

Superina Paolo

THE REVELATION
OF JOHN

Disclosed

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**THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH
AND
THE UNIVERSAL COMMUNION**

In the Name of the Father and of His Son, Jesus Christ



As, at the beginning, there was perfect harmony between Yahweh and His whole creation, so it will be at the end, when all will live a new life of full spiritual communion with Yahweh and with each other

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Which is the real meaning of this cryptic book?
Does it carry a true “Christian” message?
Is it in line with the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

Text based on:

The Holy Bible New International Version

Notes and explanations based on:

The Study Bible. New International Version

The Daily Study Bible. William Barclay

Thoughts. Superina Paolo

The Gospel of Jesus Christ. Superina Paolo

Superina Paolo

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PERSONAL INTRODUCTION: What follows is not intended and does not want to be a new or original study of this particular New Testament book, but simply what I have learned from it and of it, then put in writing.

Foreword

When, reading the New Testament, I arrived at the Revelation, I felt projected into a different atmosphere, something quite unlike the rest of the New Testament; not only different but also very difficult for a modern mind to understand. For many years I did try to avoid the problem set by this book abandoning it as unintelligible; considering it not only unworthy to be taken into account, but also negative and unacceptable for the Christian faith -too many people did use and are still using it to draw celestial time-tables of what is to come. In this I was not alone as -to make one example only- Luther, among many others, would have denied the Revelation a place in the New Testament. He declared that in all the images and visions of the book the teaching of Jesus Christ is never mentioned, and that the inspiration of the Spirit of Yahweh is never perceptible in it. And I personally and fully agree with this point of view.

Anyway, at a certain point, I felt the urge to understand the inner meaning and the actual message of this difficult and perplexing book, and, if possible, to make it understandable by "translating" the text into a more "normal" language. To reach this goal -to make the Revelation clear enough to be understood by the reader- I have changed the minimum necessary quantity of words and phrases. Anyway, not to lose connection with the original text, the latter appears in the comments -marked by < >- aside the "translated" one. And, in Appendix 1, there is the complete text of the Revelation, following the New International Version -with the few alterations requested by my personal beliefs, as they are expressed in my work "Thoughts."

Furthermore, the text is edited giving back to God His Name: Yahweh.

The Revelation outline

At the time the Revelation was written, the Christian Church -the New Chosen People of Yahweh- was decimated by a merciless persecution unleashed by Rome (the Beast) under the instigation of Satan (the Dragon).

The Revelation is a message directed to all the Churches in the Roman Province of Asia Minor. It begins with the author introducing himself and declaring that he is following Jesus Christ's instructions (ch. 1).

Within this message, specific instructions are addressed to the most important Churches of the province (ch.s 2-3).

An opening vision describes the majesty of Yahweh -Who reigns in Heaven and is the absolute Master of human destiny (ch. 4)- delivering to the Christ (the Lamb) the scroll with the decree of condemnation of the persecutors (ch. 5).

Then the vision moves on with the announcement of a barbaric people invasion -the Parths- accompanied by its usual follow-up of evil: war, famine, plague (ch. 6).

The countless who are faithful to Yahweh will be spiritually preserved and will enjoy their reward in Heaven (ch. 7).

Yahweh, desiring the salvation of all sinners, will not destroy the persecutors immediately but, after giving them time to repent, will warn them as He did with the Pharaoh and the Egyptians, striking them with a sequence of warning scourges (ch.s 8-9).

Then, there is an interlude in the narrative, with a short summary of the rest of the Revelation (ch.s 10-11).

Next comes the vision of an angelic war in Heaven, which ends with Satan's expulsion (ch. 12), followed by his renewed activity on Earth, mainly in terms of the Roman persecution in which the Antichrist is involved (ch. 13).

Then there is a vision of Christ in Heaven with all his faithful, accompanied by the announcement of the Roman persecutors' judgment (ch. 14).

This is followed by a vision announcing (ch. 15) and describing (ch. 16) the last series of warning scourges which will precede the fall of the unrepentant Roman Empire.

But all those warnings will be a waste of trouble; and Yahweh will have to destroy the Roman Empire, which corrupts the Earth pushing men to worship Satan through the Emperor worship (ch. 17).

Following there are a lamentation over Rome (Babylon) destroyed (ch. 18) and a triumphal song addressed to Heaven. Then the vision comes to the final destruction of the persecuting Rome, carried out by the glorious Christ (ch. 19).

After that, the development of the Church on Earth begins, which will end at the last days with a new attack from Satan, followed by the final defeat of the Enemy, the resurrection of the dead and their judgment (ch. 20), by the final establishment of the Kingdom of Yahweh in Heaven, and by the elimination of death. Then a vision describes the perfect condition of the New Jerusalem which reigns over the New Earth (ch.s 21-22).

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INTRODUCTION

Apocalyptic literature

The Revelation is also commonly called "Apocalypse," from the Greek word "Apokalupsis." The Revelation book, although unique in the New Testament, is nonetheless representative of a kind of literature which was quite common in the time between the Old and the New Testament, called Apocalyptic literature, which was the product of an indestructible Jewish hope.

The Jews could not forget that they were the Chosen People of Yahweh. To them that involved the certainty that some day they would arrive at world supremacy, and they looked forward to the coming of a king of David's line who would unite the nation and lead it to greatness. But the actual history of Israel was dramatically different. After the death of Solomon, the kingdom was split in two under Rehoboam and Jeroboam and so lost its unity. The Northern Kingdom, with its capital at Samaria, vanished at the end of the eighth century BC under the assault of the Assyrians, and never reappeared in history. The Southern Kingdom, with its capital at Jerusalem, was reduced to slavery and exile by the Babylonians at the beginning of the sixth century BC. It was later subject to the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. History for the Jews was a catalog of disasters from which it became clear that no human deliverer could rescue them.

So, the Jews developed the concept of the "Two Ages." They considered the present one really bad and beyond redemption, so much that for it there could be nothing but total destruction. Therefore, they waited for the "Age to Come," which would be totally good, the "Golden Age of Yahweh" when there would be peace, prosperity and righteousness, and Yahweh's Chosen People would at last be avenged and receive the place that was theirs by right. They believed that the change could never be brought about by men and, therefore, looked for the direct intervention of Yahweh. He would come into history to blast the present world out of existence and bring in His "Golden Age." The day of the coming of Yahweh was called "The Day of the Lord" and was to be a terrible time of terror, destruction, and judgment; the "birthpangs" of the new age.

All apocalyptic literature dealt with these events; the sins of the present age, the terrors of the time between, and the blessing of the time to come. It was entirely composed of dreams and visions of the end. Because of this, all apocalyptic literature was necessarily cryptic, for it was continually attempting to describe the indescribable and to say the unsayable.

The more the Jews were held down by some foreign power, the more they dreamed of the destruction of that power and of their own revenge. But to write openly of these dreams would only have worsened the situation with the oppressing power, for such writings would have seemed the work of rebellious revolutionaries. Such books, therefore, were written in code, in a language which was to be unintelligible to outsiders.

All this is precisely the situation with the New Testament Revelation, which is the only Christian Apocalypse -also if there were many others which did not gain admission into the New Testament. It is written exactly on the Jewish pattern and details and follows the basic concept of the two ages. The only difference is that for the Day of the Lord it substitutes the day of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

By this book, John wants to encourage and to strengthen the faith of the Christians, who were suffering under the harsh persecution launched by the Roman Emperor Domitian -and, before of him, by Nero- assuring them that the hostile power of Rome would fall in a not too far future and, then, describing what will happen at the end of times, with the final defeat of evil and Satan, and with the full establishment of Yahweh's Kingdom.

Literary form

To understand adequately the Revelation, the reader must recognize that it is a distinct kind of literature: "apocalyptic," that is, a highly symbolic kind of writing. Although its visions often seem bizarre to the modern reader, fortunately the book provides a number of clues for its own interpretation (see Appendix 1): Stars are angels (v. 1:20), lampstands are Churches (v. 1:20); the "great prostitute" is Babylon (v. 17:5), that is, Rome (v. 17:18); the New Jerusalem is the Christian Church (v. 21:9-10).

The apocalyptic visions don't have a "physical" direct meaning, as they are fully symbolic. In an apocalypse everything, or almost everything, has a symbolic value: the figures, the things, the parts of the body, the characters coming on scene. The apocalyptist who describes a vision translates in symbols the ideas Yahweh is giving him, piling up things, colors, symbolic figures, without worrying about the incongruity of the overall effect. So, to understand the message of an apocalypse without distorting it, it is necessary to be in tune with the author, re-translating into ideas the symbols he proposes.

The apparatus of apocalyptic literature

The Jewish apocalypses had a standard apparatus of events which were to happen at the last times and of blessedness which will follow; and all these events have found their place in the Christian Revelation.

A) Events at the last times

i) In apocalyptic literature the Messiah is a divine figure of power and might, waiting to descend into the world to begin his all-conquering action. He will come to put down the mighty from their seats, to dethrone the kings of the Earth and to destroy the sinners. There is nothing human or gentle about this Messiah; he is a divine figure of avenging power and glory before whom the Earth trembles in terror.

ii) The coming of the Messiah will be preceded by the return of Elijah who will prepare the way for him standing on the hills of Israel and announcing the coming of the Messiah with a voice so great that it will sound from one end of the Earth to the other.

iii) The last times were known as "The Travail of the Messiah." The coming of the Messianic age will be painful like birthpangs.

iv) The last days will be a time of terror. All men will be full of fear and will seek a place to hide, finding none.

v) The last days will be a time when the world will be shattered, a time of cosmic upheaval when the universe, as men know it, will be disintegrated. The seasons will lose their order, and there will be neither night nor day. The firmament will crash in ruins. The stars will be extinguished; the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood.

vi) The last days will be a time when human relationship will be destroyed. Hatred and enmity will reign on the Earth. Every man will be against his neighbors. Brothers will kill brothers, parents will murder their own children. The man of humility will become a man of envy.

vii) The last days will be a time of judgment. Yahweh will come like a refiner's fire and will deal with men by the fire and the sword. The coming Messiah will destroy all sinners, who will be burned up as Sodom was long ago.

viii) In almost all of these visions the Pagans will be totally destroyed or will come in chains to Israel. Sometimes there is depicted one last gathering of the Pagans against Jerusalem, and one last battle in which they are destroyed. In this case, the kings of all nations will throw themselves against Jerusalem, placing their thrones in a ring around the city, where they will only find their final destruction. But, few times, there appears the picture of the conversion of the Pagans through Israel. In this case surfaces the concept that Yahweh has given Israel as a "light" to the Pagans, that she may bring Yahweh's salvation to all the peoples of the Earth. In this case the Messiah, the Son of Man, will be the Light to the Pagans, and all nations will come to Jerusalem to see the glory of Yahweh.

ix) In the last days the Jews who have been scattered throughout the Earth will all be reunited again in Jerusalem.

x) In the last days the New Jerusalem, which is already prepared in Heaven, will come down among men. It will be beautiful beyond comparison and its glory will be much greater than the glory of the earthly one.

xi) In the last days there will be the resurrection of the dead. Sometimes this resurrection is applied only to the righteous in Israel, sometimes to all Israel, and sometimes to all men everywhere.

xii) There were differences as to how long the Messianic Kingdom was to last. The most natural and usual view was to think of it as an everlasting Kingdom. Some believed that the Reign of the Messiah would last for four hundred years. They arrived at this figure comparing Genesis 15:13, in which Abraham is told that the period of affliction of the children of Israel will be four hundred years, and Psalm 90:15, in which the psalmist asks Yahweh to make the nation glad after the days of punishment He has inflicted them. In the Christian Revelation the view is that there is to be a "Reign of the Saints" for a thousand years; after this there will be the final battle with the assembled powers of evil and, then, the Golden Age of Yahweh will come for ever.

B) Blessedness of the New Age to come

i) The two divided kingdoms will be united again, the old divisions will be healed and the People of Yahweh will be one.

ii) There will be in the world a surprising fertility, the wilderness will become like the Garden of Eden, and there will be plenty of everything.

iii) All wars will cease and there will be a great peace throughout the Earth. Swords will be reforged into ploughshares and spears into pruning-hooks.

iv) There will be no more enmity between the animals or between men and animals. In all nature there will be a universal friendship in which none will wish to do another any harm.

v) The people will not sorrow or suffer pain any more. There will be no such a thing as an untimely death and no man will be sick. Disease will disappear and childbirth will have no pain.

vi) There will be perfect holiness among men. Mankind will be good, living properly in the eyes of Yahweh.

John's Revelation is the New Testament representative of all these apocalyptic works which tell of the terror before the end of time and of the blessing of the age to come, and it has used all the already existing imagery. John's Revelation is often difficult and unintelligible to the modern reader, but it uses pictures and ideas which those who read it at the time of its writing would have known and understood without any particular problem.

Prophetic and apocalyptic works

It is practically impossible to define the boundary between the two genres; the latter being in some way the continuation of the former.

Anyway, there are two main differences, one of message and one of method.

- i) Of message. The prophets thought of this present world, and their message was often a cry for social, economic and political justice, and was always a call to obey and serve Yahweh within the present world. To the prophets it was this world that was to be reformed and in which Yahweh's Kingdom would come. To the apocalyptists this world was beyond mending. They believed, not in the reformation, but in the dissolution of this present world. They looked forward to the creation of a new world, after the present one had been shattered by the avenging wrath of Yahweh.
- ii) Of method. The prophets' message was spoken; the message of the apocalyptists was always written. An apocalypse is always difficult, complicated, often unintelligible; it has to be well thought over before it could be understood.

Attitude towards Rome

Comparing the Revelation to the other books and letters of the New Testament, it immediately appears that in the Revelation there is a completely new attitude towards Rome and the Roman Empire.

In Acts the tribunal of the Roman magistrate was often the safest refuge of the Christian missionaries against the hatred of the Jews and the fury of the mob (Acts 16:36-40; 18:12-17; 19:23-41; 21:27-40; 23:12-31; 25:10-11). Paul was proud to be a Roman citizen; when he wrote to the Romans, he urged them to obey to the power of the Emperor because he was ordained by Yahweh (Romans 13:1-7). Peter's advice was exactly the same; governors and kings are to be obeyed, for their task is given them by Yahweh (1 Peter 2:12-17). In his writing Paul often points to the power of Rome as the one thing which is controlling the threatening chaos of the world.

On the contrary, in the Revelation there is nothing but blazing hatred for Rome. Rome is a Babylon, the mother of harlots, drunk with the blood of the saints and the martyrs (v. 17:5-6). John hopes for nothing else but her total destruction.

The explanation of this change in attitude lies in the wide development of the Emperor worship which, with its accompanying persecutions, is the background of the Revelation. By the time of the Revelation the Emperor worship -which began with Augustus (who died in AD 14) allowing the worship of Julius Caesar, his great predecessor- was the one common reli-

gion which covered the whole Roman Empire; and it was because of their refusal to conform to its demands that the Christians -and the Jews, as well- were persecuted and killed. The essence of this worship was that the reigning Roman Emperor, as embodying the spirit of Rome, was divine. Once a year everyone in the Empire had to appear before the magistrate to burn a pinch of incense to the god-head of the Emperor and say: "Caesar is Lord." This was the one common act and belief which turned the Empire into a unity. After he had done that, a man could go away and worship any god he liked, so long as his worship did not infringe the good order. To refuse to burn the pinch of incense and to say: "Caesar is Lord," was not an act of irreligion; was an act of severe political disloyalty. And the Christians considered they could not give the title "Lord" to any other but Jesus Christ.

At the time the Revelation was written, Domitian was the Roman Emperor (81-96 AD). He began his reign with a harsh campaign of persecution against all who would not worship the ancient gods of Rome and the Roman Emperor. He made it compulsory to be addressed as Lord and God. All over the Empire men and women had to call Domitian god, or die. In particular, he launched his hatred against the Jews and the Christians. It was to encourage men in such times that the Revelation was written. John did not shut his eyes to the terrors of the Roman persecution, he saw dreadful and still more dreadful things on the way; but beyond them he saw the glory for those who defied Caesar in the name of Jesus Christ. The Christians were outlaws, and the Revelation was a call to be faithful till death in order to win the crown of Eternal Life.

Some within the Church were advocating a policy of compromise (vv. 2: 14-15,20), which had to be corrected before its subtle influence could undermine the determination of the believers to stand in the dangerous days that lay ahead. Against this idea, John wrote to encourage the faithful to resist firmly all the demands of the Emperor worship. He informed his readers that the final battle between Yahweh and Satan was imminent. Satan will increase his persecution of the believers, but they must stand, even to death. They were sealed against any spiritual harm and would be soon vindicated when Jesus Christ will return; when the wicked will be for ever destroyed, and when Yahweh's people will enter an eternity of glory and blessedness.

Author

The author identifies himself four times as John (vv. 1:1,4,9; 22:8), without telling which John. The book itself reveals that the author was a Jew, well versed in Scripture, a Church leader who was well known to the Chur-

ches of Asia Minor, and a deeply religious person fully convinced that the Christian faith would soon triumph over the demonic forces at work in the world.

From the beginning of the Church (Justin martyr, second century) it has been considered that this John was the Apostle. Yet, in the third century Dionysius, an African bishop, compared the language, style and thought of the Revelation with that of the other writings of John and decided that it could not have been written by the Apostle. He suggested that the author was a certain John the Presbyter, whose name appears elsewhere in ancient writings. Also today the controversy is not completely solved, even if most are supportive of the traditional view. Most probably the Revelation was written, under his supervision, by somebody of John's entourage, a person who was very close to John and knew quite well his teaching.

Date of compilation

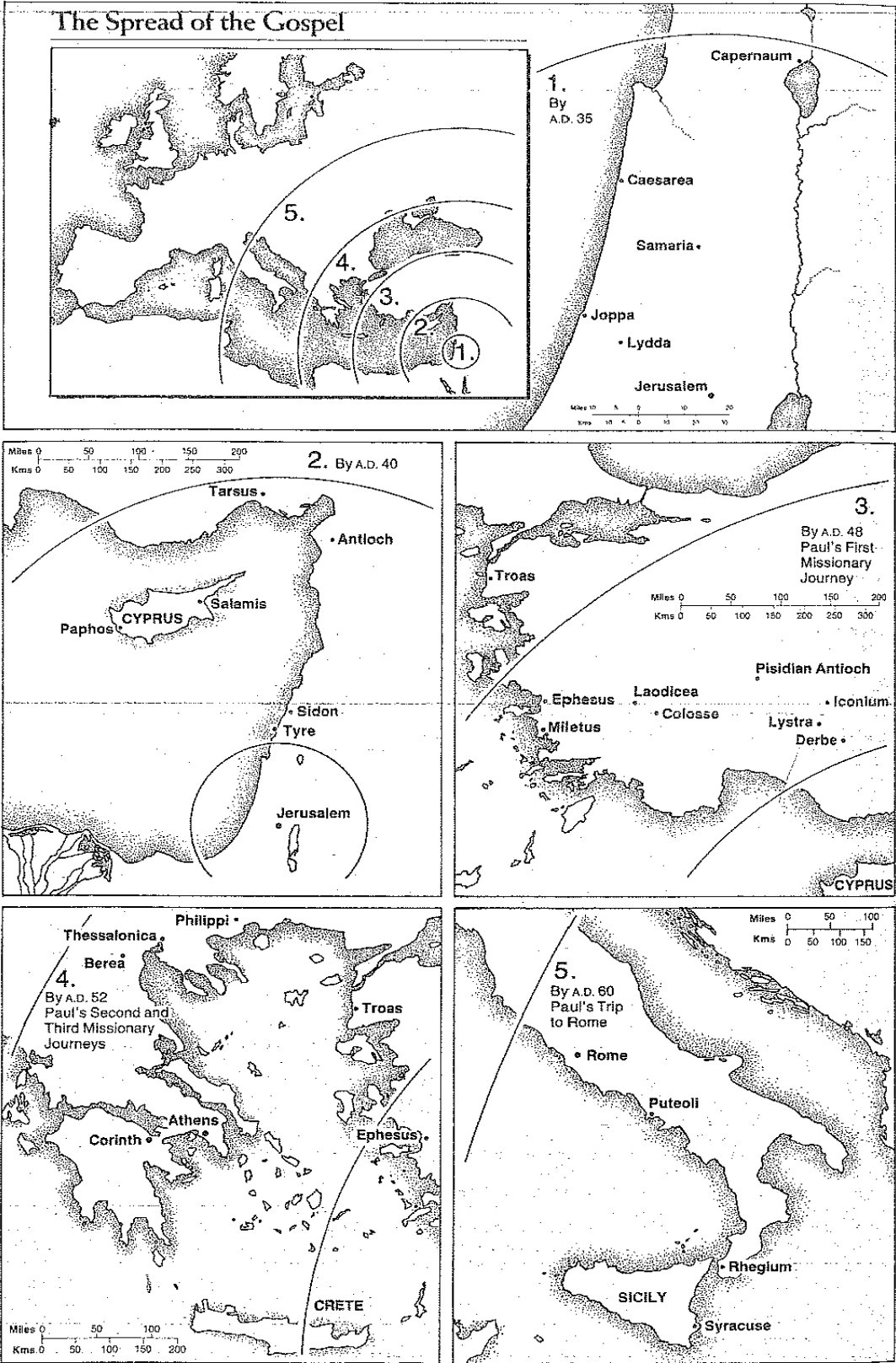
The Revelation was written about the year 95 AD, when the Christians were entering a time of heavy persecution, during the latter part of Domitian's reign (81-96 AD). But some parts could have been written earlier, during Nero's reign (54-68 AD) and persecution.

Old Testament Books

Genesis	Ge	Song of Songs	Ss
Exodus	Ex	Wisdom	Wis
Leviticus	Le	Sirach	Sir
Numbers	Nu	Isaiah	Isa
Deuteronomy	Dt	Jeremiah	Jer
Joshua	Jos	Lamentations	La
Judges	Jdg	Baruch	Bar
Ruth	Ru	Ezekiel	Eze
1 Samuel	1Sa	Daniel	Da
2 Samuel	2Sa	Hosea	Hos
1 Kings	1Ki	Joel	Joel
2 Kings	1Ki	Amos	Am
1 Chronicles	1Ch	Obadiah	Ob
2 Chronicles	2Ch	Jonah	Jnh
Ezra	Ezr	Micah	Mic
Nehemia	Ne	Nahum	Na
Tobias	Tob	Habakkuk	Hab
Judit	Jud	Zephaniah	Zep
Esther	Est	Haggai	Hag
Job	Job	Zechariah	Zec
Psalms	Ps	Malachi	Mal
Proverbs	Pr	1 Maccabees	1Mac
Ecclesiastes	Ecc	2 Maccabees	2Mac

New Testament Books

Gosp. Mark	Mk	Philippians	Php
Gosp. Matthew	Mt	1 Timothy	1Ti
Gosp. Luke	Lk	2 Timothy	2Ti
Gosp. John	Jn	Titus	Tit
Acts	Ac	Hebrews	Heb
1 Thessalonians	1Th	James	Jm
2 Thessalonians	2Th	1 Peter	1Pe
Galatians	Gal	2 Peter	2Pe
1 Corinthians	1Co	1 John	1Jn
2 Corinthians	2Co	2 John	2Jn
Romans	Ro	3 John	3Jn
Ephesians	Eph	Jude	Jd
Colossians	Col	Revelation	Rev
Philemon	Phm		



THE REVELATION Disclosed**Prologue. (1:1-3)**

(1:1)The revelation of Jesus Christ, which Yahweh gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending His angel to His servant John, (2)who testifies to everything he saw -that is, the Word of Yahweh and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (3)Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

1:1. *'The revelation of Jesus Christ':* The "communication" of the future events given by Yahweh to Jesus Christ and by Jesus Christ to John. The revelation always and only comes from Yahweh Who, here, gives His revelation through Jesus Christ. *'His servants':* All believers in Jesus Christ. *'Must soon take place':* This is the announcement of a foretelling of the near future (here, and in vv. 1:3; 22:6,10,20), the proof that it is wrong to use the Revelation as a kind of mysterious timetable of what is going to happen thousands of years later. As John sees it, the things it deals with are to happen in the immediate future and, so, the Revelation has to be interpreted against the background of its own time. *'His angel':* An angel whose duty was to be Yahweh's and Jesus Christ's messenger. *'John':* See Introduction: Author.

1:2. *'Who testifies':* John declares that what he is writing here is exactly what Yahweh (the "Word of Yahweh") has communicated him by means of Jesus Christ. *'Testimony of Jesus Christ':* The Bible never, as it is, makes God of Jesus; rather it stresses his complete dependence on Yahweh. It's Yahweh's truth that Jesus brings to men; and that is precisely why his teaching is unique and final.

1:3. *'Blessed is the one who reads... those who ear...':* The first two of the seven beatitudes listed in the book (here, and in vv. 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7,14). "Blessed" means much more than "happy," and here it describes the fact that is a great privilege to be a "Reader," an official reader and interpreter of the Scriptures in the Church. And it is also a great privilege to be put in condition of hearing the reading of the Scriptures and of observing their commands. *'This prophecy':* The word "prophecy" includes not only the foretelling of the future, but also the proclaiming of any word from Yahweh -whether command, instruction, history or prediction- written in this book. *'The time is near':* This can be understood as a reference to Jesus Christ's second coming and the judgment associated to it, as the early Church lived in the expectation of the second coming. The insistence on imminence arose from the teaching that the "last days" began with the birth

of Jesus and that the next great event in redemptive history would be his second coming. But the New Testament never says when it will take place; only its certainty is never questioned and the believers are admonished to watch constantly for it. It was in this light that John expected the "imminent" return of Jesus Christ. Apart from that, no man knows when the call will come to take him from this Earth (but the time of this call is surely near) and so, in order to meet Yahweh with confidence (and in this occasion Jesus will come for this man's personal judgment) during his life he must hear and be obedient to the Word of Yahweh.

THE LETTERS TO THE CHURCHES IN ASIA

Greetings and praise to Yahweh <doxology>. (1:4-8)

(1:4)John,

To all the Churches in the Province of Asia:

Grace and peace to you from He who is, was, and will be, and from all the spirits before His Throne, (5)and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the first reborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the Earth.

To him who is fond of us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, (6)and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve [Yahweh] his God and Father -to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

(7)Look, he is coming with the clouds,

and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him;

and all the people of the Earth will mourn because of him.

So shall it be! Amen.

(8)"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says Yahweh the Lord, "He who is, was, and will be, the Almighty."

