

KEYS to Understanding REVELATION

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The book of Revelation has been the center of more speculation than any other book in the Bible. Leading members of the religious community frequently debate its content and offer various theories about nearly every aspect of its message. Why is there so much confusion about this book? Is it possible to comprehend its meaning? Are there keys that can open doors of understanding? The answer is yes!

KEYS

to Understanding

REVELATION

Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.
~ Revelation 22:7 ~

In order to understand the book of Revelation, we must first recognize that God has a profound purpose for humanity. With infinite wisdom the Almighty inspired John's vision and filled it with images of heaven, symbols, and shocking descriptions of the end of the age. However, this vision was designed to be understood by certain individuals at specific times in history. It is a revealing—and not a concealing—as many have wrongfully taught. Therefore, God has provided a way for you to understand the book. But exactly what is that way?

How to Understand the Book

The Bible has been characterized as God's instruction book for humanity. It consists of many truths that are easily understood, but it also contains a vast amount of knowledge that we cannot acquire on our own. This led the Apostle Peter to write that we are to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Pet. 3:18). This type of spiritual growth requires divine assistance. As Christ stated:

The Spirit of truth... will guide you into all truth; for *it* will not speak on *its* own *authority*, but whatever *it* hears it will speak; and *it* will tell you things to come (John 16:13).

Christ revealed that the Bible like a coded book that requires the reader to have God's Spirit in order to understand many of its details. The Apostle Paul also explained this principle in his epistle to the Church at Corinth:

For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual (1 Corinthians 2:11-13).

God communicates to all people through His printed Word, but He gives deeper understanding of that Word to those who have been called, baptized, and have received His Spirit. Therefore, in order to fully understand the book of Revelation, one must have God's Spirit. His divine nature imparts perception that cannot be gained by the human mind alone. The Holy Spirit allows us to understand more than what the Bible means to each person—but what it means to the entire creation.

The next key is to carefully examine the Scriptures. For example, Christ revealed that God is only calling certain people to become kings and priests in His Kingdom (Rev. 1:6; 5:10). These people must search out His truth. As Solomon wrote:

It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, but the glory of kings is to search out a matter (Proverbs 25:2).

We must search the Scriptures and allow God to reveal deeper truths to us. This principle was confirmed by the Apostle Paul who wrote:

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15).

This scripture explains that we must study the Bible and put the verses in their proper context. This is the exact place where most Bible students err. Many attempt to interpret the book based on preconceived thoughts and emotions. They often think the way they feel about a verse is just as important as what the Scriptures actually say. But it must be understood that no Scripture is of private interpretation (2Pet. 1:20).

In addition, those who take this approach tend to forget an important principle of Bible study. We must not use our own reasoning in an attempt to understand God's Word. The Almighty is not like us! As He explained to Isaiah:

“For My thoughts *are* not your thoughts, nor *are* your ways My ways,” says the LORD. “For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9).

In order to clearly understand Revelation, we must allow the One who inspired the Bible to speak on His own behalf. His intended message can be understood, but only by allowing the Bible to interpret itself. As the prophet Isaiah was inspired to write:

Whom will He teach knowledge? And whom will He make to understand the message? Those *just* weaned from milk? Those *just* drawn from the breasts? For precept *must be* upon precept, precept upon precept, Line upon line, line upon line, Here a little, there a little (Isaiah 28:9-10).

With guidance of the Holy Spirit, by carefully examining the Scriptures, rightly dividing the word of truth, and allowing the Bible to interpret itself, God's intended message in the book of Revelation can become clear.

Understanding Insets

It is important to understand that most subjects in the book of Revelation follow a straight forward pattern of chronology. Nonetheless, there are insets which take the reader to a separate, but

related, chronology of events. These insets are important pieces of the prophetic puzzle.

However, not recognizing when they begin and end has confused many Bible students. This is another reason why we must rightly divide the book, put the insets into their proper context, and seek to gain God's Spirit. Therefore, a deeper understanding of the book requires that we keep God's commandments and sincerely ask Him to help us to comprehend the details of His plan for humanity.

A Time for Everything

The book of Ecclesiastes reveals that there is "a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecc. 3:1). God has a time and purpose for all that He does. It is important to understand that God never intended for every prophecy in the Bible to be understood immediately after they were written. In fact, Daniel wondered about the meaning of some of the visions he was shown, and God explained that it was not for him to understand at that time. Certain inspired words were to be sealed until the time of the end:

"But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase..." And he said, "Go *your way*, Daniel, for the words *are* closed up and sealed till the time of the end" (Daniel 12:4-9).

God explained that much of what Daniel saw would not be understood until "the time of the end." We are now living in that very time! Many are running to and fro, and yet they remain unfulfilled. Knowledge has increased on a massive scale, but wisdom of how to use that knowledge has widely not been the result.

The Bible calls this present age "the last days" (2Tim. 3:1). It is at this time that many of the prophecies declared by God will come to pass. Before they do, the Eternal promised that His faithful people will understand exactly what is going to occur:

Surely the Lord GOD does nothing, unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets (Amos 3:7).

God's plan shall be known. However, in order to grasp the full meaning of that plan, readers need to possess certain keys. These keys will unlock some of the great mysteries concerning the future of this world and beyond.

The Purpose of the Book

The Apostle John wrote the book of Revelation during exile on the small island of Patmos. During this time, John was taken in vision to heaven where he witnessed various beasts, angels, and symbols that foretold dramatic and devastating end time events. It is important to understand that John specifically indicated that the purpose of these visions was to bare record of three things: The word of God, the testimony of Christ, and the things that John saw (Rev. 1:2). Therefore, the words he recorded must be considered in this context. In fact, the Apostle began by introducing readers to the Source of his vision:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified *it* by His angel to His servant John (Revelation 1:1).

Whenever the New Testament uses the word “God” it is referring to the Father. Therefore, notice that this remarkable book is not the revelation of John. It is the revelation that the Father gave to Christ, who presented it to an angel. The angel then delivered it to John, and it was the apostle's job to record it. In fact, the first words in this book state that it is “The revelation of Jesus Christ.” He is the one God chose to be the revealer, and this vital point is dramatically illustrated throughout the book.

For example, in chapter five John is taken in vision to the third heaven. There he saw God the Father sitting on His throne while holding a scroll in His right hand. This scroll is sealed with seven seals. At one point, an angel proclaims with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the scroll and to loose its seals?” John goes on to say that no one in heaven or earth was worthy to open the book except the Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:2-5).

Therefore, God commissioned Christ to be the Revealer. Understanding this point is critical to grasping the meaning of this book and its symbols. Once we consider the conduit through which the words of this book came to us, we should read the Scriptures with enormous respect. These words come from the Author of the universe. It is the Creator Himself. Notice how He is portrayed:

Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the seven lampstands *One* like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair *were* white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet *were* like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance *was* like the sun shining in its strength. And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I *am* He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death (Revelation 1:12-18).

This is the first place in Scripture where Christ is portrayed as He might appear in the spirit world. His glory is so great that He radiates with righteous brilliance. Looking into His face would be like looking into the sun in its full strength. John’s first reaction was to fall “at His feet as dead.” This is but a snapshot of the true Author of the book. We should stand in awe of this being that created us and then died to save us. We should not take His words lightly. He is all powerful, breathtaking in glory, and His words are eternal!

Understanding the Day of the Lord

Chapter one indicates a specific time in which the prophetic events of Revelation will unfold. Exactly what day was John speaking of when he wrote these words?

I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet (Revelation 1:10).

The "Lord's day" has long been a subject of much debate. Many think that John was referring to the first day of the week—Sunday. This cannot be the case for several reasons. First, God's true Church has always kept, and always will keep, the Sabbath. Sunday was not instituted as a day of worship by Christ or the New Testament Church. It was not until the reign of Constantine, more than 200 years after John recorded his vision, that an apostate organization attempted to change the Sabbath to Sunday (*Paganism to Christianity in the Roman Empire*, p. 257).

Further, there is not a single place in the Bible that uses the term "Lord's day" in reference to a specific day of the week. The first appearance of this term came from a spurious writing known as the *Gospel of Peter* that was written more than 150 years after Christ's crucifixion. For more on this subject, please request our booklet—*Sabbath Confessions*.

Instead, other verses help us to understand what John was actually referring to. Several Scriptures refer to a "day of the Lord," and they indicate that it is a time when the Almighty takes powerful action by intervening in the affairs of humankind. For example, notice what the esteemed prophet Jeremiah wrote:

For this *is* the day of the Lord GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; It shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; for the Lord GOD of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the River Euphrates (Jeremiah 46:10).

This verse refers to a "day of the LORD" that came to pass in 605 B.C. Although it is called a "day," it took longer than 24 hours to fulfill. Therefore, the "Lord's day" spoken of by John has the same meaning. It is a time when God miraculously intervenes in mankind's affairs to fulfill His purpose.

However, there is a specific time frame mentioned by the prophets called "the day of the LORD" and it means the "day of His

wrath.” It is this expression that is directly related to the book of Revelation. Consider the words of Isaiah who wrote:

Wail, for the day of the LORD *is* at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty... Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it (Isaiah 13:6, 9).

In these verses, Isaiah did not refer to a literal day, but rather a prophetic day—a full year. This principle is demonstrated in the book of Numbers which states “for each day you shall bear your guilt one year” (14:34). In addition, Ezekiel was told to perform an acted oracle that represented “a day for each year” (Eze. 4:6). These Scriptures explain that a prophetic day frequently represents a year.

