

THE TRUTH ABOUT
REVELATION

UNVEILING APOCALYPSE



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Unveiling Apocalypse: What does the Book of Revelation really show?

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Sneak Peek

Arguably, the book of Revelation has attracted more attention than any other book of the Bible. It is a major preoccupation for many Christians and has inspired many Christian and Hollywood movies in today's world. Television and YouTube has witnessed a proliferation of 'Revelation gurus' occupying the airwaves with their latest 'discoveries'. To many readers, the book conjures up images of end-of-the-world scenarios. This seems to be part of its appeal. However, we need to step back a bit and view the book for what it truly is and does.

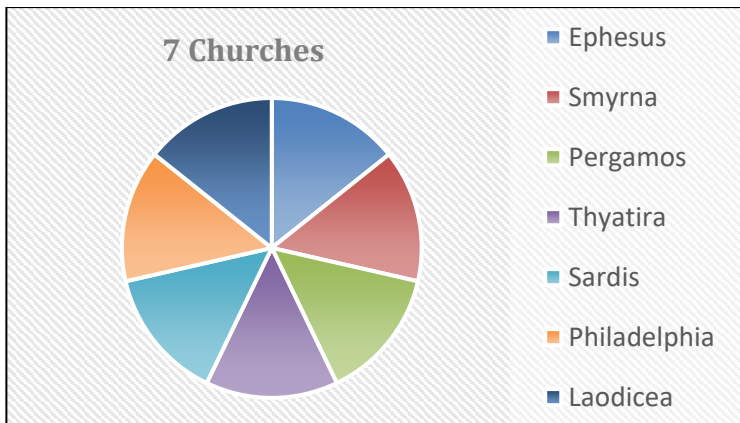
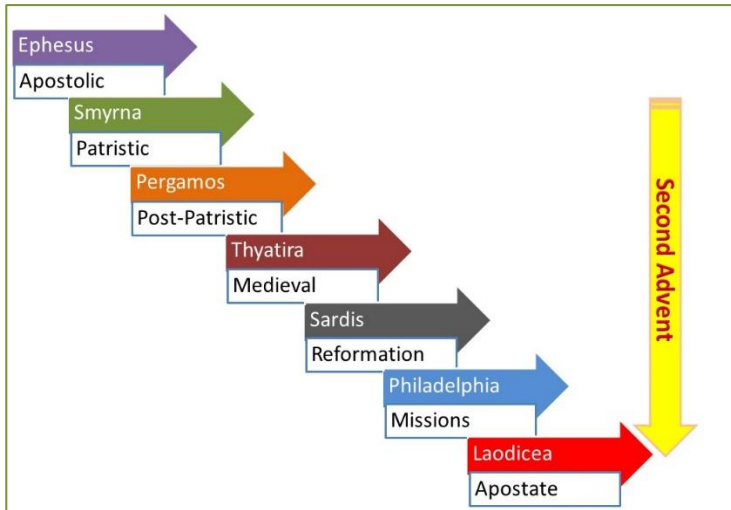
Revelation is a translation of the Greek name *apokalupsis*. From this Greek word we get the English words 'apocalypse' and 'apocalyptic'. The mouth-watering, soul-frightening images derived from such words do not so much reflect the contents of the book as our misconception about its name. The word *apokalupsis* does not so much connote horrific images of the end of the world as it tells us about something less known. This is highlighted by the very first claim of the book itself, 'This is the *apokalupsis* of Jesus Christ' (Rev 1:1). The book wants us to discover Christ; end-of-the-world scenarios are the hooks on which this picture hangs. Revelation is an attempt to unveil the veiled, a vision of Christ and an encounter of enormous significance.

Many who present Revelation do not really read the text closely. They assume a certain relationship between history and prophecy and impose a historical reading which may be somewhat foreign to the book. An example of this is the use of gematria, a method of interpreting the Hebrew Scriptures by computing the numerical value of words, based on the numerical values of the Hebrew letters. Applying this principle, the Hebrew numerical equivalent of Caesar Nero is 666. Others have found the same number in a papal title, Vicarius Filii Dei. The picture below illustrates how gematria works. John 21 tells the story of how Jesus, after the resurrection, enabled the disciples to haul in a large catch of fish, 153 to be exact. Using Hebrew alphabet numerical value for 'I am God' ('ani Elohim), we arrive at 153. Therefore, this miracle of Jesus shows that he is God.



Sometimes presenters of Revelation adopt a linear reading of prophecy while ignoring the actual structure of the text. In doing so they may ignore actual reality and resort to manufacturing one. A good example of this is the treatment of the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3. In the diagrams below we observe the difference between this linear approach and a composite approach which appears to fit the text better. The first diagram is an example of the linear approach. This method links the Seven Churches to specific periods of history and attempts to match a specific Church to a specific time period. The second diagram presents a composite view of the Churches. It considers the symbolic usage of the number 7 as descriptive of a seven-fold view the Church throughout history.

To demonstrate that the linear view does not agree with the text, we can refer to the message of the first Church. The chief complaint against this church is loss of their 'first love' (Rev 2:4). If Ephesus is the Apostolic Church, the text and history do not agree. How can a church where tens of thousands of believers suffered martyrdom be accused of losing their love? Close reading reveals similar discrepancies with every church. I suggest that the second diagram offers greater harmony with the text.



A major hurdle to overcome is the micro-management approach, with its historical presuppositions, so often employed to teach Revelation. This approach dissects the book, isolates its various components and imposes non-textual elements into the interpretation. For instance, the Seven Seals and the Seven Trumpets are studied as two separate sequences whereas the text indicates the latter arising from

the former with no textual break between the two. Another example is the manner by which the Sevens series are treated. For many, these sequences are viewed as linear, compartmentalised units, but this may not be how the text actually presents them.

Another challenge with the book pertains to its numerous symbols. Revelation, as literary genre, is an apocalyptic book which is largely differentiated from classical prophecy by its insistence on symbolic language and imagery. The difficulty here is that the book is heavily dependent on Zechariah and Ezekiel for symbols and Isaiah for theological concepts. The four horsemen of Revelation 6 are more or less a reproduction of Zechariah 1 and 6. The description of God's throne room and of the four living creatures in Revelation 4 bears great similarity to Ezekiel 1. Important concepts such as claims of Christ as 'first and last' echo similar claims about Yahweh in Isaiah 41, 44 and 48. Yet most people who study Revelation do so in connection with Daniel, with whom it has minimal connectors. Those who present seminars on Revelation would have a better grasp of the book if they study its symbolic and conceptual underpinnings without imposing supposed connections which are external to the biblical material.

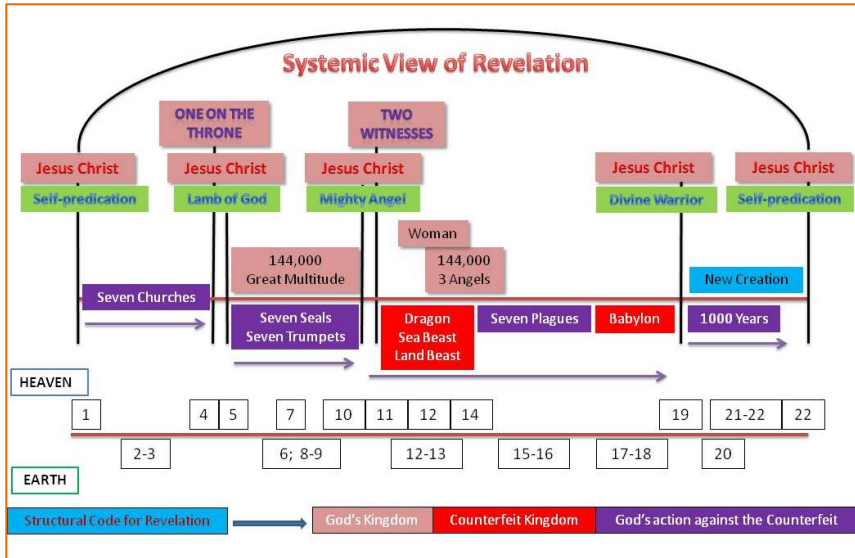
Many symbolic and conceptual mysteries of Revelation are actually easier to comprehend when we return to the sources from which they are derived. If this is true, then Revelation should be studied alongside Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah and other biblical materials. These books provide interpretative clues to Revelation rather than some imaginary paradigm. Moreover, Revelation contains numerous echoes, allusions and references to materials from the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) many of which impact the understanding of the visions in the book. In Revelation, the 'DNA' of Scripture (including NT materials) is embedded in the form of echoes, allusions, underpinning references and even direct citations so as to create a collage of Scriptural material which is encapsulated in this final book of the Bible.

A startling lacuna in Revelation discourses is the non-recognition of the systemic picture which undergirds the book. This systemic picture is not about the structure of the book (there are many excellent attempts to highlight the literary structure of the book). What I am referring to is

the recognition that the book primarily depicts a contest between two systems or paradigms: one genuine, the other counterfeit. The book unveils the conflict between Christ (with the 'system' that comprises his kingdom) and his challenger (with his own counterfeit 'system'). Essentially, the book unveils the clash between God's kingdom and a usurper kingdom. The veil between two cosmic protagonists is lifted so we may see what is really happening behind the scenes and how this impacts us.