1:4. *'All the Churches <the seven churches>... of Asia'*: The Revelation is a letter written to all the Churches in Asia, where Asia is not the continent, but that part of it which was a province of the Roman Empire, corresponding to modern western Turkey. The seven Churches named in verse 1:11 were by no means the only Churches in that province. There are two reasons for selecting these seven among all. First reason, these towns were the centers of postal districts, being all positioned on a kind of ring road which circled the interior of the province. Letters delivered to these towns would easily circulate in the surrounding areas; and since every letter had to be hand-written, each one had to be sent where it could reach most easily the greatest number of people. The entire book of the Revelation (including the seven letters) was sent to each Church as requested by the angel in v. 1:11. Second reason, the reading of the Revelation shows John's preference for the number seven, which occurs fifty-two times. Now, the ancient people regarded seven as a perfect number, the one which stands for completeness. So, when John wrote to seven of the Churches in Asia, he was actually writing to all the Churches; better, to the whole Christian Church. *'Grace and peace'*: A greeting which added the wish of Yahweh's grace to the usual Eastern form "Peace with you." *'He who is, was, and will be <him who is, and who was, and who is to come>'*: A paraphrase of the divine Name taken from Exodus 3:14-15, a common way to indicate Yahweh. To note that, in the original Greek version of the Revelation, it is actually written

"from 'He' who is" and not "from 'Him' who is," probably because John did expressly want to leave the nominative. *'All the spirits <the seven spirits>'*: Here the idea is that, as men can be in spiritual communion with Yahweh, so can the Churches -which are communities of believers. Therefore, those spirits stand for the spiritual communion between all Christian Churches and Yahweh. This means that no Christian fellowship is left without the spiritual presence, the power and the illumination of Yahweh.

1:5. *'Faithful witness'*: Jesus is the witness of the Truth of Yahweh, and he speaks from his first-hand knowledge of the Father. *'The first reborn from the dead <the firstborn from the dead>'*: The Greek word used here is "protokos", which means both "first-born" and "one who occupies the first place, that of power and honor." So, the reference is both to Jesus Christ's Resurrection -he was the first man to gain victory over death- and to the fact that Jesus is seated, in Heaven, at the right hand of Yahweh; a clear indication that he is second only to his Father. This also means that Jesus is Lord of the dead as he is of the living. *'The ruler of the kings'*: This is a reminiscence of Psalm 89:27: "I will appoint him my first-born, the most exalted of the kings of the Earth," which was a description of the Messiah who had to come. Therefore, this phrase declares that Jesus is the Messiah. *'Him who... has freed us from our sins'*: What Jesus did, was to free all men at the cost of his own life. He "bought" all men, paying the price of their possession with his life.

1:6. *'A kingdom of priests <a kingdom and priests>'*: This is a quotation from Exodus 19:6, an Old Testament designation of Israel, which in the New Testament is applied to the Christian Church. Through Jesus men can become true sons of Yahweh and they can have, being Yahweh's priests, direct access to Him -that is, they can be in spiritual communion with Yahweh.

1:7. *'Coming with the clouds'*: Jesus ascended to Heaven "in a cloud" and, as the angel told his disciples: "This same Jesus... will come back in the same way..." (The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Ascension. Ac 1:11). In this passage John marks his full confidence in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, who will save all Christians and will bring them to eternal life. In this way John was giving strength and comfort to the Christians, who were suffering from the cruelty of their enemies, and for whom faith meant death. *'Pierced'*: In the Old Testament, this same word appears in Psalm 22:16; Isaiah 53:5; Zechariah 12:10. *'Even those who pierced him'*: Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Yahweh, had been nailed to the Cross, but the day will come when those who have sent him to the Cross will repent of what they have done. And, this time, the time of his second coming, he will not

be a broken figure on a cross but a regal figure to whom all powers had been given. *'All the people... will mourn'*: The first reference of these words is to the Jews and the Romans who actually crucified Jesus. But in every age all who sin "take part in his crucifixion" (he was born and crucified for the salvation of all men of every time). And the day will come when all those who disregarded and opposed Jesus Christ during their earthly life, will find him the Lord of the world and the judge of their souls. *'Shall it be! Amen'*: A double affirmation, for in John's text appear both the Greek (nai) and Hebrew (amen) forms.

1:8. *'The Alpha and the Omega'*: Alpha is the first letter and omega the last of the Greek alphabet; the phrase "alpha to omega" indicates absolute completeness. Yahweh is the beginning and the end of everything, and He rules over all human history. *'He who is, was, and will be <who is, and who was, and who is to come>'*: The same paraphrase of the divine Name appears in v. 1:4. *'Almighty'*: The Greek word for "Almighty" is "Pantokrator," and describes the One who has dominion over all things.

One like a Son of Man. (1:9-20)

(1:9)I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering, the Kingdom, and the patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the Word of Yahweh and the testimony of Jesus. (10)On the Lord's Day I was lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, (11)which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to these Churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

(12)I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw the symbols of the Churches, (13)and among the symbols was someone "like a Son of Man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. (14)His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were blazing like fire. (15)His feet were glowing like bronze in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. (16)At his right hand he had the angels of the Churches, and out of his mouth came the perfect judgment. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

(17)When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. (18)I am the Living One; I was dead and, look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

(19)Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. (20)The mystery of the angels that you saw at my right hand

and of the symbols is this: The angels are the angels of the Churches, and the symbols are the Churches."

1:9. *'I, John...'*: John introduces himself, not by any official title but as brother in Jesus Christ and partner in tribulation. *'The suffering, the Kingdom, and the patient endurance <the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance>'*: These are three pivotal themes in the Revelation. *'Patmos'*: A small rocky island (4 by 8 miles; 6.5 by 13 km) in the Aegean Sea some 50 miles (80 km) southwest of Ephesus, off the coast of modern Turkey. It served as a Roman penal colony. Eusebius, the "father of the Church history" (AD 265-340), reports that John was banished to Patmos during the reign of Domitian and released from there under the Emperor Nerva (AD 96-98). Banishment to a remote island as Patmos was a common form of Roman punishment, usually reserved to political prisoners. Such banishment involved the loss of all civil rights and of all property except enough for a bare existence. People so banished were not ill-treated and were not confined in prison, but were free to move within the island. But John was not a political prisoner, he was a leader of the Christians and, for that reason, a criminal. Banishment for him would involve hard labor in the quarries under the lash of the military guards. Therefore, his right to speak was due to the fact that he had already gone through all the suffering and the troubles that those to whom he was speaking were now going through. John was not preaching endurance from the comfort of an easy chair, he was not preaching heroic courage while he himself was in a condition of safety. He had already suffered persecution and imprisonment, for the sake of the Kingdom of Yahweh, with the patient endurance of the strong, that endurance which can be found only by being in spiritual communion with Jesus Christ and Yahweh.

1:10. *'The Lord's Day'*: Sunday, the first day of the week, so defined because Jesus rose from the dead on that day. It was also the day on which from the beginning the Christians met for common worship. *'Lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh <in the Spirit>'*: In a state of spiritual exaltation, of ecstasy -this was not a dream, but a vision. *'A loud voice like a trumpet'*: It was the voice of the angel sent by Jesus Christ, which to John had the sound of the commanding, unmistakable clarity of a trumpet call.

1:11. *'Which said...'*: John received a vision -that is, a message from Yahweh- that he had to share with all Christians. *'Scroll'*: Pieces of papyrus or parchment (sheep or goat skin specially prepared) sewn together, on which scribes wrote in columns with a pen. After being written, the scroll was rolled on a spindle (the book form was not used until about the second century AD). *'Send it to these Churches <the seven churches>'*: As seen in com-

ment to v. 1:4: The Revelation is a letter addressed to all the Churches in Asia Minor. The seven Churches named here were centers of postal districts, so that letters delivered to them would easily reach all the Churches of the surrounding areas.

1:12. *'The symbols of the Churches <seven golden lampstands>'*: In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." As a lampstand physically holds a light, so a Church spiritually holds the Light of Jesus Christ.

1:13. *'Son of Man'*: Jesus' most common title for himself. This form comes from Daniel 7:13-14 -where the kingdom, the power and the dominion are given by Yahweh, the Ancient of Days, to one "like a Son of Man," to Jesus Christ- and Jesus used it many times as a Messianic title for himself. *'Robe... to his feet'*: The High Priest of Jerusalem Temple wore a full-length robe and a belt embroidered with gold. So, here John is saying that Jesus is the High Priest of Christianity. Even in Heaven Jesus, the great High Priest, is still carrying on his priestly work, opening the way for all men to the presence of Yahweh, that is, to His Kingdom.

1:14. *'White like wool...'*: In Daniel 7:9 this is the description of the Ancient of Days, of Yahweh. This applies to the Risen Christ, too, who had been given by Yahweh the position of full power and authority over mankind and the world, becoming in this way His full representative. Snow and white wool are emblems of absolute purity. *'Eyes... blazing like fire'*: This image comes from Daniel 10:6 and is a symbol of penetrating insight.

1:15. *'Glowing like bronze'*: Jesus Christ was dressed in a long robe, out of which his feet were visible. The divine messengers in Daniel 10:6 and Ezekiel 1:7 have this same bodily characteristic which, in Jewish thought, stands for very high physical strength. *'His voice was like...'*: In Ezekiel 43:2, this is the description of the voice of Yahweh; and again, being Yahweh's full representative, Jesus is depicted as having similar characteristics.

1:16. *'At his right hand he had the angels of the Churches <in his right hand he held seven stars>'*: In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) is said that the stars are the angels of the Churches. As Yahweh has at His right hand Jesus, so Jesus has at his right hand the Churches, that is, all the Christians. *'The perfect judgment <a sharp double-edged sword>'*: A short sword for close fighting which symbolizes the cutting quality of Jesus' judgment, which "cuts away" the good -who are immediately accepted in the Reign of Yahweh- from the bad -who are sent or kept in Hell for the necessary period of formative punishment- (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 3). *'Face... like the sun shining'*: This corresponds to the glowing of

the feet and to the aspect of Jesus' face when he was transfigured before Peter, James and John: "His face shone... like the sun" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Transfiguration. Mk 9:2-3; Mt 17:1-2; Lk 9:29).

1:17. *'I fell at his feet...'*: A sign of great respect and awe. *'Do not be afraid'*: No Christian has to be afraid of his Master, Jesus Christ. *'I am the First and the Last'*: Essentially the same as "I am the Alpha and the Omega" of v. 1:8 which, even if usually referred to Yahweh, here is applied to Jesus as His full ambassador. This also means that Jesus is always present, in the life of each Christian, from the beginning to the end of it.

1:18. *'Living One'*: Jesus Christ is the one who has conquered death and is alive for evermore, in company of all his people. *'I hold the keys of death and Hades'*: When, after his death, Jesus descended into Hades, he opened its doors and brought out Abraham and all Yahweh's faithful people who had lived and died in the generations before. And, so, Jesus has abolished spiritual death and has brought light and immortality to all men. "To hold the keys" is a phrase which means having a very special power; here, the power to go and preach to the souls undergoing the punishment of Hell, trying to convince them to repent and to accept him as their spiritual Savior and, in this case, bringing them out of spiritual death into spiritual life in the Kingdom of Yahweh.

1:19. *'What you have seen'*: The part of the vision which was already past (chapter 1). *'What is now'*: The letters to the Churches (ch.s 2-3). *'What will take place'*: The following part of the vision (from ch. 4 onwards).

1:20. *'The mystery...'*: The word "mystery" here, as throughout all the New Testament, corresponds to the Greek "musterion," which means something meaningless to the outsider but meaningful to the initiate who possesses the interpretation key. This is the first time the symbols are interpreted in the book itself, as (see App. 1 v. 1:20) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." *'Angels <seven stars>'*: Most probably guardian angels. In Hebrew thought every nation had its presiding angel (for example, Michael was held to be the guardian of Israel.) These guardian angels were the representatives, the ambassadors and messengers of Yahweh and Jesus in the Churches. So, as their representative, they were rebuked for the sins of the Churches. The meaning is that, if a Church went wrong, the tutor angel was blamed and had to refer this blame to the Church members. *'Symbols <seven golden lampstands>'*: As a lampstand physically holds a light, so a Church spiritually holds the Light of Jesus Christ.

To the Church in Ephesus. (2:1-7)

(2:1) *"To the angel of the Church in Ephesus write:*

These are the words of him who has the angels of the Churches at his right hand and walks among the symbols of the Churches: (2)I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. (3)You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary.

(4)Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first priority, affection. (5)Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your symbol from its place. (6)But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

(7)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches. To him who gets through, I will give the right to eat from the Tree of Life, which is in the Paradise of Yahweh."

2:1. *'Ephesus'*: Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor, even if the official capital of the province was Pergamum. At that time it had a harbor which opened into the Cayster River, which in turn emptied into the Aegean Sea. Because it was also an intersection of major trade routes, Ephesus became a very important commercial center, the greatest and wealthiest in all Asia Minor. It was the center of the worship of the Roman goddess Diana (the Greek Artemis), whose temple was one of the wonders of the ancient world. That temple possessed the right of asylum -any criminal was safe if he could reach it- and in its precincts there were hundreds of priestesses who actually were sacred prostitutes. All this combined to make Ephesus a notoriously evil place, a very unpromising soil for the sowing of the Word of Yahweh. Yet Paul, working there for more than two years (Acts 19:10), made Ephesus a center of Christian evangelism. And, in later days, John was the Christian leading figure of Ephesus. Tradition has it that he brought Mary, the mother of Jesus, to Ephesus and that she was buried there. And the Church there flourished -but, later, needed the warning of the present letter. *'To the angel of the Church'*: In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven Churches." In Hebrew thought every nation or institution had its guardian angel who, in the case of a Church, is the representative and the ambassador of Yahweh and Jesus Christ in that community of believers. As such, it is the angel who is rebuked for the sins of the Church. *'These are the words of...'*: John is reporting the words of Jesus Christ. *Him who has <holds> the angels of the Churches at <the seven stars in> his right hand and walks*

among the symbols of the Churches <the seven golden lampstands>': As Yahweh has at His right hand Jesus, so Jesus has at his right hand the Churches, represented by their guardian angels.

2:2. *'I know your deeds... hard work... perseverance':* Jesus begins by recognizing the good work done with perseverance in Ephesus and the results achieved. *'I know... you have tested those... and found them false':* The necessity of testing the pastors for correct doctrine was widely recognized from the beginning, even in the early Church. Jesus himself had warned: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: A tree and its fruit. Mt 7:15). And Paul in his farewell speech to the elders of this same Church at Ephesus, had warned them: "After I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock" (Acts 20:29). For this reason, Jesus had demanded the strictest test of all: "By their fruit you will recognize them" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: A tree and its fruit. Mt 7:16).

2:3. *'You have persevered... and have not grown weary':* Practically, this is a repetition of the first part of v. 2:2, stressing the fact that the Ephesian believers did act properly.

2:4. *'Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your priority, affection <your first, fervor>':* The Church at Ephesus had faithfully applied its tests and had weeded out all evil and misguided men; but the trouble was that something had got lost in the process. Most probably, heresy-hunting had killed affection, and orthodoxy had been achieved at the price of real friendship. When that happens, orthodoxy has cost too much, for the orthodoxy could never take the place of affection.

2:5. *'Remember...':* Here, when the Risen Christ asks to "remember," he is not speaking to someone who has never been part of the Church, but to those who are already inside and have somehow lost the way. Memory can often be the first step on the way back, for the first step to correct a wrong situation is to realize that something has gone wrong. In the far country the prodigal son, coming back to his senses, remembered the life at home and said: "I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against you" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The parable of the lost son. Lk 15:18). *'The height...':* From the summit of Christian affection, they had gone down to the lowland of religious orthodoxy. *'Repent':* Repentance is the admission of a fault and is accompanied by the feeling of sorrow for it. The hardest thing about repentance is the acceptance of personal responsibility for failure, for once the responsibility is accepted the liberating sorrow will surely follow. *'Do the things...':* The sorrow of repentance is meant to drive a man to two things. First, to drive him back to the grace of Yahweh, asking: "Yahweh, be merciful to me, a sinner." Second, to drive him

to action in order not to do the same thing again and to amend the wrong done. *'If you do not... I will... remove your symbol <lampstand>'*: In John's vision, the symbols of the Churches were at the right hand of Jesus Christ. It is clear that, if a community does not follow Jesus' teaching any more, it has to step down from this privileged position and has to be judged accordingly.

2:6. *'You hate... which I also hate'*: It may seem strange to attribute hatred to the Risen Christ; but we have to remember that it is necessary to hate the sin but to be fond of the sinner. *'Nicolaitans'*: A heretical sect within the Church that had worked out a compromise with the pagan society. They considered to have been given enough spiritual strength to be allowed to participate to pagan ceremonies -eating the food offered to idols- and to practice immorality. Tradition identifies them with Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch who was one of the first deacons in the Church of Jerusalem: "They chose... Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism" (Acts 6:5), though the evidence of it is merely circumstantial. A similar group at Pergamum "hold to the teaching of Balaam" (vv. 2:14-15), and some at Thyatira did "tolerate the woman Jezebel" (v. 2:20). It is important to note that this dangerous attack was coming not from outside the Church but from inside. The claim of these heretics was that they were not destroying Christianity but presenting an improved version. They argued that the Christians were so defended by grace that they could do anything and take no harm. If they had been successful, the world would have changed Christianity and not Christianity the world.

2:7. *'He who has an hear...'*: All the letters end with these words (here, and in vv. 2:11,17,26; 3:5,12,21) which, first, individualize their message. They say to every man: "All these things apply to you as well." It is too easy, and it happens often, to apply the message of a preacher to everyone but ourselves. Second, they generalize their message; they say that it was not confined to the people of the Asian Churches of two thousand years ago, but that it applies to every man in every place and every generation. *'What the Spirit of Yahweh says'*: As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh. *'To him who gets through, I will give...'*: Finally, the Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome the problems mentioned in the letters. *'The Tree of Life'*: This tree, which was in the middle of the Garden of Eden, bears fruits which allow men to live forever: "Take... from the Tree of Life and eat, and live for ever" (Genesis 3: 22). Now, it was a Jewish thought that, when the Messiah came, the Tree of Life -which was located in Paradise- and its fruits would be given to those men who had been faithful. *'Paradise'*: Originally a Per-

sian word meaning "pleasure garden." In the Revelation it symbolizes Heaven, the place and state in which Yahweh and men are restored to the perfect fellowship that existed in the Garden of Eden.

To the Church in Smyrna. (2:8-11)

(2:8) "To the angel of the Church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. (9) I know your afflictions and your poverty -yet you are rich! I know the calumny of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. (10) Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for a while. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

(11) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches. He who gets through will not be hurt at all by the second death."

2:8. *'Smyrna':* Smyrna (modern Izmir), the great rival of Ephesus, was a splendid city, situated at the end of the road which crossed Lydia and Phrygia and lead to the far east, commanding the trade of the rich Hermus valley. The city itself stood at the end of a long arm of sea, which ended in a small harbor in the city's heart. It was a very safe arbor, easy to defend in case of war. It had a hill covered with magnificent temples and rich buildings. Smyrna was one of the most ancient allies of Rome. It was the first city in the world to erect a temple to the goddess Rome (in 195 BC), and an Asian center of the emperor worship. This plus a large Jewish population -specially influential in the local government and actively hostile to the Christian Church- made it extremely difficult to live there as a Christian. Polycarp, one of the early martyrs, was bishop of Smyrna. *'To the angel of the Church':* In v. 1:20 (see App.) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." In Hebrew thought every nation or institution had its guardian angel who, in the case of a Church, is the representative and the ambassador of Yahweh and Jesus Christ in that community of believers. As such, it is the angel who is rebuked for the sins of the Church. *'These are the words of...':* John is reporting the words of Jesus Christ. *'Him who is the First and the Last':* Essentially the same as "I am the Alpha and the Omega" of v. 1:8 which, even if usually referred to Yahweh, here is applied to Jesus as His full ambassador. *'Who died and came to life again':* Stressing the fundamental point of the Christian faith; Jesus Christ's physical Resurrection after having been actually dead.

2:9. *'Your afflictions and your poverty'*: The Church of Smyrna was in trouble, and further trouble was imminent. They were afflicted by the hatred of the Romans because they refused to submit to the ceremony of the Emperor worship. They were poor because most of them belonged to the lower classes of society and, anyway, their belongings were seized during persecution times. *'Yet you are rich'*: Spiritually rich because of their faith in Jesus and in the eternal life of communion with him and Yahweh. *'The calumny'*: Many calumnies were brought up against the Christians: (i)On the basis of the repetition during their common meals of Jesus' words: "Take and eat it; this is my body" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The last supper. Mk 14:22; Mt 26:26; Lk 22:19), the story went about that the Christians were cannibals. (ii)Because the Christians called their common meal the "Agape," the "Affection Feast," it was said that their gatherings were orgies of lust. (iii)Because the conversion of some members of a family did, in fact, often split the family, the Christians were accused of destroying the basic institutions of society. (iv)The Christians were accused of being incendiaries because they foretold the end of the world in flames, as announced by Jesus: "Fire and sulfur rained down from Heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The coming of the Kingdom of Yahweh. Lk 17:29-30). *'Those who say they are Jews'*: Jesus himself has given the definition of a true Jew, a true Israelite, who follows the will of Yahweh: "Here is a true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael. Jn 1:47). *'Synagogue of Satan'*: Here, John is taking a favorite expression of the Jews and reversing it, actually saying: "You call yourself 'The Assembly of Yahweh' when, in fact, you are 'the assembly of the devil.'"

2:10. *'Do not be afraid...'*: In view of the final price: eternal life. *'Will suffer persecution for a while <ten days>'*: "Ten days" is not to be taken literally, as it was a common expression for "a short time which has soon to come to an end." This prophecy is at once a warning and a promise. Imprisonment -and the one the letter is speaking about was merely a prelude to death- and persecution were coming, but the time of trouble, although sharp, will be short. In effect, persecution was not continuous, and the Christians were left in peace for long periods, but they were living in the uncertainty, because now and then a governor decided to punish them, or the mob did set suddenly up against them. *'Crown of life'*: Here "crown" does not refer to a royal crown, but to the garland or laurel awarded to the winner in athletic con-tests. It is not the royal crown which is offered to the Christians; it is the crown of joy and victory, having won eternal life.

2:11. *'He who has an ear...'*: All the letters end with these words which,

first, individualize their message saying to every man: "All these things apply to you as well." In effect, it is too easy to apply a moral message to everyone but ourselves. Second, they generalize their message saying that it is not confined to the people of the Asian Churches, but that it applies to every man in every place and every generation. *'What the Spirit of Yahweh says'*: As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh. *'He who gets through...'*: Finally, the Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome the problems mentioned in the letters. *'Second death'*: This definition occurs only in the Revelation (here, and in vv. 20:6,14; 21:8). The second death, after the physical death which every man must undergo, is the death of those who are undergoing the punishment (even if temporary, formative, and redemptive) of hell. But nothing in life or in death, in time or in eternity can separate those who stand all tests and trials for their faith in Jesus Christ. At the time of their personal judgment they will be accepted straight away into Heaven.

To the Church in Pergamum. (2:12-17)

(2:12)"To the angel of the Church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who delivers the perfect judgment. (13)I know where you live -where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city -where Satan lives.

(14)Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to instigate the Israelites to sin eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. (15)Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. (16)Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the Word of my mouth.

(17)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches. To him who gets through, I will grant my spiritual communion. I will also grant him the protection of my name."

2:12. *'Pergamum'*: Pergamum (modern Bergama), even if not on any of the great roads, as Ephesus and Smyrna were, historically was the greatest city and the capital of Asia. Under the Romans, it was the administrative center of that province. It was built on a tall conical hill, rising 1,000 feet (300 m) above the surrounding valley of the River Caicus, from the top of which the Mediterranean Sea could be seen, 15 miles (24 km) away. It was a center of culture, famous for its library, containing more than 200,000 parchment rolls, second only to the library of Alexandria. Its name in Greek means

"citadel" and is at the origin of the word "parchment" -Pergamene sheet- which derives from Pergamum. In effect, the parchment was invented there, in competition with the Egyptian papyrus. *'To the angel of the Church'*: In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." In Hebrew thought every nation or institution had its guardian angel who, in the case of a Church, is the representative and the ambassador of Yahweh and Jesus Christ in that community of believers. As such, it is the angel who is rebuked for the sins of the Church. *'These are the words of...'*: John is reporting the words of Jesus Christ. *'Him who delivers the perfect judgment <has the sharp, double-edged sword>'*: A short sword for close fighting which symbolizes the cutting quality of Jesus' judgment, which "cuts away" the good -who are immediately accepted in the Kingdom of Yahweh- from the bad -who are sent or kept in Hell for the necessary period of formative punishment.

2:13. *'I know where you live -where Satan has his throne'*: Pergamum was one of the great religious centers of Asia. In particular very strong was the worship of Zeus and Athena and, furthermore, Pergamum was the main center of the Roman Emperor worship in Asia; in other terms, it was the place where Satan's rule was the strongest. *'You remain true... You did not renounce...'*: Jesus recognizes that the Christians at Pergamum were able to remain faithful even under the worst circumstances. *'Antipas'*: He was the first martyr of Asia. According to tradition he was slowly roasted to death during the reign of Domitian. *'Faithful witness'*: This is Jesus Christ's title in vv. 1:5 and 3:14. So much Antipas was faithful to Jesus that Jesus gave him nothing less than his own title in relation to Yahweh.

2:14-15. *'Nevertheless...'*: In spite of the fidelity of the Church in Pergamum, there was some error, because some members of that Church were following the teaching of Balaam and the doctrine of the Nicolaitans. *'Teaching of Balaam'*: Balaam son of Beor (Numbers 22:5) was the pagan diviner who advised the Midianite or Moabite women how to lead the Israelite astray seducing them by the Canaanite fertility rites of Baal (Numbers 25:1-2; 31:16). *'Food sacrificed to idols... immorality'*: In Acts Paul (Acts 15:20) and, consequently, all apostles and elders (Acts 15:23,29) stated that Christians have to avoid creating moral problems by eating food which had been offered to idols, and to abstain from sexual immorality. *'Nicolaitans'*: Mentioned in v. 2:6, they were an heretical sect within the Church that had worked out a compromise with the pagan society. They considered to have been given enough spiritual strength to be allowed to participate to pagan ceremonies -eating the food offered to idols- and to practice immorality. Tradition identifies them with Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch who was

one of the first deacons in the Church of Jerusalem: "They chose... Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism" (Acts 6:5), though the evidence of it is merely circumstantial. They argued that the Christians were so defended by grace that they could do anything and take no harm. If they had been successful, the world would have changed Christianity and not Christianity the world.

2:16. *'Repent. Otherwise I will soon come'*: Jesus' warning was not directed against the whole Church of Pergamum, but only against those who were corrupting their fellow Christians. For those who were led astray he had nothing but pity, and he assured them that he will personally come (surely, sending somebody with the necessary moral strength) to help them overcome their problems. *'Word <sword> of my mouth'*: The sword of Christ is his Word, which is the Word of Yahweh. In the Word of Christ there is the judgment for sin, followed by the invitation to come back to the affection of Yahweh. There is the assurance of salvation; for it makes a man understand his sins and repent of them, and it assures him that he can be saved in the name of Jesus Christ (that is, by having faith in Jesus Christ's power of salvation.)

