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A BRIEF OVERVIEW AND INTERPRETATION OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

Eric V. Snow

Does the last book of the Bible confuse you? What do these beasts and horsemen represent? Are we condemning to just guessing the meaning of its symbols? Should we just give up even trying? In order to interpret the symbols of the last book of the Bible correctly, we need to apply a basic rule of Bible study: Interpret the Bible by using the Bible's own words when it deals with the same subjects elsewhere, instead of devising our own ideas of its meaning, and then reading them into the text. The Book of Daniel in the Old Testament is the key for interpreting the Book of Revelation's symbols and meaning. (Other books, such as Zechariah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, can help one way or another also in interpreting Revelation). So if you study this book on your own without using commentaries or other "Bible aids," try to find other places in the Bible where the same symbols are used.

It's helpful to remember that Jesus Himself is the Revelator of the book (Rev. 1:1): "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place." He does wish to reveal its meaning to truly called Christians (John 6:44). After all, He was the One who symbolically opened the scroll with seven seals on it so what was written on it by God the Father could be understood (Rev. 5:1-7). A good practical way to implement this is to read through His Olivet Prophecy, as found in Matthew 24, in order to interpret the symbols of the Book of Revelation.

Different Schools of Interpretation Described

There have long been disputes among informed theologians and other students of the Bible about how to approach the prophecies of the Book of Revelation. Here the straight-forward, more literal "premillennialist" interpretation is presented. That's because Jesus comes **before** the millennium (Rev. 20) occurs, when the world will have peace and prosperity under the literal rule of God's kingdom on earth. (The other major views don't take this book seriously, such as the traditional Catholic non-literal amillennialist view, that largely looks upon the present church age as the millennium, or the especially liberal post-millennialist view, which optimistically maintains Jesus returns at the **end** of the thousand years). The "preterist" view of eschatology (i.e., the study of end time events in the Bible) is seriously mistaken, which attempts to apply all the prophecies of Revelation to first-century Rome's government and emperor(s). The "historical" view interprets the symbols to be about what has happened in general over the past roughly 1900 years since it was written. Inevitably this view results in a very negative view of the medieval church, since it would be the scarlet woman riding the beast. Then there's the "futurist" view, which basically maintains only the second and third chapters of Revelation (i.e., the letters to the churches) are historical. All the rest of the book's events are still in the future as of this time (the year 2010). Often prophecies are dual in nature, such as concerning Jesus' coming (first and second times), the Abomination of Desolation (Matt. 24:15), and the destruction of Jerusalem (once by Rome in 70 A.D., and once by the Euro-Beast power in the years to come). The "historical" and "futurist" views are both generally correct and need not contradict each other in many cases. For example, the woman riding the beast existed in the distant past, she still exists today and will in the future ride the beast when disaster strikes humanity in general during the Great Tribulation (Matt. 24:21). Basically, let's see where Scripture's description of general conditions and also certain individual texts would fit in with what's presently going on in the world, as reported in the news media, including newspaper headlines. These can help supply us with background that shows where we are in the march of events leading to the end time when Jesus will return. In the Olivet Prophecy, Christ mentioned we should observe what's going on around us as indications in advance of His return, which would include in today's world media sources: "Now learn the parable from the fig tree; when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too,

when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door" (Matt. 24:32-33). Of course, we have had many down through the centuries jump the gun, and set dates, which Jesus warns against close by in verse 36: "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone." When considering the Olivet Prophecy, where could anyone fit in an optimistic post-millennialist viewpoint anyway? Where does it or Revelation talk about humanity's actions in the world making the world's general conditions more Godly, more spiritual, before Christ's return and the establishment of His kingdom on earth (Daniel 2:44; 7:13-14)?

Evidence for the Premillennialist Interpretation

Let's consider some examples of fulfillments or indications from prophecy of Christ's return that couldn't have been true in prior centuries. One of the most obvious, which some did see in advance before Zionism was something to take seriously, concerns the reestablishment of the Jewish people in their old land in the Middle East. A few oppressed dhimmis under Arab Muslim or Turkish control weren't going to do the trick here. Another more specific text concerns the most direct interpretation of Matt. 24:22: "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short." Now, could have this been fulfillable in any century before the twentieth century's development of nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare? Other signs of the end have occurred that weren't possible and/or did actually occur unless recent decades. History and the news media's reporting, for journalism is historiography's first draft, can help in interpreting Scripture. How much has archeology, including the discovery of papyri, helped us in interpreting the Bible, for example? So long as dates aren't set, or other obvious irresponsible statements are made based on superficial exegesis and analysis of the news, we can use media sources and historical writings as background information also when it comes to interpreting Scripture, not just having it interpret itself through the grammitico-literal approach. We need not fall into "newspaper eschatology" or "headline theology."