Revelation depicts one side of the conflict as God and the other as God-impersonator. The level of impersonation is a complete one. God is depicted as triune God (chs 1; 4; 5; etc), the impersonation likewise comprises a triad of powers (chs 12; 13; etc). God's people are depicted as a celestial woman (ch 12) with a surviving remnant (chs 12; 14), while the people of the counterfeit are also depicted as a woman, a prostitute (chs 17-18), who is non-celestial. With this challenge in place, God acts against the counterfeit; he strikes back several times until the impersonator is permanently disabled. This war of God is pictorialised via a series of Sevens ('seven' being the symbol of God's perfect actions) and other war imageries which crescendo until final victory is achieved (chs 2-3; 6-8; 16; 19-20). The book culminates in a new creation (chs 21-22) which rises from the ruins of the conflict.

This macro view of the book is illustrated by the following diagrams. The first diagram depicts the organisation of materials around the two systems, while the second diagram provides a simplified view of the conflict between the two systems.



If the contents of Revelation are divided along a median, we discover two definite perspectives, heavenly and earthly. Some chapters relate to matters from a heavenly perspective, while other chapters deal with earthly events. By following this scheme, the materials of the book are placed either over the median or under it. Therefore, materials dealing with the counterfeit system and God's judgements against that system are placed below the median, while all visions about God, his throne, his people and his kingdom are located above the median (see above diagram).

Below we view this conflict through a simpler lens. The two systems, God's kingdom and the counterfeit, are represented as two towers. In between the two towers are bridges representing the seven-fold strike of God against the counterfeit. Essentially, the book comprises three sets of materials: (1) Those pertaining to the Kingdom of God which includes descriptions of the Heavenly Three (God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit) and God's people; (2) Those about the unholy three (Dragon, Sea Beast and Land Beast) and the people who belong to this system; and (3) Those concerning the judgements of God which is represented as a seven phase reality.



In this way, Revelation unveils the war between two cosmic forces, God and his challenger. This is the revelation of Christ spoken of in Rev 1:1; it is the essential reality of the book. As such, Revelation provides a view of what has happened, what is ongoing and what is yet to happen; it looks at the past, present and future. In technical terms, the book describes the war as primordial, historical and eschatological realities.

To comprehend all this, we have to adopt a two-pronged approach utilising 'bird's eye view' and 'tapestry' concepts. The big picture is important but so are the details. The 'bird's eye view' (Macro-structural analysis) allows us to look at the book from above so as to discern its major patterns, while 'tapestry' (inter-textuality and intra-textuality) explores the little pieces of scriptural data, the colourful strands of words, thoughts and ideas which comprise Revelation. 'Bird's eye view' answers the question 'How does Revelation actually work?' while 'tapestry' answers the question, 'How does Revelation utilise Scripture?' I contend that in the combination of these two, we can unveil a more comprehensive view of the book. This enables us to explore Revelation's

collation of Scriptural strands which are employed to create a climactic work of art, the clearest picture of Christ and his work, and discover its relevance to the 21st century postmodern world.

The 'tapestry' employed in this study takes into account phraseological, conceptual and contextual information. To avoid the ugly cousin of proof texting, a parallel text should adhere to three criteria. Phraseological correspondence provides a pathway to texts with similar content, whereas conceptual correspondence establishes the commonality of ideas between Revelation and source text. Contextual correspondence supplies the third strand of verification, ensuring that the two texts (Revelation and source) refer to similar or at times contrasting contexts. For instance, the name 'Bright Morning Star' in Rev 22:16 finds a phraseological parallel in Isa 14:12, 'Shining morning star'. In both passages, conceptual parallels indicate that this is an identification of a heavenly being, while contextual considerations show that in Isaiah it refers to a rebellious angel but in Revelation it is a name for Jesus. Context reveals whether the phrase or concept applies to the same or an opposing reality. Throughout this study, appropriate examples are supplied to illustrate the use of 'bird's eye view' and 'tapestry' by John.

First and Last

The Prologue (Rev 1:1-8) and Epilogue (Rev 22:6-21) of Revelation share several linguistic, syntactical and motif commonalities which form an *inclusio* (envelope) for the book. First, there is a rapid change of speakers in both sections. In the Prologue John speaks twice and God once, while in the Epilogue John speaks twice, the angel twice, Jesus three times and the Spirit once. Second, in both passages we discover a double use of 'Amen' (Rev 1:6-7; 22:20-21). Third, the use of names is also similar. In the Prologue, 'Jesus Christ' is employed three times (Rev 1:1, 2, 5), while 'Lord God' is used once (Rev 1:8). In the Epilogue, 'Lord Jesus' is utilised twice (Rev 22:20-21). Fourth, the name 'Alpha and Omega' appears in both passages but is applied differently; to God (Rev 1:8) in the Prologue and to Jesus (Rev 22:13) in the Epilogue. Last, the phrase 'this prophecy/this book' appears once in the Prologue and seven times in the Epilogue.

The Prologue of Revelation sets the agenda for the book by telling precisely what the book is about, a revelation of Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1) rather than a revelation of end-time events. This does not undermine its apocalyptic message, to the contrary, it underscores that concept by ensuring that apocalyptic considerations are placed in their proper context—the work of Christ.

The major departure of the Epilogue from the Prologue is the sharp focus on the person and words of Jesus who is referred to as 'Lord Jesus'. In the chapters prior to the Epilogue we encounter three significant invitations. In Rev 18:4, God's people are invited to make their final departure from Babylon, implying that up to this point, God's people are mixed up in with the citizens of the alternate system. In Rev 19:17, an angel invites God's people to gather for 'the great supper of God', a reference to the final battle in the conflict (Isa 25:6; Ezek 39:17-20). In Rev 22:20, God's prophet calls upon Jesus to return promptly so that the hope of all believers in the final establishment of God's kingdom will be fulfilled.

These two passages form an envelope to the book. More importantly, they encapsulate the primary message of the book.

Heavenly Three

The first system we encounter in Revelation belongs to God and his Kingdom. This system comprises two halves: (1) the Heavenly Three—God, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit—who represent the governing authority of the Kingdom; and (2) the people of the Kingdom—its citizens, divided into four different groups: the Celestial Woman, 24 elders, the 144,000 and a Great Multitude. The Kingdom of God is made up of seven components; a sevenfold description of this reality.

The heavenly side of the conflict comprises three entities plus God's people. The Heavenly Three are presented in various portions of the book but most of the descriptions are located in the first half of the book.

One on the Throne

One of the Three is simply described as 'One who sits on a heavenly throne'. The scriptural evidence indicates that this is the same being as the 'Ancient of Days' in Daniel 7, the 'Lord on an elevated throne' of Isaiah 6 and the 'awesome One on a throne' of Ezekiel 1. This One is God, the first member of the triune godhead. The phrasal connections with other visions of divine throne room (theophanies) in the Hebrew Bible augment this conclusion further. The depictions of God paint a picture which is consistent with other theophanies in the Bible (see Exodus 19; Isaiah 6; Ezekiel 1; Daniel 7). God on his throne is frequently depicted in energy terms such as light, lightning, fire, thunder and earthquake. Moreover, every encounter with this awesome God compels a similar human response, a sense of unworthiness and fatality. Every symbol surrounding God's throne is designed to impress the reader with the utter awesomeness of God.

Jesus Christ

The second member of the Heavenly Three receives the most attention and is called by several names. He is the only personage in Revelation with multiple descriptions; five major passages (chs 1; 5; 10; 19; 22),

which appear in strategic sectors of the book. Many commentators contend that the ‘mighty angel’ in the vision of Rev 10 is not Christ and some even suggest that the angel is a proxy of Jesus. However, a close reading of the passages suggests otherwise and it is preferable to read the text in its natural sense. Michael, a name for Christ, is called ‘archangel’ in Jude 9. When we compare the five principal descriptions of Jesus in Revelation we clearly see that the figure in the vision of Revelation 10 is Christ.

Specific scriptural strands examined through ‘tapestry’ strongly support the assertion that Revelation 10 is a vision of Christ. A few examples should suffice:

- ‘surrounded by a cloud’ echoes Gen 9:13-16 and Ps 97:2
- ‘a rainbow over his head’ parallels Rev 4:3 ‘a rainbow above the throne’
- ‘face like the sun’ is reminiscent of Rev 1:16 ‘his face was shining like the sun at midday’ which refers to Christ
- ‘legs were fiery pillars’ is also utilised in Rev 1:15 and Rev 2:18 to describe Jesus
- ‘stood on land and sea’ is a motif from Isa 11:9 ‘the land . . . and sea’ which is integral to a messianic prophecy
- ‘loud voice like roaring lion’ alludes to Rev 5:5 ‘Lion of the tribe of Judah’ description of Jesus
- ‘held a little scroll opened in his hand’ is drawn from Rev 5:1, 4-5 ‘in the right hand . . . a scroll with writing . . . no one was found worthy to open the scroll . . . he may open the scroll’ and connects to Jesus

There are recurring strands running through the five passages, but there are also unique elements in each passage.

1:9-20	5:1-14	10:1-11	19:11-16	22:12-16
Eyes like fiery flame			Eyes like fiery flames	

Feet like bronze fired in furnace		Legs like fiery pillars		
Voice like a trumpet		Loud voice like a roaring lion		
Face like the sun at midday		Face like the sun		
Head and hair white like snow		Rainbow over his head	On his head are many crowns	
From his mouth a sharp two-edged sword			From his mouth a sharp sword	
Son of Man	Root of David			Root and offspring of David
In his right hand 7 stars		Little scroll in his hand		
First and Last				First and Last Alpha and Omega Beginning and End
Long robe – gold sash			Blood-stained robe	
7 stars	7 horns	7 thunders		

7 lampstands 7 churches	7 eyes			
	Lion of the tribe of Judah Like a slaughtered lamb		Rider of a white horse	
Living One			Faithful and True Unknown name	
		Comes down from heaven Surrounded by a cloud	Armies in heaven	Bright Morning Star
Holds keys of death and Hades	Victorious	Stands on land and sea	Judges and makes war Shepherds with iron sceptre Tramples the winepress	
	Worshipped by 24 Elders Praised by every living thing			

These five principal visions provide specific views of the work of Christ in relationship to his people (as may be seen). These pictures portray Jesus as God, redeemer, connector and defender of his people.