2:17. *'He who has an ear...'*: All the letters end with these words which, first, individualize their message saying to every man: "All these things apply to you as well." In effect, it is too easy to apply a moral or social message to everyone but ourselves. Second, they generalize their message saying that it is not confined to the people of the Asian Churches and of John's time, but that it applies to every man in every place and every generation. *'What the Spirit of Yahweh says'*: As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh. *'Him who gets through...'*: Finally, the Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome the problems mentioned in the letters. *'I will grant my spiritual communion <give some of the hidden manna>'*: Here we have the heavenly food (spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh), available to all faithful believers, in contrast to the material, unclean food of the Balaamites. This idea of the "hidden manna" was part of the Jewish traditions. When the Israelites were in the desert, Yahweh gave them manna to eat (Exodus 16: 11-15), and a pot of it was put into the Ark (Exodus 16:33-34), then in the Tabernacle and in the Temple, to be for ever in the people's memory. Early in the sixth century BC the Temple built by Solomon was destroyed; and there was a legend saying that the prophet Jeremiah hid away the pot of manna in a small cave on Mount Sinai and that, when the Messiah came, Jeremiah would return and put back the pot of manna in the Temple. So, to a Jew "to eat the hidden manna" meant to enjoy the blessing of the Messianic age. To a Christian it meant to enter in spiritual communion with Jesus

and Yahweh and, later, in the Kingdom of Heaven. *'I will also grant him the protection of my name <give him a white stone with a new name...>'*: One of the commonest customs in the ancient world was to carry an amulet or charm. It might be made of precious metal or precious stone, but often it was nothing more than a pebble on which there was a sacred name, the name of a powerful being to summon in one's aid in time of difficulty. Such amulet was thought be much more effective if no other than the owner knew the name inscribed on it. So, what John is saying is: "Your pagan friends carry amulets with superstitious inscriptions on them and they think they will keep them safe. The faithful believer doesn't need to carry anything like this; he is already safe in life and in death because he has the protection of his Savior Jesus Christ, the New Name that surpasses any other name." '*<White>*': As a symbol of absolute moral purity.

To the Church in Thyatira. (2:18-29)

(2:18)"To the angel of the Church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of Yahweh, whose eyes are blazing like fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. (19)I know your deeds, your affection and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

(20)Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. (21)I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. (22)So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who follow her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. (23)I will punish severely her followers. Then all the Churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. (24)Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not test you any further): (25)Only hold on to what you have until I come.

(26)To him who gets through and does my will to the end, I will give the position of authority, just as I have received the position of authority from my Father. (27)'He will shepherd the faithful with his protective strength; he will completely defeat their enemies.' *(28)I will also give him myself. (29)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."*

2:18. *'Thyatira'*: Thyatira (modern Akhisar), situated 20 miles (32 km) southeast of Pergamum, lay in the long valley connecting the valleys of the

Hermus and the Caicus rivers; and it was this geographical position which gave it its importance. Thyatira lay on the road which connected Pergamum with Sardis and went to Philadelphia and to Laodicea, linking up with Smyrna and Byzantium; the road of the imperial post, crowded with the commerce of Asia and the east. Therefore, Thyatira was mainly a commercial center, known for its many trade guilds and famous for its dyeing works, especially royal purple (crimson). Thyatira was the least important of all the cities to which the letters were sent. Nonetheless, the problems and the dangers which faced its Church were very serious and involved all the Churches of Asia. *'To the angel of the Church'*: In v. 1:20 (see App.) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." In Hebrew thought every nation or institution had its guardian angel who, in the case of a Church, is the representative and the ambassador of Yahweh and Jesus Christ in that community of believers. As such, it is the angel who is rebuked for the sins of the Church. *'These are the words of the Son of Yahweh'*: John is reporting the words of Jesus Christ, the "Son of Man." *'Eyes... blazing like fire'*: This image comes from Daniel 10:6 and is a symbol of penetrating insight. *'Feet... like burnished bronze'*: As seen in vv. 1: 13-15, Jesus was dressed in a long robe, out of which his feet were visible.

2:19. *'I know your deeds...'*: Jesus recognizes that the Christians at Thyatira were very faithful and very active in the Church, even more active now than they were at the beginning of their Church.

2:20. *'Nevertheless'*: In spite of their fidelity, in the Church of Thyatira there was a serious problem, because some of its members were following the teaching of a woman whose name was Jezebel -or who John called by that name to clearly identify her as dangerous for the true Christian faith. That problem came from the fact that Thyatira had many powerful trade guilds, which were associations for mutual profit of the people working in certain trades. To refuse to join one of these guilds would mean to give up all prospects of commercial existence. And the Christians could not join the guilds, which often held common meals in the temple of some god, meals which would begin and end with a formal sacrifice to the god, and during which the meat eaten would be the meat already sacrificed. Furthermore, often these meals ended in sexual promiscuity. In Thyatira the threat came from inside the Church, as there was a strong movement, held by the woman addressed as Jezebel, which pleaded for compromise with the word's standards in the interest of business and commercial prosperity. On this, the Risen Christ is very clear; the Christians must have nothing to do with such things. *'Jezebel'*: The name, well known in the Old Testament (1 Kings 16: 31; 2 Kings 9:22,30-37), here is used as an epithet for a woman prominent

in the congregation who undermined loyalty to Yahweh by promoting tolerance toward pagan practices. The Jezebel of the Old Testament was the daughter of Ethbaal, king of Sidon, and the wife of Ahab (1 Kings 16:30-31). When she came from Sidon, she brought her own gods and caused Ahab and his people to worship Baal. Now, she did not want to banish the worship of Yahweh, but only to worship Baal in addition to Yahweh. In the same way, the Jezebel of Thyatira did not want to destroy the Church, but she wished to bring into it new ways which were, in fact, destructive of the faith. *'Sexual immorality. Food sacrificed to idols'*: In Acts Paul (Acts 15:20) and, consequently, all apostles and elders (Acts 15:23,29) stated that Christians have to avoid creating moral problems by eating food which had been offered to idols, and to abstain from sexual immorality.

2:21. *'Given her time to repent'*: Jesus always gives enough time and opportunity to all sinners to understand their fault and to repent, if they are willing to.

2:22. *'Bed of suffering. Those who follow <commit adultery with> her'*: Disease was often considered as the appropriate punishment for sin.

2:23. *'Punish severely her followers <strike her children dead>'*: Jezebel was the spiritual mother of all those who followed her doctrines. And, unless they repent and change, Jesus Christ will punish them (probably in their commercial interests) as an example to all other Churches. *'He who searches hearts and minds'*: The phrase "to search heart and mind" was a conventional expression for Yahweh's examination of a man's hidden character and motives (Psalm 7:9; Proverbs 24:12; Jeremiah 11:20; 17:10). And the prerogatives of Yahweh are also the prerogatives of the Risen Christ. "Heart," for the Jews, designated the center of rationale, conscious life. "Mind" (literally "kidney," as they believed that the center of emotions was in the lower viscera; the kidney and the bowels) referred to the center of will and affections. *'Repay... according to your deeds'*: Judgment based on works is taught by Jesus: "The Son of Man... will reward each person according to what he has done" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus predicts his death. Mk 8:38; Mt 16:27; Lk 9:26), even if it has to be clear that the possibility and capability of doing "good work" is always a gift of the grace of Yahweh.

2:24. *'Satan's so-called deep secrets'*: Gnosticism, one of the most dangerous heresies of the first two centuries, taught that in order to defeat Satan one had to know his secrets, that is, to experience evil deeply. Its central teaching was that spirit is entirely good and matter entirely evil. This heresy was characterized by many errors. (i) Man's body, which is matter, is evil. (ii) Salvation can be achieved not by faith in Christ but by special knowledge (in Greek "knowledge" is "gnosis," from which derives "Gnosti-

cism"). (iii) Since the body, made of matter, is evil, any licentious usage of it has no moral consequence, nor spiritual influence. (iv) Furthermore, the Gnostics denied Jesus' true humanity saying that either Christ seemed to have a body or that the divine Christ joined the man Jesus at baptism and left him before he died. *'I will not test you any further <impose any other burden on you>'*: Their faith did not require further testing, as they had already confirmed it by not following the easy way proposed by Jezebel.

2:25. *'Only hold on to what you have'*: They had the strength and the faith coming from the teaching of the Apostles, the teaching on how to live a Christian life on Earth. This, without any changes, was all they needed to know in order to gain the eternal life of spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh.

2:26. *'Him who gets through'*: The Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome the problems mentioned in the letters. *'I will give the position of authority <authority over the nations>... I have received the position of authority <received authority>'*: That is, they will stand at the right hand of Jesus. Those faithful to him in their terrestrial life will enter the Kingdom of Yahweh in Heaven immediately after their physical death and will have the better "positions" -that is, with at a deeper level of spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4).

2:27. *'He will shepherd the faithful with his protective strength <rule them with an iron scepter>'*: A quotation from Psalm 2:9, which is a royal Psalm, originally composed for the coronation of Davidic kings, in light of Yahweh's covenant with David. Here it refers to Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Yahweh of Davidic lineage. *'<Will rule>'*: In the Greek text, literally, "will shepherd" (a common metaphor for the verb "to rule"). *'<Iron scepter>'*: Symbolic of the strength of his rule. *'He will completely defeat their enemies <dash them to pieces like pottery>'*: The Egyptians of that time used to inscribe the names of their enemies on terracotta bowls and to smash them, believing to break in this way the power of their enemies.

2:28. *'Myself <the morning star>'*: The morning star is the herald of the day which chases away the darkness of the night. The coming of Jesus Christ is the herald of the Kingdom of Yahweh which chases away the darkness of sin and death. As Jesus said: "I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the Light of Life" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The validity of Jesus' testimony. Jn 8: 12). The background is the Messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob." The promise of the morning star is the promise of Christ himself.

2:29. *'He who has an ear...':* All the letters end with these words which, first, individualize their message saying to every man: "All these things apply to you as well." In effect, it is too easy to apply a moral or social message to everyone but ourselves. Second, they generalize their message saying that it is not confined to the people of the Asian Churches and of John's time, but that it applies to every man in every place and every generation. *'What the Spirit of Yahweh says':* As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh.

To the Church in Sardis. (3:1-6)

(3:1) *"To the angel of the Church in Sardis write:*

These are the words of him who has all the spirits of Yahweh and all the angels of the Churches at his right hand. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. (2)Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of [Yahweh] my God. (3)Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

(4)Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not lost their faith. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. (5)He who gets through will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the Book of Life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and His angels. (6)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."

3:1. *'Sardis':* Sardis (modern Sart) was the capital of the ancient kingdom of Lydia, which was at the top of its splendor about seven hundred years before this letter was written. The wealth of ancient Sardis was legendary. The greatest of its kings was Croesus, with whom Sardis reached its zenith -and began its fall when Croesus declared war to Cyrus of Persia, and was defeated. Anyway, even at the time of John, Sardis was a city of great wealth, situated on a plateau of the northern ridge of Mount Tomolus. It rose 1,500 feet (450 m) above the lower valley of the River Hermus. *'To the angel of the Church':* In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." In Hebrew thought every nation or institution had its guardian angel who, in the case of a Church, is the representative and the ambassador of Yahweh and Jesus Christ in that community of believers. As such, it is the angel who is rebuked for the sins of the Church. *'These are the words of...':* John is reporting the words of Jesus Christ. *'Has all the spirits <holds the seven spirits> of*

Yahweh and all the angels of the Churches <the seven stars> at his right hand': Here the idea is that, as men can be in spiritual communion with Yahweh, so can the Churches -which are communities of believers. Therefore, those spirits stand for the spiritual communion between all Christian Churches and Yah-weh. *'Reputation of being alive, but you are dead'*: "Alive" and "dead" from a moral, Christian, point of view. Jesus knew the way the Christians of Sardis behaved: externally they looked quite faithful and very active but, actually, they were spiritually passive. Sardis appears to have been a privileged Church, as in the letter there is no accusation of any heresy, no warning against any attack from the outside -not by the Jews, nor by the Pagans. But these privileged conditions had the result of making the Church members spiritually asleep.

3:2. *'Wake up!'*: From their spiritual sleepiness. *'What remains and is about to die'*: Some of their original faith was still there, and had to be strengthened if they did not want to spiritually die of lazy orthodoxy. *'Not found your deeds complete...'*: They were keeping up a form of religion -which looked good in its orthodoxy- which, obviously, could not be sufficient for Yahweh, who is asking for an attitude of active, alive, participation.

3:3. *'Remember...'*: The Risen Christ is telling the lethargic Sardians to remember the thrill and the joy with which they first received and heard his Good News. *'Obey. Repent'*: The Christians have to keep the commands of the Gospel and have to repent of whatever error they can commit during their life. *'I will come like a thief...'*: This is a reference to Jesus' personal judgment at the death of a man: "You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The day and hour unknown. Mt 24:44; Lk 12:40), which here is applied to the Churches as communities of individuals, as well as to the single individuals.

3:4. *'A few... in Sardis... have not lost their faith <soiled their clothes>'*: Even in that lethargic Church there were few true and faithful Christians. *'They will walk with me'*: They will be accepted in the Kingdom of Heaven in full spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh. *'Dressed in white'*: A usual description of the faithful, where the white symbolizes spiritual purity.

3:5. *'He who gets through'*: Finally, the Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome the problems mentioned in the letters. *'Will... be dressed in white'*: Those who repent and restart a Christian life -being again faithful- will have again the privileges of the faithful believers. *'Book of Life'*: The "Book of Life" is a concept which occurs often in the Bible (Exo-

us 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Philippians 4:3). In the New Testament the "Book of Life" refers to Yahweh's list of those destined to eternal life. To have a man's name erased from this book would indicate the loss of "citizenship," that is, of the possibility of entering straight away into the Kingdom of Yahweh. Of course, all the "erased" ones will have the possibility to be included again by accepting, in this life or in the next one, the redemption offered them by Jesus Christ (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4).

3:6. *'He who has an ear...'*: All the letters end with these words which, first, individualize their message saying to every man: "All these things apply to you as well." In effect, it is too easy to apply a moral or social message to everyone but ourselves. Second, they generalize their message saying that it is not confined to the people of the Asian Churches and of John's time, but that it applies to every man in every place and every generation. *'What the Spirit of Yahweh says'*: As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh.

To the Church in Philadelphia. (3:7-13)

(3:7) *"To the angel of the Church in Philadelphia write:*

These are the words of him who is Holy and True, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.

(8) *I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. (9) I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars - I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I had been fond of you. (10) Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the Earth.*

(11) *I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. (12) Him who gets through I will make a pillar in the Temple of [Yahweh] my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the Name of [Yahweh] my God and the name of the City of [Yahweh] my God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming down out of Heaven from [Yahweh] my God; and I will also write on him my new name. (13) He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."*

3:7 *'Philadelphia'*: Philadelphia (modern Alashehir), a city of great commercial importance, was the gateway to the high central plateau of the Province of Asia, a fertile land, a great grape-growing area and a famous pro-

ducer of wines. The name means "brotherly affection" and commemorates the loyalty and devotion of Attalus (220-130 BC) to his brother Eumenes II. It was situated where the borders of Mysia, Lydia, and Phrygia met and it acted as the center for the diffusion of Greek language and customs in a rich, peaceful land. *'To the angel of the Church'*: In v. 1:20 (see App.) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." In Hebrew thought every nation or institution had its guardian angel who, in the case of a Church, is the representative and the ambassador of Yahweh and Jesus Christ in that community of believers. As such, it is the angel who is rebuked for the sins of the Church. *'These are the words of...'*: John is reporting the words of Jesus Christ. *'Who is Holy and True'*: In the Old Testament this definition refers to Yahweh, the Holy One. In the New Testament it refers as well to Jesus Christ, who has "received all the powers" by Yahweh, his Father. *'Who holds the key of David'*: The key is the symbol of authority: Jesus Christ is the Davidic Messiah to whom Yahweh has delegated the authority to control the entrance to His Kingdom, the final authority which no one can question (Isaiah 22:22). *'What he opens... what he shuts...'*: Jesus Christ has -actually is- the key of admission to the Kingdom of Heaven, to a man's spiritual communion with him and with Yahweh (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4).

3:8. *'Placed before you an open door'*: Three hundred years before this letter was written, Philadelphia had been the door to the diffusion of Greek ideas in the lands beyond. And now there had come to the Church of this town a similar great missionary opportunity; to carry to men who never knew it the message of the affection of Jesus Christ. And this opportunity, to the Christians of Philadelphia, meant the opening of the door of Yahweh's Kingdom. *'I know that... you have kept my word...'*: Jesus recognizes that the Christians of Philadelphia, in spite of not being -or not appearing- very strong, were able to live properly, even when subjected to test.

3:9. *'Those of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews...'*: As in v. 2:9, John is taking a favorite expression of the Jews and reversing it, actually saying: "You call yourself 'The Assembly of Yahweh' when, in fact, you are 'the assembly of the devil.'" *'Fall down at your feet'*: In a position of great respect, recognizing the authority and the power of the Christians. This promise of the Risen Christ -that some day the Jews who at the time were slandering the Christians will kneel before them- is purposely similar to the Jewish expectation that in the New Age all nations would do humble homage to the Jews. In effect is a declaration that the position of "People of

Yahweh" -which in the Old Testament belonged to the Jews only- belongs now to all Christians, of any nation and time.

3:10. *'You have kept my command...'*: The Greek form of this phrase implies that there had been some time of trial out of which the Philadelphian Church had emerged triumphantly faithful. *'Keep you from...'*: The Greek for this phrase can mean either "keep you from undergoing" or "keep you through." In both cases, the help of Jesus is fundamental. *'Hour of trial'*: The persecution which was spreading all around the Roman Empire.

3:11. *'I am coming soon'*: This is a warning to be ready and faithful, because Jesus can come any moment. As Jesus said: "You don't know... on what day your Lord will come" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The day and hour unknown. Mk13:33; Mt 24:36); "It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Watchfulness. Lk 12:38). *'Hold on to what you have'*: They had the strength and the faith coming from the teaching of the Apostles, the teaching on how to live a Christian life on Earth. This, without any changes, was what they needed to know in order to gain the eternal life of spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh. *'Your crown'*: As in v. 2:10, here "crown" does not refer to a royal crown, but to the garland or laurel awarded to the winner in athletic contests. It is not the royal crown which is offered to the Christians; it is the crown of joy and victory, having won eternal life.

3:12. *'Him who gets through'*: Finally, the Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome the problems mentioned in the letters. *'I will make a pillar in the Temple'*: To be a pillar of the Temple -of the Church- is a great and honored position. *'Never again will he leave it'*: This phrase describes the life of total goodness which is lived when, after the struggles of Earth, a faithful Christian reaches the presence of Yahweh. *'Write on him the Name of [Yahweh] my God... of the City of [Yahweh] my God... my new name'*: As seen in v. 2:17, one of the commonest customs in the ancient world was to carry an amulet or charm on which there was a sacred name, the name of a powerful being to summon in one's aid in time of difficulty. So, what John is saying is: "Your pagan friends carry amulets with superstitious inscriptions on them and they think they will keep them safe. The faithful believer doesn't need to carry anything like this; he is already safe in life and in death because he has the protection of his Savior Jesus Christ, the New Name that surpasses any other name." Jesus Christ's name represents everything he is: The Son of Yahweh born of a human mother, the Messiah of Yahweh, the one to whom Yahweh has delegated all the powers. And all the faithful will be marked by this name and will live in Heaven, in full spiritual communion with him and with Yahweh. *'The New*

Jerusalem': The faithful ones will be citizens of the City where there is always the presence of Yahweh. *'Coming down... from... Yahweh'*: The New Jerusalem, the "Heavenly City," actually is the Kingdom of Heaven. So it can come only from Yahweh.

3:13. *'He who has an ear...'*: All the letters end with these words which, first, individualize their message saying to every man: "All these things apply to you as well." In effect, it is too easy to apply a moral or social message to everyone but ourselves. Second, they generalize their message saying that it is not confined to the people of the Asian Churches and of John's time, but that it applies to every man in every place and every generation. *'What the Spirit of Yahweh says'*: As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh.

To the Church in Laodicea. (3:14-22)

(3:14) *"To the angel of the Church in Laodicea write:*

These are the words of the Truth, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of Yahweh's creation. (15)I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! (16)So, because you are lukewarm -neither hot nor cold- I am about to expel you out of my Church. (17)You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. (18)I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and ointment to put on your eyes, so you can see.

(19)Those whom I am fond of I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. (20)Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone ears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

(21)To him who gets through, I will give the right to seat with me on my throne, just as I got through and sat down with my Father on His throne. (22)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of Yahweh says to the Churches."

3:14. *'Laodicea'*: Laodicea (modern Pamukkale), was the wealthiest city in Phrygia during Roman times. It was widely known for its banking establishment, medical school and textile industry. Its importance was entirely due to its position, on the road from Ephesus to the east and Syria, which was the most important in Asia. Two other roads passed through Laodicea; one from Pergamum and the Hermus valley to Pisidia, Pamphilia and the coast at Perga, and one from eastern Caria to central and west Phrygia. *'To the angel of the Church'*: In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) Jesus Christ explains that:

"The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches." In Hebrew thought every nation or institution had its guardian angel who, in the case of a Church, is the representative and the ambassador of Yahweh and Jesus Christ in that community of believers. As such, it is the angel who is rebuked for the sins of the Church. *'These are the words of...'*: John is reporting the words of Jesus Christ. *'The words of the Truth <Amen>'*: The Greek word for "Truth" here is "Amen," the same word which is often put at the end of a solemn statement in order to guarantee its truth. The Old Testament speaks of "[Yahweh] the God of the Truth" (Isaiah 65:16), describing the One who is perfectly trustworthy; here, the same applies to Jesus Christ. *'The faithful... witness'*: As seen in v. 1:5, Jesus is the witness of the Truth of Yahweh, and he speaks from his first-hand knowledge of the Father. *'The ruler ...'*: Jesus Christ has been given full power and authority over the human race and the world by Yahweh, his Father.

3:15-16. *'Neither cold nor hot'*: The Church in Laodicea had the grim distinction of being the only Church of which the Risen Christ had nothing good to say. *'Cold. Hot. Lukewarm'*: It is important to understand the exact meaning, in Greek, of these words. "Cold" is "psuchros" and it means cold to the point of freezing. "Hot" is "zestos" and it means hot to the point of boiling. "Lukewarm" or "tepid" is "chliaros" which has a meaning of something nauseating, making the stomach turn. *'I wish you were...'*: The one attitude which the Risen Christ absolutely condemns is indifference which, of all attitudes, is the hardest to combat. The message is that it is better not even to start on the Christian way than to start and then drift into a conventional and meaningless Christianity. *'Expel <spit> you out of my Church <mouth>'*: Literally "vomit." Indifference is so negative that there is no other solution but to expel those people from the Christian Church, from the community of believers.

3:17. *'You say, "I am rich..." but you do not realize...'*: Laodicea was so much proud of its material wealth to be blind to its spiritual poverty.

3:18. *'I counsel you'*: The words of the Risen Christ arise directly from the prosperity and the skill in which Laodicea took so much pride and which had eliminated from the mind of its citizens, even the Christians, the need of Yahweh. *'Gold. Clothes. Ointment <salve>'*: This verse refers to three items of which Laodicea was so proud: Financial wealth, an important textile industry, and a famous eye collyrium. "Gold": In the year 61 AD Laodicea was devastated by an earthquake; but so rich and independent were its citizens that they refused any help from the Roman government and rebuilt the city out of their own resources. No wonder that Laodicea could boast that it was rich and had amassed so much wealth that they had need of no-

thing. "Clothes": Laodicea was a great center of clothing manufacture. It was so proud of the garments it produced that it never realized it was naked in the sight of Yahweh. "Ointment <salve>": Laodicea was a very considerable medical center. Its medical school and doctors were very famous for two things throughout the world, an ointment for the ear and an ointment for the eyes. Laodicea was so proud of its medical skill in the care of the eyes that it never realized to be spiritually blind. *'Gold refined in the fire'*: This stands for faith tested and verified. For a man equipped with such a faith there is nothing he cannot face; and he is really rich. *'White clothes to wear'*: As seen in v. 3:4, white symbolizes spiritual purity. Laodicea prided itself of the garments it produced, but spiritually was naked; and to be naked was to be in a shameful condition. The white clothes stand for the beauties of life and character which only the grace of Yahweh through Jesus Christ can give. *'Ointment <salve> to put on your eyes'*: The situation did show that Laodicea was blind to its own moral poverty and shameful spiritual nakedness. The Greek word for "salve" is "kollurion" which literally means "a little roll of bread." The reason for the word is that this famous ointment, a powder, was exported all over the world in solidified tablet form in the shape of little rolls.

3:19. *'Those whom I am fond of I... discipline'*: Far from being a reason of despair, discipline is a basis for encouragement and perseverance. When received submissively, discipline is beneficial as it promotes moral health. In the Old Testament there are many cases involving Yahweh's discipline. Trough times of testing and affliction Yahweh is teaching to those He wants to form better (Proverbs 3:11-12). The father who spares the rod doesn't love his son (Proverbs 13:24). As Yahweh's redeemed children we are disciplined -just as a human father disciplines his child- so that we may repent of our sins and grow in peace (1 Corinthians 11:32). The Lord's discipline should be seen as instruction for our spiritual development as His children (Hebrew 12:5-11).

3:20. *'I stand at the door and knock'*: This picture of Jesus Christ knocking at the door of the defective believer's heart expresses the appeal of his affection. The origin of this passage is likely to be in Solomon's Song where the lover stands at the door of his beloved and pleads with her to open (Song of Songs 5:2-6). *'If anyone...'*: Here we see human responsibility; Christ knocks and a man can answer or refuse to answer. Christ does not break in; he must be invited in: "As they approached the village... Jesus acted as if he were going farther. But they urged him strongly, 'Stay with us'" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: On the road to Emmaus. Lu 24:28-29). *'I will come in and eat...'*: In Greek, the word translated "eat" is "deipnon,"

the evening meal, the main meal of the day, the one that was eaten when the work of the day was done. Not an hurried meal, but one taken and savored with plenty of time.

3:21. *'Him who gets through'*: Finally, the Risen Christ makes his great promise to those who overcome the problems mentioned in the letters. *'Seat with me on my throne'*: Those who faithfully stand suffering and trial will be highly rewarded in Heaven. As Jesus said, speaking to his Twelve Apostles: "When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The rich young man. Mr 10:29-30; Mt 19:28-20; Lu 18:29-30).

3:22. *'He who has an ear...'*: All the letters end with these words which, first, individualize their message saying to every man: "All these things apply to you as well." In effect, it is too easy to apply a moral or social message to everyone but ourselves. Second, they generalize their message saying that it is not confined to the people of the Asian Churches and of John's time, but that it applies to every man in every place and every generation. *'What the Spirit of Yahweh says'*: As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh.

THE PROPHEMIC VISIONS

The Throne in Heaven. (4:1-11)

(4:1)After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in Heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." (2)At once I was lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh, and there before me was a Throne in Heaven with Someone sitting on it. (3)And the One who sat there had the luminous appearance of precious gems. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the Throne. (4)Surrounding the Throne were many other thrones, and seated on them were many elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. (5)From the Throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the Throne, the symbols of all the Churches were blazing. These are all the spirits of Yahweh. (6a)Also before the Throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

(6b)In the center, around the Throne, were all the cherubs, and they watched over everything, all around. (7)A first cherub was like a lion, a second was like an ox, a third had a face like a man, a fourth was like a flying eagle. (8)Each of the cherubs had six wings and watched over everything all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is Yahweh the Lord Almighty, who was, is, and will be."

(9)Whenever the cherubs give glory, honor and thanks to Him who sits on the Throne and who lives for ever and ever, (10)the elders adore Him who sits on the Throne, and worship Him who lives for ever and ever. They make act of submission before the Throne and say:

(11)"You are worthy, [Yahweh] our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they were created and have their being."

