, priests, and kings to the lamp that is Israel. There is a hierarchy of mediation: Angel/trees, pipes/leaders, Israel/lamp. In Revelation 11, oil no longer comes from cherubim but from human beings. As sons of oil, the witnesses are human cherubim, also priests and kings as well as prophets. Here as often in Revelation, we have a hint of the large transition being described: For a little while, angels supplied the energy that powered Israel, but now human

witnesses receive the Spirit and shine with his light. In Rev. 1:20, Jesus identifies the seven stars as the angels of the churches, and the lampstands as the churches themselves. If the two witnesses are lampstands, they form a double church, at the side of the Son of Man who walks in the midst of the shining trees. Through the suffering of the witnesses, oil is squeezed from them to make the light of the church shine brightly. Martyr blood is the seed of the church. Martyr spirit is the oil that makes the church shine. Jesus the priest *can* make the lamp of the church shine in tribulation; indeed, it shines all the more when in distress.

The two witnesses consume enemies like fire-breathing hippolions (→9:17–18). Yahweh breathes fire (2 Sam. 22:9), and so, metaphorically, does Jeremiah. The Lord promises to put his words into Jeremiah's mouth like fire, and to make the people like wood that will be consumed when the prophet breathes against them (Jer. 5:14). The two witnesses are in a setting like Jeremiah's, prophesying against the great city. Fire from the mouth is performative speech, a spoken judgment that consumes, that destroys enemies or turns them to living sacrifices. Fire-breathing witnesses demolish a world. They shut up the *heavens*; they turn the *waters* to blood; they smite the *land* with plagues. Each of the three zones of creation is smitten. A whole cosmos is falling apart.

With this in the background, we can attempt a more specific identification of the witnesses. Chapter 9 begins with a vision of Satan releasing demons from an inverted temple to afflict the inhabitants of the land, a vision I have interpreted as a description of the Judaizing heresy in the early church. Satan unleashed demons and demon-inspired Jews to rip apart the new Adam that Jesus had made in his death and resurrection, to turn humanity back to the old duality of Jew and Gentile. The prayer-and-preaching cavalry of the sixth trumpet opposes the demons and overcomes them. Prosaically: Paul rebuked Peter, raged against Judaizers, and the council of Jerusalem settled the affair. After the council of Jerusalem, Jew and Gentile witness together provided a double witness in the city where Jesus is crucified. Some Jews could not abide the pollution of joining Jews and Gentile into one new man, and if they could not separate Jew and Gentile, they would kill them both together, a double witness slaughtered in the streets of Jerusalem. The two witnesses are the two humanities of the old world, united in common testimony to Jesus (cf. Bede 1997: 146; Oecumenius (1997: 48) thinks the two olive branches are Jew and Gentile).

This helps to explain the strange singular τὸ πῶμα of verse 8. Two witnesses, the one corpse of Jesus: United in death, Jew and Gentile are bound in the one corpse of Jesus in the grave of martyrdom. There is an OT analogue: The old prophet of Bethel and the man of God from Judah—prophets from Judah and Israel—are buried in the same grave (1 Kgs 14), a sign of the eventual reunion of the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in the grave of exile (Ezekiel 37).

This understanding of the two witnesses smooths the transition from the two witnesses passage to what follows in chapters 12–13. Satan has been unable to tear Jew and Gentile apart, so he attempts to kill the united, dual witness by forming his *own* Jew-Gentile cooperative, the counterfeit new covenant of sea beast, land beast, and harlot, a mystery of iniquity (→13:11–18).

The witnesses are killed, and in the same city where Jesus is crucified. They lie dead for three and a half days. Some simply observe, but others celebrate their death, because the prophets make life miserable. Then the Lord breathes his Spirit into them so they stand on their feet, becoming new Adams (Koester (2015: 502) notes connection with Gen. 2:7), raised from the grave like the dry bones (Ezekiel 37; cf. Mounce 1997: 222), and are caught up to heaven in a cloud. It all sounds so familiar. Jew and Gentile witness to Jesus, and not only in word. Their very lives are conformed to the life of Jesus, as they follow him in bearing the cross and being vindicated.