Of course, although the newspapers and media have long been full of bad news, there are reasons to believe things really have been getting worse in certain regards overall in the past two or three generations, for now humanity has the ability to destroy itself, as per Matt. 24:21-22. And, if anything, the general trends in the culture have been towards de-Christianization over the past 250 years, with a rapid increase in the past 70. God has a plan that will stand. He will push humanity along as is necessary to accomplish it. But, He also allows people free will such that it's a cooperative enterprise as that interacts with the help given by the Holy Spirit in obeying Him better in their personal lives. However, the few true believers, or even the many sincere traditional Christians, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox, are fundamentally going to change things in the world as a whole for the better permanently before Jesus' arrival. No great improvement prophesied for the world's conditions in the words of Scripture

before Jesus returns in the Olivet Prophecy, for example, or in the Book of Revelation. The Dominion theology reconstructionists wouldn't agree, but post-millennial eschatology was buried in Flanders' mud and further destroyed by the gas chambers of Auschwitz. True, some trends in American culture aren't all bad: Since about 1993 there has been some overall improvement in (say) the divorce, violent crime, and abortion rates, and even illegal drug usage, but we still aren't back to where we were in (say) 1959 overall. Only if a lot of intellectuals, academics, and cultural leaders should surrender to Intelligent Design as the leading edge of a return to a Biblical viewpoint, and Western society in general have Nineveh's levels of repentance when Jonah visited them, then reconstructionist post-millennialism could start to seem more plausible than premillennialism.

Jesus Is Described in Revelation 1

Now, having surveyed the schools of interpretation about the final book of the Bible, let's start to go through its text more specifically. The first chapter of Revelation is mostly about the Revelator Himself, i.e., Jesus. It describes what He looks like in heaven today. By using such titles as "Alpha and Omega," the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, and "the Almighty," it shows Jesus is not just the Son of God, but God the Son (Rev. 1:8). It also sets up directly the subject of the next two chapters, by naming the seven churches.

This chapter describes Jesus as having hair white like wool. Notice that Revelation 1:18 makes clear that the preceding verses are a portrayal of Jesus long after His resurrection and ascension to heaven: "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore." This description reflects that Jesus has fully again the glory that He had before the incarnation (i.e., His virgin birth) and the world was (John 17:5).

So then, what's the significance of this depiction of Jesus? When Jesus is described as having white hair, that refers to His purity and righteousness. It likely alludes to His similarity to the Father as found in the book of Daniel 7:9: "I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool." The glorified Jesus stood among seven lampstands, which represent the seven churches (and church eras) mentioned in the letters to the seven churches in Revelation 2-3, the following two chapters. This means Jesus is present with Christians spiritually down through the ages and as they assemble (Matthew 18:20). This symbol also alludes back to the single golden lampstand with seven lamps that stood in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem before it was destroyed by both Babylon and Rome (centuries apart, in 586 b.c., and 70 A.D). Notice how the seven lampstands correspond to the seven churches, and the seven stars refer to the seven angels who are messengers to the seven churches (Revelation 1:20). When John says the stars are Jesus' right hand, that means they are under His sovereign or complete control as their Lord and Creator. It also likely

alludes to the angelic host who will accompany Him when He returns. Here (in verse 20), the Bible clearly explains the symbols in question. As already mentioned above, whenever possible, we should try to find the Bible's own interpretation of its symbols, even if it occurs in another chapter or book, rather than inventing our own meanings and reading them into Scripture. The general rule is, let the Bible interpret itself.

In this vision, Jesus also had glowing bronze feet. John F. Walvoord in "The Bible Knowledge Commentary" (p. 930), which has been consulted for insights in writing this section of this essay in general, says this alludes to the bronze altar in the temple being a place for the sacrifice for sin and divine judgment concerning it. When He is said to have a sword coming out of His mouth, this refers to His power and authority to judge and wage war against the unrighteous nations when He returns in glory to the earth in the future (cf. II Thess. 1:7-10; Revelation 19:11-12, 21).

When Jesus calls Himself the Alpha and the Omega (Revelation 1:11), that's a synonym for when He says He is the First and Last and the beginning and the end. "Alpha" was the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and "Omega" was its last letter. So it would be like saying he was the "A" and "Z" of the English alphabet. This title demonstrates that Jesus is God, that the great plan for humanity and His creation He began as Creator He will bring through to completion (cf. Revelation 21:6). When John says Jesus' face shone like the sun, this refers to His being the source of light and truth for humanity (John 1:6-8). In Revelation 21:22-23, Jesus and the Father are the temple and source of light for the New Jerusalem. This alludes indirectly to His great creative power since He created the sun and thus is superior to it, although many people from many civilizations down through the centuries mistakenly worshipped it as a god. People instead should worship He who created the sun, not the sun itself.

When John wrote that Jesus had the keys to death and Hades, the place of the dead (Rev. 1:18), this refers to Jesus' power to resurrect, judge, and condemn the human race (cf. Romans 14:10; II Cor. 5:10) since He is both their Creator and Savior. He gives us life, but also can deny us eternal life if we don't repent and have faith in Him as Savior (Romans 6:23).

What's interesting is that the seventh spirit is mentioned in the immediately preceding verses in both cases. The spirits and angels are interchangeable, since angels are composed of spirit, according to Hebrews 1:7: "And of the angels He says: 'Who makes His angels spirits and His ministers a flame of fire.'" Notice that in Rev. 4:6 mentions that the seven spirits of God: "Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God." Likewise, consider Rev. 15:1: "Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete." Now, these seven spirits stand before God's throne, according to Rev. 1:4. Also notice how the seven stars are the seven angels in

Rev. 1:20: "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand, and the seven golden lampstands, the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." In Revelation 3:1, Jesus equates the seven spirits with the seven angels when we compared Rev. 1:20 with this statement: "And to the angel of the church in Sardis write: 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. 'I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead.'" In the next two chapters of Revelation, one angel corresponds with each church Jesus specifically wrote a letter to. The seventh angel is mentioned in three places (Revelation 10:7; 11:15; 16:17). This seventh angel has the awesome tasks of sounding the trumpet for the arrival of God's kingdom and of pouring out the final bowl of God's wrath upon the earth.