4:1. *'After this':* After having seen the Risen Christ (vv. 1:12-16) and having received the text of the letters to the Churches. *'A door standing open in Heaven':* The Jews conceived the sky as a solid dome -set like a roof over a square flat Earth- with Heaven beyond it, and with a door giving access to Heaven. And Jesus Christ had open that door, the door of the Kingdom of Yahweh, to all people of every time and nation. *'The voice I... first heard':* The voice of the angel of v. 1:10. *'Come up here':* After the vision of the Risen Christ among his Churches on Earth, now the scene changes

and John is called to enter Heaven to receive divine direction. *'What must take place after this'*: The future events, as announced in vv. 1:1 and 1:19.

4:2. *'Lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh <in the Spirit>'*: In a state of spiritual exaltation, of ecstasy -this was not a dream, but a vision. *'A Throne in Heaven with Someone sitting on it'*: The image of Yahweh ruling from His Throne in Heaven, with all His angels standing around Him, is a regular feature of the Old Testament. To remember that John did not actually see Yahweh, but that he was given a vision of Yahweh, and that in the following verses he is trying to describe his vision in terms understandable to the people of his time.

4:3. *'Luminous appearance of precious gems <appearance of jasper and carnelian>'*: In the Old Testament, Ezekiel had a similar vision (Ezekiel 1: 26-28). Here John, reporting his vision of Yahweh, carefully avoids saying that he saw Yahweh directly and, rightly, makes no attempt to describe Him in any human shape. Since no human eye can see Yahweh, John describes Him in "the flashing of gem-like colors," never mentioning any kind of form. *'Precious gems <jasper and carnelian>'*: The jasper we know today is a red, yellow, or brown opaque quartz. The carnelian, also called "sardian," because in ancient times it was found mainly near Sardis, is a blood-red, opaque stone. But from the descriptions we are given (here, and in Exodus 28:17-20; Ezekiel 28:13) they had to be translucent rock crystals, possibly diamond and ruby. *'A rainbow... encircled the Throne'*: John sees his vision in terms of the brilliant light irradiating from precious gems in the sun, generating all the colors of the rainbow around Yahweh's Throne.

4:4. *'Many <twenty-four> other thrones... many <twenty-four> elders'*: The twenty-four elders, who appear frequently in the Revelation, are the symbolic representation of all the people of Yahweh. Their white robes are the robes promised in v. 3:5 to the faithful, their crowns are the crowns promised in v. 2:10 to those who are faithful till death, and their thrones are the thrones Jesus promised to those who followed him: "You who have followed me will also sit on... thrones" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The rich young man. Mk 19:29-30; Mt 19:28-29; Lk 18:29-30). The number twenty-four comes from this: The Church is composed by Jews and non-Jews. There were originally twelve Jewish tribes, but with the conversion of the Pagans it is as if the tribes were doubled. So, the twenty-four elders stand for the whole Church which will be one day in Heaven.

4:5. *'Lightning... thunder'*: As all throughout the Revelation, John is using imagery regularly connected in the Old Testament with the presence of Yahweh. Lightning and thunder are symbolic of the majesty and power of Yahweh, as in His manifestation at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19) and in

the conventional Old Testament depiction of Yahweh coming in mighty power to deliver His people (Psalms 18:12-14; 77:18). In the Revelation, lightning and thunder always mark an important event connected with the heavenly Temple. *'The symbols of all the Churches <seven lamps>'*: In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches." As a lampstand physically holds a light, so a Church spiritually holds the Light of Jesus Christ. *'Blazing'*: As Yahweh is depicted in terms of blazing light, so are the communities of Yahweh's people. *'All the spirits <the seven spirits>'*: Here the idea is that, as men can be in spiritual communion with Yahweh, so can be the Churches -which are communities of believers. Therefore, tho-se spirits stand for the spiritual communion between all Christian Churches and Yahweh.

4:6a. *'What looked like a sea of glass'*: The source of this image is the basin in Jerusalem Temple called "Sea of cast metal" (1 Kings 7:23; 2 Chronicles 4:2), an enormous reservoir of water which replaced the bronze basin of the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:18-19) and was used by the priests for their purification before entering the inner part of the Temple. Likewise in Heaven, those who are approaching Yahweh have to walk on this "Sea" and are purified before they met Him.

4:6b. *'In the center'*: Directly around the Throne. *'All the cherubs <four living creatures>'*: This is a high order of angelic beings whose task is to guard the Throne of Yahweh. The number four, as the number seven, stood for completeness (4 are the directions of the Earth in Genesis 13:14; 4 the quarters of the Earth in Isaiah 11:12) and is used often in this chapter -and over 40 times in the Revelation. *'They watched over everything, all around <were covered with eyes, in front and in back>'*: The cherubs are the custodians and the guardians of the Throne; nothing can escape their attention.

4:7. *'A first cherub <the first living creature>... a fourth...'*: Ezekiel in a vision also saw four living creatures, each of which had four faces -human in front, lion on the right, ox on the left, and eagle behind (Ezekiel 1:5-10). The living creatures, identified as cherubs in Ezekiel 10:1-22, are Throne attendants, each of them representing the best of an aspect of Yahweh's creation. *'Like a lion'*: This cherub represents the strength of the wild animals, for the lion was considered the strongest of them. *'Like an ox'*: Representing the strength of the domesticated animals, for the ox was considered the most powerful of them. *'Like a man'*: Representing the highest of Yahweh's created beings, the one whom Yahweh ordained ruler of His earthly creation (Genesis 1:26-28). *'Like a flying eagle'*: Representing the strength of the animals of the air, for the eagle was considered the most powerful of the birds.

4:8. *'The cherubs <four living creatures> had six wings'*: As the quantity of eyes expresses their absolute attention, so the number of wings expresses their high mobility and power in absolving their duty of custodians and guardians of the Throne. *'Watched over everything <was covered with eyes> all around'*: As seen in v. 4:6b, the cherubs are the custodians and the guardians of the Throne; nothing can escape their attention. *'Day and night they never stop'*: The cherubs -and the elders, as stated in vv. 4:10-11- praising constantly Yahweh represent the ceaseless activity of His creation, activity which is in itself a ceaseless tribute of praise. The basic idea behind this is that whatever and whoever carries out and fulfills the function for which it or he was created is actually and continuously praising and worshipping Yahweh. *'Holy, holy, holy'*: The triple repetition underscores Yahweh's infinite holiness. *'Yahweh the Lord Almighty'*: The people to whom the Revelation was written were suffering under the persecution of the powerful Roman Empire, the maximum power of the time. So those people were to be comforted by the fact that the Almighty stood behind them, making their spiritual life secure in life and in death. *'Who was, is, and will be <who was, and is, and is to come>'*: A paraphrase of the divine Name taken from Exodus 3:14-15, a common way to indicate Yahweh.

4:9-10. *'The cherubs <living creatures> give glory... the <twenty-four> elders adore <fall down before>'*: The cherubs stand for the creation in all its totality and greatness and the elders for the communion of all the Churches united in Jesus Christ. *'Make act of submission <lay their crowns>'*: In the ancient world that was the sign of the complete submission of a king to a more powerful one. This picture means that Yahweh is the conqueror of the souls of men, and that the Church is the body of people who worship Him under the guidance of Jesus Christ.

4:11. *'[Yahweh] our Lord and God'*: This is a very important declaration for the people John was writing to, as most of their problems were due to the Emperor worship. *'You created all things, and...'*: It is through Yahweh's will that all things were created (Genesis 1:1-31). Man has acquired many powers, can alter and rearrange, can make things out of already existing materials, but does not possess the power to create from nothingness.

The scroll and the Christ <Lamb>. (5:1-14)

(5:1) Then I saw in the right hand of Him who set on the Throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with absolutely unbreakable seals.

(2) And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (3) But no one in Heaven or on Earth or under the Earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. (4) I

wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll and look inside. (5) Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and all its seals."

(6) Then I saw a gentle but powerful man, looking as if he had been killed, standing in the center of the Throne, encircled by the cherubs and the elders. He had all the powers and honors and the power of seeing everything, which is the power of all the angels of Yahweh sent out into all the Earth. (7) He came and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the Throne. (8) And when he had taken it, all the cherubs and all the elders adored the Christ. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, consisting of the prayers of the faithful. (9) And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were sacrificed and with your blood you purchased men for Yahweh from every tribe and language and nation. (10) You have made them to be a kingdom of priests to serve [Yahweh] our God, and they will reign on the Earth."

(11) Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the Throne and the cherubs and the elders. (12) In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Christ, who was sacrificed, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

(13) Then I heard every creature in Heaven and on Earth and under the Earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To Him who sits on the Throne and to the Christ be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (14) The cherubs said, "Amen," and the elders adored and worshipped.

5:1. 'Scroll': Pieces of papyrus or parchment (sheep or goat skin specially prepared) sewn together, on which scribes wrote in columns with a pen. After being written, the scroll was rolled on a spindle (the book-form was not used until the second century AD). *'Writing on both sides':* Normally, ancient scrolls were written on one side only, as the fibers of a papyrus scroll run horizontally on the inside, which makes writing easier than on the reverse side, where the fibers are vertical. The implication here is that this scroll -like the Stone Tables of the Old Testament Covenant (Exodus 32:15) and the scroll given to the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 2:9-10)- was really full of divine words. *'Sealed with absolutely unbreakable <seven> seals':* The number seven, which stand for completeness, indicates the absolute inviolability of Yahweh's words. As in Isaiah 29:11 and in Daniel 12:4,

the seals can be open and the scroll read only by a person having the necessary characteristics.

5:2. *'Powerful angel'*: As John looked at the vision of Yahweh with the scroll in His hand there came a challenge -from an angel so powerful that his voice could reach all of Yahweh's creation- for anyone worthy of the task to come forward and open the scroll.

5:3. *'No one in Heaven or on Earth or under the Earth'*: A conventional phrase here used to express the universality of the proclamation that, till that moment, nobody had the necessary characteristics. *'Look inside it'*: The presence of so many seals didn't allow to give even a look between turn and turn of the scroll.

5:4. *'I wept... because...'*: John was full of sorrow because at this point it seemed to him that there was no one to whom Yahweh could assign the task of making His words known to men. Here there is a great truth; Yahweh does not deliver a message to mankind unless there is a man fit to receive and to report it to his fellow men.

5:5. *'Then one of the elders said...'*: But the time came when a worthy person was found. *'The Lion of the tribe of Judah'*: Traditionally, a Messianic title taken from Genesis 49:8-10, where Judah, one of Jacob's sons, is named "a lion's cub" and is promised the right to rule "until it comes to whom it belongs." This title was referred initially to David and then, ultimately, to Jesus Christ. *'Root of David'*: In his visions the prophet Isaiah, after the Assyrians conquest and the Babylonian exile had destroyed the Kingdom of Judah, looks forward to the Messiah, the King in the line of David and of his father Jesse (Isaiah 11:1-10). *'Has triumphed. He is able to open... all its <its seven> seals'*: Jesus Christ has won such a victory that he has acquired the characteristics necessary to open the scroll and to read its content, to know Yahweh's words and to reveal them to men.

5:6. *'Gentle but powerful man <Lamb>'*: John the Baptist called Jesus "The Lamb of Yahweh, who takes away the sin of the world" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus, the Lamb of Yahweh. Jn 1:29), an expression meaning that the sacrifice of Jesus made amends for the sins of all men. *'As if it had been killed <slain>'*: This Lamb, this man, bears even in Heaven the marks of having been sacrificed, marks which are the indication of how much Jesus had been fond of men. *'Standing in the center of the Throne'*: This man holds the closest position to Yahweh, the position of maximum power and authority (and also of maximum responsibility and duty.) *'Encircled by the cherubs <four living creatures> and the elders'*: Nobody in Heaven has a position of higher authority than Jesus. *'He had all the powers and honors <seven horns>'*: The horn is an ancient Jewish symbol for power and

strength, used by Moses (Deuteronomy 33:17) and, in the New Testament, by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Zecharias' Song. Lk 1:69). The horn was also a symbol of honor, used by the Psalmist (Psalm 89:17; 112:9; 148:14). Seven horns would symbolize absolute and perfect power, strength, and honor. Here is the great paradox; this man bears the wounds of his sacrifice, but at the same time is clothed with the very power of Yahweh. *'The power of seeing everything <seven eyes>, which is the power of all the angels <are the seven spirits> of Yahweh...'*: This picture comes from the prophet Zechariah who sees the seven lights which are the "eyes of the Lord, which range throughout the Earth" (Zechariah 4:10). It is a strange picture, which says that there is no place on Earth which is not under the sight of Yahweh. Before Jesus Christ, Yahweh was sending his angels to look and take care of everything; now this power and duty is given to Jesus. So Jesus is the one whose power nobody can withstand -all men, in this life or in the next, will become "Christian"- and whose eyes nobody can escape -Jesus will judge all men at the moment of their physical death (a better explanation of this point can be found in App.4).

5:7. *'He came and took the scroll...'*: By his sacrifice and the confirmation of his total obedience to Yahweh, Jesus demonstrates that he has the characteristics necessary to receive all of Yahweh's knowledge (the scroll) and to use that knowledge for the good of mankind (to open it).

5:8. *'All the cherubs <the four living creatures> and all the <the twenty-four> elders adored the Christ <fell down before the Lamb>'*: Recognizing by this the unique position of Jesus Christ in Yahweh's Kingdom. *'Harp'*: An ancient stringed instrument (not the modern one) used especially to accompany the singing of the Psalms (Psalms 33:2; 98:5; 147:7). *'Bowls full of incense, consisting of the prayers of the faithful <saints>'*: Incense was normally used in Hebrew rituals. The likening of incense to prayer (Psalm 141:2), with the cherubs and the elders presenting the prayers to Yahweh, was an idea very common in later Jewish literature. It is clear that this idea is quite unnecessary to the Christians. Jesus Christ has opened a door which no man can ever shut; no man's prayer need any assistance, for Yahweh's ear is open to the prayers of every man.

5:9. *'A new song'*: In the Old Testament a new song always celebrated a new act of divine deliverance or blessing (Psalms 33:3; 40:3; 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1; Isaiah 42:10). That is also its sense here, as Jesus Christ has freed men from the bondage of sin. The Greek word used here for "new" is "kainos," which means "of a better quality," meaning that Jesus brought

into life a quality which did not exist before, with new joy, new strength, and new peace. *'You are worthy...'*: Heaven and Earth and all that is within them are giving praise to Yahweh and, consequently, to Jesus Christ. *'Sacrificed <slain>'*: Jesus Christ bears even in Heaven the marks of having been sacrificed, marks which are the indication of how much he had been fond of men. Jesus Christ's death was a sacrificial one, that is, with a purpose in it. It was not an accident, nor the tragic death of a good and heroic man in the case of righteousness and of Yahweh. *'With your blood...'*: The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is central to the New Testament teaching of the liberation of mankind achieved by him. Jesus himself said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The request of James and John. Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28). *'Every tribe and language and nation'*: This phrase states and confirms the universality of Jesus' saving action, which applies to all men, with no limitation of any kind.

5:10. *'Kingdom of priests <kingdom and priests>'*: This is a quotation from Exodus 19:6, an Old Testament designation of Israel, which in the New Testament is applied to the Christian Church. Through Jesus men can become true sons of Yahweh and they can have, being Yahweh's priests, direct access to Him -that is, they can be in spiritual communion with Yahweh. *'They will reign on the Earth'*: Not by political supremacy, but by the supremacy of the example given by living a Christian life.

5:11. *'Thousands upon thousands...'*: This clearly stands for an indefinitely large number.

5:12. *'Worthy is the Christ <Lamb>, who was sacrificed <slain>'*: Jesus Christ's death was sacrificial, that is, with a purpose in it, the spiritual salvation of all men. *'To receive...'*: To receive what by right belongs to Yahweh alone.

5:13. *'I heard every creature in Heaven... on Earth... under the Earth... on the sea... all that is in them, singing'*: This chorus of praise comes from everybody and everything everywhere. *'To Him... and to the Christ <Lamb>'*: This shows again that Jesus Christ holds the highest position, the nearest to Yahweh.

5:14. *'The cherubs <four living creatures> said, "Amen," and the elders adored <fell down> and worshipped'*: The cherubs stand for the creation in all its totality and greatness and the elders for the communion of all the Churches united in Jesus Christ.

The seals. (6:1-17)

(6:1)I watched as the Christ opened the first of the unbreakable seals. Then I heard one of the cherubs say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" (2)I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider was a powerful warrior, a king, and a great conqueror.

(3)When the Christ opened the second seal, I heard the second cherub say, "Come!" (4)Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was taking peace from the Earth and making men slay each other. He killed many with a large sword.

(5)When the Christ opened the third seal, I heard the third cherub say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was spreading famine with his hand. (6)Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the cherubs, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not affect the oil and the wine!"

(7)When the Christ opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth cherub say, "Come!" (8)I looked and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Plague, and Hades was following close behind him. They killed a fourth of the Earth by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the Earth.

(9)When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of Yahweh and the testimony they had maintained. (10)They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, Holy and True, until You judge the inhabitants of the Earth and avenge our blood?"

(11)Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

(12)I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, (13)and the stars in the sky fell to Earth, as late figs drops from a tree when shaken by a strong wind. (14)The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

(15)Then the kings of the Earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. (16)They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the Throne and from the judgment of the Christ! (17)For the great day of their judgment has come, and who can stand?"

Note: For a proper comprehension of this chapter, it is necessary to remember that, at the time the Revelation was written, the Christian Church -the New Chosen People of Yahweh- was suffering under a merciless persecution unleashed by the powerful Roman Empire. After the vision describing the majesty of Yahweh (ch. 4) who delivers to the Christ <the Lamb> the scroll containing the decree of punishment of the persecutors (ch. 5), the vision moves on with the announcement of an invasion (of the Parths, a barbaric people) accompanied by its usual follow-up of evil: war, famine, plague (ch. 6).

6:1. *'The Christ <Lamb>'*: As seen in v. 5:6, John the Baptist called Jesus: "The Lamb of Yahweh, who takes away the sin of the world." *'Opened the first of the unbreakable <seven> seals'*: As seen in v. 5:1, the seals can be open and the scroll read only by a person having the necessary characteristics. *'Then... one of the cherubs <four living creatures>'*: This is a high order of angelic beings whose task is to guard the Throne of Yahweh. *'Voice like thunder'*: A voice so powerful that it could reach all of Yahweh's creation. *'Come!'*: By saying "Come!" the angel orders to the images representing some of the future events to "come out" of the scroll.

6:2. *'A white horse'*: The imagery of the colored horses comes from Zechariah 6:1-8. The color of each horse corresponds to the main characteristic of its rider. Their riders are the instruments of Yahweh's judgment of the nations oppressing His people. As one by one the seals of the scroll are opened, future history "unfolds" before John's eyes. To notice that the disclosure of the future events begins with the opening of the first seal -when the scroll is still rolled and sealed- and consists of images, not of written words. Here, white symbolizes victorious conquest in war (the chariot of a Roman general celebrating his triumph was drawn by white horses). *'Was a powerful warrior <held a bow>'*: In the Old Testament the bow is always the sign of military power. But this is also a picture which the Romans and all the Asians would immediately recognize. The Parthians, who rode white horses and were famous bow-men living on the far eastern frontiers of the Empire, were the only enemy the Romans feared. In AD 62 a Roman army had surrendered to Vologeses, the king of the Parthians -an unprecedented event. *'A king <he was given a crown>'*: Here, the crown is the sign of kingship and of victorious military conquest. *'A great conqueror <he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest>'*: The posture of the rider was that of a highly victorious warrior.

6:3. *'Christ <Lamb>. Cherub <living creature>. Come!'*: The same sequence of v. 6:1.

6:4. *'Another horse... a fiery red one'*: The blood-red color symbolizes the

bloodshed accompanying the war of conquest. *'Was taking <given power to take> peace from the Earth'*: The barbaric invasions caused the fall of the Roman Empire and, consequently, the end of the famous "Pax Romana." *'Making <to make> men slay each other'*: With the Roman Empire falling apart, the various nations constituting the Empire went on fighting each other. *'He killed many with <to him was given> a large sword'*: As a result of the barbaric invasions and of the fighting of nation against nation, a large number of people perished.

6:5-6. *'Christ <Lamb>. Cherub <living creature>. Come!'*: The same sequence of vv. 6:1,3. *'Black horse'*: The black color symbolizes the famine accompanying the war of conquest. *'Was spreading famine with <holding a pair of scales in> his hand'*: A balance beam, the symbol of great scarcity. In the Old Testament the phrase "to eat bread by weight" indicates the greatest scarcity (Leviticus 26:26). *'A voice among the cherubs <four living creatures>, saying...'*: This voice states Yahweh's decision of setting limits to the seriousness of the famine. *'A quart of wheat for... three quarts of barley for...'*: A quart -in Greek, a "choenix," equivalent to about a liter-of wheat would be enough for a day for only one person. Three quarts of the less nutritious barley would be barely enough for a small family. Famine was inflating prices to at least ten times their normal level. A denarius was a working man's wage for a day, so the famine was so severe that a working man could barely survive, with nothing left for other necessities. *'Do not affect <damage> the oil and the wine'*: Scarcity of wheat and barley, with no scarcity of oil and wine, describes a situation in which the poor were starving when the rich were still having more than enough, a situation of deep social unbalance, which hastened the fall of the Roman Empire.

6:7. *'Christ <Lamb>. Cherub <living creature>. Come!'*: The same sequence of vv. 6:1,3,5.

6:8. *'Pale horse'*: The color refers to the ashen appearance of the dead. It symbolizes the death brought by the plague following invasion, war, and famine. *'Plague <Death>'*: The Greek word used here is "thanatos," which means both "death" and "plague." *'Hades was following'*: Where the rider was going, the plague was leaving a track full of dead. *'They killed <were given power over> a fourth of the Earth'*: This invasion and its follow-up would be terrible, causing a drastic decimation of the population, but would not bring total destruction. *'<To kill> by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts'*: Here John uses a traditional Jewish picture of what is to happen when Yahweh takes action against His enemies.

6:9. *'Under the altar'*: At the opening of the fifth seal comes out the vision of the souls of those who had sacrificed their life for their faith. As in Old

Testament rituals the blood -the life essence- of the sacrificed victims was poured out at the base of the altar (Exodus 29:12; Leviticus 4:7), so it has been for the life essence -the soul- of the martyrs.

6:10. *'How long...?'*: A typical Jewish lamentation, with the cry of the suffering righteous ("how long?"), and the request of the judgment of the persecutors ("You judge".) *'Inhabitants of the Earth'*: A regular designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh.

6:11. *'White robe'*: Symbolizing the spiritual purity of the faithful. *'Until the number... was completed'*: Jewish thought hold that Yahweh rules the world according to a predetermined time schedule. So, the end of the Roman persecution and the final punishment of the persecutors had to wait for the martyrdom of a stated number of righteous. This can appear an odd concept, but at the back of it is the idea that all history is in the hands of Yahweh and that through it He is working out His purposes.

6:12-14. In these verses John uses all the classical terrifying images typical of the Day of the Lord (the end of time), to give an idea of the terror and the suffering to come. *'Earthquake'*: From: Exodus 19:18; Isaiah 2:19; Ezechiel 38:19; Joel 2:10; Amos 8:8; Haggai 2:6. *'Sun turned black'*: From: Isaiah 13:10; 50:3; Ezechiel 32:7; Joel 2:31; Amos 8:9; The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Signs of the end of the age. Mt 24:29; Mk 13:24-25. *'Moon turned blood red'*: From: Joel 2:31; quoted by Peter in his Pentecostal sermon (Acts 2:20). *'Stars... fell'*: From: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Signs of the end of the age. Mt 24:29; Mk 13:24-25. *'Late figs'*: Green figs appearing in the winter and easily blown from the tree, which at that season has no leaves. *'The sky receded like a scroll'*: From: Isaiah 34:4. *'Every mountain and island was removed'*: From: Jeremiah 4:24; Nahum 1:5.

6:15. *'Kings, princes, generals, rich, mighty, every slave, every free man'*: John saw in his vision that the time coming was to be of universal terror. Not only the rich and powerful persecutors would have to suffer, but all the inhabitants of the Roman Empire as well. *'Hid in caves and...'*: As usual this image comes from the Old Testament imagery (Isaiah 13:6,8; Joel 2:1).

6:16. *'Fall on us...'*: Blocking the entrance to the caves and the mountain paths to the invading people (from Hosea 10:8). *'Hide us from the face of Him... and from the judgment <wrath> of the Christ <Lamb>'*: The two phrases are synonymous. People who stand in the presence of Yahweh are subject to His judgment. And Yahweh has given the task of judging all men to His Son, the Christ.

6:17. *'The great day of their judgment <wrath> has come'*: The day of Yahweh and Christ's judgment requested by the martyrs in v. 6:10.

The great number <144,000> sealed. (7:1-8)**The great multitude in white robes. (7:9-17)**

(7:1) After that I saw four angels standing at the four corner of the Earth, holding back the four winds of the Earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. (2) Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of [Yahweh] the Living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: (3) "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of Yahweh."

(4) Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: a great number from all the tribes of Israel. (5) From the tribe of Judah many were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben, from the tribe of Gad, (6) from the tribe of Asher, from the tribe of Naphtali, from the tribe of Manasseh, (7) from the tribe of Simeon, from the tribe of Levi, from the tribe of Issachar, (8) from the tribe of Zebulun, from the tribe of Joseph, from the tribe of Benjamin.

(9) After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Throne and in front of the Christ. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (10) And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to [Yahweh] our God, who sits on the Throne, and to the Christ."

(11) All the angels were standing around the Throne and around the elders and the cherubs. They adored and worshipped Yahweh, (12) saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to [Yahweh] our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

(13) Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes -who are they, and where did they come from?" (14) I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are those who have come out of the great tribulation; they have been faithful and made themselves pure keeping the Word of the Christ. (15) Therefore, they are before the Throne of Yahweh and serve Him day and night in His Temple; and He who sits on the Throne will spread His tent over them. (16) Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. (17) For the Christ at the center of the Throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And Yahweh will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

7:1. *'Four angels... four corners of the Earth... four winds':* Here again John is using pictures familiar to all the Jews. To them all the forces of nature were under the charge of angels and they believed that the Earth was

flat and square. Furthermore, they believed that the winds coming from north, south, east, and west were all favorable winds; but that those blowing diagonally across the Earth were harmful and destructive. *'Land... sea... tree'*: To remind the terrible storms these destructive agents of Yahweh can cause.

7:2. *'Angel coming up from the east'*: From the rising of the sun, as such an angel bringing good news. *'Seal of [Yahweh] the Living God'*: Ancient documents were rolled or folded and tied, and a lump of clay was pressed over the knot. The sender then stamped the hardening clay with his signet ring or rolled it with a cylinder seal, so authenticating and protecting the content. *'Four angels... given the power...'*: The angels of v. 7:1.

7:3. *'Seal on the forehead'*: This image comes from Ezechiel 9:4. The seal (the Name of the Lord stamped on the forehead of His followers) is a sign that those people belong to Yahweh and are under His power and authority. Its primary purpose is to recognize and protect the people of Yahweh; it is not that they are to be exempt from the tribulation, but that they are to be brought spiritually safe through it. In this time of invasion and devastation the faithful will suffer terribly, but they will come out of it because they are protected by Yahweh.