Douglas (1915: 177) sees in the story “a resuscitation of the Hasmonean Kingdom on ‘Satanic’ grounds,” that is, the Herods. He argues that “Satan’s throne” (→2:13) is the Herodian monarchy as Caesar’s agent in Judea. He points out that “the first attack on the Church, apart from the ‘police court’ proceedings of the Sanhedrin and the Stephen riot, was made by Agrippa I (Acts 12) and was checked almost immediately by the tyrant’s sudden death. It would be perfectly natural for the next generation to transfer the interpretation from the forgotten Palestinian conditions to the persons of Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, and Trajan.” Douglas does not think this transfer legitimate; it wrecks the book. I do not follow Douglas, but the echo of Herodian persecution is there.

The city is Sodom and Egypt πνευματικῶς (11:8). As Sodom, it is a city of *porneia* where visitors are assaulted; it is inhospitable to strangers. As Egypt, it is a place of bondage and abuse. As Sodom and Egypt, it is also a city from which the saints will be delivered, as Lot escapes from Sodom and Israel from Egypt. It is called the “great city,” and initiates a plotline that will dominate the book at least through chapter 18. *Spiritually* the great city is Sodom and Egypt; it is *literally* the city where the Lord is crucified. From here to the end of the book, the same city is in view, the city where Jesus was crucified, identified later as Babylon. The great contest of the book of Revelation is not between Rome and Jerusalem, but between Jerusalem and Jerusalem, between the holy city and the profane court, the “great city” that was once holy.

Few commentators take the identification of the city in 11:8 at face value. Most insist instead that the great city is Rome (Boxall 2006: 165–6; Smalley 2005: 281; Koester 2015: 500). Aune (1998a: 619) suggests that Jerusalem did not meet the ancient criteria of a πόλις, but it is unclear why John would indulge such technicalities. Mounce (1997: 221) oddly thinks that Rev. 18:24 provides decisive evidence that the city is Rome; I will argue in due time that it *is* decisive, but decisively identifies Babylon as Jerusalem. Commentators point to later descriptions of Babylon as a political power or trading center as evidence. As I argue below,

the imagery of the harlot city fits Jerusalem better than Rome, but for now I limit myself to a simple-minded observation: The first time John introduces the “great city,” he identifies it for us as the “city where the Lord was crucified.” He expects us to accept that identification, and to remember it as we read on.

Two groups react very differently to the death of the two witnesses. One is made up of peoples, tribes, tongues, and nations—a common designation for Gentiles throughout Revelation. The other group is land-dwellers, Jews who live in the Promised Land. The Gentiles regard the two witnesses, and do not allow them to be buried. It is not clear whether this is out of spite or fear or some other motive. They do not abuse the bodies (no Achilles with Hector here), but neither do they rejoice. Their reaction seems neutral. Not the land-dwellers, who rejoice over the corpse, party, send gifts to one another. Gift-giving is part of the celebration of Purim (Esther 9), a festival marking the victory of the Jews over Haman, the enemy of the Jews. The two witnesses made life miserable for the people of the land and residents of the great city, threatened their way of life, and they are glad they are gone. They regard the two witnesses as another Haman, and think of themselves as Mordecai, deliciously vindicated when the witnesses die.

The celebration does not last long. The witness of the witnesses lasted 1,260 days, 3 ½ years. They are dead for only 3 ½ days. The numbers are not literal, but the contrast does communicate the brevity of the city-dwellers’ triumph. The two witnesses are raised from the dead and caught up into heaven, as John (4:1) was and Jesus before him. Their resurrection is a public vindication. The enemies know that the saints have been vindicated. The result is a shakeup of the city, an earthquake that destroys a tithe of the city. This could be punishment for the killing of the witnesses, but the connotations of “one-tenth” (the portion that belongs to God) and the number “7,000” (the remnant in Elijah’s time) suggest instead that the 7,000 “fall” in martyrdom or in worship.