Angels are messengers for God, for the very word translated "angel" means "messenger" in Greek and also Hebrew. The seven spirits shouldn't be seen as the third member of the Godhead of the Trinity teaching. "The Holy Spirit" is never personified in any of the throne room scenes described in the Book of Revelation, which is one of the best arguments against its being a separate member of the Godhead. Even if one upholds that teaching, wouldn't it be peculiar to imagine one member of the Godhead being seven separate "Spirits"?

Jesus Sends Letters to the Churches in Revelation 2-3

The letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3 describe churches in seven cities in Asia Minor, which is basically Turkey today. In general Jesus describes something good and something bad about each church, although for Philadelphia (the 6th) He says only good things and for Laodicea (the 7th and last) He says only bad things. They can be interpreted in more than one way plausibly. They could be about attitudes, good and bad, that describe various churches and groups of true believers down through the centuries. The letters also could be describing general predominate tendencies of believers chronologically through the centuries, which is called the "church era" theory. After all, Revelation's "sets of seven," i.e., the seals, the trumpets, and the bowls of God's wrath, all occur in time order, so this theory has good evidence for it. But then any number of Christians down through the centuries at any and all times could be described as "Philadelphian," "Laodicean," "Ephesian," etc. So just because we're near the end before Jesus' return doesn't mean all true Christians must be "Laodicean," and thus the other six churches' descriptions of Christians can be ignored except for their historical interest. A dual interpretation of these letters is perfectly sound, but emphasizing the church era interpretation would be wise.

Jesus Opens the Seven Seals

The book of Revelation contains the most detailed descriptions of God's throne room in the third heaven that are found in the Bible. Chapters 4 and 5 describes God's throne in considerable detail, including who is there. I believe that they should generally be taken literally, not merely metaphorically, even though human language will inevitably fall to capture the utter glory, splendor, and majesty of what takes place there. Chapter 5 focuses on Jesus after He takes the scroll with the seven seals on it from God the Father. He makes it possible to understand what's on it, which John had been lamenting about no one's being able to read it.

The sea of glass is mentioned in two places, Revelation 4:6 and 15:2. It's near and by God's throne in heaven in Rev. 4:6: "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal." It's also the place by God's throne where the finally saved Christians stood before God (Rev. 15:2): "And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having the harps of God." These people are part of the same group of people will reign with Jesus during His earthly rule on earth described in Rev. 20:4.

The seven seals are a general overview of human history since the first century A.D. and also are especially about what terrible events will befall humanity in the end times. The first four seals are the well-known four horsemen of the apocalypse. ("Apocalypse" in Greek merely means "revelation" or "unveiling," but in English it has taken on the meaning "disaster" because of all the dreadful events described in this book. Normally Catholic translations of the Bible will call this book the "Apocalypse," which basically just transliterates the Greek into English instead of translating it). An important way to figure out what they mean is to correlate them with Jesus' Olivet Prophecy found in Matthew 24, Luke 21, and Mark 13. By using the Bible to interpret the Bible, it helps us avoid just reading our own made-up meanings for these symbols into the Bible, rather than getting the correct meaning that Jesus intended us to understand. (He's the real author, not the Apostle John, ultimately). So the first horseman represents false religion's influence, the second war, the third famine, and the fourth death. This makes sense intrinsically, since false religious ideas can lead to needless wars, and then famines and disease epidemics often follow in the wake of wars, such as in the case of World War I and its aftermath in Russia and elsewhere. This same order is found in Matthew 24:4-8.

Who are the 144,000?

The fifth seal concerns the persecution of Christians, which Christ mentions in Matthew 24:9. The great tribulation and its wars are part of this seal. The sixth seal Christ speaks about in Matthew 24:29 also, which concern the heavenly signs like the sun's becoming black. God seals and then protects the 144,000 Israelites (who mostly aren't Jews, by the way, but are also members of

the “Ten Lost Tribes”) who are also true Christians in Revelation 7. Jesus describes this in Matthew 24:31. Revelation later returns to describe the 144,000 some more in Rev. 14:1-5). Then a huge multitude, gentiles and Israelites, who receive spiritual salvation, but often weren’t saved physically during the this coming terrible time. (See Rev. 7:9-10, 14). They are people who heard the warning message to repent, obey God’s law, and have faith in Jesus as Savior, but didn’t take action until the Great Tribulation began.