7:4. *'A great number <144,000>'*: These are the Jews members of the twelve Jewish tribes who have recognized the Christ, "those who have come out of the great tribulation" (v. 7:14); the Jew-Christians. The number 144,000 stands, not for limitation, but for completeness and perfection. It is made up of 12 multiplied by 12 -the perfect square- and rendered all-inclusive by being multiplied by 1,000. So, the number 144,000 tells that the number of the Jew-Christians saved will be really very great.

7:5-8. *'From the tribe of... many <12,000>...'*: Following the traditional Old Testament enumeration in terms of the twelve tribes, John says that the great number of Jew-Christians saved is itself composed by great numbers of be-lievers coming from every group of Jews. *'Tribe of Judah'*: The name of Ju-dah is listed before that of Reuben, his older brother, most probably because the Messiah was from the tribe of Judah. *'Tribe of Manasseh'*: One of the two tribes of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh), yet mentioned separately probably to make up 12 tribes since Dan is omitted. This omission is due to Dan's early connection with idolatry (Judges 18:30), and to the tradition that the Antichrist was to come from that tribe.

7:9. *'Great multitude'*: As the great number of Jew-Christians of v. 7:4, even this great multitude of people is composed by "those who have come out of the great tribulation" (v. 7:14). They are all the non-Jewish Christians of the rest of the world. *'No one could count'*: This reminds Yahweh's

promise to Abraham that his physical and spiritual descendants will one day be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5), uncountable as the sand of the sea (Genesis 32:12). *'Before the Throne and in front of the Christ <Lamb>'*: It is in victory that the faithful stand in the presence of Yahweh and of His Son. *'White robes'*: White, in sign of both victory and spiritual purity. *'Palm branches'*: Used for festive occasions (Leviticus 23:40; The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The triumphal entry. Mk 11:8-10; Mt 21:8-9; Lk 19: 36-38; Jn 12:13).

7:10. *'Salvation belongs to [Yahweh] our God'*: Only Yahweh can take the initiative and bring back to Himself all men, in spite of Satan's opposition. *'And to the Christ <Lamb>'*: Jesus Christ, who was sent by Yahweh, has been given by Him complete power and authority over the human race. He, the "Savior" of all men, has said: "I am the Way and the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus the way to the Father. Jn 14:6).

7:11. *'Angels... around the Throne...'*: As in v. 5:11, the picture here is of the inhabitants of Heaven forming great concentric circles. On the outer one stand all the angels. Nearer to the Throne are the elders; still nearer are the cherubs; and before the Throne all the white-robed faithful. *'Elders. Cherubs <four living creatures>. They adored <fell down on their faces before the Throne> and worshipped Yahweh'*: The cherubs stand for the creation in all its totality and greatness and the elders for the communion of all the Churches united in Jesus Christ.

7:12. *'Amen!... Amen!'*: Shall it Be! A double affirmation, for in John's text appear both the Greek (nai) and Hebrew (amen) forms. *'Praise and... strength'*: This list of attributes expresses complete and perfect praise.

7:13. *'White robes'*: White, in sign of both victory and spiritual purity. *'These... who are they and...?'*: The great multitude of v. 7:9.

7:14. *'Those <they> who have come out of the great tribulation'*: Those who suffered under the persecution of the Roman Empire and the barbaric invasion. *'They have been faithful <washed their robes>'*: This explains why v. 7:9 says that they were wearing white robes. *'Made themselves pure keeping the Word <them white in the blood> of the Christ <Lamb>'*: As the sacrificial death ("in the blood") of Jesus Christ is central to the New Testament teaching of mankind's salvation, so the keeping of Jesus Christ's Word is essential for the salvation of the individual believer.

7:15. *'Therefore, they are before the Throne of Yahweh'*: Those who have been faithful are admitted at the presence of Yahweh. *'Serve Him day and night in His Temple'*: This, as all the 16 references to the Temple in the Revelation, uses the word that designates the inner shrine -the Tabernacle, the

place where Yahweh's presence dwells- rather than the whole Temple. In the Old Testament "serving Yahweh day and night" was the task of the priests and the Levites (1 Chronicles 9:33) and all the other Jews had only partial access to the various parts of the Temple in Jerusalem (the non-Jews were allowed only in the outer court, the Court of the Pagans). But now, as the sacrifice of Jesus Christ was for the whole of mankind, all men are in the presence of Yahweh, that is, live in the inner part of His heavenly Temple. *'Spread His tent'*: A protective image, evoking memories of the Tabernacle in the desert (Leviticus 26:11-12), and depicting the protection of the tent of the Tabernacle been given to all the faithful.

7:16. *'Never again will they...'*: This passage comes from the promise of the restoration of Israel (Isaiah 49:10). Here in the Revelation there is a spiritual promise, the promise of the ultimate satisfaction of the needs of the human soul, and of the end of the spiritual suffering. Jesus has pronounced similar words in: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The beatitudes. Mt 5:6; Lk 6:21; Jesus the bread of life. Jn 6:35.

7:17. *'The Christ <Lamb> at the center of the Throne'*: Jesus holds the closest position to Yahweh, the position of maximum power and authority (and also of maximum responsibility and duty). *'Shepherd'*: The image of Jesus Christ, "the Good Shepherd" leading his people to salvation (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The shepherd and his flock. Jn 10:11). *'He will lead them to springs of living water'*: This water is the symbol of the indispensable spiritual nourishment that Jesus Christ gives to his followers, the "living water" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman. Jn 4:13-14; Is Jesus the Christ?, Jn 7:37-38). *'Yahweh will wipe away...'*: An image from Isaiah 25:8. Yahweh will accept all the faithful into His Kingdom.

The last <seventh> seal and the golden censer (8:1-5)

(8:1) When he opened the last seal, there was silence in Heaven for about half an hour.

(3) Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, consisting of the prayers of all the faithful, on the golden altar before the Throne. (4) The smoke of the incense, consisting of the prayers of the faithful, went up before Yahweh from the angel's hand. (5) Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the Earth: and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

(2) And I saw the angels who stand before Yahweh, and to them were given trumpets.

Note: Verse 8:2, if left in its numerical position, is clearly out of place, as it interrupts the sense of the passage. Its proper position is immediately before verse 8:6.

8:1. *'The last <seventh> seal'*: The opening of the previous seal, the second last one, is reported in v. 6:12. *'Silence in Heaven'*: A dramatic pause, corresponding to the time given to the "inhabitants of the Earth" (a regular designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh) to repent. But they will not, so Yahweh decides to send another series of plagues (described in vv. 8:7-13; 9:1-21), which will be announced by angels sounding their trumpets.

8:3. *'Censer'*: A brazier used to hold live charcoal for the burning of incense. *'Altar. Golden altar'*: The altar appearing many times in the Revelation corresponds to the "altar of incense," made of gold, which stood before the Holy Place in the Temple of Jerusalem. *'Incense... consisting of the prayers'*: The Greek for this phrase allows a double translation, the incense "to be" or "to be mixed with" the prayers. The first makes more sense and corresponds to the image of v. 5:8 ("golden bowls full of incense, consisting of the prayers of the faithful.")

8:4. *'The... prayers... went up... from the angel's hand'*: The fact that an angel is presenting the prayers of the faithful to Yahweh doesn't mean they will be accepted or rejected. Incense was normally used in Hebrew rituals. The likening of incense to prayer (Psalm 141:2), with the cherubs and the elders presenting the prayers to Yahweh, was an idea very common in later Jewish literature. It is clear that this concept of angels and elders acting as mediators is quite unnecessary to the Christians, for Jesus Christ has opened a door which no man can ever shut; and no man's prayer needs any assistance, for Yahweh's ear is open to the prayers of every man.

8:5. *'Then the angel took the censer... and hurled it on the Earth'*: The "inhabitants of the Earth" (a regular designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh,) who were given enough time to repent "half an hour of silence in Heaven" (v. 8:1), did not. As a consequence the prayers of the faithful, who were asking Yahweh to put an end to the tribulation, were not accepted and were "thrown back" to Earth. *'Thunder... earthquake'*: All throughout the Revelation, John uses imagery regularly connected in the Old Testament with the presence of Yahweh, symbolic of His majesty and power, and always marking an important event connected with the heavenly Temple.

8:2. *'The <seven> angels who stand before Yahweh'*: These angels were known as the "angels of the presence," the archangels. One of them, Gabriel, is named in "The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The birth of John the Baptist foretold. Lk 1:19; The birth of Jesus foretold. Lk 1:26). Michael is named in Daniel 10:13 and Raphael in Tobit 12:15. Other traditional names

are: Uriel, Raguel, Sariel, Remiel. '<Seven> trumpets': In Old Testament times the trumpets served to announce important events, not to make music. In the Scriptures they always announce the intervention of Yahweh in history. In the Revelation (vv. 8:6-13; 9:1-21; 11:15-19), the trumpets announce a series of plagues more severe than those announced by the opening of the seals but not so much devastating as those coming from the bowls (ch. 16).

The trumpets. (8:6-13;9:1-21)

(8:6) Then the angels who had the trumpets prepared to sound them.

(7) The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and terrible lightning, and it struck with great force the Earth. A part of the Earth was hit, many of the trees were stripped, and all the green grass was beat down.

(8) The second angel sounded his trumpet, and a flaming star was thrown into the sea. A part of the sea was turned red as blood, (9) many of the living creatures in the sea died, and many of the ships were destroyed.

(10) The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky pulverizing on many of the rivers and on the springs of water -(11) the star of Bitterness. A part of the water turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

(12) The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a part of the sun was struck, a part of the moon, and a part of the stars, so that many of them turned dark. A part of the day was without light, and also a part of the night.

(13) As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the Earth, because of the trumpet blast about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

(9:1) The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw an angel who had fallen from Heaven to the Earth. The angel was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. (2) When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and the sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. (3) And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the Earth and were dangerous like the scorpions of the Earth. (4) They were told not to harm the grass of the Earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of Yahweh on their foreheads. (5) They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when he strikes a man. (6) During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

(7) The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they

wore something like crowns of gold, and they resembled human soldiers. (8) Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. (9) They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. (10) They were dangerous like scorpions, and with their bites they did torment people for five months. (11) They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

(12) The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

(13) The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before Yahweh. (14) It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Recall the four angels who are guardians at the great river Euphrates." (15) And the four angels who had been kept on duty till this very hour and day and month and year were recalled, for the destruction of a part of mankind. (16) The number of the mounted troops was immense. I heard their number.

(17) The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses looked very dangerous, and really frightening. (18) A part of mankind was killed by the terrifying cavalry. (19) The power of the horses was in their heads and in their tails; for they were drawing ropes with stones, with which they inflict injury.

(20) The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood - idols that cannot see or hear or walk. (21) Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

8:6. '<Seven> angels... <seven> trumpets': The angels of the presence -the archangels-, introduced in v. 8:2, those who always stand at the presence of Yahweh. They are ready to announce a new series of plagues by sounding their trumpets.

8:7. '*The first angel sounded...*': Announcing the first of this group of plagues sent by Yahweh to the unpenitent "inhabitants of the Earth" (a regular designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh). '*Hail and terrible lightning <fire mixed with blood>*': The imagery of this plague comes from the plagues on Egypt (Exodus ch.s 7-11). '*It struck with great force <was hurled down upon> the Earth*': This is a clear description of a dramatically strong hail-storm accompanied by heavy lightning flashing to the ground. '*A part <third> of the Earth was hit <burned up>, many <a third> of the trees*

were stripped <burned up>, and all the green grass was beat down <burned up>': The fact that only a "third" is destroyed shows that the punishment announced by the trumpets is not complete and final, because Yahweh does not desire the destruction of all sinners, but is trying to push them towards their salvation.

8:8. *'A flaming star <something like a huge mountain, all ablaze>':* A huge meteor which concluded its descent falling into the sea. *'A part <third> of the sea was turned red as <into> blood':* A physical phenomenon resulting from the partial dissolution of the meteorite into sea water.

8:9. *'Many <a third> of... in the sea died, and many <a third> of... were destroyed':* Clear consequences of the impact of the meteor with the sea water.

8:10. *'A great star, blazing like a torch':* Another meteor. *'Fell from the sky pulverizing <---> on many <a third> of the rivers and...':* This meteor did not penetrate into the atmosphere hitting directly the Earth as the one of v. 8:8, but came in with at low inclination and so was burnt and turned to dust by friction with the atmosphere. The resulting dust fell on the Earth, causing the poisoning of rivers and springs.

8:11. *'The <name of the> star of Bitterness <is Wormwood>. A part <third> of the water turned bitter and...':* Wormwood is a general name for the class of plants known as Artemisia, whose characteristic is the strong bitter taste. These plants are not really poisonous but their bitter taste can give an idea of the bitterness of the water actually poisoned by the meteor dust.

8:12. *'A part <third> of the sun was struck, a part <third> of the moon, and a part <third> of the stars, so that many <a third> of them turned dark. A part <third> of the day... a part <third> of the night...':* This detailed picture, saying that not only the unrepentants were affected, but also the whole universe known at that time, gives an idea of the extent of Yahweh's action. The people of the time surely saw such celestial phenomena as announcing a dramatically strong divine punishment. The meaning of this picture is that, in His attempt to convince the unrepentants, Yahweh is sending also some very strong physical signals.

8:13. *'An eagle... call out in a loud voice...':* The image of the eagle -which was considered the strongest of the birds- as a messenger of Yahweh means that the message is of particular importance. This picture is to be taken as an example of how Yahweh uses nature to send His messages to men. *'Woe! Woe! Woe...!':* These three woes correspond to the last three of the plagues announced by the trumpets.

9:1. *'An angel who <a star that> had fallen from Heaven <the sky>':* A

"fallen angel," one of those who followed Satan in his rebellion against Yahweh. *'The angel <star> was given the key...'*: In the mind of ancient people, dramatic natural phenomena were always originated by supernatural agents. *'Abyss'*: It was conceived by the Jews as the subterranean place of confinement of Satan and evil spirits (It appears in: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The healing of a demon-possessed man. Lk 8:31, where the Legion of demons ask Jesus "not to order them to go into the Abyss".) In the Revelation, their final place of punishment is the "lake of fire," that is, hell.

9:2. *'Smoke rose... like... from a... furnace'*: This is the description of the smoke accompanying a deadly volcanic eruption, like that of the Vesuvius in August of AD 79 which decimated the bay of Naples. *'The sun and the sky were darkened'*: This picture, saying that also the universe was affected, gives an idea of the extent of Yahweh's action. The meaning is that, in His attempt to convince the unrepentant, superstitious people of the time, Yahweh sends them also some very strong physical signals. As usual, out of this picture of terror, it clearly appears that Yahweh is using the forces of nature for His aims.

9:3. *'Out of the smoke locusts came'*: As announced by the sign (the smoke obscuring the sun and the sky), the plague now strikes. *'Locusts'*: All through the Old Testament the locusts are the symbol of destruction, as in Joel 1:2-7; 2:1-11, from whom John takes much of his material. They travel in enormous swarms and can strip a land of all vegetation. *'Were dangerous <given power> like the <that of> scorpions'*: The scorpions injure or kill by means of a poisonous sting in the tail. These locusts, because of their number and voracity, were dangerous as the scorpions.

9:4. *'They were told not to arm the grass... or any plant or tree'*: Told as Yahweh does: by setting up the proper physical conditions at the proper moment for the proper result. In this case it is clear that the invasion of the locusts happens during a particularly hot, dry, and long summer. In a summer like that there is no grass, and all the plants and trees are reduced to trunks and branches left devoid of leaves by the drought. In such conditions the locusts, which usually do not attack human beings, try to eat whatever food there is around, biting even men. *'People who did not have the seal of God'*: As announced in v. 7:3, this plague does not affect the "servants of Yahweh" who, by receiving the "seal of Yahweh," evidently had been instructed how to protect themselves against the locusts (that is, by wearing appropriate clothes and by keeping closed and fumigated their houses.)

9:5. *'Not given power to kill'*: It is clear that, to be attacked and bitten by hundreds of locusts, is harmful as a torture. *'For five months'*: A limited period of time corresponding both to the life cycle of the locusts -which is of

five months- and to the duration of a particularly long dry season -from spring to late summer.

9:6. *'Seek death, but will not find it...'*: A strong and dramatic phrase, used to give a clear idea of the terrible suffering caused by the locusts during that summer. Without any doubt, to live in such conditions for a number of months is almost unbearable and can drive many people to total despair.

9:7. *'The locusts looked like horses'*: The head of a locust is like the miniature head of a horse (for that reason, the Italian word for locust is "cavalletta," small horse.) *'Prepared for battle'*: A horse prepared for battle wore a metallic helmet and some frontal, protective plates. In effect, the overall look of a locust is quite similar. *'Like crowns of gold'*: A reference to the actual conformation of the locusts' heads. *'They <their faces> resembled human soldiers <faces>'*: The hordes of the locusts looked like an army of soldiers marching into battle.

9:8. *'Like women's hair'*: A reference to the locusts' long antennae. *'Like lion teeth'*: Because they were biting in a powerful and cruel way.

9:9. *'Breastplates like...'*: A reference to the conformation of the locusts' front legs. *'The sound of their wings was like...'*: The noise of millions of wings moving is really terrible. The image given corresponds to the noise of an army rushing into battle.

9:10. *'They were dangerous <had tails and stings> like scorpions'*: The scorpions injure or kill by means of a poisonous sting in the tail. These locusts, because of their number and voracity, were dangerous as the scorpions. *'With <in> their bites <tails> they did <had power to> torment '*: Clearly, to be attacked and bitten by hundreds of locusts, is harmful as a torture.

9:11. *'As king... the angel of the Abyss'*: The action of the locusts was so terrible that it was as if they were an army under the direct command of Satan, the Destroyer.

9:12. *'First woe... two other woes...'*: The three woes announced by the eagle in v. 8:13.

9:13. *'Horns of the golden altar'*: The horns were projections at the four corners of the altar, described in Exodus 27:2.

9:14. *'Recall <release> the four angels who are guardians <bound> at the... Euphrates'*: In Jewish belief these angels were in charge of preventing Israel's enemies from crossing the river Euphrates, which is the longest one in western Asia (about 1,700 miles; 2,700 km). It marked the boundary between Israel and her historical enemies to the east, Assyria and Babylon (Genesis 15:18).

9:15. *'The four angels had been kept on duty till <ready for> this very*

hour...': The view here is that Yahweh rules the world according to an exact and predetermined time schedule. At the back of this concept there is the idea that all history is in the hands of Yahweh and that through it He is working out His purposes. *'Were recalled, for the destruction of <released to kill>'*: Released from their guardian duty, freeing the way to the invaders. *'A part <third> of mankind'*: The fact that only a "third" of mankind is destroyed shows that the punishment announced by the trumpet is not complete and final, because Yahweh does not desire the destruction of all sinners, but is trying to push them towards their salvation.

9:16. *'Mounted troops'*: A characteristic, identifying the invaders, is that all of them came mounted on horses. This was another invasion of the dreadful Parthian horsemen already seen in v. 6:2. *'Immense <two hundred million>'*: The reference is general, intending an incalculable rather than a specific number.

9:17. *'Their breastplates were...'*: This is an exact description of the protective frontal plates horses and men were wearing. *'The heads of the horses looked very dangerous <resembled the heads of lions>'*: With the protective and the offensive gear the horses were wearing (described in v. 9:19) they looked really powerful and dangerous. *'Really frightening <out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur>'*: In reality, what came out of their mouths was the mist of their breath. But during an attack that, plus the aspect of the horses, plus the aspect of their riders, was more than enough to justify John's frightening description.

9:18. *'A part <third> of mankind'*: Again, the fact that only a "third" of mankind is destroyed shows that the punishment is not complete and final, as Yahweh does not desire the destruction of all sinners, but tries to push them towards their salvation. *'Killed by the terrifying cavalry <three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths>'*: A repetition of v. 9:17, stressing the terror inspired by the cavalry.

9:19. *'The power of the horses was in their heads <mouths>'*: The horses' heads were covered by metallic helmets, which were quite effective weapons during a cavalry charge. *'And in their tails; for they were drawing ropes with stones <their tails were like snakes having heads>'*: Most probably, at the back of the horses were attached some ropes terminating with stones which, when they run into an enemy army, moved from side to side "like snakes," injuring their enemies.

9:20-21. *'The rest of mankind... still did not repent...'*: It would have been natural to think that the remainder of mankind would have taken warning from these dreadful events; but they did not and continued worshipping their old idols and living as they were before.

The angel and the little scroll. (10:1-11)

(10:1) Then I saw another powerful angel coming down from Heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was luminous as the sun, and his legs were like blazing pillars. (2) He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, (3) and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voice of the Lord spoke. (4) And when the Lord spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from Heaven say, "Seal up what the Lord has said and do not write it down."

(5) Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to Heaven. (6) And he swore by Him who lives for ever and ever, who created the Heavens and all that is in them, the Earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! (7) But in the days when the last angel will sound his trumpet, the plan of Yahweh will be accomplished, just as He announced to His servants the prophets."

(8) Then the voice that I had heard from Heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

(9) So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and read it. It will turn you sad, but to you it will be a bliss." (10) I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and read it. It was a bliss to me, but when I had read it, I turned sad. (11) Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

10:1. *'Another powerful angel':* Angels as this one, announcing matters of the first importance, were already seen in vv. 5:2; 7:2; 8:3. *'Robed in a cloud':* As it clearly appears from vv. 10:1-2, this angel was "physically" really big, so much that his robe was large as a cloud. *'Rainbow about his head':* As the rainbow encircling the Throne of Yahweh, depicted in v. 4:3, where John describes his vision in terms of the brilliant light irradiating from precious gems in the sun, generating all the colors of the rainbow. *'His face was luminous as <like> the sun':* The rainbow and the luminosity show that the angel comes straight from the presence of Yahweh, sharing part of the luminous appearance of the vision of Yahweh portrayed in v. 4:3. *'His legs were like blazing <fiery> pillars':* "Pillars" because of the huge size of the angel. Their "blazing" reminds of the glowing of Jesus' feet seen in v. 1:15, a bodily characteristic which, in Jewish thought, stands for very high physical strength.

10:2. *'A little scroll... open':* Obviously this scroll was different than the sealed scroll of ch. 5. The present one, being unrolled and open, was inten-

ded to reveal its content. The fact that it was little means that it contains a limited revelation relevant to a limited period of time. *'Right foot on the sea... left foot on the land'*: Indicates the size and power of the angel and that his announcement has to do with the destiny of the whole world.

10:3. *'A loud shout'*: To call everybody's attention and reach all of Yahweh's creation. *'Like the roar of a lion'*: Not only his shout was very loud, but also full of power and authority. *'The voice of the Lord <voices of the seven thunders> spoke'*: In Psalm 29 "The voice of the Lord" (which is repeated seven times) is traditionally called "The seven thunders of the Lord," that is, of Yahweh. Here, the voice John hears is the voice of Jesus Christ.

10:4. *'When the Lord <seven thunders> spoke, I was about to write'*: When John sees the open scroll and hears the voice of the Lord, he prepares to make a record of it. *'Seal up what the Lord has <seven thunders have> said and do not write it down'*: The fact that he is ordered not to make the record means that John has been given a revelation which, at least at the moment, he is not to pass on. This is the same situation as that of Paul when he says that he "heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell" (2 Corinthians 12:4). In other terms, what the Lord has said to John will not be revealed until the proper time.

10:5. *'Raised his right hand'*: The angel is to make a particularly important announcement, so he makes it in the form of an oath. To rise the right hand has always been a gesture of oath taking, as in the oath of Abraham to the king of Sodom (Genesis 14:22) and in Yahweh's promise (recited by Moses in "The Song of Moses." Exodus 15:1-18) to all the people of Israel (Deuteronomy 32:1-43).

10:6. *'He swore by Him who lives for ever and ever, who...'*: An oath involving the Name and the attributes of Yahweh, which is intended to be of special encouragement to the suffering faithful in a context of impending persecution and martyrdom. *'No more delay'*: In vv. 6:9-11, the martyrs were told to wait for a little longer, but now the time for the end of the Roman persecution and for the punishment of the persecutors is actually coming.

10:7. *'When the last <seventh> angel will sound his trumpet'*: Described in vv. 11:15-19. *'The plan <mystery> of Yahweh will be accomplished'*: In apocalyptic thought mysteries were secrets preserved in Heaven and revealed to the apocalyptist. Here the secret is the plan of Yahweh with His final victory over the forces of evil and the everlasting duration of His Kingdom. Beyond the strangeness of the picture stands the truth that history is moving towards the inevitable triumph of Yahweh and that evil, even if it is presently rampant, cannot in the end be victorious.

10:8-10. *'Go, take the scroll'*: John is told twice to "take" the scroll which, even if it is for him, is not handed to him. The meaning is that Yahweh's revelation is never forced on any man; he must personally and actively take it. *'Take it and read <eat> it'*: This picture comes from Ezechiel 3:1-3, who was told to eat the scroll and to fill his stomach with it. The meaning is that John has to fully understand the message of the scroll. In both cases the idea is the same; the messenger of Yahweh has to take Yahweh's message into his very life and being. *'It will turn you sad <your stomach sour>, but to you <in your mouth> it will be a bliss <as sweet as honey>'*: The message of the little scroll, a bliss to John who received it, will announce much suffering, which will make John sad. The sweetness of Yahweh's words is a recurring thought in Scripture: The judgment of Yahweh is sweeter than honey (Psalm 19:10); so are the words of Yahweh (Psalm 119:103). *'It was a bliss to me <tested as sweet as honey in my mouth>, but when I had read <eaten> it, I <my stomach> turned sad <sour>'*: To John the scroll was sweet and bitter at the same time. Sweet because it was a privilege for him to be chosen as the messenger of Yahweh and admitted to the secrets of Heaven. Bitter because it was a painful duty to have to forecast the coming of so much suffering, even if there was triumph at its end.

10:11. *'Prophecy again'*: The prophecies which will follow the sounding of the last <seventh> trumpet and which are reported in v. 11:15. *'Many peoples... kings'*: The message of the little scroll regards all the peoples of the Earth.

The <two> witnesses. (11:1-14)

The last <seventh> trumpet. (11:15-19)

(11:1)I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the Temple of Yahweh and the altar, and count the worshippers there. (2)But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Pagans. They will trample on the Holy City for a number of months. (3)And I will give power to my witnesses, and they will prophesy for a number of days, clothed in sackcloth." (4)These are the olive trees and the lampstands that stand before the Lord of the Earth. (5)If anyone tries to harm them, Yahweh will punish their enemies. For anyone who wants to harm them must be judged. (6)Yahweh will shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and He will turn the waters into blood and strike the Earth with every kind of plague as often as He wants.

(7)Now when they have finished their testimony, the Antichrist will attack them, and overpower and kill them. (8)Their bodies will lie in the street of

the Great City, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. (9) For a number of days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. (10) The inhabitants of the Earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these martyrs had tormented those who live on the Earth.

(11) But after a number of days a breath of life from Yahweh will enter them, and they will stand on their feet, and terror will strike those who see them. (12) Then they will hear a loud voice from Heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they will go up to Heaven in a cloud, while their enemies will look on.