Isaiah confirmed this principle when he made a second reference to the day when God will execute vengeance on a wicked world. The prophet explained that, among other things, the purpose of the Messiah’s ministry was:

To proclaim the acceptable **year** of the LORD, and the **day** of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn (Isaiah 61:2).

Two chapters later the prophet spoke of this period again. On this occasion, he continued describing this “day” as being a period of time lasting one year:

For the **day** of vengeance *is* in My heart, and the **year** of My redeemed has come (Isaiah 63:4).

In the entire Bible, the term “Lord’s day” never refers to a particular day of the week. When God speaks of a specific day, He simply calls it by its number. For example, if God meant Sunday, He would say “on the first day” (Gen. 1:5; Mark 16:2). The phrase “day of the Lord” has a different and specific meaning. It speaks of a time when God will intervene in the affairs of humanity.

When we use the key of allowing the Bible to interpret itself, and compare many of these Old Testament verses with those in the book of Revelation, we see that the a large portion of the Apostle John's vision is in reference to the time of the Almighty's end-time wrath. For example, John described the time when the Eternal will strike the earth with terrifying plagues. As an angel stated:

For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Revelation 6:17).

A few chapters later we are told that this great day includes the last seven plagues that will be poured out on a rebellious and wicked planet. Then, just prior to Christ's return, the sixth of these final plagues will dry up the Euphrates and unleash demons who will gather the ungodly to the battle of Armageddon:

For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty (Revelation 16:14).

Thus we are shown that this period of time called "the day of His wrath" is longer than a single day. It is a full year. However, when the Apostle John was "in the spirit on the Lord's Day," it refers to being completely, spiritually, immersed in the imagery. The entire vision, and God's overall intervention, is the "day of the Lord" that the apostle mentioned in the first chapter of Revelation.

Throughout this revelation John witnessed a unique time when God will miraculously intervene in the affairs of humankind. In fact, most prophesies that fill the pages of the book of Revelation are regarding His vengeance. At this point, it is also important to understand that God has provided a way to escape these terrifying judgments that will befall the wicked. As will be discussed later, that way of escape is also revealed in the book of Revelation.

Understanding the Seven Letters

The second and third chapters of Revelation contain letters written to seven churches. The congregations identified as

recipients of these letters were located in seven cities of Asia Minor. As John wrote:

What you see, write in a book and send *it* to the seven churches which are in Asia: to Ephesus, to Smyrna, to Pergamos, to Thyatira, to Sardis, to Philadelphia, and to Laodicea (Revelation 1:11).

Understanding the true identity of these churches is essential to understanding the purpose of the letters. When examining the content, it becomes clear that their intended audience is much greater than just these seven first century congregations. The circumstances described in all of these letters could not have been contemporary to John's time.

The Seven Churches Are Prophetic

The seven letters of Revelation were set within the framework of a book that is entirely prophetic. This is apparent from the very first verse which states that the book is to “show His servants—things which must shortly take place” (Rev. 1:1). This verse tells us that the purpose of John's entire vision is to reveal pivotal events that would begin in the first century and continue until the return of Christ and beyond. If each of the letters had no relation to future generations of God's Church, the letters would NOT have been recorded as an integral part of this prophetic manuscript. They would have been written to each congregation separately; as were all the other epistles penned by John, James, Peter, and Paul.

Instead, these seven letters were included as an integral part of an entirely prophetic book. The only way these letters have meaning is if the churches are symbolic of eras throughout time. By recording them sequentially, successive eras would be able to understand both the history preceding them and the circumstances they would face during their time.

For example, Christ told Smyrna they would have tribulation ten days (Rev. 2:10). It would have been impossible for Smyrna to endure a devastating “ten days” of persecution while a

sister congregation only a few miles away in Philadelphia was free to preach the gospel. In addition, the churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea are identified as being in existence at the time of Christ's return (Rev. 3:7-19). Yet those first century congregations no longer exist.

We must also recognize the fact that there were more than seven congregations existing on this Roman mail route. Among these other churches were congregations in Magnesia, Tralles, and Hierapolis, but these Christians were not specifically mentioned by Christ. Seven is a number symbolizing completion. Therefore, these seven churches are symbolic of the complete Church of God. The only way this symbolism could have meaning is if these seven churches represent Church eras!

This truth is confirmed when we examine the history of God's Church down through the ages. The events they experienced, and the attitudes they expressed, fall into seven historical eras of God's true Church. These eras clearly reflect the prophetic words Christ told John to write.

There is also a duality in these letters that reflects the history of God's people throughout the time of the Old Covenant. In fact, ancient Israel is referred to as God's "church in the wilderness," and they stand as an important predecessor to the seven New Testament eras of God's Church (Acts 7:38).

Therefore, God intended these missives to be an inherent part of the entire vision for a divine purpose. They are both symbolic and prophetic! Their warnings and admonitions correspond to events that began during the time of Moses and ended with the era of the Pharisees. Their duality also speaks of prophetic events that began in John's time and have continued unto this very day! For this reason, the angel told John to:

Write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this (Revelation 1:19).

Throughout the chapters that follow this verse, the book of Revelation is a calendar of successive world events, institutions, and

people that have continued over vast periods of time. It carries readers through history unto the end of this age and beyond. The history of the seven eras spoken of in the letters is one of the most fascinating stories ever told. Their triumphs and hardships could fill the pages of many books. However, for the purpose of this booklet, we offer only a brief summary of these seven Old and New Testament eras.

The First Old and New Testament Eras

The first era of the Old Covenant took place during the time of Moses, Joshua, and the elders. These people experienced the birth of a nation. They were eyewitnesses to the miracles God performed when bringing Israel out of Egypt and throughout their trek to the Promised Land (Jgs. 2:6-7). This first Old Covenant era came to a close soon after the death of Joshua who was one of the last living eyewitnesses to the works of God through Moses.

Moses had prophesied that one day God would send a prophet like himself to Israel (Deu. 18:15). By this pronouncement God made a direct comparison between Moses and Christ. Thus, the era of Ephesus paralleled the first Old Covenant era. The disciples were eyewitnesses to the dramatic miracles that Christ performed. They experienced the birth of the New Testament Church when newly begotten believers received the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. The New Testament era of Ephesus ended like that of the Old Covenant. It concluded at the close of the first century with the death of the Apostle John who was one of the last living eyewitnesses to the works of Christ.

The Second Old and New Testament Eras

The second era of the Old Covenant began with a period known as the time of the Judges (2Sam. 7:11). The passing of those eye witnesses to God's miracles performed through Moses and Joshua signified a definite turning point in Israel's history. As the Biblical historians wrote:

All that generation were gathered unto their fathers: and there arose another generation after them, which knew

not the Lord, nor yet the works which He had done for Israel. And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served Baalim (Judges 2:10-11).

After the first generation passed, zeal for God also waned. The people let down and lost much of the truth God had given them. The Israelites also began to worship false gods. As a result, they suffered persecution at the hand of their neighbors. Israel found themselves in a fluctuating state of fear and poverty.

This second era foreshadowed the New Testament era of Smyrna. After the death of the Apostle John, a notable transition took place in the Church. The Roman church claimed they were Jews (true servants of God), but they were not (Rev. 3:9). They were deeply infected by Gnosticism. Further, Sunday began to be observed instead of God's commanded Sabbath. Just like Israel during the period of the Judges, this era of the Church let their loyalty to God slip. As a result, they experienced poverty and persecution.

The Third Old and New Testament Eras

The third era of the Old Covenant occurred during the united monarchy. After the unification of Israel under the leadership of Kings David and Solomon, the nation had become the land they had always hoped for. They were fortified, enjoyed peace, and were generally well off (1Kin. 4:20-24). However, Israel eventually fell into the apostasy spoken of as "the doctrine of Balaam" (Rev. 2:14). Men sought marriage with women who worshipped false gods, and this practice led Israel to idolatry. Even Solomon entered into relationships with foreign women resulting in the worship of false gods (1Kin. 11:1-6). Consequently, the monarchy began to deteriorate and Israel became divided.

The corresponding era of Pergamos began with an age of fortification and expansion. However, the heretical Roman church became powerful, invasive, and threatening. This resulted in many members feeling a need to go along with the whore's false doctrines in order to avoid persecution. This fulfilled Christ's words that they would participate in spiritual fornication (Rev. 2:14). Rather than obeying God and seeking His protection, they

eventually took up arms and suffered tremendously under the sword of the Byzantine Empire.

The Fourth Old and New Testament Eras

The fourth era of the Old Covenant existed during Israel's divided monarchy. Because of their many sins, God allowed a civil war to separate the northern tribes from Judah in the south. In the north, King Jeroboam set up golden calves in Bethel and Dan and commanded the northern tribes to worship these idols instead of the true God (1Kin. 12:28-33). King Ahab not only continued in the sins of Jeroboam, he married a devout pagan priestess known as Jezebel and allowed her to lead the people into Baal worship. This apostasy spread until nearly all ten tribes came to worship this false god (1Kin. 16:31-33). The Almighty punished the ten tribes for their sins by allowing them to be taken captive by the brutal armies of Assyria. Nearly one hundred years later, Judah also began worshiping idols. As a result, they too suffered great destruction and were taken captive by the Chaldeans. While the faith of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was preserved during this captivity, it certainly did not flourish (2Chr. 36:19-20).

The events of that time are again reflected in the corresponding New Testament era of Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29). As a spiritual form of Jezebel, the Roman Catholic Church led many of God's people astray. Many true Christians allowed their worship to be influenced by various false doctrines. This resulted in members experiencing the horror of the Crusades and the Spanish Inquisition which drove many into hiding.