Let’s consider who the 144,000 of Revelation 7 and 14 are. Apparently they are true Christians who happen also to be physical descendants of the various tribes in question also. God will seal them shortly before the 7th seal is opened, so they are those actually alive at the end time. It isn’t a subsection of all those who have lived down through human history who are true people of God, but a group of those true Christians living shortly before Jesus returns. Notice that they are distinguished from the great multitude described in Rev. 7:9? Why do we know they are different? Notice this formula, "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues." Compare it to what Nebuchadnezzar meant in Daniel 3:29, and what John wrote in Rev. 5:9-10; 14:6. These aren’t Jews or Israelites, but gentiles. They can’t be physically of the same national background as those listed earlier, from the 12 tribes of Israel, mentioned in the prior verses. Or, at the barest minimum, Israel and Judah are also included with this great (saved) multitude as a minor subset, but the 144,000 aren’t identical to them.

The 144,000 are only part of all the saved Christians down through the centuries who will be in the first resurrection (or translation, if still alive) when Jesus returns. The gentiles who are truly saved before Jesus’ return, and also during the millennium, need not wait until the second resurrection (Rev. 20:5, first part) to be saved. In this case, the number 144,000 is literally accurate, in part because of the specific enumeration of tribes that follow afterwards. These Israelites and Jews will be also truly saved Christians, who accept Jesus as their personal Savior in this life before He returns. Hence, spiritual Israel and physical Israel overlap in this regard. Likewise, historically, they did in the early days of the true Church in the first century, when the only believers in Jesus as the Messiah and Savior were Jewish.

The seventh seal, which includes Christ’s return, is composed of the seven trumpets, which are acts of God in punishing the world. These are listed in Revelation 8, 9, and 11:15-19. The seventh trumpet proclaims the arrival of Jesus’ kingdom before His actual arrival on earth (Zech. 14:1, 3-4). Chapter 10 is an “inset” chapter that isn’t part of the general flow of Revelation’s chronology. It focuses on describing how the Apostle John is receiving the prophecies that lead to writing the Book of Revelation. Then Chapter 11 describes Two Witnesses before it turns to the seventh trumpet. The Two Witnesses will live in or near Jerusalem when it is conquered by the coming “Euro-Beast,” lead by the King of the North (see Daniel 11:40-45). They will prophesy about God’s truth,

and be able to kill people who attack them. But they will be martyred by the Beast power before being resurrected and rising into heaven (or at least the sky).

Revelation 12 and Satan's Rebellion

Now, Revelation 12 is an "inset" chapter that reaches from the distant past to the still future events of the time of Jesus' return. It isn't part of the general chronological order of much of the events of the Book of Revelation as a whole (i.e., the 7 seals, 7 trumpets, and 7 bowls of God's wrath). It's an "inset" chapter that describes the true church's persecution by Satan and his armies before it escapes into the wilderness. It stretches from the time of Jesus' birth, and the emergence of the true church from physical Israel in the first century A.D., to the Medieval period, on into the future, when the Great Tribulation occurs. The woman represents a church (see Eph. 5:22-27, 32). I believe this chapter has a dual application: It refers to true Christians who fled from areas dominated by the Catholic Church and the Holy Roman Empire's full control during the Middle Ages, such as the Waldensians apparently were. But it will also refer to a place of safety on earth (not a rapture to a place in heaven) for many but not all true Christians during the Great Tribulation to come. This chapter mentions Satan's fall from heaven right after the verse saying the great tribulation period's length is 1260 days, when at least part of the true church will be protected by God's direct power in an apparent "place of safety." Since the great tribulation hasn't occurred yet, Satan would need to make another assault on heaven, and be thrown down to earth again. After he's cast down here once again, he's strike out in rage and cause chaos throughout the world. We won't "wonder" whether he's been thrown down or not the earth when those terrible events occur. He'll know that Jesus' return and his imprisonment will occur only about 3 1/2 years after that period begins. So he'll want to try to turn this world into a vast graveyard for all of humanity by having us turn our weapons of mass destruction against each other. Since our ultimate destiny is to replace him and his angels (the demons) as rulers of this world, he would like to stop that from happening.

Evidence for the Duality Principle of Biblical Interpretation

The basic reason why to think the war described in Rev. 12:7-9 will be in the future also, not just the past, is because of the duality principle of prophecy in Scripture. Often an event will have a minor or smaller fulfillment earlier in time before a greater fulfillment later on. This general pattern appears in the famous Olivet Prophecy of Jesus in Matt. 24, where events related to Jerusalem's fall in 70 A.D. and to His Second Coming are both being referred to. In particular, the abomination of desolation that Jesus mentioned in Matt. 24:15 once was already set up when He spoke this (c. 31 A.D.), when the Greek ruler of the Selucid Empire, Antiochus Epiphanes, ended the sacrifices in the Temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem in the mid-second century b.c. This event

happened again when Rome's legions took Jerusalem in 70 A.D., after Jesus spoke these words. And there will be a third fulfillment when the Beast Power of Europe, the King of the North, will occupy and take Jerusalem after defeating a Muslim-composed King of the South. (See Daniel 12:40-45; Zechariah 14:2-3). That's just before Jesus returns.

Notice Revelation 12:3, which mentions a third of the stars of heaven being thrown to earth by Satan. We know that angels can be referred to as "stars" in Scripture (Job 38:7). This text shows about one third of the angels rebelled against God, their Creator, under Satan's influence. Obviously, this occurred many centuries ago, not the immediate future. Jesus told the disciples, after they rejoiced over casting out demons by God's power: "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven" (Luke 10:18). Now, this had to have occurred before 31 A.D., since Jesus was crucified in that year. In Ezekiel 28:11+ and Isaiah 14:12-14, Satan's prehistoric rebellion against God is described, although there he is being addressed by other names (like "King of Tyre," an ancient trading city on the coast of what is now Lebanon).