(13) At that very hour there will be a severe earthquake and a tenth of the City will collapse. Many thousand people will be killed in the earthquake, and the survivors will be terrified and will give glory to [Yahweh] the God of Heaven.

(14) The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

(15) The last angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in Heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world will become the Kingdom of [Yahweh] our Lord and of His Christ, and He will reign for ever and ever."

(16) And the elders, who were seated on their thrones before Yahweh, adored and worshipped Yahweh, (17) saying: "We give thanks to You, [Yahweh] Lord Almighty, the One who is and who was, because You will take Your great power and will begin to reign.

(18) The nations will be angry; and Your judgment will come. The time will come for judging the dead, and for rewarding Your servants the martyrs and Your saints and those who reverence Your Name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the Earth."

(19) Then Yahweh's Temple in Heaven will be opened, and within His Temple will be seen the Ark of His Covenant. And there will come flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hail-storm.

Chapter 11: This chapter contains a kind of summary of the rest of the book of the Revelation. In chapter 10 John has read the little scroll and understood the message of Yahweh; and now he sets it down in broad lines (the details will follow in the rest of the book.) That is the reason why from v. 11:11 (see App.) in his narrative he speaks of things still in the future as if they were past. The scheme of this chapter, which is also the scheme of the rest of the book, is as follows:

- In vv. 11:1-2 there is the picture of the measuring of the Temple. The measuring is closely parallel to the sealing; it assures divine protection to the faithful.
- In vv. 11:3-6 there is the picture of the witnesses, the martyrs.
- In vv. 11:7-10 there is the first emergence from the Abyss of the Antichrist (*), with his initial temporary victory which results in the martyrdom of the witnesses.
- In vv. 11:11-13 there is the call to eternal life of the martyrs.
- In vv. 11:15-19 there is the triumph of Yahweh, with the establishment of the Kingdom of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ.

(*) Antichrist: The Antichrist is not actually Satan, the chief rebel angel, but a visible figure on Earth in which the very essence of Satan has become incarnate. Of the whole New Testament, the idea of the Antichrist occurs only in the Letters of John (1 John 2:18; 2:22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). In the Revelation (See App. v. 11:7) there is the picture of the Beast from the Abyss, which depicts the Antichrist as coming from Hell supplied with a terribly destructive, but limited in time, power. In John's mind the Antichrist is the great persecutor on Earth of the Christian Church. On the contrary, the great red dragon of ch. 12, who is ultimately defeated and cast out of Heaven, is definitely identified as Satan in v. 12:9.

11:1. 'A reed': A bamboo-like cane that grew in abundance along the banks of the Jordan. Straight and light, the reed was used as a measuring rod, about ten feet and four inches long (315 cm). In Hebrew, the word for "measuring rod" is literally "reed." *'I... was told':* By Jesus Christ, the Lord, as in the case of the personal revelation -the one he was told not to record- given to John by the Lord in v. 10:4. *'Go and measure the Temple of Yahweh...':* The picture of measuring is common in the visions of the prophets (Ezekiel 40:3; Zechariah 1:16). Here, the instruction to measure the Temple and to count the faithful is equivalent to the order, given in v. 7:3, of putting a seal, for their spiritual protection, on those faithful to Yahweh. *'Temple':* This, as all the 16 references to the Temple in the Revelation, uses the word that designates the inner shrine -the Tabernacle, the place where Yahweh's presence dwells- rather than the whole Temple.

Note: The Revelation was written about the year 95 AD, and the Temple in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by the Romans in the year 70 AD, so it seems odd that John has to measure the Temple 25 years after its destruction. But, as usual, John takes from the Scriptures an already existing picture and assigns it a completely different, spiritual, meaning. When he speaks

of the Temple, he speaks of the Christian Church, the People of Yahweh. Then, the measuring of the Temple represents the spiritual protection given to the People of Yahweh by Jesus Christ.

11:2. *'But exclude the outer court'*: The Court of the Pagans, where the Pagans were allowed to go and worship Yahweh. *'Do not measure it'*: In other terms, the instruction is to exclude the Pagans, who here are seen as enemies, from Yahweh's protection. *'It has been given to the Pagans. They will trample on the Holy City'*: In effect, Jesus said: "Jerusalem will be trampled on by the pagans until the times of the pagans are fulfilled" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Signs of the end of the age. Lk 21:24). The Pagans were first given a spiritual opportunity (by being allowed to enter in the outer court of the Temple) and then the domination of Jerusalem (with the Roman conquest in 70 AD). *'For a number of <42> months'*: The Pagans' domination will end when Yahweh's purpose for them has been fulfilled. The background of this picture comes from the time of suffering under the Syrian tyrant, Antiochus Epiphanes, when Jerusalem was invaded and the Temple desecrated (from June 168 to December 165 BC: three and a half years = 42 months). The same length of time is also designated as "1,260 days" (See App. 1 v. 11:3) and as "a time, times and half a time," or "a year plus two years plus half a year" (see App. 1 v. 12:14; Daniel 7:25; 12:7). This length of time became a conventional symbol for a limited period of unrestrained wickedness.

11:3. *'I will give power'*: Jesus Christ gives the capability to speak in his name and the strength to stand outrage and persecution. *'My <two> witnesses'*: It was always part of the Jewish belief that Yahweh -in this case, the Christ- would send His special messengers during periods of particular distress and suffering. They have the task of prophesying; that is, of referring the Word of Yahweh applied to the situation of their time. The number of the witnesses, two, gives full and legal validity to their testimony (Deuteronomy 19:15). *'For a number of <1,260> days'*: For the whole period of terror and destruction. *'Clothed in sack-cloth'*: A coarse, dark cloth woven from the hair of goats or camels. It was worn as a sign of mourning and penitence, cited in both the Old and the New Testament (Joel 1:13; Jonah 3:5-6; The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Woe on unrepentant cities. Mt 11:21; Lk 10:13). This traditional picture identifies them as men sent by Yahweh.

11:4. *'The <two> olive trees'*: Symbols of peace. *'The <two> lampstands'*: Symbols of the Christian Communities. In v. 1:20 (see App. 1) Jesus Christ explains that: "The seven lampstands are the seven churches." As a lampstand physically holds a light, so a Church spiritually holds the Light of Jesus Christ. This imagery emphasizes that the power for effective testimony

is supplied by the spiritual communion with Yahweh and Jesus Christ. *'Lord of the Earth'*: Jesus Christ.

11:5-6. The witnesses, who are totally unknown, represent all the faithful who are martyred for the proclamation of the Word of Yahweh. *'If... Yahweh will punish <fire comes... and devours> their enemies'*: See Elijah's encounters with the messengers of Ahaziah (2 Kings 1:10-12). *'For <This is how> anyone... must be judged <die>'*: In the sense of undergoing Yahweh's judgment and punishment (in this life or in the next). *'Yahweh will <these men have power to> shut up the sky'*: See the drought in the days of Elijah (1 Kings 17:1). *'He will <they have power to> turn the waters into blood and <to> strike... as often as He wants <they want>'*: Remindful of how Yahweh used Moses to bring the plagues on the Egyptians (Exodus 7:17-21).

11:7. *'Finished their testimony'*: At the end of the "1,260 days." *'The Anti-christ <beast that comes up from the Abyss>'*: This is the first mention in the Revelation of the main opponent of Yahweh's people on Earth, traditionally called the Antichrist, who is always a man acting under the total control of Satan. The Abyss was conceived by the Jews as the subterranean place of confinement of Satan and the evil spirits (It appears in: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The healing of a demon-possessed man. Lk 8:31, where the Legion of demons ask Jesus "not to order them to go into the Abyss"). In the Revelation, their final place of punishment is the "lake of fire," that is, hell. *'Will attack... and kill them'*: All the martyrs suffer the "same" fate as their Lord Jesus Christ, as declared in v. 11:8.

11:8. *'Their bodies will lie in the street'*: For the Jews, the denial of burial was terrible (Psalm 79:3). *'Great City'*: Jerusalem. "Sodom" refers to its low level of morality (Isaiah 1:9-10), "Egypt" emphasizes its oppression of the Christians. *'Were also their Lord was crucified'*: Jesus Christ was crucified in Jerusalem.

11:9. *'For a number of <three and a half> days'*: A short time, still carrying the symbolic meaning of a limited period of unrestrained wickedness. *'Men from every people...'*: The same meaning as the "inhabitants of the Earth" of v. 11:10. *'Refuse them burial'*: Practically, a repetition of the first part of v. 11:8.

11:10. *'Inhabitants of the Earth'*: A regular designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh. *'Will gloat... will celebrate'*: Even worse than leaving the dead on the street, such will be the hatred of the people for the martyrs that they will regard their death as a reason for celebration. *'These martyrs <two prophets> had tormented...'*: Their message, and their example, was a message of condemnation; to listen to it was like a spiritual torture and so the

people of Jerusalem will be glad when they are killed (v. 11:7). *'Those who live on the Earth'*: The same meaning as the "inhabitants of the Earth."

11:11. *'After a number of <the three and a half> days'*: As in v. 11:9, it indicates a short time, carrying the symbolic meaning of a limited period of unrestrained wickedness. *'A breath of life from Yahweh will enter <entered> them'*: This picture comes from Ezechiel 37:5-10. The meaning is that all the martyrs will receive eternal life from Yahweh, as declared by Jesus Christ: "The Father raises the dead and gives them life. Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Life through the Son. Jn 5:21-24). *'They will stand <stood> on their feet'*: In Heaven, at the presence of Yahweh and of His Son, as the "great number" and the "great multitude" of vv. 7:4,9. *'Terror will strike <struck> those who see <saw> them'*: All the people who understand the wickedness of their actions against the witnesses of Yahweh will be terrified by the thought of their judgment.

11:12. *'They will hear <heard> a loud voice'*: The voice of Jesus Christ, telling them to come near the Throne of Yahweh. *'They will go <went> up to Heaven...'*: Figurative of their full acceptance in Heaven: "Whoever acknowledges me before men, I, the Son of Man, will also acknowledge him before... my Father in Heaven" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus sends out the Twelve. Mt 10:32; Lk 12:8). *'While their enemies will look <looked> on'*: Figurative of their punishment. This picture reminds that of the rich man looking up to Lazarus from his place of punishment (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The rich man and Lazarus. Lk 16:19-31).

11:13. *'There will be <was> a severe earthquake. A tenth of the City will collapse <collapsed>. Many <seven> thousand people will be <were> killed'*: In these verses, as usual, John uses all the classical terrifying images typical of the Day of the Lord (the end of time), to give a picture of the terror and the suffering to come. Figuratively, the earthquake confirms to all that Yahweh is behind the martyrs. *'The survivors will be <were> terrified'*: All the people who understand the wickedness of their actions against the witnesses of Yahweh will be terrified by the thought of their judgment. *'Will give <gave> glory to [Yahweh] the God of Heaven'*: Both an act of repentance and the terrified realization that Yahweh, and so Jesus Christ, not the Antichrist, is the true Lord of all men.

11:14. *'Second woe'*: The second of the three woes announced by the eagle in v. 8:13.

11:15. *'The last <seventh> angel sounded...'*: The series of trumpet blasts is now continued (the second last was in v. 9:13) and completed. *'Loud voices*

in Heaven': The voices of the angels messengers. *'The kingdom of the world will <has> become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ'*: This is a quotation from Daniel 7:27, declaring that all the people of the Earth will at the end be part of the Kingdom of Heaven. *'He will reign for ever and ever'*: This, and the previous declaration, are very important for the moral of the suffering faithful.

11:16. *'The <twenty-four> elders... adored <fell on their faces> and worshipped Yahweh'*: The twenty-four elders, who appear frequently in the Revelation, are the symbolic representation of all the people of Yahweh.

11:17. *'We give thanks...'*: In view of Yahweh's final victory the elders, that is, the whole Church, break out in thanksgiving. *'The One who is and who was'*: In vv. 1:4,8; 4:8, Yahweh is also the "One who will be <is to come>." This is now omitted because His Reign is here pictured as having begun. *'You will take <have taken> Your great power and will begin <have begun> to reign'*: Yahweh will use His power to put an end to evil on Earth and to establish His Kingdom, as already stated in v. 11:15.

11:18. *'The nations will be <were> angry'*: This picture comes from Psalm 48:4 and announces that there will be a final attack of the hostile powers against Yahweh and His people. *'Your judgment will <wrath has> come'*: All the hostile powers will be finally defeated and then subjected to Yahweh's judgment, which will be carried out by Jesus Christ, to whom Yahweh has given the task of judging all men. *'The time will <has> come for judging the dead'*: The judgment which was requested by the martyrs in v. 6:10, will finally be carried out. *'Your servants the martyrs <prophets>'*: The witnesses-martyrs depicted in vv. 11:3-12. *'Your saints and those...'*: All the faithful of every nation, time, and social position. *'Destroying those...'*: Sending to the deserved punishment all the evil forces presently operating on Earth. They "destroy" the Earth because their evil influence makes it very different from how Yahweh would like the Earth to be.

11:19. *'Yahweh's Temple in Heaven will be <was> opened and... will be <was> seen the Ark of His Covenant'*: The Ark of the Covenant was in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, the inside of which no ordinary person had ever seen, and into which even the High Priest went only on the Day of Atonement. This means that in the Kingdom of Yahweh, Yahweh Himself will be seen by everybody, and that everybody will have the possibility of standing in His presence. *'There will come <came> lightning.... hailstorm'*: As all throughout the Revelation, John is using imagery regularly connected in the Old Testament with the presence of Yahweh, and symbolic of His majesty and power.

Christ's Mother <the Woman> and Satan <the Dragon>. (12:1-17)

(12:1) A great and wondrous sign appeared in Heaven: a Woman luminous as the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of stars on her head. (2) She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. (3) Then another sign appeared in Heaven: a terrible figure, Satan, endowed with total knowledge and huge powers and absolute control over the kingdoms. (4) His actions swept a part of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the Earth. Satan stood near the Woman who was about to give birth, so that he might kill her child the moment he was born. (5) She gave birth to a Son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with protective strength. And her child was taken up to Yahweh and to His Throne. (6) The Woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by Yahweh, where she might be taken care of for a number of days.

(7) And there was war in Heaven. Michael and his angels fought against Satan, and Satan and his angels fought back. (8) But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in Heaven. (9) The Evil One was hurled down -that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the Earth, and his angels with him.

(10) Then I heard a loud voice in Heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of [Yahweh] our God, and the authority of His Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before [Yahweh] our God day and night, has been hurled down.

(11) They overcame him by the Blood of the Christ and by the Word of their testimony; they were not fond of their lives so much as to shrink from death.

(12) Therefore rejoice, you Heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the Earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

(13) When Satan saw that he had been hurled to the Earth, he pursued the Woman who had given birth to the male child. (14) The Woman was protected by the arms of Yahweh, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a period of time, out of Satan's reach. (15) At that time from his own Satan sent a great many, to overtake the Woman and kill her. (16) But the Earth helped the Woman by opening its mouth and swallowing all that Satan had sent. (17) Then Satan was enraged at the Woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring -those who obey Yahweh's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

12:1. *'A great... sign appeared in Heaven'*: Another vision that John, as usual, describes using images taken from the Old Testament. *'A Woman'*: She is undoubtedly the Mother of Jesus Christ, Yahweh's Messiah. *'<Clothed with> the sun. The moon under her feet. A crown of <twelve> stars'*: This is the picture which justifies the titles of "Regina Coeli" and "Regina Mundi" given by the Roman Catholic Church to Mary, the Mother of Jesus Christ. John has taken the particulars of this image from Genesis 1:16-18 and from Psalm 136:8-9, which tell that "the sun governs the day" and "the moon, helped by the stars, governs the night." It is clear, by John's imagery, that the Woman, by generating Yahweh's Messiah, has "assumed the government" of the day and the night, that is, of the whole world. *'Luminous as <clothed with> the sun'*: The Woman shares the luminosity of the vision of Yahweh on His Throne described in v. 4:3. *'The moon under her feet'*: By sharing the luminosity of the vision of Yahweh, the Woman is given the status of the highest light, the sun. As such the lesser light, the moon, lies at her feet. *'<Twelve> stars'*: They represent the twelve tribes of Israel, that is, all the people of Yahweh.

12:2. *'She... cried out in pain as she was about...'*: After the banishment from the Garden of Eden, Eve and all the women -even this particular one-give birth with great pain (Genesis 3:16).

12:3. *'A terrible figure, Satan <an enormous red dragon>'*: The red dragon is identified in v. 12:9 as Satan. Dragons and other huge wild animals abound in the mythology of the ancient people. In the Old Testament they are normally used metaphorically to depict the enemies of Yahweh and of Israel (Psalm 74:14; Isaiah 27:1; Ezekiel 29:3). *'Endowed with total knowledge <with seven heads> and huge powers <ten horns> and absolute control over the kingdoms <seven crowns on his heads>'*: At the beginning Satan -Lucifer- was given all the knowledge and the power for implementing Yahweh's Creation. After his rebellion against Yahweh, he became the "Accuser" or the "Tempter." Then, after Adam and Eve's initial sin, Satan became the actual ruler of the Earth; especially the ruler -the power behind-the people who have a position of authority (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 6)

12:4. *'His actions <tail> swept a part <third> of the stars out of the sky'*: Satan's actions against Yahweh's believers cause great damages, so great that John describes them in galactic terms. *'Satan <the dragon> stood near <in front of> the Woman... so that he might kill <devour> her child'*: Clearly Satan, who knew that the new born was to be Yahweh's Messiah, tried to kill him when he was the most defenseless; at the crucial and dangerous moment of his birth.

12:5. *'A Son, a male child'*: The Messiah. *'Will rule all the nations'*: Jesus Christ's action is for the salvation of all mankind. *'With protective strength <an iron scepter>'*: Symbolic of the strength of his rule. *'Taken <snatched> up to Yahweh'*: At the moment of his Ascension, Jesus Christ was "taken up" to Heaven where he took seat at the Throne with Yahweh his Father (as stated in vv. 5:6; 7:17). To note that this verse mentions only the beginning (for the Jews, life began at birth) and the end (when his action of salvation was concluded) of Jesus Christ's presence on Earth; the most important moments.

12:6. *'The Woman fled into the desert'*: This is the flight of Mary and Joseph with the baby Jesus into Egypt to escape the murderous intent of Herod. In the Gospel, we can read, "An angel of the Lord... said, 'Take the child...and escape to Egypt'" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The escape to Egypt. Mt 2:13). *'A place prepared for her... by Yahweh, where...'*: Yahweh, through an angel, gave the instructions to Joseph when and where to go. *'A number of <1,260> days'*: This length of time is a traditional symbol for an undefined but limited period of trouble or of suffering.

12:7. *'There was war in Heaven'*: In the Old Testament, Satan -in spite of his rebellion against Yahweh- was still an angel under Yahweh's command and with access to His presence (Job 1:6-9; 2:1-6; Zechariah 3:1-2). In effect the word "satan" originally meant simply "accuser." In the Old Testament Satan was a cynical prosecutor bringing and inventing charges against men before Yahweh (Job 1:11-12). But he still needed Yahweh's authorization for putting men to test (Job 2:1-6; Zechariah 3:1-2). It is only in the New Testament that he becomes the Satan we know -in Greek "Diabolos," the "Slanderer." *'Michael and his angels fought against Satan <the dragon>'*: In this passage John clearly affirms that to prevent Satan from killing the new-born Jesus Christ's, all the angels of Heaven, under the command of the archangel Michael, the "great protector" (Daniel 12:1), had to fight against Satan and his followers.

12:8. *'They lost their place in Heaven'*: After Michael had defeated Satan in this heavenly warfare, Satan -and his angels as well- lost what he still had: the access to the presence of Yahweh.

12:9. *'The Evil One <great dragon> was hurled... to the Earth'*: His final exclusion from Heaven is an explanation of Satan's intense hostility against Yahweh's people (vv. 12:12,17), when Satan became the absolute enemy of Yahweh and men, "the Evil One." And he can be called even more "the Ruler of the World" because, from the moment he was finally cast out of Heaven, he exerts all his evil influence directly among men. *'Ancient serpent'*: The "serpent" of 'The fall of man' (Genesis ch. 3).

12:10. *'I heard'*: In vv. 12:10-12 there is the song of the glorified martyrs when Satan is cast out of Heaven. *'A loud voice'*: Of one of the martyrs, as he speaks of "the accuser of our brothers." *'Accuser'*: Satan in Hebrew means "accuser" (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5; Zechariah 3:1).

12:11. *'They overcame him...'*: All Christian martyrs, who were able to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and to his teaching. *'By the Blood of the Christ <Lamb>'*: Helped by the power of Jesus Christ's action of salvation, which was already mentioned in vv. 1:5; 5:9; 7:14. *'By the Word of their testimony'*: Helped by the Word of Jesus Christ -his teaching- which is also the Word of Yahweh. *'They were not fond of their lives so much as...'*: The martyrs did not consider physical life more important than loyalty to Yahweh. As Jesus said: "The man who is fond of his life will lose it, while the man who is not fond of his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus predicts his death. Jn 12:25). Similar words are in: Jesus sends out the Twelve. (Mt 10:39), in: Jesus predicts his death. (Mk 8:35; Mt 16: 25; Lk 9: 24), and in: The coming of the Kingdom of Yahweh. (Lk 17:33).

12:12. *'Therefore rejoice, you Heavens and you... But woe to the Earth... the devil... is filled with fury... his time is short'*: This passage confirms to the suffering faithful to whom John was writing that Jesus Christ's coming had already caused the expulsion of Satan from Heaven and that, even if his powers on Earth were still very strong, he would have only a limited time of action (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4).

12:13. *'Satan <the dragon>... pursued the Woman'*: Satan, excluded from Heaven, tried to find and harm Jesus Christ in his refuge in the desert of Egypt. In effect, it is quite likely that Herod, after ordering the killing of the boys in Bethlehem, realized that the one he was looking for had escaped to Egypt and sent his people there to find and kill him.

12:14. *'The Woman was protected by the arms of Yahweh <given the two wings of a great eagle>'*: In the Old Testament the eagle's wings are the symbol of the protective arms of Yahweh (Exodus 19:4; Deuteronomy 32: 11; Isaiah 40:31). Either they could stay in one place only or had to flee continuously, Mary, Joseph and Jesus were protected by Yahweh who, clearly, instructed them how to elude all perils. *'A period of time <a time, times and half a time>'*: This is the period of time spent in the desert, first appearing in v. 12:6, a length of time which is a traditional symbol for an undefined but limited period of trouble or of suffering. *'Out of Satan's <the serpent's> reach'*: Actually, the people sent by Herod did not find Jesus.

12:15. *'From his own Satan sent a great many <mouth the serpent spewed water like a river> to... kill her <sweep her away with the torrent>'*: Plenty of people were sent to find and eliminate Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

12:16. *'The Earth helped... by swallowing all <the river> that Satan <the dragon> had sent <spewed out of his mouth>':* Jesus, Mary and Joseph had fled to the desert of Egypt, and the desert is notoriously a dangerous place for men to cross. The meaning is that Yahweh's protection came (one or many times) through the desert itself, that is, its sand storms, lack of water, scorching sun and high temperature.

12:17. *'Satan <the dragon> was enraged':* For his failure in finding and killing Jesus Christ. *'The rest of her offspring':* Being the mother of Jesus Christ, Mary is spiritually the mother of all Christians. *'Testimony of Jesus':* The testimony that Jesus bore to Yahweh, his Father. The Bible never, as it is, makes God of Jesus; rather it stresses his complete dependence on Yahweh. It's Yahweh's truth that Jesus brings to men; and that is precisely why his testimony is unique and final.

The emblem of Rome <beast> out of the sea. (13:1-10)

The emblem of the Antichrist <beast> out of the land. (13:11-18)

(13:1) And I stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw an emblem of Rome coming out of the sea. It had the symbols of great knowledge and great power with absolute authority, and on each symbol a blasphemous name.

(2) The emblem I saw symbolized Rome's cruelty, huge strength and high pride. Satan gave Rome his power and his throne and great authority. (3) One of the symbols of power of the emblem seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed Rome. (4) Men worshipped Satan because he had given authority to Rome, and they also worshipped Rome and asked, "Who is like Rome? Who can make war against her?"

(5) Rome was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise her authority for a period of time. (6) She opened her mouth to blaspheme Yahweh, and to slander His Name and His dwelling place and those who live in Heaven. (7) She was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And she was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. (8) All inhabitants of the Earth worshipped Rome -all whose names have not been written from the creation of the world in the Book of Life belonging to the Christ that was sacrificed.

(9) He who has an ear, let him hear. (10) If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the faithful.

(11) Then I saw another emblem, of the Antichrist, coming out of the land. It had the symbols of gentle power, but it spoke like a devil. (12) The Anti-

christ exercised all the authority of Rome on her behalf, and made the Earth and its inhabitants worship Rome. (13) And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from Heaven to Earth in full view of men. (14) Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of Rome, he deceived the inhabitants of the Earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of Rome. (15) He was given power to enforce the cult of Rome, so that he could charge and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. (16) He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a certificate of compliance, (17) so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the certificate, which is the name of the Antichrist or the number of his name.

(18) This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the Antichrist, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

13:1. *'I stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw...':* The general meaning of this vision, in which John finds himself standing near the sea, is that Satan -cast out of Heaven and aware of having only a limited time at his disposal- is determined to do as much damage as he can, delegating on Earth his power to the two entities <beasts> who are the central figures of this chapter. *'An emblem of Rome <a beast>':* This emblem symbolizes Rome, the Roman Empire -the incarnation of evil, with its deification of secular authority- which John describes in terms coming from Daniel 7:3-7 (a vision of four great beasts representing four powerful world empires.) *'Coming out of the sea':* Actually, the Roman army came to Palestine from the sea. *'It <he> had the symbols of great knowledge <seven heads> and great power <ten horns>, with absolute authority <ten crowns on his horns>':* Satan had given the Roman Empire his knowledge, power and authority (to remember that, as seen in v. 12:3, at the beginning Satan -Lucifer at the time- was given all the knowledge and the power for implementing Yahweh's Creation.) Clearly, Satan gives only what knowledge, power and authority the recipient needs to carry out his part of Satan's plans. *'On each symbol <head> a blasphemous name':* With the spreading of the Emperor worship, Roman Emperors assumed titles of deity as "Dominus et Deus noster" (Our Lord and God); titles blasphemous to both Jews and Christians.

13:2. *'The emblem <beast>... symbolized Rome's cruelty <resembled a leopard>, huge strength <but had feet like those of a bear> and high pride <a mouth like that of a lion>':* These were the main characteristics of the Roman Empire, which had the vigilance, craft and cruelty of a leopard; the crushing strength of a bear; the powerful and proud appearance of a lion. *'Satan <the dragon> gave Rome <the beast> his power and his thro-*

ne and great authority': The power, to conquer and subject great part of the world; the throne, for the Emperors to be worshipped as deities; the great authority, for spreading and enforcing the Roman Law and the Emperor worship all around the Empire.

13:3. *'One of the symbols of power <heads> of the emblem <beast> seemed to have had a fatal wound, but... healed'*: Most probably this healed wound represents the defeat suffered by the Roman Army at the hands of the Parthians in AD 62. The wound to Rome, to her power and prestige "had been healed" when, later, the Roman Army defeated the Parthians. *'The whole world was astonished'*: Of such a huge and long-lasting Empire. *'Followed Rome <the beast>'*: All people followed the rules, and the Emperor worship, imposed by Rome.