1:9-20	5:1-14	10:1-11	19:11-16	22:12-16
Jesus the divine One	Jesus the Lamb	Jesus the mighty Angel	Jesus the divine Warrior	Jesus the divine One
He is God	He is the Redeemer	He is the Connector	He is the Defender	He is God

The descriptions of Christ play a dual role in the book: (1) They provide an inclusio (envelope) structure, and (2) They underscore the book's agenda statement set out in Rev 1:1, 'this is a revelation of Jesus Christ'. Each vision of Christ depicts common elements but also uncovers different attributes. The three central visions (chs 5, 10, 19) supply a threefold portrait of Jesus: as salvific Lamb of God, as heavenly messenger maintaining heaven-earth connections and as divine warrior fighting for the security of his people. The two visions which envelope the book reveal the divinity of Christ; he is God.

The placement of the visions is also significant. Visions 1 and 5 provide an envelope for the book and insist upon the divinity of Christ. The second vision introduces Jesus in the divine throne room where he shares the throne but is also Lamb of God. This vision establishes Jesus as God and saviour. Visions 3 and 4 play a distinctive role in the book; they envelope the primary visions (Revelation 12-18) about counterfeit. The Mighty Angel vision comes just before we read about the Dragon, while the Warrior vision comes right after the Babylon vision. Together they engender confidence in the victory of Christ and the defeat of the impersonators.

The Spirit

The third member of the Heavenly Three is far more elusive but there are clear allusions to his presence, especially in Revelation 11. The

imagery in this chapter provides an indirect reference to the Spirit of God as the source of prophetic proclamation and activity (see 2 Pet 1:21). The words ‘prophesy’ (v3), ‘prophecy’ (v6) and ‘prophets’ (v10) along with veiled references to Elijah, Moses and other prophets underscore the prophetic nature of these two witnesses. The inferences of this vision are that the personae depicted here (the Two Witnesses; see Zechariah 4) are intricately linked to major prophetic activity and mission. Allusions and echoes to the deeds of such crucial prophets as Moses and Elijah are inescapable. The use of materials from Ezekiel and Zechariah augments this prophetic connection. There is even an indirect reference to Jesus, the apex of prophetic activity. All the evidences point to the activity of someone who inspires the prophetic office and its players (2 Pet 1:21). This is an indirect way of indicating the presence of the Holy Spirit in the book. The following summary highlights the connections between the Two Witnesses and biblical prophets.

The words ‘prophesy’, ‘prophecy’ and ‘prophet’ are used in this passage
There are multiple references to Moses (Exod 7:7-21; 11:3) and Elijah (1 Kgs 13:7ff; 17:1; 18:17, 38-39; 2 Kgs 2:1-11)
Materials from Ezekiel (Eze 37:5-6) and Zechariah (Zech 4:1-6, 11-14) are utilised
There are allusions to other prophets like Daniel (7:25; 12:7) and Jonah
There is an indirect reference to Jesus, the prophet of prophets (Acts 1:9)
The use of 3 is integral to prophetic activity (Elijah’s 3 years of drought; Jonah’s 3 days in the fish; Jesus’ 3 years of ministry and 3 days in the grave)

Another consideration pertains to the number 2 (a number that has generated some intriguing conjectures). The bulk of the information brings us back to Moses and Elijah again and again. Every Bible student is familiar with the importance of these two prophets. They mark the start of specific eras; they are portrayed as being in heaven; and they

appear from heaven at the transfiguration of Jesus. This seems to be the best way to understand the Two Witnesses as the Spirit who inspired these two prophets and others like them.

The summary below examines the common elements between the members of the Heavenly Three. The descriptions unveil a triune God, even though the portrayals focus primarily on Jesus.

One Seated on the Throne	Jesus/Lamb	Holy Spirit
Alpha and Omega One who was, who is, who is coming	Alpha and Omega First and Last (2) Beginning and End Faithful and True	
		2 Witnesses 2 olive trees 2 prophets
Almighty	Root of David (2) Unknown name	Given no name
One on the throne	Comes to the throne	Goes up to heaven
Rainbow over throne	Rainbow over his head Many crowns on his head	
Lightning, rumblings, thunder	7 thunders	
7 fiery torches	7 lampstands Eyes like fiery flames Feet like bronze fired in furnace Legs like fiery pillars Face like the sun	2 lampstands Fire comes from his mouth
7 spirits	7 spirits, 7 horns, 7 eyes	
One living forever	Swears by One living forever	Killed by the beast

	Living One, dead, alive forever	Resurrected after 3½ days Breath of life comes from God
Sea of glass Jasper and carnelian	Face like the sun Bright Morning Star	
4 living creatures (lion, ox, man, eagle)	Son of Man Lion of the tribe of Judah Voice like a roaring lion Voice like a trumpet	
24 Elders worship him	24 Elders worship him Praised by angels Praised by every living thing	
	Long robe and gold sash Blood-stained robe Head and hair white like snow In hand 7 stars, 7 angels, little scroll From his mouth a sharp sword (2)	In sackcloth for 1,260 days Prophecy for 1,260 days
	Like a slaughtered lamb	
	Comes down from heaven Surrounded by cloud	Returns to heaven in cloud
	Stands on land and sea	Power to close the sky, over waters and to strike the earth with plagues

	Rider on white horse Judges and makes war Armies of heaven Shepherds with iron sceptre	
	Holds keys of death and Hades	

There are striking similarities in these depictions of the Heavenly Three. They include names, motifs, physical attributes and actions. Since Christ is the main subject of Revelation, it comes as no surprise to discover more detailed descriptions of him. Nevertheless, the connection between the three members is self-evident.

Citizens of the Kingdom

The People of God's kingdom are depicted in four separate images as the 24 Elders, the 144,000, the Great Multitude and, most importantly, the Celestial Woman. Each subset provides distinctive features of God's People along with what appears to be functional differences between the portrayals.

The 24 Elders

The first subset of God's people is portrayed as a very specific group of 24 Elders. The imagery draws upon two particular pieces of OT data, the offices of elder (Exod 18:17-26; 24:9-11) and priest. The 24 Elders clearly reflect the position and roles of the elders and priests of Israel as now replicated in this description of God's throne room. The white robes and gold crowns are suggestive of priestly attire (Exod 28:36, 39; 29:6), while thrones imply governance (Isa 14:9; Ezek 26:16). The number 24 echoes the number of priestly orders recorded in 1 Chronicles 25. The use of 'elder' reminds us of the elders of Israel who actually entered the presence of God on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:9-11). In the OT, those two groups stood or ministered directly in the presence of God and the 24 Elders of Revelation do precisely that.

The 144,000

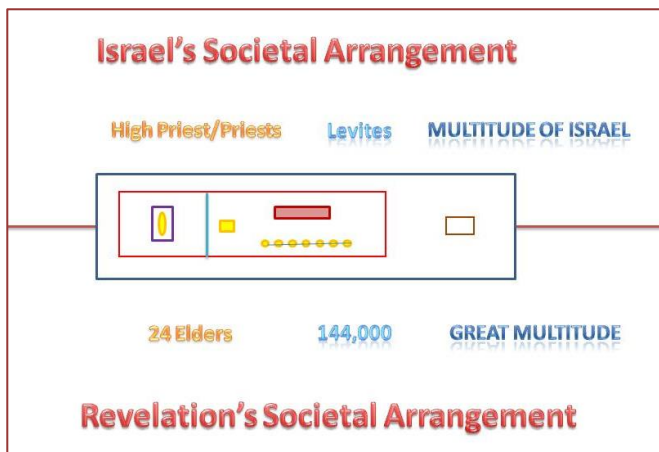
The second subset of God's people pertains to the 144,000, a symbol that has generated a great deal of discussion among those who study Revelation. Some have claimed that they are persons from literal Israel. Others have supposed that this is simply a metaphor for the Church. Some, like Jehovah's Witnesses have said that this is the actual number of humans who will make it to heaven. Certain Christian groups, like the Christian Skoptsy sect in Russia, have even claimed that they are the 144,000. Others have asserted that this is the number of the 'saved' at the time of Christ's return.

The only certainty about the 144,000 is that the number is symbolic and emphasises completeness. Of greater significance, the 144,000 parallel the position and work of the Levites in OT times. They are said to be the ‘first fruits for God and the Lamb’ (Rev 14:4), a clear parallel to Num 3:12 where the Levites are stated to be ‘firstborn’ to God. Their special function is to the Lamb; they follow him wherever he goes. Since Jesus is our High Priest (see Hebrews 2; 4; etc) and the 144,000 serve him, then they are the ‘Levitical’ parallel in the book of Revelation (Num 3:6).