Although this can't be directly proven, it's an excellent inference Satan's rebellion caused the condition of ruin and destruction that the earth is described as being in when God begins to re-create the earth in Genesis 1:2. Here the King James Version's (and other major translations') wording obscures what had happened. Since God is almighty and all-knowing, He didn't create the earth as a mess and then have to straighten it out (compare Isaiah 45:18). The text is translated, "The earth was without form and void" (RSV). It could be translated fully legitimately like this: "The earth became a waste and emptiness." So then Satan was first thrown out of heaven when he rebelled against God before Adam and Eve were created, which is long before 1914, the date the Jehovah's Witnesses mistakenly focus on for this event. The text in Isaiah 14:13 explains that the rebellious angel (called here, "the king of Babylon") wanted to ascend to heaven. That shows he was on earth when the rebellion occurred, and then tried to get up to heaven to defeat God.

This rebellion is described symbolically in Revelation 12:7-9: "And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. And the dragon and his angels waged war, and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." So then, Satan will again attempt to assault God in heaven, as opposed to just doing this in the past before Adam and Eve were created. Satan will try to attack heaven again, for Rev. 12:6 places this rebellion as occurring after the woman, who is the true church symbolically, goes into the wilderness during the Middle Ages and also during the Great Tribulation to come before Jesus' return. Since God is Almighty, Satan will lose, and be cast back down to earth again. Rev. 12:12 also shows that this occurs during the great time of

trouble, the Great Tribulation, before Jesus' return: "Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time."

The Jehovah's Witnesses' mistake about 1914

The Jehovah's Witness doctrine about 1914 is fundamentally mistaken, for the great tribulation didn't begin in that year nor was Jesus seen to return. Of course, that is a crucial year in world history, for it was when World War I began, from which we in the Western world didn't recover from until arguably the fall of communism in Russia in 1991. But that hardly compares with the incredible death and destruction that will result worldwide from the Great Tribulation. After all, the USA and Japan were hardly hurt by World War I compared to Europe; both of those nations actually economically profited from the war, unlike the Europeans, who lost far and away more in dead also. Since the Great Tribulation is yet to come (see Matt. 24:21-22), Satan has yet to fall from heaven again.

So Satan couldn't have fallen from heaven in 1914 since that was long after the re-creation of the earth and also before the Great Tribulation that occurs before Jesus will return. For Satan fell from heaven once, before the events in Genesis 1:2 occurred. He will also fall again, during the Great Tribulation before Jesus' return. Jesus did not return secretly in 1914, which I think is what the Jehovah's Witnesses teach (ask your friend about this), for "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him" (Rev. 1:7).

Satan clearly was tossed out of heaven long before 1914. One key text proving this is Luke 10:18, where Jesus said: "I was watching Satan fall from heaven like lightning." Satan was on earth when he initially revolted against God. Notice what God stated was Lucifer's (Satan) plans in Isaiah 14:13: "For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north." So although Lucifer had been the covering cherub, right over God Himself on His throne (see Ezekiel 28:14), he then was transferred to the earth while still obedient. While on the earth, ruling over it, he (and one third of the other angels) decided to rebel against God. As he rose up to attack heaven, he was cast down to earth, as Jesus had seen.

So Satan will be thrown down to the earth again, *but this hasn't happened yet*. The year 1914 was too long ago for this second attack on heaven by Satan and the demons. I think it will occur during the Great Tribulation just before the Second Coming of Christ. If Jehovah's Witnesses teach it happened in 1914 they are wrong. Jesus did not return secretly that year, which is what I believe they teach about what happened then.

The Two Beasts of Revelation 13

Chapter 13 is another “inset” chapter. It needs to be interpreted in the light of Daniel 2 and 7. Who and what is the first Beast that comes out of the sea (Rev. 13:1-11)? According to Daniel, it would be the fourth, most terrible Beast that emerged from the sea and the legs of iron in King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. That beast is the Roman Empire, including its various resurrections, such as the Holy Roman Empire of the Middle Ages. The end-time Beast will be the present European Union turned dictatorial and (perhaps) shorn of some of its present, smaller members. The “Beast” can refer to either the empire or the dictator leading it, just as a king represents his country symbolically, such as on its stamps and coins. But then who is the second beast (Rev. 13:11-18)? This will be the false prophet or man of sin described in II Thess. 2. But it also refers to the religious institution that he leads. Inevitably, if we apply the historical school’s premises to what this chapter says and what Revelation 17-18 says about the woman riding the Beast, this second beast is also the woman. That then means the Catholic church, past and future, was and will be in an unholy alliance with the political government of Europe that supports it. The union of church and state that characterized the Middle Ages will be reborn fully in the years to come, believe it or not. Especially that’s likely after its top leader, the man of sin (II Thess. 2) publicly performs demonic miracles that will deceive almost everyone into believing the power of God backs him. (Just because its miraculous doesn’t mean God is behind it!)