13:4. *'Men worshipped Satan <the dragon> because he had given authority to Rome <the beast>'*: Satan wants people to worship idols and false gods, because whoever worships them actually worships him (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 6). *'Worshipped Rome <the beast>'*: By worshipping the Roman Emperor. *'Who is like Rome <the beast>? Who can make war against her <him>?'*: No nation was as powerful as Rome; all her enemies had been defeated, even the famous and terrible Parthians.

13:5. *'Rome <the beast> was given'*: This phrase, repeated three times, plus the "Satan <the dragon> gave Rome <the beast>" of v. 13:2, emphasize that Rome was actually under Satan's control. *'A mouth'*: Figuratively, the mouth of the Roman organization issuing the decree of compulsory Emperor worship and all Roman laws. *'Proud words'*: Proud of herself, of her power. To remember that pride had been the main sin of Satan against Yahweh. *'Blasphemies'*: The formula of the Emperor worship. *'Her <his> authority for a period of time <forty-two months>'*: The authority of Rome over all the people of the Empire was not to last for ever, but only till when Yahweh's purposes have been fulfilled, as per His plans.

13:6. *'She <he> opened her <his> mouth to blaspheme Yahweh, and to slander His Name and...'*: The power of the Roman Empire and the institution of the Emperor worship were truly a blasphemy against Yahweh, Heaven, the angels and all the faithful.

13:7. *'She <he> was given'*: As already stated in v. 13:5, Rome was actually under Satan's control. *'Power to make war against...'*: As already stated in v. 12:17, Satan went heavily against the people of Yahweh. *'And to conquer them'*: Rome made war against Israel, "the saints," conquered the Jewish nation and destroyed Jerusalem. *'She <he> was given authority over every tribe...'*: Over all the nations of the Empire.

13:8. *'Inhabitants of the Earth'*: A regular designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh. *'Worshipped <will worship> Rome <the beast>'*: Clearly, all the non-Jew and non-Christian subjects of the Empire had nothing against the Emperor worship. *'Written from the creation of the world'*: The meaning is not that Yahweh has chosen His own from the beginning, but that He knows who will be those people. *'Book of Life'*: In the New Testament the "Book of Life" refers to Yahweh's list of those destined to eternal life. To have a man's name erased from this book would indicate the loss of the possibility of entering straight away into the Kingdom of Yahweh. Of course, all the "erased" ones will have the possibility to be included again by accepting, in this life or in the next one, the redemption offered them by Jesus Christ (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4). *'The Christ <Lamb> who was sacrificed <slain>'*: Jesus Christ gave his life as a sacrifice for the final salvation of all men.

13:9. *'He who has an ear...'*: These are the same words used at the end of all the letters sent to the Churches but, here, they are introductory to the message of the next verse (v. 13:10).

13:10. *'If anyone is to go...'*: This is a quotation of Jeremiah 15:2. *'If anyone is to be...'*: This is a quotation of Jesus' words: "All who draw the sword will die by the sword" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus arrested. Mt 26:52-54; Jn 18:11). The meaning is that, whatever is involved in following Jesus Christ, the Christian must accept it. *'Patient endurance and faithfulness'*: Christianity can never be defended by force. The weapons that the Christians can use are endurance and loyalty. This does not simply mean to endure passively, but to courageously accept the worst that life can do in the name of Jesus Christ. It is an intolerable paradox to defend the Gospel of affection by using violence.

13:11. *'Another emblem, of the Antichrist, <beast>'*: This emblem symbolizes the Antichrist, the religious organization which -being in the service of secular authorities, which are under Satan's control- is actually acting against Yahweh and His people. *'Coming out of the land'*: The Antichrist is always a man, as such coming "out of the land." *'It <he> had the symbols of gentle power <two horns like a lamb>'*: The Antichrist always attempts to appear as gentle and harmless as Jesus Christ is described to be in v. 5:6. *'It <he> spoke like a devil <dragon>'*: Jesus had warned his people against false prophets: "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: A tree and its fruit. Mt 7:15).

13:12. *'The Antichrist <he> exercised all the authority of Rome <the first*

beast > on her <his> behalf': The Antichrist is not a single man, but the one man who, in a certain place, moment and circumstance, exercises his religious authority against the real faith. As such, in the Revelation, it is each single man -Roman or not- who tries to impose the Roman Emperor worship on the Christians. Clearly, this is only one of the Antichrist's activities. For example the High Priest of the Temple, accusing of blasphemy and condemning to death Jesus Christ, was -in that place, moment and circumstance- the Antichrist. *'The Earth'*: The Roman Empire. *'Its inhabitants'*: Equivalent to "Inhabitants of the Earth," that is, hostile to Yahweh. *'Worship Rome <the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed>'*: All this long phrase to avoid writing "Rome."

13:13. *'He performed great and miraculous signs'*: Both in the Old and the New Testament there are warnings against false prophets (Deuteronomy 13:1-3; The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Signs of the end of the age. Mk 13:22; Mt 24:24). *'Fire... from Heaven'*: The highest of the classical miraculous signs. *'In full view of men'*: With plenty of witnesses, as such giving full legal validity to the sign.

13:14. *'The signs he was given power to do on behalf of Rome <the first beast>'*: Supporting in this way the idea of religious compromise and formal acceptance of the Emperor worship. In effect, certain of the Christians advocated the necessity and convenience to fulfill the annual request of the Emperor worship ceremony. *'Inhabitants of the Earth'*: Mankind hostile to Yahweh. *'Image... of Rome <the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived>'*: Actually, the image of the reigning Emperor.

13:15. *'He was given power to enforce the cult <give breath to the image> of Rome <the first beast>'*: The Antichrist is always fully under Satan's control, as is Rome itself. *'So that he could take action <speaking> and cause...'*: Not only the Antichrist had the capability of setting up the Emperor worship and of enforcing it all around the Empire, but also to punish with extreme severity those who, even for religious reasons, did not want to comply. *'<Speaking>'*: Belief in statues that could speak is widely attested in ancient literature. Ventriloquism and other forms of deception were quite common.

13:16. *'Forced everyone...'*: All men, all around the Roman Empire, had to worship the Emperor as a deity. *'A certificate of compliance <mark on his right hand or on his forehead>'*: When a man had burned his pinch of incense to the god-head of Caesar and said, "Caesar is Lord," he was given a certificate attesting that he had done so. But a Christian could obtain this certificate, this mark, only at the cost of denying his faith; of becoming the slave of Satan (slaves were marked on their bodies with the mark of their master.)

13:17. *'No one could... unless he had the certificate <mark>':* Those who refused to comply were subject to social and economic boycott. *'The name of the Antichrist <beast>':* The Emperor worship ceremony and the certificate of compliance were in the name of the reigning Emperor who, in that moment, was the Antichrist. *'Number of his name':* In ancient times the letters of the alphabet served for numbers. Riddles using numerical equivalents for names were popular.

13:18. *'If anyone... let him calculate...':* Clearly there were set rules to work out this kind of calculation. *'The number of the Antichrist <beast>... is man's number':* A confirmation that the Antichrist is actually a man. *'His number is 666':* Clearly, this number identified (to the Christians) and at the same time concealed (to the Romans) the name of the arch-enemy of Christianity. But it is evident that the key to this code was lost very early; for even a great Christian scholar as Irenaeus in the second century did not know who this Antichrist was. Many names were and still are suggested, none of which is convincing. Anyway, the real important point is that John, in the Revelation, was forecasting the coming of a powerful Antichrist and his fellow Christians were well aware of who it was.

The Christ <Lamb> and the great number <144,000>. (14:1-5)

(14:1) Then I looked, and there before me there was the Christ, standing on the New Jerusalem, and with him a great number who had his Name and his Father's Name written on their foreheads. (2) And I heard a sound from Heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. (3) And they sang a new song before the Throne and before the cherubs and the elders. No one could learn the song except the great number who had been redeemed from the Earth. (4) These are those who have been faithful, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Christ wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to Yahweh and the Christ. (5) No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

14:1. *'Then I looked':* In his vision, after standing near the sea (v. 13:1), John finds himself again in Heaven. *'The Christ <Lamb>':* Jesus, a man, the Son of Yahweh, who bears even in Heaven the marks of having been sacrificed -marks which are the indication of how much he had been fond of men- and who stands in the center of the Throne of Yahweh -holding the closest position to Him, the position of maximum power and authority, and also of maximum responsibility and duty. *'Standing on the New Jerusalem <Mount Zion>':* Not the literal Mount Zion (Jerusalem or its south-east

portion), but he heavenly City of Yahweh in which Jesus Christ reigns and of which all Christians are citizens, in contrast with the earthly Jerusalem. *'A great number <144,000>'*: All the "sealed," those who have recognized Jesus Christ (v. 7:4) and all "those who have come out of the great tribulation" (v. 7:14). The number 144,000 stands, not for limitation, but for completeness and perfection. It is made up of 12 multiplied by 12 -the perfect square- rendered all-inclusive by being multiplied by 1,000. In other terms, the number 144,000 tells that the number of the faithful is really very great. *'Had his Name and his Father's Name written on their foreheads'*: The equivalent of having a "seal on the forehead" (v. 7:3) as a sign that they fully belong to Jesus Christ and to Yahweh. This image comes from Ezekiel 9:4. The seal is a sign that those people are under Yahweh's power and authority. Its primary purpose is to recognize and protect the people of Yahweh; it is not that they are to be exempt from the tribulation, but that they are to be brought spiri-tually safe through it. In that time of invasion and devastation the faithful will suffer terribly, but they will come out of it spiri-tually safe because they are protected by Yahweh.

14:2. *'A sound... like the roar of rushing waters'*: A sound having the characteristics of the voice of Jesus Christ. In Ezekiel 43:2, this is the description of the voice of Yahweh; and again, being Yahweh's full representative, Jesus is depicted as having similar characteristics. *'Like a loud peal of thunder'*: As all through the Revelation, John is using imagery regularly connected in the Old testament with the presence of Yahweh, symbolic of His majesty and power. *'Sound... like... harpists playing their harps'*: The harps of v. 5:8 (the ancient harp was a stringed instrument -not the modern one- used to accompany the singing of the Psalms.)

14:3. *'A new song'*: In the Old Testament a new song always celebrated a new act of divine deliverance or blessing. That is also its sense here, as all the singers had been saved by Jesus Christ. *'Before the Throne and... the cherubs <four living creatures> and the elders'*: In v. 5:9 the cherubs and the elders were those who sang a "new song." *'No one could learn the song except the great number <144,000> who...'*: This is a truth of life. To learn certain things a man must be a certain kind of person. These singers were able to learn that song because they had passed through certain experiences; they had suffered, they had lived in loyalty, and they had spiritual-ly grown under the guidance of Jesus Christ's teaching. *'Had been redeemed'*: Actually, "purchased" by the saving action of Jesus Christ and by having accepted his teaching. *'From the Earth'*: From among all men living on the Earth, where Satan fully exerts his evil influence (v. 12:9).

14:4. *'Those who have been faithful <did not defile themselves...>, for they*

kept themselves pure': All the faithful of vv. 7:9 and 7:14. '*<Did not defile... with women>*': This is a symbolic description of the believers who kept themselves from compromising with the pagan world system. It is clear that, even if from very early the Church has obsessively tended to glorify those who have remained celibate, this is far from the teaching of the New Testament. Most of the apostles were married and had children. The same Jesus clearly glorified marriage with his presence and his actions (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus changes water to wine. Jn 2:1-11) and never said that it is better not to marry: "At the beginning... Yahweh the Creator made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man will... be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Divorce. Mk 10:6-9; Mt 19:4-6). '*They follow the Christ <Lamb>*': As his disciples did, as soon as they were called: "Come, and you will see" (Andrew and another of John's disciples: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus' first disciples. Jn 1:39); "You are Simon. You will be called Cephas" (Simon Peter: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus' first disciples. Jn 1:42); "Follow me" (Philip: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael. Jn 1:43). '*Purchased from among men*': Purchased by Jesus Christ's action and sacrifice. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ is central to the New Testament teaching of the liberation of mankind achieved by him. Jesus himself said: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The request of James and John. Mk 10:45; Mt 20:28). '*Offered as firstfruits to Yahweh and the Christ <Lamb>*': The firstfruits were the best of the crop; as such they were offered as a symbolic dedication of the whole harvest to Yahweh. So each Christian who has consecrated his life to Yahweh is offered as a symbolic dedication of all men to Yahweh and to Jesus Christ. **14:5**. '*No lie was found in their mouths*': As Jesus declared in the case of Nathanael: "A true Israelite, in whom there is nothing false" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus calls Philip and Nathanael. Jn 1:47). '*Blameless*': The same as "pure" on v. 14:4.

The three angels. (14:6-13)

(14:6) Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal Gospel to proclaim to those who live on the Earth -to every nation, tribe, language and people. (7) He said in a loud voice, "Fear Yahweh and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made the Heavens, the Earth, the seas and the springs of water."

(8) A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Rome the Great, which made all the nations follow her immoralities."

(9) *A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, "If anyone worships Rome and her Emperor and receives the certificate of compliance, (10) he, too, will have to face Yahweh's punishment, which has been set to the full severity of His justice. He will be severely punished before the holy angels and the Christ. (11) And their punishment will last for very, very long. There is no rest day or night for those who worship Rome and her Emperor, or for anyone who receives the certificate of compliance." (12) This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey Yahweh's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.*

(13) *Then I heard a voice from Heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."*

"Yes," says the Spirit of Yahweh, *"they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."*

14:6. *'The eternal Gospel to proclaim to... every nation...':* The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News that, after his Resurrection, the Kingdom of Yahweh is open for ever to all men of the Earth. As such, the Gospel must be preached and spread in the whole world.

14:7. *'In a loud voice':* To reach all of Yahweh's creation. *'The hour of His judgment has come':* The angel actually announces to the persecuted Christians that Rome's power is going to end in a short time, and that their enemies will have to undergo Yahweh's judgment and punishment. It may seem strange that the same angel carrying the Gospel of affection had also to announce Yahweh's severe judgment. But it is clear that the Gospel is at the same time Good News for those who receive it, and judgment for those who reject it. And the condemnation of those who reject it is much heavier because they were given the chance to accept it. *'Worship Him who made...':* A declaration that everything was created by [Yahweh] the true God, that all men have to abandon their false idols. *'Springs of water':* Clearly, for people living in a mostly arid and desert country, the springs of drinkable water assume more importance than the generic concepts of Heaven, Earth, and sea.

14:8. *'Fallen is Rome <Babylon> the Great':* The name "Babylon" in the Revelation replaces the name of Rome, which was seen as the center of opposition to Yahweh and His people. Here there is the announcement of the imminent end of Rome's power, of the end of the Roman Empire. The title "Babylon the Great" is taken from Daniel 4:30. Ancient Babylon in Mesopotamia was the political, commercial and religious center of a world empire, noted for its luxury and moral decadence. To the early Jew-Christians Babylon seemed to have been reborn in the luxury and immorality of Rome. *'Follow her immoralities <drink the maddening wine of her adulte-*

ries>': As the dominant power, Rome obliged all the nations under her domination to follow her corrupted customs (and the Emperor worship.)

14:9. *'Worship Rome <the beast> and her Emperor <his image>'*: The image of the reigning deified emperor was considered the image of Rome, of the Roman Empire. *'The certificate of compliance <his mark on the forehead or on the hand>'*: All men, all around the Roman Empire, had to worship the Emperor as a deity. When a man had burned his pinch of incense to the god-head of Caesar and said, "Caesar is Lord," he was given a certificate attesting that he had done so. But a Christian could obtain this certificate, this mark, only at the cost of denying his faith; of becoming the slave of Satan (slaves were marked on their bodies with the mark of their master.) Those who refused to comply were subject to social and economic boycott.

14:10. *'Will have to face <drink of the wine of> Yahweh's punishment <fury>, which has been set to the <poured> full severity <into the cup> of His justice <wrath>'*: In the Old Testament Yahweh's wrath is commonly pictured as a cup of wine to be drunk (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15). Here, the meaning is that those people will be judged with maximum severity. *'Will be severely punished <tormented with burning sulfur>'*: The punishment is described in terms of the Old Testament pictures of the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah -which were destroyed by a rain of burning sulfur (Genesis 19:24)- and of the wicked (Psalm 11:6). *'Before <in the presence of> the holy angels and <of> the Christ <Lamb>'*: This doesn't mean that those in Heaven "enjoy" the view of the punished. The New Testament affirms that those in Heaven and those undergoing the punishment of Hell can see each other (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The rich man and Lazarus. Lk 16:19-31). Those in Hell (who are undergoing a formative and redemptive punishment) can see Heaven to be pushed to repent and accept Jesus (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 5). Those in Heaven can see Hell to be ready to rejoice for the repentance of each punished. Jesus said: "There will be more rejoicing in Heaven over sinner who repents than..." (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The parable of the lost sheep. Mt 18:14; Lk 15:7).

14:11. *'Their punishment will last <the smoke of their torment rises> for very, very long <ever and ever>. No rest... for those who worship Rome <the beast> and her Emperor <his image>, or for... who receives the certificate of compliance <mark of his name>'*: Here the angel declares that those who comply with the Emperor worship will deserve a particularly long ("ever and ever") and harsh ("no rest day or night") punishment. Of

course to them, as to any other sinner, is open the door of repentance and acceptance of Jesus' teaching (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4).

14:12. *'Patient endurance and...'*: Christianity can never be defended by force. The weapons that the Christians can use are endurance and loyalty. This does not simply mean to endure passively, but to courageously accept the worst that life can do in the name of Jesus Christ. It is an intolerable paradox to defend the Gospel of affection by using violence.

14:13. *'Blessed are... who die in the Lord'*: The supreme happiness -to be accepted in Heaven in full spiritual communion with Jesus, Yahweh, and all other men- will reward immediately after their physical death those who we-re able to remain faithful to Jesus. *'Says the Spirit of Yahweh'*: As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus, who received it from Yahweh. *'Their labor... their deeds'*: At first this sound as if the Revelation is preaching salvation by works. But we have to be very careful as to what John means by works. In v. 2:2 the deeds of the Ephesians are hard work in setting with perseverance their Church. In v. 2:19 the deeds of the Thyatirans are affection, faith, service and perseverance. So what John means is that those who "die in the Lord" will enjoy the end of their earthly battle with Satan and that their good moral characteristics will always be manifest in their life in Heaven.

The harvest of the Earth. (14:14-20)

(14:14)I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a Son of Man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15)Then another angel came out of the Temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the Earth is ripe." (16)So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the Earth, and the Earth was harvested.

(17)Another angel came out of the Temple in Heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18)Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the Earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." (19)The angel swung his sickle on the Earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of Yahweh's justice. (20)They were trampled in the winepress outside the City, and the essence of their sins flowed out of the press, rising as high as men's heads for all over the Earth.

14:14. *'A white cloud'*: As in v. 1:7, a cloud -white as a symbol of absolute purity- is linked to the coming of Jesus Christ. *'One "like a Son of Man"'*: Jesus Christ, already introduced by this title in v. 1:13. This form comes from Daniel 7:13-14 -where the kingdom, the power and the dominion are given by Yahweh, the Ancient of Days, to one "like a Son of Man," to Jesus Christ- and Jesus used it many times as a Messianic title for himself. *'Crown of gold'*: The "crown of life," not a royal crown, but the crown of victory, the garland or laurel awarded to the winner in athletic contests. *'Sharp sickle'*: A sickle to reap grain, as the generic "the harvest" of v. 14:15 means harvest of grain. The sickle used in Israel for cutting grain was a large iron blade attached to a curved shaft of wood.

14:15. *'Another angel'*: A messenger angel reporting an order from Yahweh. *'Temple'*: The Temple of the New Jerusalem, the heavenly City of Yahweh in which Jesus Christ reigns and of which all Christians are citizens, in contrast with the earthly Jerusalem. *'Called in a loud voice'*: As usual, to be heard by all of Yahweh's creation. *'Take your sickle and reap, because...'*: This is not the final judgment at the end of time, but the judgment requested by the martyrs and then promised to them at the fall of their persecutors, that is, of the Roman Empire (v. 6:11).

The large and inaccurate sickle used by Jesus Christ symbolizes his way of harvesting souls for Heaven: with an ample margin of acceptance, without considering the imperfections of a man during his earthly life, but only his final -good- attitude at the end of it.

14:16. *'He... swung his sickle...'*: By his action, Jesus Christ takes all the good, leaving the wicked to the angel of vv. 14:17-19.

14:17. *'Another angel'*: Not a messenger, but one sent for a specific duty. *'He too had a sharp sickle'*: A smaller sickle, the grape-knife with which the farmers cut the clusters of grapes from the vine (v. 14:18 speaks of gathering "clusters of grapes" only.)

14:18. *'Angel, who had charge of the fire'*: The fire of the "altar of incense" set before the Throne of Yahweh. *'Called in a loud voice'*: As usual, to be heard by all of Yahweh's creation. *'Take your sharp sickle and...'*: This angel has to take all the wicked, the persecutors of the Christian martyrs.

The smaller sickle of the angel symbolizes the method applied for deciding that a man is worthy of the punishment of hell, as the small blade allows for a careful selection of those who are really to be considered out of divine mercy.

14:19. *'The angel swung his sickle...'*: The angel takes all the wicked and "throws" them to their punishment. *'Winepress of Yahweh's justice <wrath>'*: A winepress was a trough hollowed out of the rock, or built of

bricks, with a channel leading to a lower and smaller trough. Grapes were thrown into the upper trough and tramped with bare feet. The juice was collected in the lower trough. The treading of grapes is a common Old Testament figure for the execution of divine justice <wrath> and stands for the suffering of the punishment in hell (Isaiah 63:3; Lamentations 1:15; Joel 3:13).

14:20. *'They were trampled... outside the City'*: They were sent to their punishment in hell, which is far from the City of Yahweh, the heavenly Jerusalem. *'The essence of their sins <blood> flowed out...'*: The punishment of hell, even if very harsh (bloody) and long-lasting, is redemptive. As such, the "essence" of the sins "flows out" of it. The essence of sins can be defined both as the attitude of the sinners against Yahweh, Jesus Christ, and their people; and as the not acceptance of Jesus Christ's offer to repent and be saved. *'Rising as high as men's heads <the horses bridles>'*: The bridles of an horse are about at a man's height. The meaning of this picture is that the "essence" flowing out comes from all kinds of men's sins, from the lowest physical ones to the highest mental and spiritual ones -which clearly have their origin in the head (at the head's height). *'All over the Earth <a distance of 1,600 stadia>'*: This is the "essence" of all the sins of all the sinners of the Earth, where the Earth is represented by Palestine -which approximate length from north to south is 1,600 stadia (180 miles; 290 km).

The <seven> angels with the last <seven> plagues. (15:1-8)

(15:1)I saw in Heaven another great and marvelous sign: the angels with the last plagues -last, because with them Yahweh's justice is completed. (2) And I saw what looked like a sea of glass alight as fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over Rome and her Emperor and over the Antichrist's name. They held harps given them by Yahweh (3)and sang the Song of Moses the servant of Yahweh and the Song of the Christ: "Great and marvelous are Your deeds, [Yahweh] Lord Almighty. Just and true are Your ways, King of the ages. (4)Who will not fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your Name? For You alone are Holy. All nations will come and worship before You. For Your righteous acts have been revealed."

(5)After this I looked and in Heaven the Temple, that is, the Tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. (6)Out of the Temple came the angels with the last plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. (7)Then one of the cherubs gave to the angels the golden bowls filled with the justice of Yahweh, who lives for ever and ever. (8)And the Temple was filled with smoke from the Glory of Yahweh

and from His power, and no one could enter the Temple until the last plagues of the angels were completed.

15:1. *'I saw...'*: This chapter announces the coming of the third and severest series of plagues, which follow the first series announced by the opening of the seals and the second series announced by the sounding of the trumpets. This third and last series develops in chapter 16 with the pouring of the bowls. *'The <seven> angels with...'*: Not the same angels of the presence of v. 8:2, as v. 15:6 only tells that these angels come out of the Temple. *'The <seven> last plagues'*: For the third and last time Yahweh sends a series of warning plagues to men -actually, to the Roman persecutors of His people- to convince them to repent. *'With them Yahweh's justice <wrath> is completed'*: After that, the total destruction of all the obstinate sinners -the fall of the powerful Roman Empire- will be the only possible solution left to Yahweh's justice.

15:2. *'A sea of glass alight as <mixed with> fire'*: As in v. 4:6a, the source of this image is the basin in Jerusalem Temple called "Sea of cast metal" (1 Kings 7:23; 2 Chronicles 4:2), an enormous reservoir of water which replaced the bronze basin of the Tabernacle (Exodus 30:18-19) and was used by the priests for their purification before entering the inner part of the Temple. Likewise in Heaven, those who are approaching Yahweh have to walk on this "Sea" and are purified before they met Him. *'Those... victorious'*: All Christian martyrs, who were able to remain faithful to Jesus Christ and to his teaching. *'Over Rome <the beast> and her Emperor <his image>'*: The image of the reigning deified Emperor was considered the image of Rome, of the Roman Empire. All men, all around the Roman Empire, had to worship the Emperor as a deity, burning a pinch of incense to the godhead of the reigning Emperor and saying, "Caesar is Lord." Those who refused to comply were subject to social and economic boycott. *'And over the Antichrist's <number of his> name'*: As in v. 13:18, this confirms that the Antichrist is actually a man. There were set rules to work out the calculation of the number corresponding to the name of the Antichrist, which identified (to the Christians) and at the same time concealed (to the Romans) the name of the arch-enemy of Christianity. *'Harps'*: The harps of vv. 5:8 and 14:2 (the ancient harp was a stringed instrument -not the modern one- used especially to accompany the singing of the Psalms).

15:3-4. *'Song of Moses'*: The "Song of Moses" (Exodus 15:1-18) was sung on Sabbath evenings in the synagogue to celebrate Israel deliverance from Egypt. *'Song of the Christ <Lamb>'*: This is the song that only the martyrs could learn (v. 14:3), and is almost entirely composed by quotations from the Old Testament.

'Great and marvelous are Your deeds': Psalms 98:1; 111:2; 139:14.

'[Yahweh] Lord Almighty': See comment to v. 1:8.

'Just and true are Your ways': Psalm 145:17.

'King of the ages': Equivalent to the "He who is, was, and will be" of v. 1:4.

'Who will not fear You, O Lord, and bring glory to Your Name?': Psalm 86:9.

'For You alone are Holy': 1 Samuel 2:2; Psalms 99:3; 111:9.

'All nations will come and worship before You': Psalm 86:9.

'For Your righteous acts have been revealed': Psalm 98:2.

There is another important thing which characterizes the song of the triumphant martyrs. There is not a single word in it about their own achievements; from beginning to end their song is an exaltation of Yahweh's greatness.

15:5. *'Tabernacle of the Testimony'*: The "Tent of the Testimony," the dwelling place of Yahweh during the Israelites' wandering in the desert (Exodus 40:34-35). It was so named because the tent contained the Tables of the Law (of the Testimony) Moses brought down from Mount Sinai (Exodus 32:15). *'Was opened'*: The Tabernacle of the testimony was in the Temple, in the Holy of Holies, the inside of which no ordinary person had ever seen, and into which even the High Priest went only on the Day of Atonement. To have it now open means that in the Kingdom of Yahweh, Yahweh Himself will be seen by everybody, and that everybody will have the possibility of standing in His presence.