The Great Multitude

The third subset of God’s people is presented as a ‘great multitude’, an allusion to the multitude of Israel in the OT (2 Sam 6:19; 2 Kgs 7:13). The appearance of ‘multitude of Israel’ in 2 Sam 6:19 is particularly significant because ‘multitude’ here refers to the worshippers around the Ark of the Covenant which David was moving to Jerusalem. This ‘multitude’ in Revelation serves a similar purpose as the ‘multitude of Israel’ and is described in similar terms as the 24 Elders and 144,000. The ‘multitude’ stand in the presence of God and offer him their worship. Their primary function appears to be worship (Ps 134:1). They are also the redeemed from the earth, like the 24 Elders and 144,000.

The three subsets of God’s People—the 24 Elders, 144,000 and Great Multitude—are the redeemed from the earth. While there are differences in the descriptions, there are certain common features which point to the same basic reality. These are: white clothes, singing new songs to God, playing lyres and worshipping God. The apparent differences between the three groups is functional rather than essential. The following diagram provides a comparison between the societal arrangement of biblical Israel and what we see in Revelation. God’s community then and here is more or less the same.



The Celestial Woman

The Heavenly Three maintain their presence on earth through the Celestial Woman (Revelation 12) who has a male child and other offspring. She is the corporate identity of all God's people through space and time, inclusive of OT Israel and NT Church.

The 'rest of her offspring' are described as people who 'keep the commands of God' and possess 'the testimony of Jesus' (Rev 12:17). A close reading of the strands in this verse reveals that 'commands of God' and 'testimony of Jesus' are not two separate experiences, rather they are a singular experience; they reveal a people who live in covenant relationship with God. In the OT, the basis of covenantal relationship with God, 'commandments' (Exod 24:12) and 'testimonies' (Isa 8:16) often parallel each other (Deut 4:44-45; 6:17; Ps 25:10). Such people order their lives according to covenantal requirements and all instructions of God and Christ.

A comparative view of the four images of God's people is shown in the following table. The descriptions comprise both similarities and differences.

24 Elders	144,000	Great Multitude	Celestial Woman
Elder			Woman
24 in number	Numbered 12,000 from each tribe	Uncountable	No number attached
Sit on thrones			
White clothes		Robed in white Washed and whitened robes Fine linen	Clothed with the sun Moon under her feet
Crown on their heads			Crown of 12 stars
		Palm branches in their hands	
Worship One on the throne Worship the Lamb	With the Lamb Follow the Lamb	Stand before the throne and Lamb Lamb shepherds them and guides to springs of living water Invited to the Lamb's marriage feast	Male child caught up to God's throne Shepherds with iron sceptre
Sing song Sing new song	Sing new song	Singing Sing Song of Moses and the Lamb	
Have lyres	Play lyres	Lyres from God	
		Serve God in the Sanctuary Stand on the sea of glass	

	Seal on foreheads Names on foreheads		
	Sound like waterfalls and thunders	Loud voice Sound of waterfalls and thunders	
	Not defiled with women Without lie and blameless		
	Redeemed from earth	From every nation, tribe and people	
	First fruits		
		Come out of tribulation Victory over the Beast	In wilderness for 1,260 days Persecuted by the Dragon Dragon wages war
		Not hunger Not thirst Not struck by sun or heat	
		God will wipe tears from their eyes	
			Pregnant Male child Rest of offspring
			Given 2 wings to escape

			Helped by the earth
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These images of God's people reveal different aspects of who they are but keep the most basic information intact; they are the redeemed from the earth. Nevertheless, it is helpful to recognise that in God's kingdom there are different roles and functions for his people.

Three Impersonators

In nearly perfect simulation, the enemy of God also comprises a system of three cosmic beings plus a people. The narrative about this system occurs mainly in chapters 12-18. The components of this system consists of Dragon, Sea Beast, Land Beast, Prostitute Babylon, Kings and Merchants and a multitude.

The Dragon

The first member of this unholy three is a heavenly being referred to as Dragon (Revelation 12; 20) and he is God-impersonator. The Dragon is a heavenly being who was ejected from heaven (Isa 14:12-15; Ezek 28:12-19) and now plies his trade on earth while waiting the final judgement. He is known by many names (Dragon, Satan, Serpent) and his mannerisms and activities are a ploy to counterfeit God. He appears to be ruler of this world and pretends to be god of the world. He employs proxies and empowers them to do his bidding as though he possesses authority and power.

The Sea Beast

The second member of this unholy three is a beast which originates in the sea (Revelation 13) and appears at the behest of the Dragon. The Sea Beast encapsulates many of the elements and features of the Dragon; he definitely behaves like him. He is also a direct impersonation of Christ, the Lamb of God. From a structural point of view, this Beast receives more attention in the book than the other counterfeiters, evidently an attempt to emulate Christ. The Sea Beast is the Christ impersonator, a satanic and global power. He emulates numbers and names which are more appropriate for Jesus. He seeks worship which belongs only to Christ. His experiences parallel the experiences of Christ, including death and resurrection. He is the second member of the evil triad.

The Land Beast

To complete the set, a third member, originating on land, accompanies the previous two (Revelation 13) and is an integral part of the impersonation of God's system. The Land Beast is part of the triad of counterfeit, functions as an impersonation of the Holy Spirit and is a global and dualistic power. The Land Beast (also called False Prophet) does much of his work within the Church, fulfilling the warning of Jesus that false prophets appear 'in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravaging wolves' (Matt 7:15) and yet retains his 'dragon' behaviour. Like the others in the unholy trio, this Beast meets the same fate, fiery conflagration and eternal annihilation (Rev 20:10).

In the central vision of Christ (Revelation 10), we see a 'mighty angel' coming from heaven and standing upon land and sea. Heaven, land and sea are the three principal aspects of biblical cosmology. The three impersonators also occupy the same three realms, heaven, sea and land. This triad of evil comprises the counterfeit system opposing God. However, it should be noted that this evil force often reveals itself in historical faces. While this is a cosmic and global system, it also manifests itself in different ways through historical events and persons. In as much as God manifests himself through history, the evil contenders do the same. For instance, the work of the counterfeit has a unique ring in Medieval Europe when the apostate Church attempted total control of life and faith in that continent. Wisdom calls for vigilance so that we do not miss the faces in today's world.

Below we have a bird's eye-view of the counterfeit system and its various components. In this portrait we observe both similarities and differences.

Dragon	Sea Beast	Land Beast
A sign Fiery red		Performs great signs Brings fire from heaven
7 heads, 10 horns	10 horns, 7 heads (3x)	2 horns

	7 heads / 7 mountains / 7 kings 10 horns / 10 kings	
7 crowns	10 crowns	
Tail sweeps 1/3 of the stars from heaven		
Stands in front of the woman Stands on the sand of sea		
War in heaven Michael against Dragon	Blasphemy against God's system Blasphemous names Mouth to boast and blaspheme Wages war against the Lamb	False prophet
Does not prevail and is ejected from heaven Thrown to earth	Comes out of the sea	Comes out of the land
Ancient serpent, devil, Satan	Authority from the Dragon	Authority of the Sea Beast
Deceives the world Deceives the nations	Authority for 42 months Authority over peoples Kings receive authority with the Sea Beast Kings give authority to the Sea Beast	Deceives earth's people
River from his mouth		

Persecutes the Woman Furious with the woman Wages wars against her offspring	Wages war against the saints Wars against the Lamb 'Who is able to wage war against him?'	Kills those who do not worship image of the Sea Beast
Imprisoned for 1,000 years Chained and sealed in the abyss Released for a short time	Comes from the abyss Receives fatal wound Wound is healed Earth is amazed and follows 'Who is like the beast?'	
Gathers multitude for the battle of Gog and Magog	Defeated by the Rider on white horse	
Consumed by fire from heaven Lake of fire	Consumed by fire from heaven Lake of fire	Consumed by fire from heaven Lake of fire
	Composite creature (leopard-bear-lion)	Composite creature (lamb-dragon)
	Humans not in the Lamb's book worship him Humans not in the book of life are astounded	Compels worship of the Sea Beast Makes image and gives spirit to the image of the Sea Beast
	'was, is not, is about to come'	
	Number 666?	Requires mark on hand or forehead Cannot buy or sell without the mark Number 666?

Before proceeding further, we should consider the match-up between the Heavenly Three and the three impersonators. A close examination of these parallels enables a proper understanding of the complexity of this conflict.