In Revelation 14:6-13 is a description of what three angels proclaim to warn the world. The angel who reaps the earth in Rev. 14:14-16 apparently reaps the saved, but the angels described in verses 17-20 refer to the final battle (often called “Armageddon,” somewhat inaccurately, Rev. 16:16, 14) that will occur in and by Jerusalem. “Armageddon” is the “staging area,” but not the (main?) battlefield.

Revelation 15-16 describe the set up and implementation of the seven terrible “bowl” judgments of God against the world for its sins. Much like God punished the world’s sins by flood when Noah’s family was in the ark (Genesis 6-7; Matthew 24:37-39), God will punish the world again in the years or decades to come.

Revelation 17:1-19:10 describe generally the great false church’s union with the political “Beast” power in Europe, and its fall. It’s also an economic system that produces wealth for many people; not everyone will be poor during the time of economic and military chaos to come, at least initially. Notice that the headquarters of the woman has “seven mountains” (Rev. 17:9). Is not Rome famous for having seven hills? What church is headquartered there, both in the Medieval past and in the near future? Revelation 19:11-21 describe Jesus’ actual return and His war against the Beast Power’s armies.

The Millennial Reign of Jesus Christ on Earth Described

Revelation 20 is an unusually important chapter in this book. It describes the thousand year period, the millennium, during which Christ will rule the world from Jerusalem on earth. It mentioned Satan's unleashing and rebellion with many people at the end of the thousand years. After that rebellion is crushed, then the great white throne judgment takes place. During this time, people will be resurrected and receive salvation who hadn't hear the name of Jesus before (compare Ezekiel 37:9-14). Others will be punished by being thrown into the lake of fire, where they will be destroyed, not eternally tortured (cf. Malachi 4:1, 3).

Now, what happens during the thousand years while Christ reigns on earth? The Bible teaches that when Christ rules the earth there will be a great period of general peace and prosperity for all the people then living on the earth and born during it. But of course, there will be a need to recover and rebuild after the terrible wars that took place during the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord.

The book of Isaiah is full of idyllic descriptions of life during this time of spiritual and physical peace and prosperity after Christ returns. People on earth will be much happier on average during this time period than they are today. One reason for the difference is because Satan and the demons will be tied up during this time, and not be able to deceive the nations until after it ends (see Revelation 20:1-3). Christ would be the righteous ruler over all the earth (Isaiah 9:4-5). There would be so much harmony that even the animals that preyed on others would get along with each other instead. A lion would eat straw (or hay) like an ox! A young child would lead a lion and calf together. And, most importantly, spiritual deception would end, since the knowledge of the Lord would fill the world as the oceans do today (see Isaiah 9:6-9).

There would be imposed peace on the whole earth by God's power, and His law would go out to all the nations from Jerusalem. Everyone would have the opportunity to learn of His ways. Now the United Nations was established by mankind after World War II with the hope of turning swords into plowshares. Well, this will actually occur during the millennium, but by God's power, not by man's. (See Isaiah 2:1-4). People's general medical problems would be divinely healed: The blind will see, the deaf will hear, and the lame will leap (Isaiah 35:4-6). According to Amos 9:13, the agricultural blessings would be so rate the plowman will overtake the reaper!

A key job for the saints ruling with Christ (Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6) would be to prepare the world for when Satan will be unleashed at the end of the millennium and when the vast majority of the world's pre-millennial population would be resurrected at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:5). People would need to be taught to resist Satan's pull. They also would have to be told it would be their duty to help prepare the world for the multiple billions to be resurrected

just after the thousand years ended. These billions of people will receive then their first and only chance at salvation during an apparent one hundred year period (Isaiah 65:17, 20) during which they'd have to make up their minds about whether to go God's way or not. Plainly a lot will change compared to the world's conditions today during the millennial rule of Christ.

Will Sinners Stand Before God to Be Judged?

Will sinners stand before God to be judged? The short answer to this question is "yes," as shown by this text (Revelation 20:12, RSV): "And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done." However, we shouldn't think that has to mean they can't still be saved. If they weren't called during their first lifetimes on earth (as per John 6:44), and they never heard the name of Christ or never had saving knowledge of Him, unsaved people still can be saved after they die. The key text demonstrating this truth is Ezekiel 37:11-14, since we know historically that the vast majority of ancient Israel was rebellious and died unsaved: Then he said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. Behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, I will open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you home into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the LORD, when I open your graves, and raise you from your graves, O my people. And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land; then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken, and I have done it, says the LORD." Therefore, it's a major mistake for someone to equate "sentencing" with "judgment" (cf. Hebrews 9:27), since a period of judgment can last for an extended period of time (cf. Genesis 15:16).

It should be noted that saved Christians will also stand before Christ to be judged (Romans 14:10-12): "Why do you pass judgment on your brother? Or you, why do you despise your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of God; for it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall give praise to God." So each of us shall give account of himself to God."