The Fifth Old and New Testament Eras

The fifth era of the Old Covenant began as God's people came out of captivity in Babylon. Once freed, God used Ezra to lead His people in rebuilding the temple and re-establishing true worship. Once again known as the people of YHWH, they carried His name and the faith remained alive. But for the most part the work was weak. The majority of the people did not share the zeal exhibited by a relative few leaders. There were no great exploits such as those done by the Judges. They won no significant wars,

produced no great fortifications, nor did they construct any building projects like those of King David or Solomon. Once again, a body of God's people existed, but when it came to their works, it was as if they were dead (Rev. 3:1).

The corresponding New Testament era of Sardis arose during the 1500's when God's Church came out of hiding. The terrible persecution they had endured ceased, and to a degree the Church was revived. Some of these believers were called Anabaptists, but during the next century they were dubbed Sabbatarians. Like the Jewish people who had built synagogues during the Diaspora, Stephen Mumford and others brought the faith to distant lands. This resulted in several small congregations rising up in America called the Church of God. The main body of these believers called themselves the Seventh Day Church of God. However, most of these people lacked enthusiasm for the whole truth. They accomplished little in terms of a unified, visible work of preaching the gospel to the world. For this reason the general public knows little about them today.

The Sixth Old and New Testament Eras

The sixth era of the Old Covenant began with a devout family known as Maccabeus. Under the leadership of this family, Judah rose to power and influence during a time of overwhelming dominance by the Greek empire.

Before the revolt of the Maccabees, the Jewish resistance to this powerful empire was passive and amounted to little more than prayer and patience. However, in time, a relatively small but determined group of soldiers finally drove out the Greeks and restored the temple—rededicating it on Kislev 25 (*The Original Maccabees Bible*, p. 16-17). Their success was an obvious sign of God's intervention as He gave them repeated victory over their enemies. God's people were once again a notable nation in the region.

There is an obvious parallel between this Old Covenant era and the era of Philadelphia. The sixth era of God's New Testament Church is also characterized as having little strength (Rev. 3:8). It too started small with one man and his family. Herbert W. Armstrong opposed the paganization of Christianity, and was an

instrument the Almighty used to restore the spiritual temple—God’s Church. Mr. Armstrong’s efforts resulted in renewed zeal. Thousands were converted, and tens of thousands wholeheartedly supported the work. This era of the New Testament Church ultimately left a monumental mark on the world, and in the lives of untold numbers. As a result, a remnant of this work is still alive today.

The Seventh Old and New Testament Eras

The seventh era of the Old Covenant began about 100 years after the temple was restored by the Maccabees. During this time, two main groups of leaders formed within the ranks of those exercising leadership in Judea—the Sadducees and the Pharisees. It was the Pharisaic sect that dominated the last era of the Old Covenant. They emphasized the oral law over the Scriptures and adhered strictly to their religious traditions rather than God’s commandments. Their religion came to be known as Judaism.

Outwardly they had an appearance of righteousness, but they consistently denied God’s intended way of keeping the Commandments (Mat. 23:27-28). For this reason, they suffered a type of the end-time tribulation. The powerful beast of the Roman Empire eventually stamped them out, destroyed the temple, and scattered the priesthood. Interestingly, this destruction occurred over more than three years.

Today, we see several striking parallels between the last era of the Old Covenant and the seventh and final era the New Testament known as Laodicea. For example, Christ came to the earth at the end of the last Old Covenant era and He will return at the conclusion of the seventh era of the New Testament. John the Baptist was an Elijah figure before Christ’s first coming, and the Savior explained that another Elijah will come before His return (Mat. 17:10-12; Mal. 4:5). In addition, the Pharisees were willing to kill Christ to protect their positions. This is much like many Church leaders today who are more interested in protecting their status rather than acknowledging God’s truth!

This is where we find ourselves today. In the last era of God’s Church, many have succumbed to attitudes of this world. In

this way they are much like the Pharisees. Vast numbers have a form of godliness, but deny God's authority in their lives (2Tim. 3:5). This last era of the New Testament is warned that if they do not repent they will suffer severe persecution during the great tribulation (Rev. 3:18-19). For a more complete explanation of Church eras, please request our free book—*Evidence for Eras*.

Understanding the Seven Seals

Chapters six through eight describe seven seals which secure a book held by God in His right hand (Rev. 5:1). These seals have been a cause of confusion for many Bible students, but it is entirely possible to know what each of them represents. An enormous clue was given to us by Christ during His ministry on earth. Just a few days before His crucifixion, Christ's disciples came to Him on the Mount of Olives and asked Him a profound question:

Tell us, when will these things be? And what *will be* the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age? (Matthew 24:3).

The disciples asked when Christ would return to establish His Kingdom on earth, and what would be recognizable signs of His second coming. The Messiah answered by describing religious deception, wars, rumors of wars, racial strife, political upheaval, famine, disease, and natural disasters (Mat. 24:4-51). His words describe the same sequence of events portrayed symbolically in the seals of Revelation six.

The Four Horsemen

The first four seals are represented by four infamous horsemen that would cause great suffering on the earth. The first of which is a white horse that pictures religious deception (Rev. 6:2). The Savior said that “many will come in My name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many” (Mat. 24:5). This means that numerous individuals would arise and claim to represent Him, but they would preach a deceptive message causing multitudes to be misled. Therefore, the first seal pictures false Christianity. It is a religion that appears to be holy, but promotes iniquity.

Although Christianity seems to be alive and well today, the vast majority practices a faith vastly different from that of Christ and the Church that He established through the apostles. Most of the customs and teachings found in the Catholic, protestant, Mormon, Baptist, and Adventist denominations actually originate from Gnostic heresy and the pagan world.

For example, Christmas and Easter are the two most important holidays of modern Christianity. However, these days were never observed by the faithful people of God, and they are not sanctioned in the Scriptures. On the contrary, the Bible condemns such practices. For more on this subject please request our booklets—*The Truth about Christmas* and *The Truth about Easter*.

In addition, despite the fact that Christ and the apostles taught that God’s law would never be abolished; most “Christian” organizations teach that God’s law was “nailed to the cross” and the Ten Commandments are no longer required today. For the truth on this subject, please request our book—*The Ten Commandments*.

The second seal pictures a time of war and was illustrated by a red horse (Rev. 6:4). Christ stated that “you will hear of wars and rumors of wars” and that “nation will rise up against nation and kingdom against kingdom” (Mat. 24:6-7). The Greek word translated as “nation” is *ethnos*. It is the root word for the English term ethnic. The use of this term makes it clear that Christ was describing wars involving various nations, races, and religions. Even now hostility and violence are on the rise.

With this prophecy Christ said that worldwide tensions resulting in conflict and war would reach their greatest intensity during the end time. It is clear that we are well on our way to fulfilling these prophesied events.

The third and fourth seals were illustrated by a black horse and a pale horse (Rev. 6:5-8). These horses and their riders portray a time of famine and pestilence that will claim a great number of lives. With the advent of thousands of pesticides, herbicides, medications, and the many ill-effects that modern inventions have imposed on the natural world, it should be of no surprise that the human race is poised for famine and disease on a massive scale.

The Fifth Seal and Persecution

The fifth seal will include persecution specifically directed at those affiliated with God's true Church. The Apostle John saw individuals who were slain for their dedication to Christ crying out for God to take His vengeance (Rev. 6:9-10). When describing this seal, Christ said:

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another (Matthew 24:9-10).

Christ went on to say that this time of trouble would be so fierce that unless He intervened the earth and its inhabitants would be destroyed (Mat. 24:21-22). It will be a period of unimaginable persecution upon the physical descendants of ancient Israel and the last era of God's true Church. Because Jacob and His descendants carry the name of Israel, Jeremiah wrote:

Alas! For that day *is* great, so that none *is* like it; and it *is* the time of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be saved out of it (Jeremiah 30:7).

It is important to understand that the first six seals are not the wrath of God, but are the wrath of Satan. They are merciless and cruel and are directed at all people of the earth, but particularly toward those who have made a commitment to obey God. The devil is driven by hatred, and his wrath will be unleashed because he will have only a short time left to wreak his havoc (Rev. 12:12).

Therefore, the great tribulation will result in the descendants of Israel going into a captivity so great that the horror of the holocaust will pale in comparison (Mat. 24:21). Additionally, God's Church will experience an assault designed to eradicate it from the face of the earth, but there is a way of escape.

Understanding the Place of Safety

Although some of God's people will suffer great persecution in the last days, a number will be miraculously removed from

harm's way. The 12th chapter of Revelation indicates that select individuals will be taken to a place where they will be spiritually nourished throughout the great tribulation:

But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent (Revelation 12:14).

A woman is used to represent a church 18 times in the book of Revelation. In this verse, the woman represents God's true Church. John went on to write that, during this flight, the woman will be pursued by a great flood cast out of the mouth of the serpent. This flood is symbolic of an array of people that will be inspired by the devil to maliciously seek out God's people. John then stated that God will powerfully intervene and the earth will open up to swallow the oppressors (Rev. 12:15-16; 17:15; Isa. 59:19). This subject is thoroughly covered in our booklet titled *A Place of Safety*.

John continued his chronicle of this event by indicating that Satan will become enraged and will "make war" with the remnant of the Church (Rev. 12:17). This remnant will include the half-hearted Laodicean era. In chapter three of Revelation, Laodicea is characterized as being spiritually lethargic. God warns this era that He will chastise them, stating:

So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, *that* the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed... As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. (Revelation 3:16-19).