One seated on the Throne	Dragon
Throne in heaven	A sign in heaven War in heaven, Michael against Dragon Dragon does not prevail and is ejected from heaven Tail sweeps 1/3 of stars from heaven
7 fiery torches Lightning, rumblings, thunder	Fiery red Consumed by fire from heaven
7 spirits	7 heads, 10 horns, 7 crowns
One living forever	Ancient serpent, devil, Satan
Sea of glass	Stands on the sand of the sea
24 Elders and 4 Living Creatures worship him	Deceives the world Deceives the nations
Jesus Christ the Lamb	Sea Beast
7 horns 7 eyes 7 spirits 7 thunders	10 horns, 7 heads 7 heads / 7 mountains / 7 kings 10 horns / 10 kings
Many crowns	10 crowns
Son of Man Lion of the tribe of Judah Root of David Faithful and True Alpha and Omega First and Last Beginning and End Unknown name	Blasphemy against God's system Blasphemous names
Comes down from heaven	Comes out of the sea

Stands on land and sea	Comes from the abyss
Authority from One seated on the Throne	Authority from the Dragon
Judges and makes war Armies in heaven	Wages war against the saints Wars against the Lamb 'Who is able to wage war against him?'
Michael ('Who is like God?') Living One, dead, alive forevermore	'Who is like the beast?' Fatal wound Wound is healed
Rider on white horse	Defeated by Rider on white horse
Eyes like fiery flames Feet like bronze fired in furnace Legs like fiery pillars	Consumed by fire from heaven Lake of fire
Voice like roaring lion	Composite creature (leopard-bear-lion)
From his mouth comes a sharp sword	Mouth to boast and blaspheme
24 Elders, angels and every living thing worship him	Humans not in Lamb's book worship him Humans not in book of life are astounded
Two Witnesses (Holy Spirit)	Land Beast
Power to close sky, over waters and to strike the earth with plagues	Performs great signs
Fire from their mouths 2 lampstands	Brings fire from heaven Consumed by fire from heaven Lake of fire
2 olive trees	2 horns
2 prophets	False prophet
Stand before the Lord of the earth	Comes out of the land
Authority from God	Authority of the Sea Beast

Prophesy even in sackcloth	Deceives earth's people
Killed but resurrected after 3½ days	Kills those who do not worship image of Sea Beast
Torment those who dwell on earth Great fear on those who see them	Compels worship of and image to the Sea Beast Requires mark on hand or forehead Cannot buy or sell without the mark Number 666?
Breath/spirit of life from God on them	Gives breath/spirit to the image of the Sea Beast

If the unholy three are an almost perfect impersonation attempt, it is imperative that they be viewed as a whole in a way similar to the Heavenly Three. The triune God of the book is in conflict with the evil triad; a conflict transcending historical considerations. To view the unholy three in some sequential manner fails to comprehend the true import of the text. They are not so much three separate entities as three parts of the same evil entity paralleling the existence of the Heavenly Three. If the triad represents a system opposed to God's kingdom, they must be viewed in terms of their corporate rather than individual identity. The analogy here is that they collectively oppose God, an idea that envisages totality rather than compartmental time and space. When the fourth members of both systems (the Celestial Woman and the Prostitute Babylon) are brought into view, this concept receives further clarity. All components in the two systems stand in direct opposition to each other through time and space. This is a cosmic conflict which has been fought from the beginning of time and creation, with earth as the principal battleground.

Having said this, it is quite reasonable to expect historical manifestations of these evil entities in various religious, historical, philosophical and ideological paradigms at different periods of history and in different places. What is intriguing about the conflict is the potential for a full-blown visible war before history culminates in 'new

heaven and new earth'. In the final analysis, the Heavenly Three and the people of their kingdom will be victorious. This is the underlying message of Revelation.

Citizens of the Counterfeit

The citizens of the counterfeit are represented by various entities. There is a woman of ill-repute, kings and merchants of the world and a multitude of people. This picture is remarkably similar to the portrayal of God's people. We can see a clear attempt to replicate the picture of God's kingdom, another piece of the great impersonation.

The Debased Woman

The unholy three also maintain their connection to humanity through the imagery of a debased woman, a prostitute named Babylon (Revelation 17-18). She is described in terms which are the opposite of the Celestial Woman. Her clothing is outlandish and her acts are saturated with sin and immorality. She intoxicates the kings and merchants of the world and persecutes the people of God. Her wanton behaviour eventually brings about her downfall, an act which bears close resemblance to the historical fall of the Babylonian empire (see Jeremiah 51). Like the evil triad, Babylon also ends up in the lake of fire and is permanently destroyed. Jeremiah 51, the prophecy of the destruction of literal Babylon, is the precursor to the final destruction of eschatological Babylon as shown below. The two descriptions share phrases and concepts to the extent that one could be mistaken for the other.

Revelation 17-18	Jeremiah 51
'Lord God judges'	'day of disaster'
'a haunt' for every despicable creature all celebrations cease permanently	'will scatter her and strip her land bare'
'come out of her (Babylon)'	'leave Babylon'; 'abandon her'; 'come out from among her, My People'

'her sexual immorality'; 'her sins'; 'her crimes'	'her guilt'
'God has executed judgement'	'Yahweh's vengeance'
'pay her back the way she also paid'	Yahweh will 'pay her what she deserves'
'she had a gold cup'	'Babylon was a golden cup'
'nations have drunk the wine of her . . .'	'making the whole earth drunk . . . nations drank her wine'
'brings wrath'	'nations go mad'
'it has fallen; Babylon the great is fallen'	'suddenly Babylon fell'
'Babylon the great city will be thrown down violently'	'Babylon . . . was shattered'
'will weep and mourn over her'	'wail for her'
Judged for 'the blood of prophets and saints'	'Yahweh has brought about our vindication'
'God has remembered her crimes' and will judge her	'Yahweh planned and accomplished what he has threatened'
'who reside by many waters'	'who sits on many waters'
'your judgement has come'	'your end has come'
'woe, woe, woe'; dirges over Babylon	'will sing victory song over you'
Babylon destroyed because 'the blood of prophets and saints . . . was found in' her	'repay Babylon . . . for all the evil they have done in Zion'

The Kings and Merchants

The imagery of kings and merchants appears in relationship to the people who serve and work with the prostitute. They eat at her table, drink her immoral cup, get intoxicated with her evil and lament her fate. Their existence and accomplishments are closely tied to Babylon; they are her support system and partners. They are the opposite of the ones who serve and worship God in the other system. In a manner of speaking

they are the shadow side of the 24 Elders and 144,000; they are the servants and worshippers of the counterfeit system.

The Multitude

If God has his multitudes, so does the counterfeit. The hordes who neither follow the Lamb nor worship the One seated on the throne will make up the numbers of the evil multitude. The Great Multitude represents all of God's redeemed and this multitude symbolises all of unsaved humanity. The two multitudes are inverse images of each other. One lives in the presence of God, while the other is destroyed by that same presence. One is rewarded with eternal life, while the other receives eternal judgement.

The four primary components of the counterfeit system are very much one-of-a-kind. While they appear to exhibit some distinctive characteristics, they are definitely cut from the same cloth and work in consort with each other as an alternative to God's kingdom.

God Strikes the Counterfeit

God's action against the counterfeit manifests itself in a sevenfold movement which begins with mere threats of judgement (Seven Churches) and culminates in total annihilation (lake of fire). In between we notice an escalation of judgement ranging from $\frac{1}{4}$ level of judgement (Seven Seals) to $\frac{1}{3}$ level of judgement (Seven Trumpets) to full level judgement (Seven Plagues and Winepress). The earlier threats of judgement (Seven Churches) are balanced by a verification process (millennial judgement). The apex of all this is the lake of fire which brings about complete destruction of everything belonging to the Counterfeit System.

The Seven Churches (Judgement Scene 1)

The messages to the Seven Churches reveal a completeness of Christ's activity in relationship to his people. Several of the messages contain threats of judgement but there is no execution of these threats. To the contrary, there are promises embedded in each church which suggest a redemptive purpose to the judgement threats.

In the Seven Churches there are 6 references to the principal impersonator—Satan (five times) and Devil (once). We also meet such expressions as 'synagogue of Satan' (twice; Rev 2:9; 3:9), 'Satan's throne' (Rev 2:13), 'where Satan lives' (Rev 2:13) and 'deep things of Satan' (Rev 2:24). The conflict between Christ and Christ-impersonator is conducted within the Church itself. It is important to note that the threats of judgements are not executed and each of the seven messages ends in some redemptive possibility. This is a rather different scenario from what happens when the members of the counterfeit system become the focus of judgement.

The Seven Seals (Judgement Scene 2)

The Seals mark a slight escalation in the judgement activity of God with a $\frac{1}{4}$ level of judgement rating. They are also the products of the

unsealing of the scroll by the Lamb. Additionally, they involve the four living creatures of Revelation 4-5.

Seals 1 to 4 share two common elements. All four have an invitation 'come' and coloured horses. The four horses are similar to the four horses in Zechariah 1 and 6. However, Zechariah utilises a different sequence of colours and the horsemen are agents of God to bring peace. In Revelation they are agents of divine judgement.

The Seven Trumpets (Judgement Scene 3)

The Trumpets follow the Seals almost instantaneously and exhibit a similar structural pattern. However, the escalation in judgement level rises to $\frac{1}{3}$ (the number is used 12 times in the first four Trumpets; a total of 14 times). The Trumpets appear as direct sequel to the Seals and involve angels from God's presence. Unlike the Seals, angels are involved in every Trumpet.

The Seven Plagues (Judgement Scene 4)

The Plagues are the final portrayal of divine judgement (Rev 15:2) prior to the return of Christ and can be considered the climactic judgement before the millennium. The Plagues also involve angels coming out from the Sanctuary, God's presence. They replicate the subject matter of the Trumpets fairly closely while amplifying them without reference to $\frac{1}{3}$. The fraction is replaced with the language of totality, such as 'all life' (Rev 16:3).

Relationship between the Seals, Trumpets and Plagues

The precise relationship between the Seals, Trumpets and Plagues is a complex one. Structural data, syntactical materials and recurring motifs indicate that the three sets build on each other and may actually be three portrayals of the same essential reality, God's strike against the Counterfeit System. The intricate nature of the visions suggests a three-layer portrait of this judgemental activity of God.

All three sets originate from a heavenly scene (Rev 5:1-7; 8:1-6; 15:1-8) and terminate in another heavenly scene. Additionally, there is a crescendo effect running through the sets in terms of (1) judgemental escalation ($\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{3}$ to 'all') and (2) the number of elements in item 7 (4 in Seal 7, 5 in Trumpet 7 and 7 in Plague 7). Furthermore, in all three sets, items 6 and 7 are virtually identical, with portrayals of battle and heavenly scenes respectively. This complex portrait of the Seals, Trumpets and Plagues is depicted below. The diagram shows the structural patterns of the three sets, while the table pinpoints the recurring motifs that permeate them. This strengthens the view that these are three perspectives of God's judgemental activity.