As inspired by Satan after the millennium concludes, Gog and Magog will attack loyal Christians and Jerusalem as described in Revelation 20:8-9. The saints ruling with Christ (Revelation 5:10; 20:4, 6) will have the job of preparing the world for when Satan will be unleashed and when the vast majority of the world's pre-millennial population would be resurrected at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:5). People will need to be taught to resist Satan's pull. They also would have to be told it would be their duty to help prepare the world for the multiple billions to be resurrected just after the thousand years ended. These billions of people will receive then their first and only chance at salvation during

an apparent one hundred year period (Isaiah 65:17, 20) during which they'd have to make up their minds about whether to go God's way or not. There also would be a need to fix things after the Holy Land is attacked by Gog and Magog, as described in Ezekiel 38-39, which will occur perhaps one or two generations into the millennium. That's a separate attack from the one described in Rev. 20:8.

Two of the Most Mysterious Chapters of the Bible

Revelation 21-22 are among the most mysterious chapters of the Bible. They describe the world after all physical human beings have either been turned into spirit members of God's Family or have been destroyed. There will be not more pain or suffering (Rev. 21:4), which shows that God doesn't permanently want pain in His creation: It's only a temporary intruder that performs a ghastly function for a limited time. The glorious, splendid New Jerusalem, where the Father Himself dwells, will come down to earth in order to live with humanity after the old heavens and earth have been destroyed or totally transformed. Revelation 21:9-22:5 are largely taken up in describing God's new dwelling place where the transformed saints will also be. The final part of the Bible, and much of Revelation 22, is taken up with final exhortations and encouragements for Christians to stay loyal to the truth. There's also a warning against changing the words of this book in almost its last sentences (Rev. 22:18-19).

Is It Unfair for God to Punish Sinning People by Death and Destruction?

Now, having considered briefly above all the awful worldwide events of the Book of Revelation, we have to face this question: Is it just for God to punish people who don't really seem to be all that bad or deliberately defiant of His will? Are they simply rather ignorant folks, who should be excused for not knowing or not practicing spiritual truth? There are several ways of answering this question. One point is whether our (low) standards of righteousness are sufficiently high in an utterly holy God's sight (Isaiah 55:8-9): "'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.'" One major problem we have is our ability to take for granted the moral standards of righteousness of others around us and assume that they are fine. Similarly, many people in the Third World, who have lived the lives of subsistence farming for generations (without electricity, indoor toilets, hot and cold running water, etc.) basically have accepted being poor, and didn't think too much about how life could have been radically different except for Western media influences (like reruns of American TV shows about rich families on their nation's TV) in recent decades. This ability to "adjust" and accept without question what we see, live, and experience in the world around us can be and is profoundly self-deceiving. After all, it's likely that most of the people living in Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:20-21), or in the world before the Flood in the time of Noah (Genesis 6:5-7) thought that they were "A-OK" as well. So why

should we in the world as a whole today think we're any different or morally superior to them? (See Matt. 24:37-39, where Jesus compares the period before the Flood and the period before His return as being similar).

But then, there's another way to answer this question, based on what Paul wrote in Romans 1:18-32. That is, people really aren't ignorant, at least enough to be excused from being punished for their sins, but they really do know better or could easily know better. Hence, Paul says atheists who deny God's existence are "without excuse" (v. 20) since nature witnesses to them of His existence and power. So when people, "professing to be wise," became fools (v. 22), they aren't really ignorant or nice but misled people since they also (at some level) wanted to be deceived in order to indulge in their lusts. Such people aren't as innocent as we may like to think . . . which is a disturbing thought when we realize we aren't terribly different from them in many areas of life.

Then there's another answer to this problem, which is returned to further below: God is able to bring back all these people, regardless of how nice or ignorant they are, back from the dead by His power. Then they will receive an opportunity to gain eternal life (cf. Ezekiel 37:11-14, which portrays people who died unsaved gaining their first chance at salvation). Hence, those punished during the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord aren't necessarily lost forever, even if they may lose their physical lives.

Now Scripture clearly says that God can't sin. Jesus, who is God (John 1:1-3, 14), didn't sin while living in the flesh on earth (Hebrews 2:17-18; 4:14-15). God can't lie (Titus 1:2; cf. Romans 3:4). In God, there is no darkness, only light (I John 1:5-6). Since God is holy (I Peter 1:16), righteous (Ex. 9:27), and perfect (Matt. 5:48), He will not sin.

Now clearly, as Timothy Keller points out in his best-selling defense of Christianity, "The Reason for God," a lot of people aren't comfortable with the idea of a God who judges. They like the idea of a God of "love." But what do we mean by "love"? Shouldn't love have standards? If we love someone, like our children, don't we want them to do well and good in life, not badly and evil? If God tolerated all sins people commit with indifference, and never judged or condemned anyone for anything they did, would He really love us then? And, of course, if we morally judge and condemn God for morally judging and condemning others, what is our source of authority for doing so? Suppose we're moral relativists who believe right and wrong is purely subjective, and changes across cultures arbitrarily. If we may not judge anyone for doing anything "wrong," who are we to condemn God, who logically is part of the class of "anyone"? Theoretically, God may only be condemned by people who uphold moral absolutes, yet one of the main emotional and psychological reasons people become atheists is so they can free themselves from the moral absolutes commanded in Scripture (or by others in society). If someone denies moral absolutes, they can't condemn God for condemning and punishing the

Canaanites, including the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, or the people of the pre-Flood world or those who will live during the time of the Book of Revelation's final fulfillment.