Gold is symbolic of character (Mal. 3:3; Psa. 45:13). Fire represents trials, and white garments picture righteousness (1Pet. 4:12; Rev. 19:8). In this case God allows Satan's persecution to

wake up this half-hearted group of believers so that they may recognize their error and repent. In order for this to happen, however, these people will have to experience persecution in which many will be martyred. This is a frightening aspect of the time Christ called:

Great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be (Matthew 24:21).

The Sixth Seal

The sixth seal pictures a time when the earth and the heavens will be radically shaken. Our planet will quake on a scale never before experienced by humanity. The sun will be blackened, the moon will turn blood red, and these heavenly signs will terrify the mightiest of men to the point of desiring death rather than face what is coming. Christ spoke of this time when giving the Olivet Prophecy. Quoting the words of the prophet Joel, Christ said:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken (Matthew 24:29).

Understanding the Day of God's Wrath

After these heavenly signs, the stage will be set for the seventh seal containing seven trumpet plagues. This final seal will initiate the beginning of God's wrath upon a world that has vastly rejected Him.

At this point an important clarification is needed. Many believe that the great tribulation spoken of by Christ in Matthew 24:21 represents God's wrath on the world. This is not true. The first of six seals are inspired by Satan. God's wrath lasts for one year and begins 2½ years after the great tribulation starts (see the section of this book titled *Understanding the Day of the Lord*). The time of His vengeance and coincides with the opening of the seventh seal when the Almighty will begin to unleash a series of plagues on the earth. As John wrote:

For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand? (Revelation 6:17).

As chapter seven begins, the awesome and frightening seventh seal signals the beginning of the last year of man's rule on this earth. As noted earlier, it is referred to by the prophets as "the day of the LORD." and "the day of vengeance of our God" (Joel 2:31; Mal. 4:5; Isa. 61:2). As God prepares to launch His punishing trumpet plagues, the Apostle John revealed the following:

After these things I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, on the sea, or on any tree (Revelation 7:1).

Poised in four strategic positions, these angels will insure that the plagues contained in the seventh seal will cover the entire earth. They will temporarily hold back "the four winds of the earth." But what are these winds?

Throughout the Scriptures wind is often used to symbolize spirit (John 3:7). Even the word for spirit in Greek is *pneuma* meaning "a current of air, that is, *breath (blast)* or a *breeze*" (*Strong's*, G4154). Therefore, these four winds are powerful spirit forces that will be unleashed by four angels during the trumpet plagues (Rev. 7:2-3).

The first three trumpet plagues will cause unimaginable devastation on the ecological balance of the earth. Hail, fire, and blood will strike both land and sea. One third of all sea animals will die and one third of sea going vessels will be destroyed during these first plagues. One third of the trees and all the green grass will be burned up. Additionally, one third of the fresh drinking water will be poisoned. Virtually billions of people will die. However, as will be explained later, there still remains a great hope for humanity—even for those who will perish at that time.

When the fourth angel sounds his trumpet, one third of the heavens will be darkened. This includes a third part of the sun and moon. John indicated that an angel will then fly through the midst of heaven and cry with a loud voice, "Woe, woe, woe to the inhabitants

of the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!” (Rev. 8:13). These three woes comprise the fifth, sixth, and seventh trumpet plagues.

Understanding the Three Woes

Chapter nine describes the fifth and sixth trumpet plagues. These plagues are also identified as the first and second woes. These woes will unleash venomous, demonic locusts from the bottomless pit. These creatures will be allowed to cause great pain and suffering around the world for five months. During this time, there will be a massive battle involving an army of 200 million soldiers. This military conflict will be so great that one third of all people on the earth will perish. Amazingly, those who survive will remain defiant toward God and His law.

Once the second woe is past, a seventh angel will sound a trumpet causing great voices in heaven to declare, “The kingdoms of this world have become *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Rev. 11:15). This blast will usher in one of the greatest events in human history. The dead in Christ will be resurrected and changed into incorruptible, immortal, spirit beings. Those faithful who are still alive will also be changed. The Apostle Paul described this future event, stating:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17).

Once this spectacular event takes place, the last phase of God's punishment will be unleashed.

Understanding the Bowl Plagues

Just as the seventh seal initiates the seven trumpet plagues, the seventh trumpet will signal the release of seven final plagues that will be poured out. The 16th chapter of Revelation describes seven angels with seven bowls that will pour out seven last plagues upon the earth. The devastation inflicted by these plagues will be enormous. All who have the mark of the beast will contract foul and loathsome sores. The entire sea will turn to blood and everything in it will die. Rivers and springs will also turn to blood. The sun will become so hot that people will be scorched by the heat. There will be darkness, pain, and death. The Euphrates will be dried up to facilitate the world's armies gathering to fight against God at the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16).

At this point, a seventh angel will pour out the seventh and final plague. This plague is described as unleashing thunder, lightning, and an earthquake of such magnitude that nothing like it has ever occurred in human history. So great will this quake be that islands will sink and mountains will be lowered. Finally, hail stones weighing approximately 60 pounds each will rain down upon the earth. However, most of those people still alive will refuse to repent and will continue to blaspheme God.

These trumpet and bowl plagues will fill up God's wrath. They will take place over a period of one year. At their conclusion, Christ and His saints will return to secure the earth and set up God's millennial government (Rev. 19:16-20:6).

Understanding the Two Witnesses

When the great tribulation begins, Revelation 11 reveals that two men will rise up to prophesy against the ungodly people of the earth. The Bible calls these men "the two anointed ones," and "the two witnesses" (Zec. 4:14; Rev. 11:3). Other prophecies indicate that these individuals will begin their end-time ministry approximately three years before the trumpet plagues begin. For this reason, the 11th chapter of Revelation is understood as an inset

chapter designed to introduce two prominent figures who will be key players in prophetic events near the end of the age.

John indicated that these servants of God will be given the ability to perform great miracles. He also stated that anyone attempting to harm them will be fatally wounded. In Revelation 11:4 the two witnesses are characterized as “two olive trees.” The great prophet Zechariah recorded an event in which he saw a vision that also included these two olive trees. While we cannot know exactly who the two witnesses will be, one thing is certain. Their strength comes from the living God (Zec. 4:2-13).

The two witnesses are also characterized as representing “two lampstands.” In Revelation 1:20, lampstands are identified as representing eras of God’s Church. This being the case, when we compare the parallel prophetic chapters of Zechariah 3-4, we recognize that these individuals will likely emerge from the last two eras of the Church.

God will give these two men great power. They will boldly present a strong indictment against those who reject God’s law. However, the Scriptures also reveal that, for the most part, their testimony will fall on deaf ears. Inspired by the devil, the nations of the earth will remain vehemently defiant, and Satan will ultimately find a way to murder these two servants of God. When this occurs, there will be joy in the streets as people will send gifts to one another in celebration of their deaths.

However, after 3½ days God’s power will once again be revealed in them. He will raise the two witnesses to life resulting in great fear falling upon everyone who sees them. Immediately after this, the two witnesses will ascend to heaven in plain view of their enemies. That same hour, a tremendous earthquake will strike the city where the witnesses were slain. A tenth of the city will be destroyed and 7000 people will die (Rev. 11:9-13). This event concludes what the Bible calls “the second woe.” But there is one woe yet to come.

Understanding the 144,000

Before the seven trumpet plagues are unleashed, a special angel will arise “having the seal of the living God.” He will instruct

four angels to “not harm the earth, the sea, or the trees till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads.” It is then revealed that the total number of those sealed is exactly 144,000 (Rev. 7:2-4). This tally includes faithful individuals from the beginning of human history.

Bible authorities have differed greatly in their view concerning the identity of these unique people. Some have taught that the 144,000 are comprised exclusively of Jews. Others claim they are citizens of modern-day Israel. Still others believe that these people are survivors of the great tribulation. It has even been suggested that there are two separate groups of 144,000. Can we know their identity for certain? The answer is yes!

The Scriptures identify certain aspects of the 144,000 that are indisputable. First, this community consists of true servants of God. The Scriptures also reveal that they represent a small segment of those who will ultimately be a part of God’s Kingdom. Additionally, this esteemed company is composed of God’s firstfruits that are not defiled by false religion, they are without guile, and they are spiritual Israelites who follow Christ (Rev. 14:4).

Their story is intricately woven throughout the Bible. As their narrative is told, it becomes clear that the Scriptures identify the identity and destiny of these chosen people. For our purposes in this booklet, it is only necessary to know that some will receive a unique seal that will protect them from God’s wrath at the end of the age. For a complete explanation of this subject, request our book—*The 144,000*.

Understanding the Beast

In the 13th chapter of the book of Revelation, John described a beast that will ultimately be highly revered by most of the world. This beast has been the subject of many fictional works. But the end-time beast is not a figment of human imagination. It is a very real human entity that will wield enormous power over the nations during the end time. For a complete understanding of this subject, we recommend reading our booklet—*Understanding the Mark of the Beast*. For the purpose of this booklet, we present only an abbreviated account.

Many theories have been suggested about the beast of Revelation, but the only legitimate key to understanding this beast is to let the Bible interpret itself (2Pet. 1:20). This is possible by examining other prophetic Scriptures that use the same symbolism and speak of similar events (2Tim. 2:15). The seventh chapter of Daniel provides verses that apply this principle. There, the prophet described a divine vision of four beasts representing four kingdoms that would dominate the known world down through time. As the prophet wrote:

Those great beasts, which are four, *are* four kings which arise out of the earth (Daniel 7:17).