Seven Seals	Seven Trumpets	Seven Plagues
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4 short Seals (1-4) ■ 2 longer Seals (5,6) ■ Long interlude ■ 1 long Seal (7) ■ Climax with 'thunders, rumblings, lightnings, and earthquake' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4 short Trumpets (1-4) ■ 2 longer Trumpets (5,6) ■ Long interlude ■ 1 long Trumpet (7) ■ Climax with 'thunders, rumblings, lightnings, an earthquake, and severe hail' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 3 short Plagues (1-3) ■ Short Interlude ■ 2 short Plagues (4,5) ■ 2 longer Plagues (6,7) ■ Climax with 'thunders, rumblings, lightnings, an earthquake, severe hail, mountains and islands disappear'

No.	7 SEALS	7 TRUMPETS	7 PLAGUES
			Prelude to the plagues
1		Hail, fire and blood on earth	On earth Mark of Beast
2	Fiery red	Ablaze with fire Blood	Blood
3	Not harm . . .	Blazing like a torch Rivers and springs Named Wormwood	Rivers and springs Blood
4	Named Death Plague	Sun . . . darkened	Sun Burnt with fire Do not repent

5	Blood	Darkness Not harm grass . . . harm people without God's seal King named Abaddon	Darkness Do not repent
6	Sun Blood Mountain and island Nobles, military commanders, rich, powerful <i>Great Day of God's wrath</i>	Euphrates Did not repent <i>Army . . . (battle)</i> Fire Plague	Euphrates Kings of the east Kings of the world <i>Great Day of God's battle</i>
7	Silence in heaven – altar and throne (<i>Sanctuary</i>) Fire <i>Thunders rumblings lightnings earthquake</i>	Loud voices in heaven Opened <i>Sanctuary</i> <i>Lightnings rumblings thunders earthquake hail</i>	Into the air (heaven) – loud voices from <i>Sanctuary</i> <i>Lightnings rumblings thunders earthquake hailstone islands and mountains</i>

The most significant aspect of the Seals, Trumpets and Plagues pertains to items 6 and 7. In all three scenes, item 6 involves a great battle with references to kings, military commanders and armies. Similarly, item 7 directly involves heaven and the Sanctuary as well as specific natural phenomena which are presented in an escalating manner (4 in the Seals, 5 in the Trumpets, 7 in the Plagues).

It may be helpful to view the Seals, Trumpets and Plagues as three vantage points of the same reality. They offer three views of the same truth. The following enumeration is a useful way to summarise the three strikes of God.

- Three views, ONE truth: God Strikes the Counterfeit
- Three views, ONE truth: The strikes originate in heaven
- Three views, ONE truth: The strikes terminate in heaven
- Three views, ONE truth: Item 6 in all three strikes involves ‘war’
- Three views, ONE truth: Item 7 in all three strikes relates to the Sanctuary
- Three views, ONE truth: Item 7 in all three strikes comprises similar elements
- Three views, ONE truth: The three strikes unveil an escalation in judgement levels ($1/4 \rightarrow 1/3 \rightarrow 1$)
- Three views, ONE truth: The three strikes crescendo in the elements of number 7 ($4 \rightarrow 5 \rightarrow 7$)

The following summary allows us to view the sevenfold judgement of God. It reveals the escalation of judgement and also provides context to divine actions.

Judgement Scene	Level of Judgement	Context of Judgement
7 Churches	Unexecuted judgement threats	The Church is scrutinised
7 Seals	Judgement at $\frac{1}{4}$	Earth’s inhabitants are judged
7 Trumpets	Judgement at $\frac{1}{3}$	Earth’s inhabitants are judged
7 Plagues	Judgement rated as ‘all’	Earth’s inhabitants are judged
Winepress	Judgement targets evil triad	Earth’s inhabitants are judged

Millennial	Judgement of evil dead, the followers of the counterfeit	Saints are in heaven with Christ
Lake of Fire	Judgement of all evil of all time, especially the unholy three	The unholy three Earth's inhabitants

The Winepress (Judgement Scene 5)

The Winepress judgement (Revelation 14 and 19), echoing Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard and related passages (Isa 5:1-7; 11:3-4; 63:3; see also Joel 3:13), presents Christ as warrior who rides out to battle the enemy in order to preserve the people of his kingdom (Isa 66:16; Zec 6:3; 9:14-15). The images of this war are derived from the trampling of winepress and indicate a major escalation of divine judgement. Christ is the one who execute these events and the world of sinners is his target.

The Millennial Judgement (Judgement Scene 6)

After the Winepress judgement, Revelation (chapter 20) portrays a period of 1,000 years when God's people will be in heaven with Jesus. During this long period, God's people become involved in another judgement scene. While details of this judgement are few and far between, the judgement itself is sandwiched between the Winepress and the Lake of Fire. Clearly it is related to those two events. What actually happens in this millennial judgement is unknown but it is quite clear that God's people are involved.

The Lake of Fire (Judgement Scene 7)

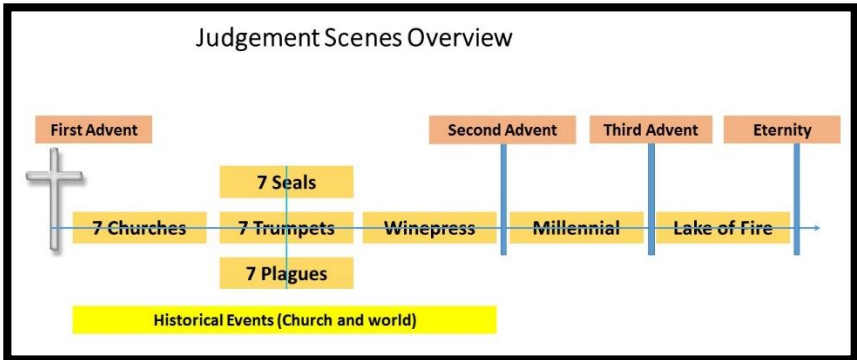
The final act of God is the annihilation of evil in all its forms. This is the Lake of Fire (see Isa 66:15-16, 24). It occurs after the 1,000 years. It takes place on earth, is preceded by the final push of the counterfeit to supplant God and ushers in the era of 'new heaven and new earth'. This final act is accompanied by a major battle called God and Magog, one of three battles in the book. The battle in Revelation 20, a last ditch

attempt by the counterfeit to oust God’s government, finds a direct parallel in Ezekiel 38 as shown below.

Rev 20:7-15	Eze 38:1-23
After 1,000 years	‘it will happen in the last days’
Satan is the leader	‘chief prince of Meshech and Tubal’ is the leader
Deceive nations of the whole world	‘many peoples are with you
Gog and Magog	Gog of the land of Magog
Gather for battle	Gather for battle
Numbered like the sand of the sea	‘mighty horde, huge army’, ‘like a cloud covering the land’
Surround the Holy City, God’s people	‘advance against my people Israel’, ‘Gog comes against the land of Israel’
Thrown into lake of fire—Devil, Beast, False Prophet and anyone not written in the ‘book of life’	‘I will pour out torrential rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone on him, as well as his troops and the many peoples who are with him’

There are seven judgement scenes in Revelation—Churches, Seals, Trumpets, Plagues, the ‘winepress’, millennial judgement and the ‘lake of fire’. With each vision there is a visible escalation involved until sin and evil are totally terminated.

In the accompanying diagram we see the seven judgement scenes and their likely connection to time and history. Notice that the seven scenes range from the first advent of Christ till the re-creation of the world. While there are seven specific scenes, the Seals, Trumpets and Plagues appear to run concurrently. Moreover, five of these scenes are pre-advent in nature while the remaining two involve events occurring after the second advent of Jesus. The diagram provides a sort of timeline to God’s work of judging the world.



The number 7, a symbol of perfection, is also a symbol of divine judgement and the seven judgement scenes in the book underscore the completeness of divine retribution.

The Final Settlement

The climactic vision of the book pertains to the re-creation of the heavens and the earth which forms a virtual biblical inclusio (envelope) with the first creation of Genesis 1. In this vision we glimpse the realisation of a promise that runs through several eschatological prophecies concerning the ultimate reversal of sin and the restoration of the pristine reality of man's original home.

Revelation and Isaiah

The influence of Isaiah on Revelation's 'new heaven, new earth' language is evident in the subsequent comparison. Admittedly, there are differences between the two accounts and as a result some have asserted that the two visions are not directly related to one another. Nevertheless, the proximity of language and concepts between the two demands a degree of caution. Based on a close reading of the two texts, the more likely conclusion is that both Isaiah and John were privy to the same reality.