From a 21st century liberal humanitarian perspective, why was God so seemingly harsh on people in the pre-Flood world and will be on people living during the time of the Beast and False Prophet? (Of course, as someone like Keller would observe, the values of 21st century humanitarianism are really derived from Christianity historically and theologically, not primarily from another source). Here we have to reckon with how utterly holy and pure God is, and how He wants His people to believe and live the same way, to be as perfect as He is (Matt. 5:48). In order to drive this point home emotionally to us humans, in Scripture God let Himself be repeatedly portrayed as the betrayed husband of an adulterous wife (Ezekiel 16:1-43; 23:1-49; Jer. 3:6-11). If we ponder the emotions of that comparison carefully, we'll then understand much better why God would command "Because God doesn't reveal all His laws and His overall will all at once, the Bible is a book that records God's progressive revelation to humanity. God doesn't reveal everything all at once, or people would reject it as too overwhelming, i.e., be "blinded by the light." The famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant once said something like, "If the truth shall kill them, let them die." Fortunately, God normally doesn't operate that way, at least prior to the Second Coming (Rev. 1:5-7) or all of us would already be dead!

Now, let's face the ultimate issue lurking behind our temptation to question God about ordering the deaths of those living before the Flood and during the time of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord: God's utter sovereignty. In this context, note especially Romans 3:4-7, 19; 9:19-21 when it comes to God's right to judge His creatures for their sins (i.e., violations of His law). Fundamentally, we puny creatures are in no better position than Job was to question His justice and righteousness. The general spirit of Romans 8:28 to 11:36 emphasizes this point, as do the concluding chapter of Job, when Jehovah Himself directly replies to Job's complaints about God not really being fair to him.

Besides totally destroying Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins (Genesis 18:20; 19:13, 24-25), God inflicted other collective punishments on the human race. Jehovah had the Canaanite nations living in the Holy Land when Israel arrived displaced, subordinated or even destroyed for their sins (Deut. 12:29-31) at the hands of Joshua, Samson, Saul, and others. And even more completely and utterly, God drowned every human being and land animal in the world during the great Deluge, except for Noah's family (only 8 people!) and the animals with him in the ark (1 Peter 3:20). And much like the time So now, is God evil for executing people for violating His law? Well, God tells us through Paul that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). Sinners have no right to live in God's sight: He has the right at any time to execute someone for their sins before time of natural death comes. Fortunately, God normally doesn't exercise that option! And most mysteriously, He had His Son, who also was God, take on the pain and

sin of the world, and die on its behalf despite He was innocent! Jesus' great sacrifice allowed God to reconcile mercy and justice together: For our sins make us worthy of death, but by having Jesus pay such a great price in our stead, that death penalty is lifted off us, but not because of our merit from obeying His law (John 3:16; Romans 5:6-10; 7:25).

God still believes in and practices capital punishment, unlike the western Europeans. As the Creator of life, He may also take it. But unlike men, He can resurrect and bring to life again the people He executes. For example, God chose to execute all the people on earth outside of Noah's family by sending the great flood because of humanity's general wickedness (Genesis 6:5-7): "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'" Notice that Jesus predicted that many would be killed again when He returns like it was in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:36-39).

Clearly, nobody is truly "innocent" or "good" separate from God. God always has the option of imposing the death penalty on us at any time, but normally He doesn't, since His mercy triumphs over His justice, thanks to Christ's sacrifice. Furthermore, since He can resurrect the dead, He can give them their lives back. This helps to explain why He would (say) have Sodom destroyed when not even ten righteous people could be found living there (see Genesis 18:22-33; 19:24-25). These people were living such a sinful and personally harmful way of life that it was better for them to be put to death rather than still living that way. Hence, it's hard to look upon the people in Sodom and Gomorrah, the people drowned in the great flood (Genesis 6:11-13) that Noah lived through, and the Canaanites that God had killed by Joshua's army as "righteous" or "innocent," due to their crimes of violence, idolatry, etc. When He resurrects them at the end of the millennium (see Ezekiel 37:1-14; Rev. 20:11-15), the thousand years of the earth being ruled by Jesus, they will receive a chance to be saved then.

Therefore, since God is the Creator of human life, we humans are in no position to judge Him for being inconsistent when He takes the life of those who break His law. He made human life for particular purposes of His own. If we don't fulfill those goals, He has the right to terminate our lives at His discretion. We have to respect the utter sovereignty of God, as Job ultimately learned, although that isn't a fashionable idea in the world today. God is in charge, whether we like it or not, so we humans just have to get used to it and get with the program. For we're all going to die, whether we like it or not. If God provides us a way out, a way to get eternal life, we should accept it and the conditions involved, especially if they are for our ultimate best good.

Finally, although it's true that demons can possess people, the great majority people aren't possessed and are fully responsible for the sinful actions they choose. Satan can and does influence people throughout the world (Eph. 1:2-3; I Cor. 4:3-4), but we can't claim, "The devil made me do it." Rather, we choose to agree with and then put into action (James 1:14-15) whatever impulses evil human nature, this world, and Satan and the demons encourage us to have.

This is a very brief, quick overview of the Book of Revelation. We've surveyed how to interpret the book's symbols, many of its specific events, and why God punishes people who violate this well. May this summary help you understand the Book of Revelation better and prepare for the time of the end!

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