In any case, the survivors react with terrified worship. The witness of the witnesses accomplishes what the seal conquest and the trumpet plagues could not. With the sixth seal, the world begins to collapse, and the people of the land run for cover instead of repenting (→6:12–17). In the face of the invasion by an angelic army, land-dwellers continue to cling to their idols, the temple of stone and gold that they believe will protect them (→9:13–21). No one yet has mourned for the pierced one (→1:7). Our first hint of a change of heart comes when the martyrs follow Jesus in death and exaltation. Martyrdom cuts deeper than punitive curses (Bauckham 1993: 86). Martyrdom cuts to the heart, and unveils what is hidden (Boxall 2006: 137). Though the tribes of the land did not mourn when they saw Jesus hanging on the cross, they *do* mourn when they see the life and death and vindication of

Jesus reenacted in the lives of his witnesses. There is a revival in the great city, the city where the Lord was crucified, when the cross is *replayed*.

God's vindication of witnesses not only demonstrates that they spoke the truth but shows that God takes the side of his oppressed holy ones. The vindication of the martyrs reveals a God who is just *and* relentlessly faithful to the weak and helpless. There is perhaps pathos in the doubleness of the double witness, in the fact that the witnesses (Jew and Gentile, I have argued) are joined in death. Most centrally, the death and vindication of the witnesses reenacts the cross of Jesus. It is a passion play, an enacted proclamation of the gospel, and has the effect of the gospel, driving the hearers/viewers to repentance. (For more on the psycho-political effects of martyrdom, →20:4-6.)

Chapters 2–3 are a pep talk. Again and again, Jesus makes promises to victors. They will get the tree of life, escape the second death, eat hidden manna, gain authority over the nations, receive a white robe, become pillars in the temple, sit on Jesus's throne. Jesus can guarantee all this because he is the Lamb, the Lion of Judah, who overcomes (5:5), who sends out his Spirit on a white horse "conquering and to conquer" (6:2). Eleven times John uses some form of *vokáω*, and each time it is upbeat. The *twelfth* use should bring the theme to its glorious all-Israel, 3 x 4 climax. Instead, the pep talk screeched to a halt: "the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war on them, and *overcome them*, and kill them" (11:7; →13:7). We move quickly back to the saints as the victors, but we have been shocked out of our complacency. Victory will never seem as clear-cut again. Rev. 12:11 states the paradox concisely: Saints overcome when they bear witness, and when they do not love their life even to death. We overcome in being overcome. Just the path of victory we should expect if we are called to follow the Crucified.

The story of the two witnesses is the culmination of the second woe. When martyrs suffer, we are two-thirds of the way to the end of time, two-thirds through the final stages of the period of waiting, restraint, and repentance. It seems to be a woe directed to the holy city that will be trampled underfoot. It seems to be woe to the martyrs. But if the martyrs experience woe, it is only for a moment (3 ½ days), and the light momentary affliction yields to an eternal weight of glory, while heavier and perhaps everlasting woes fall on their enemies. The martyrs bear witness, and many repent. Martyr blood undoes them and drives them to worship. Others remain hardened. And the blood of the martyrs will be their undoing too.

Seventh trumpet

And the seventh angel trumpeted, and there was great thunder in the sky-heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign-as-king unto the ages of the ages.”

And the twenty-four Ancient Ones who sit before God on their thrones fell on their faces and prostrated to God, saying, “We thank you, Lord, the God, the All-Ruler, who is and who was, because You received Your great power and You have reigned-as-King. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and it was the event-moment for the dead to be judged and to give the reward to your slaves and to prophets and to saints and to those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the land.”

And the temple of God which is in the sky-heaven opened, and the ark of his covenant appeared in his temple. And there was lightning and voices and thunders and an earthquake and great hailstones.

—Rev. 11:15-19

After the two witnesses, the seventh angel blows the seventh trumpet, and loud voices of praise break out (Rev. 11:15). We are in heaven, where twenty-four Ancient Ones prostrate themselves before the Lord, the παντοκράτωρ, the Lord of the hosts of hippolions, and praise him because the kingdom of this world (τοῦ κοσμοῦ) has become the kingdom of the Lord (τοῦ κυρίου) and of Christ. Verse 18 gives liturgical expression to the pattern of events by which God comes to his throne. The verse is surrounded by neat *lex-talionis* phrases. As in Psalm 2 (Boxall 2006: 168–9), the nations rage (ὀργιζω), and the Lord responds to the rage of the nations with a rage (ὀργή) of his own. When the dust is cleared, he will have destroyed the destroyers of the land (the same verb, διαφθείρω, used twice). Destroyers have destruction turned back on their own heads. Whatever is happening here, it is a *just* happening. The enraged nations get nothing that they do not deserve.