Revelation 21-22		Isaiah 65:17-66:24	
21:1	New heavens, new earth	65:17; 66:22	New heavens, new earth
21:1	No sea		Sea is not mentioned
21:2	New Jerusalem	65:17	Recreated Jerusalem
21:3	Tabernacle with men	66:6	Temple
21:4	Former things pass	65:17	Former things are not remembered
21:4	No tears or sorrow	66:13	Comfort
21:4	No death	65:20	Death still exists
21:4	No crying	65:19	No weeping or crying
21:4	No pain	65:23, 25	No pain
21:8	Lake of Fire as final judgement	66:15-16, 24	Fire as final judgement

21:23; 22:5	No sun or moon	66:23	'New moon'
21:25; 22:5	No night		Night is not mentioned
22:3	No more curse	65:20	Curse still exists
21:8; 22:5	No sinners	65:20	Sinners still exist
	No animals are mentioned	65:25	Animals are mentioned
	No building or planting is mentioned	65:21f.	There is building and planting
21:10	High mountain: New Jerusalem	66:20	Holy mountain: recreated Jerusalem
21:24	All nations	66:18	All nations
21:23	God's glory	66:18-19	God's glory

While the two visions address the same reality, the new creation of God, there are also subtle distinctions as to warrant some explanation. The principal points of departures have to do with the continuing existence of death, curse, sin and time in the Isaiah's vision. Some scholars have suggested that this indicates the two visions are substantially different, namely, that Isaiah is only referring to the messianic age not the eschatological new creation. Perhaps, what accounts for the differences are the proximity of the prophet to the actual fulfilment and the progressive nature of divine revelation. In other words, Isaiah did see the 'new heaven and new earth', but John's view has greater clarity to supplement the Isaiah's earlier vision. Isaiah sees the same reality as John but his view is still somewhat foggy, while John's view removes the fuzziness and unveils the complete picture about this new creation.

New Jerusalem

I would like to draw attention to two intriguing pieces of information which are essential to the description of the New Jerusalem.

First, we learn that the dimensions of the New Jerusalem (12,000 stadia or about 2,200kms, in length, width and height; Rev 21:16) are reminiscent of the cubical shape of the Holy of Holies in Moses' Tabernacle (Exodus 26) and Solomon's Temple (1 Kgs 6:15-29; 2 Chron 3:8-14). The shape of the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and Temple and of the New Jerusalem is a perfect cube. While we cannot read too much into this detail, the cube appears to be the geometric symbol of God's throne room. The Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle and Temple housed the Ark of the Covenant whose cover was a symbol of God's throne. Revelation informs us that God will set up his throne in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:22-23; 22:3-5).

Second, the stones in these passages may vary in number and sequence but they reflect three significant events in cosmic and earthly history. In Ezekiel 28, they appear in conjunction with the rebel angel in heaven. He is described as being decked with these stones which are set in gold (MT and LXX give different numbers). This picture is replicated later in history in the depiction of the unique vestments of Aaron. In Exodus 28, the stones (the LXX listing of Ezekiel 28 and Exodus 28 are identical) which adorn Aaron's breast piece are also set in gold. The proximity of gold with precious stones was first noted in Gen 2:12 where gold is mentioned alongside two stones (*bdolakh* and *shoham*). The same connection between gold and stones is also evidenced in Revelation 21. Each narrative describes a beginning: (1) Ezekiel 28 addresses the primordial creation with its mention of Eden; (2) Exodus 28 tells of a historical creation where the new nation of Israel is given a spiritual head; and (3) Revelation 21 narrates the eschatological creation of a 'new heaven and new earth'. The listings of stones in the three passages (based on MT Hebrew and LXX Greek names) are remarkably similar despite variations in order.

Ezek 28:13 MT	Exod 28:17-20 MT	Ezek 28:13 LXX	Exod 28:17- 20 LXX	Rev 21:18-20 Greek
'odem	'odem	sardion	sardion	sardion
pirdah	pirdah	topazion	topazion	topazion
yahlom	yahlom	smaragdos	smaragdos	smaragdos
tarshish	tarshish	anthrakas	anthrakas	sarphiros
shoham	shoham	sarphiros	sarphiros	iastis
yashpeh	yashpeh	iastis	iastis	amethustos
sapir	sapir	ligurion	ligurion	khrusolithos
nopheka	nopheka	akhates	akhates	berullion
barqat	barqat	amethustos	amethustos	khalkedon
	leshem	khrusolithos	khrusolithos	sardonuks
	shbo	berullion	berullion	khrusoprasos
	akhlamah	onukhion	onukhion	huakinthos

Moreover, the parallel between the rebel angel and Aaron is rather uncanny. Both wear stones set in gold. Both are chosen and anointed to serve God. Both are involved at the 'creation' of something new. Both play God (compare Isa 14:13-14 and Exodus 32) in some way. Both lead a rebellion against God or his servant (compare Revelation 12 and Numbers 12). Jesus Christ, God's anointed (Isaiah 61), Lamb (John 1; Revelation 5) and High Priest (Hebrews 7), accomplishes where these two anointed ones failed.

The Numbers Game

One of the most eye-catching aspects of Revelation is the special use of numbers. The two most important numbers are 7 and 12. The following list shows all the various usages of these two numbers. The list also considers the uses of 6, another number of some significance, and a couple of other interesting numbers.

Item	References	Context
Number 7		
7 spirits	Rev 3:1; 4:5; 5:6	Dealing with Christ
7 eyes	Rev 5:6	
7 horns	Rev 5:6	
7 fiery torches	Rev 4:5	
7 stars	Rev 1:16,20	Dealing with the Church
7 angels of Churches	Rev 1:20	
7 lampstands	Rev 1:12,20	
7 churches	Rev 1:11	
7 Seals	Rev 5:2, 5; 6:1ff.	Dealing with judgement
7 Trumpets	Rev 8:2,6	
7 angels of Trumpets	Rev 8:2,6	
7 gold bowls	Rev 15:7	
7 Plagues	Rev 15:6,8	
7 angels of Plagues	Rev 15:6,8	
7 natural phenomena in the final plague	Rev 16:17-21	
7 Thunders	Rev 10:3-4	
7 judgement scenes	(see 'God Strikes the Counterfeit')	
7 affirmations	Rev 5:12	Song affirmations
7 affirmations	Rev 7:12	
7 components of God's kingdom	(see 'Kingdom of God')	God's Kingdom

7 invitations using 'Come'	Rev 6:1,3,5,7; Rev 22:17,17,20	Invitations to view something
7 crowns	Rev 12:3	Dealing with counterfeit
7 heads (10 horns/10 crowns)	Rev 12:3; 13:1; 17:3, 7	
7 mountains	Rev 17:9	
7 kings	Rev 17:10	
(Other possible instances of the number 7 has been suggested, such as, 7 visions between Trumpets and Plagues, 7 words against Babylon, 7 visions in Revelation 19-21 and 7 revelations concerning the New Jerusalem.)		
Number 12 and multiples		
24 Elders	Rev 4:4,10; 5:8	Dealing with God's people
144,000	Rev 7:4-8; 14:1,3	
12 Stars	Rev 12:1	
12 gates	Rev 21:12	Dealing with the New Jerusalem
12 angels	Rev 21:12	
12 tribes	Rev 21:12	
12 foundations	Rev 21:14	
12 precious stones	Rev 21:19-20	
12 apostles	Rev 21:14	
12,000 stadia	Rev 21:16	
144 cubits	Rev 21:17	
12 pearls	Rev 21:21	
12 kinds of fruit	Rev 22:2	
Number 6		
6 wings	Rev 4:8	Dealing with angels
666	Rev 13:18	Dealing with counterfeit
6 'woes' over Babylon	Rev 18:10,16,19	
6 references to Satan in relationship to the Seven Churches	Rev 2:9,10,13,13,24; 3:9	
Other Numbers		

42 months (6x7)	Rev 11:2	Nations trampling the holy city
42 months	Rev 13:5	Authority of the Sea Beast
1,260 days (6x210)	Rev 11:3	Time related to the Two Witnesses
3½ days	Rev 11:9	
1,260 days	Rev 12:6	Time related to the Celestial Woman
Time, times, ½ time (3½)	Rev 12:14	

The number 7 is applied primarily to the Kingdom of God (there are 21 such uses). However, there are a few instances where 7 is used for the Counterfeit Kingdom. When this happens, the number appears in hybrid situations with another number, mostly 10. The number 6 is employed primarily for God-impersonators, but it is used once for angels' wings. The number 12 deals only with the people and place of God (the majority of the occurrences concern the New Jerusalem).

In Revelation 17 we encounter 10 horns, 7 heads and 8 kings—5 fallen, 1 remaining, 1 still to come plus an 8th who is of the 7 kings (5+1+1+1=8). The closest biblical parallel to this schema is Daniel 7 where the fourth beast appears with 10 horns, but a 'little horn' uproots and replaces 3 horns producing this equation—10-3=7+1=8. It is possible that the unusual 8 in both passages is a symbolic way of stressing the counterfeit attempt to surpass God himself. While the precise meaning of this numbers play may be difficult to ascertain, it is evident that this unique hybrid represents the God-impersonator powers.

One number appears in differing formats. This is 42 months, which parallels 3½ years or 1,260 days or time, times and ½ time (3½). While these numbers appear to refer to the same or similar event, the usage is distinctive because 42 applies to the counterfeit system, while 1,260 and 3½ refers to God's kingdom but in the context of God's persons being persecuted by the counterfeit. This appears to be a deliberate device to separate the two systems numerically.

Known by many Names

The book of Revelation employs several names and titles for Jesus. The list below does not include statements of self-predication which Jesus utters.