These four empires began with Babylon symbolized as a lion having eagle's wings. While this political entity had existed for more than 2000 years, its world dominance did not begin until the Assyrian empire fell to the Chaldeans in 626 B.C. The kingdom of Babylon finally came to its end in 539 B.C. when the Medo-Persians conquered the capital of this great empire (*The Seven Great Monarchies of the Ancient Eastern World*, Vol. 4, p. 526-527).

The second beast Daniel saw represented the Medo-Persian Empire symbolized by a bear with three ribs in its mouth (Dan. 7:5). This kingdom conquered Babylon, Lydia, and Egypt and remained the prominent empire for more than 200 years (Durant, *The Story of Civilization*, Vol. I, Ch. XIII). It was during this time that King Cyrus issued an edict to free the Jews taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 1). Later, King Artaxerxes, also known as Ahasuerus, was noted for marrying Esther and dealing with Persia's administration of Judah (Est. 2-10).

The third beast Daniel saw appeared as a leopard with four heads and four wings (Dan. 7:6). This creature represented the powerful Greco-Macedonian Empire of Alexander the Great which began in 333 B.C. The war strategy of this kingdom consisted of swift attacks similar to that of a leopard which rapidly conquers its prey. Their success made way for Greece to become the next empire to dominate western civilization (Durant, Ch. XXII).

We should also note that this third beast was depicted with four heads which foreshadowed the last stage of this empire. After the death of Alexander, the empire split into four divisions. Each of these smaller kingdoms was presided over by one of Alexander's four military generals (Durant, Ch. XXIII, p. 558).

The fourth beast Daniel saw represented an empire more frightening and powerful than all of the others. As he wrote:

After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns. I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn, *were* eyes like the eyes of a man, and a mouth speaking great things (Daniel 7:7-8).

Note the striking similarities between the beasts described by Daniel and the one the Apostle John saw. Daniel witnessed a lion, a bear, a leopard, and a fourth beast that was different from all the others—it was more powerful than any before. The end-time beast spoken of in Revelation has all of these characteristics (Rev. 13:1-2). This indicates that the final beast would not only subdue the previous empires, it also assimilated various aspects of the cultures and religions of the kingdoms it conquered.

This fourth beast of Daniel's vision represented the Roman Empire which dominated Europe under rule of the Caesars. As John's vision portrayed, it was wounded to death by a number of tribes early in the fifth century A.D. However, it was restored to life under the rule of Justinian (Rev. 13:3). During its revival, the empire became a union of church and state calling itself the "Holy Roman Empire." Throughout history it would have seven successive ruling governments symbolized by the beast's seven different heads. These heads represented Justinian, Charlemagne, Otto the Great, the Hapsburgs, Napoleon, the axis powers of Mussolini and Hitler, and another who is yet to come (Rev. 17:10).

John noted that the last head will have ten horns (Rev. 12:3; 13:1). In the book of Daniel, this same beast is also depicted as having ten horns (Dan. 7:20). When the Bible speaks symbolically of a horn, it represents the power of a kingdom, nation, or its leader (Dan. 7:24). Therefore, the seventh and final head of this empire will be comprised of ten nations that will unite to form a single, mighty, military force.

These nations will combine their strength under the banner of a false religion to become a dominate world power that will be the final expression of the Holy Roman Empire. It is this extensive kingdom that will be led by an exceedingly powerful man who will boldly speak blasphemy. This empire and its leader comprise the end time beast that will force its subjects to accept a mark.

The Number of the Beast

John wrote that the beast has a name associated with a specific number. We are told that we must have understanding in order to identify the beast. This means readers are to think intelligently about the clues and they will make sense. We are then instructed to “count the number of the beast.” In other words, add it up. Next we are told that it is the number of a man. Finally, we are given the sum indicating who the beast is—666 (Rev. 13:16-18).

It must be understood that 666 is not a mark displayed by the teaming masses. Those who believe that 666 is a mark that the beast imposes on others have been misled. Instead, 666 is a number enabling readers to identify who and what the beast is. For this reason it is called the number of the beast, the number of a man, and the number of his name. With this information we can expose both the empire and the individual whose number is 666.

The founder and first king of Rome was Romulus. Both he and his subjects carried the name Roman which referred to citizens of his empire. The term Roman also referred to a Latin speaking man. Even today, most dictionaries define a Roman as an individual that uses the Latin alphabet, speaks the Italian dialect, and is fluent in the Latin language (<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Roman>, <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/roman>; retr. 1/27/2010).

The prominent language used in the New Testament is Greek. The Greek word for a Latin speaking man is *lateinos*. This term has nothing to do with race, nor is it a reference to the Hispanic culture. It pertains to a citizen of the Roman Empire. In a system known as gematria, Greek letters possess a numerical equivalent. This numbering system can be used to identify the beast. Consider the term *lateinos* and its numerical equivalent.

| Greek letter | Numerical equivalent |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| L | 30 |
| A | 1 |
| T | 300 |
| E | 5 |
| I | 10 |
| N | 50 |
| O | 70 |
| S | + 200 |
| Latin man, Roman | 666 |

Scripture states that the number 666 is “the number of his name.” Therefore, this number is a means to identify the leader who will govern the final blasphemous Holy Roman Empire. However, the name of that leader will not be identifiable until he appears on the world scene.

The great beast that John saw coming out of the sea was symbolic of a powerful, religious, military, government rising up out of the nations (Rev. 13:1; 17:1-15). The clues presented tell us that it will be a final restoration of the Roman Empire comprised of a confederation of ten nations. It will be unified under the leadership of one man who is supported by a prominent religious figure referred to as the false prophet (Rev. 16:13). Together, this powerful world force will reflect the same image and nature of the church and state government that comprised the ancient Holy Roman Empire. The Scriptures also make it clear that the beast will eventually dominate Western civilization the same way the Romans dominated the Mediterranean world. But, how could any man or, company of

men, amass such enormous influence? God answered this question plainly, stating:

And **the dragon gave him his power**, and his seat, and great authority (Revelation 13:2).

The source of this government's power comes from "the dragon," but who is this dragon capable of supplying such might? Again, God did not keep us in the dark. He tells us that the dragon is none other than the devil (Rev. 12:9).

Satan will influence entire nations to passionately follow this man and his government. The devil will inspire political and religious speeches that will persuade the masses and motivate national officials to support this wicked empire (Dan. 7:8).

Satan will also cause a second beast to work in conjunction with the political leader (Rev. 13:11). This is a false prophet who will perform astounding miracles that will seduce vast multitudes into accepting the beast's mark (Rev. 13:13; 19:20). Interestingly, as the term Roman refers to *laitenos*, a Latin speaking man, the vast majority of messages delivered by the Pope and Catholic priests are in Latin. This further reflects a past and future alliance between this apostate church and the state.

The ultimate fate of these two leaders is dreadful. The Apostle John indicated that, after Christ returns to earth, they will be "cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone" (Rev. 19:20).

Understanding the Mark of the Beast

The Scriptures state that the mark of the beast is worn in the forehead or hand. Consequently, most people think of it as an external symbol that is easily recognized. Few would suspect it to be a sign that identifies them with a specific set of beliefs that motivate behavior. But this is exactly what the mark is.

For example, though the expression may have many applications, a mark is defined as "a distinctive or characteristic trait; a device or symbol serving to identify, indicate origin or ownership" (*Webster's College Dictionary*, mark). A mark is a symbol that gives us information regarding the identity of someone or something. According to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the*

Bible, the word “mark” is the Greek *charagma* and it refers to a stamp as a badge of servitude (G5480). This definition is important to understand. A mark identifies ownership and who, or what, a person serves.

God’s Mark

What most do not realize is that God has a mark, and there are parallels between His mark and that of the beast. While the mark of God identifies people who obey Him, the mark of the beast identifies those who obey the devil. The mark of the beast is actually a counterfeit of that which was designed by our Creator.

For example, God’s mark is worn in the hand and forehead. But what does this expression mean? Do people actually tattoo a symbol in their hands or foreheads? Will they have a visible stamp of some kind? To understand we must consider God’s mark that He revealed to Israel. After explaining His Ten Commandments, statutes, and judgments, the Eternal said:

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. **You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes** (Deuteronomy 6:7-8).

These verses express God’s desire for His law to be the central part of our lives. It is to be what motivates us; guiding our decisions, identifying who we serve with our mind and strength. For this reason, God’s moral law is to be worn upon the hand and between the eyes. In other words, God’s law is to be in the frontal lobe where we process thought. It is this part of the brain that we use to contemplate and make judgments. God is telling us that His law is to be the vanguard of our minds! It is also to be displayed in our hand; reflecting what we apply our strength to do (Ecc. 9:10).

This is God’s mark. His people can be recognized by their keeping of the Ten Commandments along with God’s annual holy days. They are individuals who meditate on and live by the ethics found in the Bible. As people practice God’s way, His law becomes

engraved in their minds and it is expressed in what they put their hand to do.

Sadly, the majority of the earth's populous reject God's law. This includes billions who profess Christianity, but do not keep the Ten Commandments. By doing so, they have rejected God's mark and have carelessly chosen Satan's counterfeit. Notice the plain examples that follow.

No Other Gods

Everyone understands that murder, stealing, lying, adultery, and envy is wrong. Where the various religions differ is how we are to express love towards God. The first four commandments are foundational in this respect and will naturally affect how we keep the other six. Therefore, they are of great concern when identifying those who have the mark of God as opposed to those who display the mark of the beast.

For example, the Eternal's first commandment is to have no other god's before Him. Satan's way allows for a plethora of false gods; many of which came from Babylon's worship of the earth and its seasons. Throughout history, the world's empires adopted much of Babel's ancient religious practice. Even though rites and traditions were modified to a degree, their religions always corresponded to what had previously existed. The Babylonian system was passed to Persia, Greece, and then Rome. In fact, aspects of mystery Babylon are still visible all around the world.