Within this frame, the portrait of the coming of the kingdom is more positive. God’s ὀργή is not merely wrath against wrath. The time of ὀργή is also the time to give rewards. The passage is organized in a complex set of overlapping triads: God *judges* the dead; he *gives* wages; and he *destroys*. Each verb is an infinitive, governed by the word καιρός: The time of wrath is the time for judgment, reward, destruction. In context, “judgment” for the dead seems to be the judgment of new life, like the “judgment” rendered on behalf of the two witnesses when the πνεῦμα ζωῆς is breathed into them. Revelation

is not describing a medieval altarpiece, but speaking of a judgment that leads to resurrection.

The second of these verbs (δοῦναι) has a three-plus-one indirect object. God rewards the bond-servants, his prophets (though two terms, these go together in Revelation); the holy ones (ἅγιοι); and the fearers of the name. Those categories echo the triple categories found in some Psalms (cf. 135:19–20), and includes the leaders of the people of God, the holy ones, and God-fearing Gentiles. The last phrase—“the small and the great”—seems to be attached specifically to the Name-fearers, but we may take it as a promise that even the least prophet and saint will receive his reward. Everyone receives an appropriate wage. Judgment day, the day of wrath, is also payday, and the pay is as just as the retribution. All this happens when God’s kingdom comes: The faithful dead are raised or their names are vindicated; the faithful receive their wages, rewarded for their faithfulness; the destroyers are destroyed. Only when this has happened does God take his great power and begin to reign. This is cause for praise in heaven. It should be a matter of earnest prayer, and praise, on earth as well. Heaven gives thanks to God for his judgments, a Eucharistic offering echoed in the Eucharistic assembly on earth (Boxall 2006; 170).

The conclusion of the trumpet sequence is the opening of the temple in heaven. Trumpet sounds announce the Lord’s coming to his throne on Sinai; so here. Trumpets hail the enthronement of the king; so here. The Lord’s throne in heaven becomes openly visible, accompanied by the throne-phenomena of lightning, noises, thunder, earthquake, and hail. Hail is first mentioned in 8:7, but in connection with the throne phenomena, it is new. Hail falls when the firmament cracks and crumbles, which we are seeing gradually shattered as the book progresses. The heavenly veil is being shattered as the throne of God descends to earth, finally in the form of a bridal city.

The opening of the heavenly sanctuary follows the death and vindication of the two witnesses. When Jesus dies, the veil of the temple is torn from top to bottom (Matt. 27:51; Mk 15:38; Lk. 23:45). With the final sacrifice, the way is open into the presence of God. Jesus’s death annuls the exclusions inherent in the temple system. In Revelation, however, the heavenly sanctuary is not opened until martyrs, the two witnesses, share Jesus’s suffering and are killed for their testimony to Jesus. When they go to the cross, another veil is torn, another sanctuary opened. When the witnesses die and rise, Ancient Ones who have been seated on thrones fall to the ground, leaving their thrones for triumphant martyrs.

As soon as the temple in heaven (ναὸς ... ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ) is open, there are great signs in heaven (σημεῖα, 12:1, 3). The heavenly sanctuary opens to reveal an ark, also a woman and a dragon. They are in heaven, which is where

the dragon has been throughout the OT (Job 1–2; Zechariah 3). The Feast of Trumpets is over, and it is time for Yom Kippur, the only day when the Most Holy Place was opened to men. The red horse disappears over the horizon, and the black horse comes out, holding his scales. After the Egyptian plagues, it is time for the Passover/atonement of the martyrs, predicted by the Angel's story of two witnesses. But there is an obstacle to atonement, a dragon standing in heaven. Before the liturgical calendar can move forward, something is going to have to be done about him.

Something *will* be done, as we will see in Volume 2.

I read, mark, note, and meditate,
Smoothing edges, taking charge.
The crush of interpretation
Makes me forget rule one:
It is not I who test the book
But the book that measures me.

*Holy Spirit: Feed me every bitter word. I cannot rest without the agitation
of your speech, nor speak unless I eat. Amen.*

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