Name	References
Jesus	1:9,10; 14:12; 17:6; 19:10,10; 20:4; 22:16
Jesus Christ	1:1,2,5
Lord Jesus	22:20,21
Faithful Witness	1:5
Firstborn from the dead	1:5
Ruler of the kings of the earth	1:5
First and Last	1:17; 22:13
Son of Man	1:13; 14:14; 17:14
Living One	1:18
Son of God	2:18
Holy One	3:7
True One	3:7
Amen	3:14
Faithful and True Witness	3:14
Ruler of God's Creation	3:14
Lion of the Tribe of Judah	5:5
Root of David	5:5; 22:16
Lamb	5:8; 14:1,4; 19:7,9; 21:9,22,23,24; 22:1,3
Lord of lords	17:14; 19:16
King of kings	17:14; 19:16
Faithful and True	19:11
Word of God	19:13
Messiah	20:4
Alpha and Omega	22:13

Beginning and End	22:13
Bright Morning Star	22:17

The names 'Jesus/Jesus Christ/Lord Jesus' occur 13 times in the book, whereas the name 'Lamb' occurs 11 times. When other names and titles are added, the book bears a strong salvific imprint; it envisages redemption as Christ's principal work. When the book commences with the assertion that it is 'the revelation of Jesus Christ', it is suggesting that end-time prophecies are nails on the wall on which this portrait is hung. This is the true substance of the revelation portrayed in the book.

Revelation's Songs

Before we conclude our unveiling of Revelation, I would like to direct your attention to the use of song in the book, a topic mostly ignored by scholars and preachers alike. In our haste to dissect the prophecies of Revelation, we fail to recognise the presence and significance of song in the book. The songs are as important to the message as any of the prophecies and we side line them to our own detriment.

There are 28 songs (poems) in Revelation and these comprise the following genres: 11 Praise/Hallel Psalms, 8 Victory Chants, 5 Dirges and 4 that may be mixed types. Songs do not occur in every chapter of the book. The greatest concentration of songs belongs to chapters 18 and 19 (7 and 5 respectively), while chapters 1, 12, 15 and 21 have 1 song each, chapters 4, 11 and 16 have 2 songs each and chapters 5 and 7 have 3 songs each. A bird's eye view of the songs enables us to come to terms with the singer, type and content of each song. I hope that the brief discourse which follows motivates readers to study the songs and their messages further.

Some of these songs are labelled Hallel Psalms because of the presence of the Greek word *allelouia* which is a direct transliteration of the Hebrew *hallelu yah* meaning 'praise Yah' (that is, 'praise Yahweh'). The word is integral to biblical and Christian faith and has been transmitted directly into Christian literature as 'hallelujah'. The OT Psalms which utilise this word are called Hallel Psalms

Rev 1:7 is a benedictory song enveloped by double 'Amen'. The song refers to the soon return of Jesus, an event to be witnessed by every person. It also speaks of how the families of men (Zec 14:17) will lament because of Christ (Zec 12:10).

Rev 4:8, the song of the Four Living Creatures, is praise which repeats the 'holy, holy, holy' from the song of the Seraphim in Isa 6:3 but adds a time statement, 'who was, who is, and who is coming', to it.

Rev 4:11 is sung by the 24 Elders (see v10) and is a praise and worship song celebrating the worthiness of the Lord God to receive glory, honour and power. Such considerations are grounded in the fact that he is the creator.

Rev 5:9-10, a joint performance of Four Living Creatures and 24 Elders (see v8), is a new song, sung to the accompaniment of lyres (see also Ps 98:4-6), which describes Christ's worthiness to open the mysterious scroll which had given such anxiety to John (see Rev 5:3-4). Christ's ability to perform this task is founded on his salvific work on behalf of mankind.

Rev 5:12, the angels of heaven (see v11) break out in praise, affirming the worthiness of the Lamb, Jesus, to receive power, riches, wisdom, strength, honour, glory and blessing. The seven items depict the perfection of the angels' adoration.

Rev 5:13 is sung by every cosmic creature, praising the dominance of God and the Lamb who receive blessing, honour, glory and dominion (see also Rev 1:6).

Rev 7:10 brings the Great Multitude (see v9) in to view as they affirm the salvific work of God and the Lamb.

Rev 7:12 is sung by the angels, 24 Elders and Four Living Creatures (see v11). This benedictory song is enveloped by double 'Amen'. The benediction of the 24 Elders confirms that God has received blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honour, power and strength (another perfect rendition). The songs of Rev 5:12 and 7:12 comprise 7 elements (virtually the same) affirming what God or Christ have received.

Rev 7:14-17 is a victory chant by one of the Elders (see v13). The chant tells of the victory achieved by God's people who had faced great tribulation and cleansed themselves with the Lamb's blood. This

experience entitles them to service at God's throne and sanctuary. They also enjoy a new life without hunger, thirst or tears (Rev 21:4).

Rev 11:15 is also a victory chant which speaks of Christ's victory over and repossession of the world.

Rev 11:17-18 is a thanksgiving (Todah Psalm) of the 24 Elders (see v16). The expression of gratitude embedded in this song is reminiscent of Todah Psalms in the OT (e.g., Psalm 138). It confirms the setting up of God's kingdom with its resultant rewards for God's people and destruction of the wicked.

Rev 12:10-12 is a victory chant by someone identified as a 'loud voice' (probably an angel). The chant asserts the rulership of God and his Messiah and the defeat of the Devil. The ground for God's reign is evidenced in the unwavering loyalty of his people, even in the face of death. The Devil's defeat is precipitated by his accusatory work against God's people (see Zec 3:1)

Rev 15:3-4, sung by the redeemed from earth (see v2), is a victory chant entitled 'the Song of God's Servant Moses and Song of the Lamb'. This song emphasises the awesomeness of Lord God, the Almighty, also designated as King of the nations. It also draws attention to worship as the appropriate response to this King (see also Psalms 96-99).

Rev 16:5-6, another victory chant, is sung by the angel of the waters and articulates the rightness of God's judgements which are justified on the basis of the martyrdom meted against God's people and prophets.

Rev 16:7 is also a victory chant sung by someone from the altar and also affirms the rightness of God's judgement, a repeat the previous song.

Rev 18:2-3 is a dirge or lament by the Mighty Angel (see v1) and predicts the destruction of Babylon which is predicated upon the wanton evil she has wreaked on the citizens of the earth and deserves her punishment.

Rev 18:4-8 is an invitation, tucked between the laments of chapter 18, for God's people to depart from Babylon and not participate in her evil.

Rev 18:10 is a dirge or lament by the Kings of the earth (see v9) who weep over the fall of Babylon. The song is introduced with a double 'Woe!' which reflects the use of 'Woe' in OT prophetic texts about judgement.

Rev 18:14, another dirge or lament by the Merchants of the earth (see v11) who also lament the end of Babylon.

Rev 18:15-17a is a dirge or lament by the Merchants who mourn over the fate of Babylon with a double 'Woe!' as in Rev 18:10.

Rev 18:19-20 is another dirge or lament which employs the double 'Woe!', accompanying the wailing and mourning of shipmasters and sailors over the destruction of Babylon. The double 'Woe!' is employed three times in the dirges of Revelation 18.

Rev 18:21-24 is a victory chant which describes the defeat of Babylon in detail. Pointing to the violent end of Babylon, it enumerates all the things that will no longer exist as a consequence of this punishment and considers the martyrdom of the prophets and God's people as the sole cause for Babylon's demise.

Rev 19:1-2, a Hallel (Praise) Psalm by the Great Multitude, celebrates the fall of Babylon and reflects similar usage in the hallel psalms of the Psalter (see Psalms 146-150).

Rev 19:3 is another Hallel Psalm by the Great Multitude which also celebrates the destruction of Babylon.

Rev 19:4, a Hallel Psalm by the 24 Elders and Four Living Creatures, is mixed genre for it is both benediction and Hallel Psalm.

Rev 19:5, a praise by a 'Voice from the throne', is an invitation to praise God and echoes the sentiments of Ps 134:1.

Rev 19:6-8 is a Hallel Psalm by the Great Multitude. The psalm rejoices at the reign of Lord God, the Almighty, and draws attention to the marriage of the Lamb. The narrator concludes the Hallel Psalms with comments about the privilege of being invited to the marriage feast of the Lamb (v9).

Rev 21:3-4 is the final song in the book. This is a victory chant by 'a loud voice from the throne' and draws attention to the ultimate triumph of God and his people. It also reiterates the thoughts introduced earlier in the song of the elders in Rev 7:14-17 which speak of the new life for God's people. What is added in this chant is the idea that God cohabitates with his people. He is no longer a God in the distance but one dwelling among his people. This song serves a fitting climax to the aspirations of God's people and serves as backdrop to the final vision of the book.

The songs of Revelation provide solace and comfort in the most trying of circumstances. They are a constant reminder that no matter how grave the danger, God is in control and we can face the end of the world with assurance. When we pause to consider the pervading presence of praise and victory affirmations, we realise that the songs go beyond solace and comfort; they assert the fact that God is victorious and his people share in this certainty even when faced with perils and life-threatening dangers. In one sense, these songs outweigh the prophecies as they unveil the continual assurance of God's light in the midst and beyond the darkness of sin and evil.

Final Thoughts

The book of Revelation is an unveiling of Jesus Christ. It portrays a cosmic conflict between God's Kingdom and a counterfeit one. The materials of the book are organised around these two pillars of truth. The actions of God against the counterfeit complete the picture of what is really happening in the book.

As far as the book is concerned, people on earth belong to one of two realities, either God's Kingdom or the counterfeit. This is a cosmic conflict and the contestation will continue until sin is finally eradicated. All worldly entities (political, religious, economic and ideological) which oppose God belong to the counterfeit. The identification of any single entity is less important in comparison to the big picture presented in the book.

The message of the book is quite simple: Christ is our creator (the Alpha and Omega), our redeemer (the Lamb), our protector (the Rider on the white horse) and our connection to heaven (the Mighty Angel). Indeed it is the revelation of Jesus Christ!