Evidence of this is found in the fact that the winter Saturnalia was observed by ancient pagans for centuries. During their celebration they would cut down trees, deck them with silver and gold, exchange gifts, worship the sun god Mithra, and pay homage to the fire god Molech. Legend states that Mithra's birthday was December 25th and on this day believers celebrated the sun's "rebirth." Changing their sun god to the Son of God was easy enough for the Catholic Church. For more on this subject, please read our booklet—*The Truth about Christmas*.

In like manner, Easter was long worshipped as a goddess of fertility known as Ishtar, Eostre, Astarte, and Ashtoreth. Today followers are taught to pray to Mary who they say is the "queen of

heaven,” the same title given to these ancient pagan goddesses. The infamous cross shape † was also worn in honor of Ishtar’s brother, the pagan god Tammuz. Many of these ancient false gods, pagan holidays, and symbols have been handed down to our modern world. For more on these subjects, please read our booklets—*The Truth about Easter* and *The Truth about the Cross*.

As the powerful Holy Roman Empire conquered various nations, many pagan religious practices were assimilated by the Catholic Church. These traditions were retained by her daughters known as Protestant, Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopal, Mormon, and most other professing Christian religions. Today, this mark of pagan blasphemy remains identifiably intact. This was made clear to the Apostle John when He saw a whore riding the end-time beast that possessed the title “Mystery Babylon the Great, **the Mother of Harlots** and Abominations of the Earth” (Rev. 17:3-6).

The revival of this beast will reflect the mystery religions of Babylon. It is ridden by an apostate church that, like a harlot, has had intimate relations with numerous kings and religions. What few realize is the origin was always Babylon. These beliefs are an integral part of that false system and are still practiced by billions today.

While people have simply adopted these ancient heathen ways, and claim they have “confiscated them for Christ,” the truth is they have corrupted the practice of God’s true religion. Most give it little thought, but now is the time to give this serious attention. Whose mark do we carry—God’s or Satan’s?

Graven Images

God tells us the second way we are to show love toward Him is by not having graven images (Exo. 20:4-6). This means that we are not to use images of angels, animals, saints, plants, or anything found in heaven or on the earth in a spiritual manner. As Moses recorded God’s words:

Take careful heed to yourselves... lest you act corruptly and make for yourselves a carved image in the form of any figure: the likeness of male or female, the likeness of

any animal that *is* on the earth or the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air, the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground or the likeness of any fish that *is* in the water beneath the earth. And *take heed*, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and *when* you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the LORD your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage (Deuteronomy 4:15-19).

In contrast to God's word, people have continually created images to use religiously. Buildings all around the world are filled with idols that represent their deities. Even religious stores that profess to be Christian offer numerous idols in the shape of a cross, a fish, a saint, Mary, and Christ. Millions purchase and use these idols in worship or as a symbol of their faith. Those who use them do not display the mark of God. Instead, their practice reflects the mark of the beast.

Taking God's Name in Vain

The third commandment tells us to not take God's name in vain (Exo. 20:7). Ironically, many who claim to be "conservative Christians" attempt to soften their violation of this command by using words like gosh, golly, gee whiz, sheesh, jeepers-creepers, and cripes; when all of these are simply euphemistic slang words for Christ or God.

The Savior also instructed us to not call anyone "Rabbi" or "Father" (Mat. 23:8-9). His admonition warns us against designating any human being as our spiritual parent or master because He and the Father alone hold this sacred status. However, Jewish religious leaders have adopted the title rabbi, and the Catholic Church teaches its adherents to call their priests "father." Perhaps the pinnacle of breaking this commandment is found in the self proclaimed title of the pope who is referred to as the "Most Holy Father."

While objecting to the status and title claimed by the pope, many Protestants break the third commandment by calling their ministers "Reverend" when the Scriptures proclaim that "holy and

reverend *is* HIS name” (Psa. 111:9). These religious leaders presumptuously give themselves titles that belong only to God.

Perhaps the most ironic violation of this commandment comes from the fact that billions claim to be followers of Christ, but do not keep His Ten Commandments. By calling themselves “Christians” and refusing to obey Christ, they blatantly break both the first and third commandments.

Changing Times and Laws

Daniel noted something of great significance regarding the mark of the end-time beast. The prophet wrote the following important detail:

And he shall speak *great* words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to **change times and laws**... (Daniel 7:25).

Did God provide a mark related to time that is a sign between Him and His people? Yes! That mark is keeping God’s law which can be visibly demonstrated by the observance of His weekly and annual Sabbaths. His law enables us to identify the counterfeit.

When God delivered Israel from Egypt, He gave them His Passover. This was a sign between Him and His people that was designed to be a reminder that they are to forever keep His law:

It shall be as a sign to you on your hand and as a memorial between your eyes, that the LORD’s law may be in your mouth... (Exodus 13:9).

The word “sign” comes from the Hebrew word *ôth* and is defined as “a *signal* (literally or figuratively), as a *flag, beacon, monument, omen, prodigy, evidence*, etc.: - **mark**” (*Strong’s*, H226). Therefore, God declares that His Sabbaths mark those who belong to Him. The weekly Sabbath is observed on the seventh day of the week—the day we know as Saturday. The Almighty declared:

Surely My Sabbaths you shall keep, for **it is a sign between Me and you** throughout your generations, that

you may know that I *am* the LORD who sanctifies you
(Exodus 31:13).

A Counterfeit Sabbath

Satan understands the intent and purpose of the Sabbath and he wants us to reject this vital link to our Creator. The mark of the beast is designed to do just that. It repudiates God's commandments, and accepts a pseudo Sabbath and holidays which may appear to be holy, but were never sanctioned by God. The mark of the beast is a demonstration of a person's rejection of God's authority.

Most denominations assert we should keep Sunday as our day of worship. Despite the fact that observance of the first day of the week cannot be found anywhere in the Bible, billions cling to this day as a sign of their faith.

The Catholic Church openly acknowledges that during the period of the Holy Roman Empire, they alone were responsible for instituting the observance of Sunday in place of God's commanded Sabbath. Though the Scriptures make no provision for this change, they presumptuously state that:

Sunday is our mark of authority. The church is above the Bible, and this transference of Sabbath observance is proof of that fact (*The Catholic Record*, Sept. 1, 1923).

Many will read these words and be shocked that a supposed minister of the faith would boldly display such rebellion against God. However, the Catholics are not the only organization to promote this heresy. Her Protestant daughters have followed suit. As their mother church declared:

Which church does the whole civilized world obey? Protestants call us every horrible name they can think of, anti-Christ, the scarlet colored beast, Babylon, etc. and at the same time profess great reverence for the Bible, and yet **by their solemn act of keeping Sunday, they acknowledge the power of the Catholic Church** (*Industrial American*, T. Enright, Dec. 19, 1889).

There are literally hundreds of confessions made by the religious community acknowledging the Sabbath as Saturday and yet most still refuse to keep it. For more on this subject please read our booklet—*Sabbath Confessions*.

Satan has deceived most people into believing that the commandments were done away and it no longer matters which days are observed. If you asked a Catholic or Protestant minister why they believe there is no need to keep all of the Ten Commandments, the law of unclean meats, or God’s annual Holy Days, they might say that those are “Jewish laws” and the New Testament did away with the Old. However, Christ never expressed a desire to change any of those laws. He never even implied that the Ten Commandments were no longer necessary. He stated the exact opposite:

Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, till the heaven and the earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall in any way pass from the Law until all is fulfilled (Matthew 5:17-18).

Based on Christ’s words, we can know what the mark of the beast is. It is a counterfeit way of life in which God’s law is rejected while other ordinances and celebrations that God condemns are accepted. We live in a world where the overwhelming majority have already abandoned God’s mark and embraced another. Today, the mark of the beast is not only accepted—it is preferred. In time it will be enforced!

Understanding the Identity of Babylon the Great

The 17th chapter of Revelation begins with a vision of a woman described as “the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.” Understanding her identity is essential to grasping the meaning of the prophecy.

In prophetic symbolism, a woman represents a church. Therefore, God’s Church is also pictured as a woman (Rev. 12:6-14). However, she is not a harlot. She is portrayed as a lady of virtue who will ultimately become the bride of Christ. This future marriage was spoken of by Paul while explaining the dynamics of marriage:

Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish... For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:22-32).

This mystery in which a woman represents the Church is repeated several times in the book of Revelation. She is portrayed as a mother who gives birth to Christ. Then she is persecuted by the devil eventually fleeing to a wilderness for safety (Rev. 12:4-6). Finally, genuine members of God’s Church from all ages will be resurrected and become the Savior’s bride (Rev. 19:5-9).

The mother of harlots in Revelation 17 and 18 is far different. Unlike the bride of Christ, she is characterized as a whore dressed in scarlet. John’s description represents an apostate church that has had relations with numerous false religions. She has woven heresy into her doctrine and influenced many world governments. She is responsible for persecuting true followers of God, and has caused the murder of an untold number of saints.

This great whore is none other than the Catholic Church which is the mother of hundreds of daughters falsely professing Christianity—including the Protestant community. It is this false church that will be intimately associated with the end-time beast.

As was mentioned earlier, the vision John had of a great beast rising out of the sea represents a modern form of the ancient Roman Empire. When describing this empire, the Apostle John wrote that a second beast will come out of the earth and cause all

people to worship the first beast. The second beast has two horns like those of a lamb. This indicates an appearance of holiness, and two horns represent the two powers of church and state. However, no matter how it appears to men, this beast speaks blasphemy (Rev. 13:11-12).

Like the first beast, this second beast's words and actions are inspired by the devil. Sermons will be powerful and will stir emotions causing people to boldly defy the commandments of God. Led by a false prophet, this second beast will be empowered by the forces of darkness to perform miracles (Rev. 13:13-15). Feats of sorcery will persuade billions to worship the beast and his image. Those who refuse will be killed.

When most people read these words they think that they could never be fooled by something inspired by Satan and a false prophet. But this belief has always been a primary part of the devil's deception (Rev. 12:9). The Bible describes Satan as transforming himself into an angel of light. It should be of no surprise that many religious leaders appear to be righteous (2Cor. 11:14-15). The devil inspires people to adopt an appearance of holiness while denying God's authority in their lives (2Tim. 3:5).

This explains how many present themselves as servants of Christ. They might be appealing, charismatic, and speak words that are soothing to itching ears. But such individuals have actually persuaded people to persecute the innocent while believing they were serving God (John 16:2). In like manner, during the end-time, even though the beast will propagate wicked and brutal acts, this world leader will convince people that his atrocities are evidence of God's approval.

But understand that God chose to use beasts to represent nations, corrupt leaders, and an apostate religious organization. The actual men and women who lead these abominable organizations do not appear as hideous monsters. On the outside they are attractive to many, and appear to be holy, righteous, and pure.

Understanding Satan's Fate

The 20th chapter of the book of Revelation begins with an angel coming down from heaven with a special key and a great

chain. This angel will lay hold of Satan and bind him. He will then cast Satan into a bottomless pit where the devil will be unable to influence humankind for 1000 years (Rev. 20:1-3).

Throughout human history, nearly everything in this world has experienced Satan's corrupting touch. If we simply pause to honestly consider the reality of the world we live in, we can easily see the scope of Satan's pervasive influence.

Satan is called the god of this world and the prince of the power of the air (2Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2). These words relate the fact that he has a measure of control over the nations. Satan demonstrated that fact when he offered the kingdoms of the earth to Christ (Mat. 4:8-9). This truth is clear when we consider the behavior of most people. It is not God who the teeming masses obey. The vast majority give in to the wiles of the devil. With his vast power, he has led untold numbers to worship idols. He has inspired parents to sacrifice their children to false gods such as Molech. He led the Aztecs to cut the hearts out of people while worshipping the sun. He has influenced powerful empires to rise up and destroy one another. He has caused soldiers to torture the innocent. Through his enormous power of deception, he has caused immeasurable pain and suffering.

Seduced by the devil, the world has become filled with a toxic cocktail of false religions. Dishonesty has become a way of life in all levels of society. Violence is spinning out of control. Many have been convinced that killing unborn babies is a moral right. Government leaders have become corrupt and self serving. Pollution is poisoning the earth beyond human repair. The Devil's deceptive power is so great that violence will soon escalate to the point that God must intervene in order to prevent the extinction of all living things (Mat. 24:22).

Imagine a world without Satan and his demons. In such a world all people will live in peace. There will be happiness, generosity, mutual respect, and cooperation. War will be a thing of the past. Crime and violence in the cities will cease to exist. The result will be a high quality of life for all people.

The world without Satan will be a planet free of the pollution that now destroys it. The terrible ravages of sickness and disease

will be gone. There will be no more starvation (Isa. 30:23). Even the animals will no longer harm people, or one another (Isa. 11:6-9). Without Satan the world will provide prosperity for everyone.

The words recorded by John stand as one of the most powerful declarations of hope for humanity. The day will come when the adversary who has enslaved this world with every imaginable evil will be removed for 1000 years. Then, God will have a final judgment in which the incorrigible will be destroyed in a massive, spiritual, lake of fire. What many have not understood is that this supernatural fire is also for Satan and his demons. These evil angels will ultimately be burned up with the rest of the wicked. As Matthew wrote:

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matthew 25:41).

This event will be a final witness, to all who will ultimately be saved, of the end result of iniquity (Rom. 6:23). For more on this subject, please request our booklet—*Satan’s Fate*.

Understanding the Marriage of the Lamb

The Scriptures indicate that the relationship between Christ and His Church is that of a divine Groom and His bride. John the Baptist saw the Messiah as the bridegroom and rejoiced at that fact (John 3:29). The Apostle Paul also recognized this divine relationship and used it to encourage married couples within the Church (Eph. 5:22-27). As he described the proper dynamics in marriage, Paul went on to say that the institution of marriage actually pictures a divine relationship between Christ and His Church:

For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh. This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:32).

Marriage was established by God with a spiritual purpose. With this in mind, every couple should consider the profound

application of Christ's words when He said "Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Mat. 19:6).

Clearly the Messiah validated the connection between marriage and the relationship He will ultimately enjoy with His bride. On more than one occasion, Christ used marriage to illustrate important lessons about His Kingdom. The parable of the wedding feast, and the ten virgins, reflect an appeal for believers to prepare for that future ceremony. If they do not, they will not be a part of it (Mat. 22:1-14; 25:1-13).

The privilege of attending that event will be an honor of the highest level. When writing about the marriage supper, the Apostle John noted that it will take place just prior to Christ's return. Notice how His description which reflects the high regard given to the bride:

Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready." And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God" (Revelation 19:7-9).

This divine wedding will be one of the defining moments in the history of the universe. It will be the culmination of a vital component of God's plan of salvation. His bride will be comprised of His firstfruits—a people that will be changed from mortal to incorruptible and immortal god-like beings (1Cor. 15:52-54). At that time, the dead in Christ shall be raised and those faithful who are alive will be changed. They will meet Christ in the air and will go on to become His intimate companions (1Ths. 4:16-17; Rev 20:6). For more on this subject, please read our booklet—*Beyond the Clouds*.

Understanding the Kingdom of God

There is a consistent message throughout the Bible proclaiming the coming Kingdom of God. So important is this subject that Christ made it the theme of His entire ministry. In fact,

chapter twenty in the book of Revelation is dedicated to proclaiming this great millennial Kingdom. It declares that Christ will reign over this world as its King, and the saints will rule with Him for 1,000 years.

What will His Kingdom be like? Just about everyone who considers themselves a Christian has an opinion regarding the Kingdom of God. Some believe this Kingdom is the Church while others believe it is simply a feeling residing in the heart of believers. Many think that God's Kingdom is in heaven where those who are saved will live for all eternity. Understanding the Kingdom of God is an essential key to grasping, not only the book of Revelation, but the entire Bible.

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

The Messiah walked the countryside of Palestine and preached a powerful message. He began His public ministry by preaching about a Kingdom (Mark 1:14). It was not simply a feeling, but a literal, divine empire that will come to the earth. It is a Kingdom that He will preside over as ruler. Everything in His life was dedicated to advancing the cause of that Kingdom.

This subject dominated Christ's parables. In fact, the Savior once likened Himself to a nobleman who went into a far country to receive a Kingdom. This is just one parable indicating that He would bring that Kingdom to the earth where it will be established (Luke 19:12-27). He also stated that the Kingdom of God will spread to every nation on this planet (Mat. 13:33).

Again Christ told his disciples that all who follow Him must "seek first the Kingdom of God" and do so by seeking "His righteousness" (Mat. 6:33). So important is this Kingdom that it is mentioned more than 100 times in the New Testament, and the prophets refer to it both directly and indirectly hundreds of times in the pages of the Old Testament.

That Kingdom is described in great detail throughout the Bible. The Scriptures describe its language, its cities, and its commerce. It will have a King, territory, a populous, and laws. The Kingdom of God will be ruled over by Christ who will be unbending in upholding God's law throughout the nations (Rev. 19:15). The

Savior's reign will restore the world to the vitality and beauty God originally intended (Acts. 3:21).

The Bible further indicates that, at that time, the true knowledge of God will be available to everyone who desires it (Isa. 11:9). To learn who will be in that Kingdom, and what a person must do to be a part of it, please request our booklet—*The Gospel of the Kingdom of God*.

Understanding the Resurrections

In order to understand the resurrections mentioned in the book of Revelation, it must be understood that God is not calling everyone to salvation at this time. As the Apostle Paul wrote:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, **not many mighty, not many noble, are called** (1 Corinthians 1:26).

The pattern was set at the beginning of creation. God would call a relatively small number of people (John 6:44). Their purpose would be to strive for the first, and better, resurrection (Heb. 11:1-35). In addition, only some of those who are called will be found worthy (Mat. 22:14). Those who are chosen will become God's firstfruits. They will have a special place in the family of God, specific positions in His government, and will become the bride of Christ (Jam. 1:18; Rev. 14:4). For more on this subject please read our booklet—*Is This the Only Time of Salvation?*

Once we realize that there is a first resurrection, it becomes evident that there are others. In fact, there are three separate resurrections mentioned in the Bible. Beginning in Revelation 20, the Scriptures outline a chronology describing these three. The timeline begins with the return of Christ and the first resurrection. Notice the following verses which also mention a second resurrection occurring at a later time:

Then *I saw* the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received *his* mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived

and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.** This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6).

Those who have part in the first resurrection will be changed to spirit and will reign with Christ for 1000 years on the earth. On the other hand, notice that this passage clearly mentions that a second resurrection will take place. However, some question whether “the rest of the dead” is a reference to the second of three resurrections, or is it speaking of a second and final resurrection? In order to make this subject clear, it is important to consider the events surrounding the second resurrection. As the chronology in Revelation 20 explains:

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who *is the Devil and Satan*, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, **so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while** (Revelation 20:1-3).

We understand that those in the first resurrection will be chosen to rule with Christ. Still, there will be many who did not qualify for the first resurrection. There will also be an enormous number who died never understanding the true way of God. This leads to the purpose of the second resurrection. The rest of the dead will be raised after 1,000 years to experience a world that has prospered under God’s government. They will come to understand the truth. Only then will those who have only known Satan’s world be able to see a world the way God intended it to be. During this future age, they will be called to live by God’s law and will have

access to His Spirit. They will be finally given the opportunity to choose God's way and receive salvation.

Satan will have been bound for 1,000 years. The rest of the dead will be resurrected and Satan will be released. This is done for a specific reason. It is to test those who have not yet faced the devil's influence. After knowing the truth, these people must overcome Satan just as genuine Christians who attained the first resurrection had done in their lifetime.

For this reason the second resurrection is not to spirit. It is not the white throne judgment. It is a physical resurrection to mortal life which will give generations from times past an opportunity to develop the moral and ethical character worthy of receiving eternal life. The only way this will be possible is if they overcome their human nature and the devil.

Ezekiel prophesied in great detail of this second resurrection and how God will raise up the dry bones of Israel, put flesh on them, and give them physical breath of life (Eze. 37:1-14). The unconverted will again become mortal human beings and be given a chance to prove themselves faithful to the Almighty. As they learn God's way, their faith will be tested. Like those called now, they will have to make the most important decision of their life. Will they choose to obey God or not? This time of their testing will last an unspecified number of years; during which people will establish communities, raise families, and enjoy a planet that has flourished under the rule of Christ and the saints. Then Satan will be loosed and allowed to deceive the nations once more. Many millions will be persuaded to rebel against God. As John wrote:

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them (Revelation 20:7-9).

Despite the fact that the knowledge of God will have covered the earth, millions will rebel and challenge God's way. This final rebellion will be crushed.

Ezekiel also prophesied of this future attempt to conquer the holy land (Eze. 38:21 - 39:1-16). The prophet wrote that, after the dissenters are destroyed, it will take seven months to bury the bodies. In addition, wood from the rebel's weaponry will be used for fuel for seven years.

Finally, there will be a third resurrection. Like the first, this final resurrection will be to spirit. It will include enormous numbers of people. With the exception of those already raised in the first resurrection, this third resurrection will include all who ever lived. Those who overcame sin, and those who chose to reject Christ, will stand before God. Those who overcame will be judged worthy to receive eternal life. The ungodly will be erased from existence. As John wrote:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And **the dead were judged according to their works**, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:11-15).

These verses make a point that is vital to understand. Many who recognize this third and final resurrection believe that it is only for condemnation. Contrary to that mistaken belief, and what common sense demands, these Scriptures require that some from this final resurrection WILL be found in the Book of Life! For some, it will mean eternal life. For others it will be eternal death. The

Apostle Paul understood this truth and made it blatantly clear when he said:

There will be a resurrection of *the* dead, both of *the* just and *the* unjust (Acts 24:15).

The just are those who will be given eternal life while the unjust will be erased from existence. This last resurrection was vividly described by Christ when He said:

All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world...' Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels' (Matthew 25:32-41).

Thus, the Scriptures reveal that there are two spiritual harvests of mankind. These two will be fulfilled in the first and the third resurrections. The timing of Revelation chapter 20 reveals these three in chronological order. However, it is also possible to identify them by the individuals involved in each.

1. The first resurrection is of the just, at Christ's coming, and they are raised to spirit. These will become the bride of Christ and will reign with Him as kings and priests.
2. The second resurrection is comprised of all those who did not have a chance to truly know God. This resurrection is to flesh.
3. The third resurrection is of the just and the unjust. They are raised as spirit for the purpose of judgment. The just will be given eternal life while the unjust will be destroyed in the lake of fire prepared for the devil and his angels (Mat. 25:41).

For more detail explaining this subject, please read our booklet—*The Truth about the Resurrections*.

Understanding the New Jerusalem

The book of Revelation concludes by describing the white throne judgment when our current heavens and earth will no longer exist (Rev. 20:11). God will then create “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1). Unlike our current solar system, the new heaven and earth will be composed of spirit. Paul spoke of this when he wrote:

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Romans 8:20-21).

Once this new heaven and earth appear, the final phase of God’s plan of salvation will be introduced. This phase involves the establishment of a great city called New Jerusalem. Understanding this city and its purpose is the final key to comprehending what John recorded in Revelation.

In the 21st chapter, John described the New Jerusalem. He began by indicating that it will be brought down from heaven by God the Father:

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2).

It was no accident that the capital of Israel was named Jerusalem. God inspired that name to reflect a spiritual truth (Rom. 1:20). The Jerusalem during the millennium will precede a spiritual New Jerusalem to come. In other words, just as the temple of old served as a type of the future millennial Zion, the millennial temple in Jerusalem will be a precursor to the eternal Zion—the New Jerusalem. In fact, the New Jerusalem is on the heavenly Mount Zion where the 144,000 will stand with Christ (Rev. 14:1).

It was no accident that Christ was a carpenter. He was in the construction business long before He ever came to this earth as a man. Christ was actually the builder and creator of the entire universe (Eph. 3:9; John 1:3). In this context, He told His followers that He was going to prepare places for them to dwell in His Father's house (John 14:2-3). Christ has been working on this project for an untold number of years. He is building something of extraordinary brilliance and supreme magnificence. This will ultimately be an eternal abode for those found worthy to attain the first resurrection.

This magnificent edifice will be a flawless 12,000 furlongs long, wide, and high (Rev. 21:16). Translating furlongs to miles reveals that this building will be approximately 1,400 hundred miles long, wide, and high. If it were placed on this planet today, it would stretch from Los Angeles, California, to Dallas, Texas, and it would cover nearly 1/3 of the United States of America. This holy building would also reach approximately 1,100 miles beyond the earth's atmosphere and encompass an astounding 2.7 billion cubic miles!

If God attempted to place such a building on the earth today it would cause our planet to spin off its axis. Thus, the New Jerusalem will be placed upon a new earth that is large enough to sustain its enormous size (Rev. 21:1-2).

In order to see the full glory of New Jerusalem, the Apostle John was carried away in the spirit to a "great and high mountain" (Rev. 21:10). When speaking prophetically, the term "mountain" is used as a symbol of a government or kingdom (Dan. 2:35; Mic. 4:1). This reveals that the New Jerusalem is the seat of God's government. His government will then consist of the greatest leadership team ever assembled in the history of the universe. It will include the firstfruits of the saints (Rev. 3:21).

The heavenly city appeared to John "as a bride" and yet, as noted earlier, the Church is Christ's bride. How is it possible for resurrected saints and the New Jerusalem to both be Christ's bride?

The answer is that the Church and New Jerusalem are one and the same! Christ is constructing offices for His bride in the New Jerusalem (John 14:2). At the same time, He is also building the Church to fit this spiritual temple (Eph. 2:19-20). He is doing this by forging each Christian's spiritual character so that they will be

fitting inhabitants of this heavenly structure. Glorious New Jerusalem is the exterior of the temple. Converted, resurrected, and glorified Christians will be its interior.

A City Inscribed with the Number of Government

God uses numbers throughout the Bible to symbolize spiritual truths. Twelve is a number used to portray government. Thus, there are 12 tribes of Israel, 12 apostles, 12 months in a year, and there are 24 elders in heaven (two sets of twelve). As the headquarters of God's religious and administrative team, the New Jerusalem will also reflect the divine meaning of the number 12. Consider the number of government repeatedly expressed while describing the New Jerusalem:

New Jerusalem has the number twelve meticulously built into its design. Twelve reveals that the New Jerusalem is a city designed for those who are perfectly qualified to govern!

- 12 thousand furlongs long
- 12 thousand furlongs wide
- 12 thousand furlongs high
- 12 gates leading to the city
- 12 angels attending the gates
- 12 pearls constituting the gates
- 12 tribes of Israel written on the gates
- 12 foundation stones
- 12 apostle's names written on the wall's foundations
- 12 types of precious stones on the wall
- $12 \times 12 = 144$ cubits is the measurement of its wall
- 12 manner of fruit on its trees

The Residence of God

New Jerusalem is currently being constructed. The chief foreman of this colossal project is none other than the Messiah who is personally assuring that each room contains the quality befitting those chosen to be His bride. John wrote that only those whose names are written in the Book of Life will be allowed access to this

city (Rev. 21:27). He also stated God the Father and Christ will have glorious thrones in its Eden like setting (Rev. 22:3).

The fact that God's throne will reside in this city is of enormous significance. Without apology, Christ declared that He shared God's throne. At the same time, He revealed that He would share His throne with others (Rev. 3:21). The throne He spoke of is the very seat of God's government. Those in the first resurrection are designated to assist in governing with Christ—first during His millennial rule on earth, and later in the new heavens and new earth.

A Final Thought

The book of Revelation has been a puzzle to most people since the time it was written. However, these keys should unlock the symbolism and bring life to the words John recorded. An important point regarding these prophecies was told to the prophet Daniel. God stated “shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end...” (Dan. 12:4).

Now is the time when many prophecies that once puzzled Bible students can be understood. Through the Spirit of the living God, and the keys He has given us, we can know what shall come to pass and how we can avoid the wicked wrath of Satan and righteous punishment of God. The question is will we heed?

The Eternal Church of God offers a variety of books, booklets, articles, video, and audio to help people better understand God's Word and His plan for humanity. Some of the printed material available includes:

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