15:6. *'The <seven> angels with the last <seven> plagues'*: The angels introduced in v. 15:1. *'Dressed in clean, shining linen'*: The angels' dress is the heavenly dress: Also the angel at the empty tomb of Jesus Christ was clothed in a white robe (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The Resurrection. Mk 16:5; Lk 24:3). On Earth that was the dress of the princes, the kings, and the High Priest. *'Golden sashes'*: As the golden sash of Jesus Christ described in v. 1:13.

15:7. *'One of the cherubs <four living creatures>'*: A high order of angelic beings whose task is to guard the Throne of Yahweh. The number four, as the number seven, stands for completeness; here for the completeness of their guardian duty: nothing can escape their attention. *'Gave to the <seven> angels the <seven> golden bowls filled with the justice <wrath> of Yahweh'*: Justice means judgment and, if necessary, punishment. In this case the bowls are "filled" with Yahweh's punishment to the unrepentant "inhabitants of the Earth" (all men hostile to Yahweh.) *'Who lives for ever and ever'*: The same as the "He who is, was, and will be" of v. 1:4.

15:8. *'Filled with smoke'*: In the Old Testament smoke symbolizes the cloud which had been the visible sign of Yahweh among the Israelites during their flight from Egypt (Exodus 13:21). *'No one could enter...'*: Another idea common in the Old Testament (Exodus 40:34-35; 1 Kings 8:10-11). Nobody, not even in Heaven, can enter the House of Yahweh (the Holy of the Holiest, either in the Tent of the Testimony, or in the Temple in Jerusalem, or in the Temple in Heaven) when He is present -and doesn't allow it. *'Until the last <seven> plagues of the <seven> angels were completed'*: Here, nobody -not even Jesus Christ- is allowed to come in and discuss with Yahweh the severity of His justice. To remember that in certain circumstances Yahweh was convinced to mitigate His punishment; for example, as when Abraham pleaded for Sodom (Genesis 18:20-32).

The <seven> bowls of Yahweh's justice <wrath>. (16:1-21)

(16:1) Then I heard a loud voice from the Temple saying to the angels, "Go, pour out the bowls of Yahweh's justice on the Earth."

(2) The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the certificate of Rome and worshipped her Emperor.

(3) The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned red as blood, like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

(4) The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they turned red as blood.

(5) Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, You who are and who were, the Holy One, because You have so judged; (6) for they have shed the blood of Your faithful and witnesses, and You have given them the punishment they deserve." (7) And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, [Yahweh] Lord Almighty, true and just are Your judgments."

(8) The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was so strong to scorch people with intense heat. (9) They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the Name of Yahweh, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify Him.

(10) The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the kingdom of Satan, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony (11) and cursed [Yahweh] the God of Heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

(12) The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. (13) Then I saw three evil spirits, unclean like frogs; they came out of the

mouth of Satan, out of the mouth of Rome and out of the mouth of the Anti-christ. (14) They are demonic spirits performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle against [Yahweh] the Almighty.

(15) "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stay awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

(16) Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

(17) The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the Temple came a loud voice from the Throne, saying, "It is done!" (18) Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on Earth, so tremendous was the quake. (19) The great Rome split apart, and the cities of the nations collapsed. Yahweh remembered Rome the Great and gave her the severe punishment of His justice. (20) Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. (21) From the sky huge hailstones of about a talent each fell upon men. And they cursed Yahweh on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

Note: When reading this chapter, it is important to remember that John is writing of his vision, not of actual, physical events. As such, the description of the plagues -which are all taken from the Old Testament- has to be taken mainly for its moral meaning, without worrying too much about explaining them properly in physical terms. For the third and last time Yahweh sends a series of warning plagues to men -actually, to the Roman persecutors of His people- to convince them to repent. After that, the total destruction of all the obstinate sinners -the final fall of the powerful Roman Empire- will be the only possible solution left to Yahweh's justice.

16:1. *'A loud voice... saying to the <seven> angels'*: The voice of an angel messenger, reporting an order from Yahweh. *'Pour out the <seven> bowls of Yahweh's justice <wrath>'*: As each bowl "contains" a plague, the order of pouring the bowls is the order of sending the plagues. *'On the Earth'*: The bowls were "filled" with Yahweh's justice. Justice means judgment and, if the case is so, punishment. In this case the bowls are "filled" with Yahweh's punishment to the unrepentant "inhabitants of the Earth" (all men hostile to Yahweh.)

16:2. *'The first... poured out his bowl on the land'*: This first plague, as in the case of the plague announced by the first trumpet in v. 8:7, strikes the land. *'Ugly and painful sores'*: The Greek for "sores" is the same word used

for "boils" in "The plague of the boils" (Exodus 9:8-11). Probably it was skin anthrax, a black, burning abscess that develops into a pustule. *'On the people who had the certificate <mark> of Rome <the beast> and worshipped her Emperor <his image>'*: The image of the reigning deified Emperor was considered the image of Rome, of the Roman Empire. All men, all around the Roman Empire, had to worship the Emperor as a deity, burning a pinch of incense to the god-head of the reigning Emperor and saying, "Caesar is Lord." At this point they were given a certificate attesting that they had done so. Those who refused to comply were subject to social and economic boycott.

16:3. *'The second... poured out his bowl on the sea'*: This second plague, as in the case of the plague announced by the second trumpet in v. 8:8, strikes the sea. *'It turned red as <into> blood, like that of...'*: There is no hint on what could have caused the sea to become red and sticky, most probably it was some natural phenomenon or event used by Yahweh to work out His plans. In effect very often, if not always, Yahweh's interventions happen in the form of "natural phenomena" which, anyway, are under His total control. *'Every living... died'*: Clearly, the pollution of the water was so great that, in the area affected, all fishes died.

16:4. *'The third... poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water'*: This third plague, as in the case of the plague announced by the third trumpet in v. 8:10, strikes the sources of drinkable water. This plague is also similar to "The plague of blood" (Exodus 7:17-21). Even here, there is no hint on what could have polluted all the sources of drinkable water.

16:5. *'The angel in charge of the waters'*: Here again John is using pictures familiar to all the Jews, who believed that all the forces of nature were under the charge of angels. *'You are just ... You have so judged'*: This declaration of the angel is intended to comfort the Christians suffering under the Roman persecutions, assuring them that Yahweh is always right in what He does. *'You who are and who were'*: A paraphrase of the divine Name taken from Exodus 3:14-15, a common way to indicate Yahweh.

16:6. *'For they...'*: "They" are the persecutors of the Christians. *'Your faithful <saints>'*: As those of v. 7:14. *'Witnesses <prophets>'*: People carrying a message from Yahweh, as those of vv. 11:3-12. *'Given them the punishment <blood to drink as> they deserve'*: Because of Yahweh's perfect justice, divine punishment is always tailored to fit the offense.

16:7. *'The altar respond'*: Actually, the Christian martyrs of v. 6:9. *'Yes, Lord...'*: The martyrs confirm the declaration of the angel in charge of the waters (v. 16:6). *'[Yahweh] Lord Almighty'*: The Greek form for "Almighty" is "Pantokrator," and describes the One who had dominion over all things.

16:8. *'The fourth... poured out his bowl on the sun'*: This fourth plague, as in the case of the plague announced by the fourth trumpet in v. 8:12, strikes the sun, even if in a completely different way. *'The sun was so strong <given power>'*: Another declaration that everything is always under Yahweh's control. *'To scorch people with intense heat <fire>'*: Here, again, Yahweh is using some natural phenomenon (in this case a period of particularly intense heat with no clouds or rain) to work out His plans. In effect very often, if not always, Yahweh's interventions happen in the form of "natural phenomena" which, anyway, are under His total control. In the Old Testament "Fire" is often connected with Yahweh's judgment (Deuteronomy 28:22).

16:9. *'They were seared... cursed the Name of Yahweh... refused to repent and...'*: It is actually true that the Roman persecutions continued to strike, even if not continuously, the Christians well into the third century, practically till the actual fall of the Roman Empire.

16:10. *'The fifth... poured out his bowl on the kingdom <throne> of Satan <the beast>'*: As already mentioned in v. 2:13, the throne of Satan is the place where his rule is the strongest; that is, Rome and her Empire. *'Plunged into darkness'*: Most probably it was a solar eclipse. *'Men... in agony'*: In ancient times solar eclipses were considered unlucky events, seen with real terror. So, all people were full of fear, as in vv. 6:15-17.

16:11. *'[Yahweh] the God of Heaven'*: Because the universal and eternal Kingdom of Yahweh, after the end of time and of all the kingdoms of the world, is set in Heaven. *'But they refused to repent'*: In vv. 16:9,11,21 there is a kind of refrain which runs through this chapter. The men on whom these warning terrors fall, curse Yahweh but don't want to repent.

16:12. *'The sixth... poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up'*: Clearly the consequence of a period of heavy drought. *'To prepare the way...'*: The drying -or a substantial lowering- of this big river, which marked the boundary between Israel and her historical enemies to the East, made its crossing possible and easy to an invading army. *'Kings from the East'*: Evidently, Parthians rulers, to be distinguished from the "kings of the whole world" of v. 16:14, who are the rulers of all the nations of the Roman Empire.

16:13. *'Evil spirits unclean <that looked> like frogs'*: Frogs were unclean animals (Leviticus 11:10) and were connected with plagues as in "The plague of the frogs" (Exodus 8:5-11). *'They came out of the mouth of Satan <the dragon>... of Rome <the beast>... of the Antichrist <false prophet>'*: To say that frogs came out of their mouths is to say that their words -their deceptive propaganda against the Christians- were evil words, harmful as

plagues. *'Antichrist <false prophet>'*: This is the first time the "false prophet" appears in the Revelation. Since no explanation is given about his identity, we must assume that, at the time of John's writing, the readers knew who he was. Anyway, if we consider vv. 13:12-14 ("The Antichrist... performed great and miraculous signs") and v. 19:20 ("The Antichrist who had performed miraculous signs"), it clearly appears that the false prophet is the Antichrist.

16:14. *'Demonic spirits'*: The three evil spirits of v. 16:13, spirits speaking and acting following Satan's orders. *'Kings of the whole world'*: Of the whole Roman Empire. *'To gather them'*: Actually, to convince them and spread the persecution against the Christians all over the Empire. *'The battle against <on the great day of> Yahweh Almighty'*: "Great day" because this "battle" -actually this war- would end with the defeat and fall of the Roman Empire and, consequently, of Satan and his forces.

16:15. *'Behold...'*: This verse, a warning to be ready and faithful, is a total intrusion in the text of chapter 16. *'I come like a thief'*: A loose quotation of Jesus' words (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The day and hour unknown. Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39). *'Blessed is he who stay awake and keeps his clothes with him'*: Another loose quotation of Jesus' words (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Watchfulness. Lk 12:37). *'He may not go naked'*: Morally naked, in the sight of Yahweh, for not keeping Jesus Christ's teaching. *'Be shamefully exposed'*: Exposed to the punishment following his personal judgment.

16:16. *'They gathered the kings together'*: The actual meaning is not that the three demonic spirits brought the rulers of all the nation of the Roman Empire to one single location, but that they convinced them to persecute the Christians making, in this way, war to Yahweh. *'Armageddon'*: It means "The City of Megiddo," that is, the plain where the city stood. The Mounts Megiddo and Taanach dominated the main pass on the road from Palestine to Egypt. Because of its strategic location, the "Plain of Megiddo" has been a frequent battleground from the earliest times (Judges 5:19; 2 Kings 23:29).

16:17. *'The seventh... poured out his bowl into the air'*: The last bowl, as the last trumpet blast of v. 11:15, carries an universal message that the air will spread everywhere. *'Out of the Temple... a loud voice from the Throne'*: The voice of an angel messenger, reporting an order from Yahweh. *'It is done!'*: With the last trumpet came the announcement of the coming of the Kingdom of Yahweh; and now, with the last bowl comes the announcement of its actual coming. Furthermore, it officially announces that, after all the attempts to convince Rome to repent, the final decision is taken: The powerful Roman Empire is near to its end.

16:18. *'Lighting... thunder'*: As all throughout the Revelation, John is using imagery regularly connected in the Old Testament with the presence of Yahweh. Lighting and thunder are symbolic of the majesty and power of Yahweh -as in His manifestation at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16-19)- and of the depiction of Yahweh coming in mighty power to deliver His people (Psalms 18:12-14; 77:18). In the Revelation, lightning and thunder always mark an important event connected with the heavenly Temple. *'Earthquake'*: One of the classical terrifying images typical of the Day of the Lord (the end of time), to give a picture of the terror and the suffering of the period to come. *'No earthquake... so tremendous'*: The strength of this earthquake symbolizes the great power of the adversary, the harshness of the battle and the greatness of the victory.

16:19. *'The great Rome <city> split apart <into three parts>'*: Clearly, the fall of the central power brings the political disintegration of the Empire. *'The cities of the nations collapsed'*: Obviously, the fall of the central power causes also the political fall of all the nations constituting the Empire and of all their main cities. *'God remembered Rome <Babylon> the Great'*: A classical Old Testament phrase indicating that Yahweh, after leaving somebody or some nation the possibility of acting on his own, has taken the matter (good or bad) in His hands. *'Gave her the severe punishment <cup filled with the wine of the fury> of His justice <wrath>'*: In the Old Testament Yahweh's wrath is commonly pictured as a cup of wine to be drunk (Psalm 75:8; Isaiah 51:17; Jeremiah 25:15). Here, the meaning is that Rome will be judged with maximum severity.

16:20. *'Island... mountains...'*: These events symbolize the severity and universality of the punishment, which reached even the remotest parts of the Empire.

16:21. *'Huge hailstones...'*: This is another recurring feature of the manifestation of Yahweh's punishment. *'A talent'*: About 110 pounds (more than 49 kg). The exaggerate weight of the hail-stones, too, symbolizes the harshness of the punishment. *'They cursed Yahweh'*: The description of the last plague ends with the refrain that has run all through this chapter. The men to whom these things happen, the persecutors of the faithful Christians, remain impervious to any appeal of Yahweh's affection or of Yahweh's anger.

THE PUNISHMENT OF ROME <BABYLON>**The image of Rome <woman> on the emblem of the Antichrist <beast>. (17:1-18)**

(17:1) One of the angels who had the bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great Rome, who rules on many nations. (2) With her the kings of the Earth went along and the inhabitants of the Earth followed her immoralities."

(3) Then the angel carried me away, lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh, into a desert. There I saw an image of Rome set on a scarlet emblem of the Antichrist that was covered with blasphemous names and had the symbols of great knowledge and great power. (4) The image of Rome was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable actions and the corruption of her immoralities. (5) This mysterious title was written on her forehead: "Rome the Great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the Earth." (6) I saw that the image of Rome was covered with the blood of the faithful, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. (7) Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the image of Rome and of the emblem of the Antichrist she rides, which has the symbols of great knowledge and great power. (8) The Antichrist, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the Earth whose names have not been written in the Book of Life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the Antichrist, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

(9) This calls for a mind with wisdom. The symbols of great knowledge are the hills on which Rome sits. (10) They are also the Roman kings. Some have fallen, one is, the others have not yet come; but when they do come, they must remain for a little while. (11) The Antichrist who once was, and now is not, is also a king. He belongs to all of them and is going to his destruction.

(12) The symbols of great power you saw are the kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for a while will receive authority as kings along with the Antichrist. (13) They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the Antichrist. (14) They will make war against the Christ, but the Christ will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings -and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

(15)Then the angel said to me, "The nations you saw, where Rome rules, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. (16)The Antichrist and the kings you saw will hate Rome. They will bring her to ruin and leave her defeated; they will destroy her Empire and burn her with fire. (17)For Yahweh has put it into their hearts to accomplish His purpose by agreeing to give the Antichrist their power to rule, until Yahweh's words are fulfilled. (18)The image you saw is the great Rome that rules over the kings of the Earth."

17:1. '*<Seven> angels. <Seven> bowls*': Those of ch.s 15-16. '*Punishment of the great Rome <prostitute>*': Often in the Old Testament both pagan and disobedient cities are described as prostitutes (Nahum 3:4 for Nineveh; Isaiah 23:16-17 for Tyre; Isaiah 1:21 and Ezekiel 16:15 for Jerusalem). The symbolic idea behind this is that those cities leave their Creator and concede themselves to Satan. Furthermore, the sin of a prostitute has a peculiar characteristic, as it is not only that she sins herself, but also that she deliberately persuades others into sin. And, in v. 14:8, an angel declares that "Rome... made all the nations follow her immoralities" because, as the dominant power, Rome obliged all the nations under her domination to follow her corrupted customs and the Emperor worship. '*Rules <sits> on many nations <waters>*': This of the "many waters" is a description usually applied to Babylon, which was crossed by the river Euphrates and was also at the center of an imposing system of irrigation canals. In the case of Rome, this image represents all the "waters" (the rivers and the seas) of the nations dominated by Rome and constituting the Empire.

17:2. '*With her the kings of the Earth went along <committed adultery>*': This is another vivid picture, practically the explanation of v. 17:1, of Rome as the great corrupting agent among the nations. '*Inhabitants of the Earth*': The usual designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh. '*Followed her immo-ralities <were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries>*': The citizens of the various nations composing the Empire were following the lax morals habits of Rome's citizens.

17:3. '*Lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh <in the Spirit>*': In a state of spiritual exaltation, of ecstasy, as this was not a dream, but a vision. '*Into a desert*': It was in the desert that the great men of Yahweh received their visions (Exodus 3:1 for Moses; 1 Kings 19:4 for Elijah). '*An image of Rome <a woman>*': Rome, as it clearly appears from the following verses. '*Set <sitting> on a scarlet emblem of the Antichrist <beast>*': The scarlet color symbolizes the bloodshed of the Roman persecutions around the Empire. '*Blasphemous names*': With the spreading of the Emperor worship, Roman

Emperors assumed titles of deity as "Dominus et Deus noster" (Our Lord and God;) titles blasphemous to both Jews and Christians. *'The symbols of great knowledge <seven heads> and great power <ten horns>'*: Satan had given the Roman Empire his knowledge, power and authority (to remember that, as seen in v. 12:3, at the beginning Satan -Lucifer at the time- was given all the knowledge and the power for implementing Yahweh's Creation.) Clearly, Satan gives only what knowledge, power and authority the recipient needs to carry out his part of Satan's plans. The fact that here the same characteristics are given both to Rome (v. 13:1) and to the Antichrist shows how much Rome was acting under the Antichrist's control and how much the Antichrist evil actions were possible because of Rome's power.

17:4. *'The image of Rome <woman> was dressed... glittering with...'*: This is the picture of a wealthy courtesan, actually a prostitute, dressed to seduce rich men. It is symbolic of the luxury of Rome and of the lustful way in which her riches were used. Purple and scarlet were the royal colors, the colors of luxury and splendor. *'Golden cup'*: This is another picture of Babylon taken from the Old Testament (Jeremiah 51:7). *'Filled with abominable actions <things> and the corruption <filth> of her immoralities <adulteries>'*: As the bowls of the angels were "full" of Yahweh's justice, so this cup is "full" of all the depraved actions and immoralities that Rome had spread all over the Empire.

17:5. *'Mysterious title'*: The word "mystery" here, as all throughout the New Testament, corresponds to the Greek "mysterion," which means something meaningless to the outsider but meaningful to the initiate who possesses the interpretation key. In apocalyptic thought mysteries were secrets preserved in Heaven and revealed to the apocalypticist. *'Written on her forehead'*: In Rome the prostitutes wore on the forehead a frontlet with their name. *'Rome <Babylon> the Great'*: The mystery in this case is that Babylon means Rome. *'The mother of prostitutes'*: In Babylon there were temples to which we-re attached sacred prostitutes -to have intercourse with them was an act of worship which paid homage to the force of life. The reference here is to v. 17:2, where the kings of the Earth are depicted as having intercourse with Rome, paying in this way homage to her power. *'And of the abominations'*: This last definition of Rome actually comes from Tacitus ("The place... where all atrocious and shameful things are most popular") and Seneca ("A filthy sewer").

17:6. *'The image of Rome <woman> was covered <drunk> with the blood of...'*: This is a reference to the persecution and the slaughter of the Christians in the Roman Empire. *'Faithful <saints>... those who bore testimony'*: The martyrs of v. 6:9. *'I was greatly astonished'*: Not understanding the real meaning of the mysterious title.

17:7. *'Mystery of the image of Rome <woman>. Emblem of the Antichrist <beast>. Symbols of great knowledge <seven heads>. Great power <ten heads>'*: Practically, a repetition of v. 17:3.

17:8. *'The Antichrist <beast>'*: Later, in v. 17:11, the angel himself will tell John that the beast is the Antichrist. *'Once was, now is not'*: The Antichrist, or better the function of Antichrist, is so much an "emanation" from Satan that John can write of the Antichrist too as having been expelled from Heaven, where "once he was and now is not," and confined to the Earth -actually, vv. 12:8-9 tell that Satan lost his place in Heaven and was confined to the Earth. *'Will come up out of the Abyss'*: The Abyss was conceived by the Jews as the subterranean place of confinement of Satan and the evil spirits. In the Revelation, their final place of punishment is the "lake of fire," that is, hell. The Antichrist is an evil force -as such, coming from the Abyss-incarnated into a man -as such coming from the Earth. *'Go to his destruction'*: In the Revelation, the Antichrist is the evil power behind Rome and the Empire, embodied in the reigning Emperor. As such, although his action through Rome is really very evil and persistent, there is no uncertainty about his ultimate fate (the fall of the Roman Empire will bring the end of the persecutions). *'Inhabitants of the Earth'*: The usual designation of mankind hostile to Yahweh. *'Book of Life'*: The concept of "Book of Life" occurs often in the Bible, both in the Old and in the New Testament (Exodus 32:32-33; Psalm 69:28; Daniel 12:1; Philippians 4:3; Revelation here and 20:15; 21:27). In the New Testament the "Book of Life" refers to Yahweh's list of those destined to eternal life. To have a man's name erased from this book would indicate the loss of "citizenship;" that is, of the possibility of entering straight away into the Kingdom of Yahweh. Of course, all the "erased" ones will have the possibility to be included again by accepting, in this life or in the next one, the redemption offered them by Jesus Christ (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4). *'Astonished when they see the Antichrist <beast> because...'*: Astonished by such an evil power, so much active on Earth in spite of the defeats suffered by his instigator, Satan (the first, with his expulsion from Heaven; the second, with the sacrifice and Resurrection of Jesus Christ.)

17:9. *'This calls for...'*: The angel begins explaining the meaning of the images used in the previous verses. *'The symbols of great knowledge <seven heads> are the <seven> hills on which Rome <the woman> sits'*: This is an easy identification, as Rome is classically designated as "the city on seven hills" by the main Roman writers (e.g., Virgil, Cicero, Martial).

17:10. *'They are also the Roman <seven> kings'*: That the heads -symbols

of great knowledge- can symbolize also the hills of Rome and the most important -the most adverse to the Christians- of her Emperors, illustrates the fluidity of apocalyptic symbolism. *'Some <five> have fallen'*: At the time of John's writing, some of the most adverse Emperors were already matter of the past. As usual, whatever difficulty we may presently have in identifying those past Emperors, their names were clear and evident to the persecuted Christians of the time. *'One is'*: This must be Domitian, the Emperor in whose time the Revelation was written, under whose persecutions the Christians were suffering so much. *'The others have <other has> not yet come; but when they do <he does> come, they <he> must remain...'*: Domitian will not be the last great enemy of the Christians; more enemies will follow, each of them for a limited length of time.

17:11. *'The Antichrist <beast>... is also a <an eighth> king. He belongs to all of them <the seven>'*: The Antichrist, the real evil power behind all those Emperors -here seen by John as an actual living entity- is one of them at a time. *'Who once was, and now is not... is going to his destruction'*: A repetition of v. 17:8.

17:12. *'The symbols of great power <ten horns>... are the <ten> kings who... for a while <an hour> will receive authority... along with the Antichrist <beast>'*: These are the future Emperors who -for the length of their reign- will use their power against the Christians.

17:13. *'They have one purpose'*: To persecute the Christians. *'Will give their power... to the Antichrist <beast>'*: They will follow the Antichrist orders.

17:14. *'War against the Christ <Lamb>, but the Christ <Lamb> will overcome them'*: Another clear declaration confirming the promise made to the martyrs (vv. 6:9-11) that the final victory is for Jesus Christ and his people. *'Lord of lords and King of kings'*: This definition emphasizes the supreme sovereignty of Jesus Christ. As usual, the image is taken from the Old Testament, where it is referred to Yahweh (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:3; Daniel 2:47). *'With him will be his...'*: The faithful and the martyrs actually help Jesus Christ to win his triumph and, so, will share of his glory.

17:15. *'The nations <waters>... where Rome rules <the prostitute sits>, are...'*: Practically, a repetition of v. 17:1.

17:16. *'The Antichrist <beast> and the kings <ten horns>... will hate Rome <the prostitute>'*: The Antichrist -which is the incarnation of evil and, as such, is not faithful to any of his "allies"- by acting through the Roman Emperors against Jesus Christ and his people, will actually bring Rome and her Empire to destruction. *'They will bring her to ruin and leave her defeated <naked>, they will destroy <eat> her Empire <flesh> and burn her with fire'*: Another pictorial way to say that the Antichrist and those Empe-

rors will cause the end of Rome and of her powerful Empire.

17:17. *'For Yahweh has put... to give the Antichrist <beast>...':* All those events are part of Yahweh's plans. Even if it looks strange, the meaning is that, though all these evil powers are working out their own purposes, they are in fact working out the purposes of Yahweh. The truth behind this is that Yahweh never loses control of human affairs.

17:18. *'The image <woman>... is the great Rome <city> that ...':* The final identification of the woman as Rome.

The fall of Rome <Babylon>. (18:1-24)

(18:1)After this I saw another angel coming down from Heaven. He had great authority, and the Earth was illuminated by his splendor. (2)With a powerful voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Rome the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. (3)For all the nations have followed her immoralities. The kings of the Earth went along with her, and the merchants of the Earth grew rich from their excessive luxuries."

(4)Then I heard another voice from Heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, that you will not receive any of her plagues; (5)for her sins are piled up to Heaven, and Yahweh has remembered her crimes. (6)Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. (7)Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as a queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' (8)Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is [Yahweh] the Lord who judges her.

(9)When the kings of the Earth who went along with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. (10)Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe, O Great City, O Rome, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!'

(11)The merchants of the Earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more -(12)cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; (13)cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

(14)They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' (15)The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand

far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn (16) and cry out: 'Woe! Woe O Great City, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!'

(17) Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. (18) When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this Great City?' (19) They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe O Great City, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!'

(20) Rejoice over her, O Heaven! Rejoice faithful and apostles and prophets! Yahweh has judged her for the way she treated you''.

(21) Then a powerful angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the Great City of Rome will be thrown down, never to be found again. (22) The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. (23) The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. (24) She was guilty of the blood of prophets and of the faithful, and of all who have been killed on the Earth."

Note: This chapter was written using the literary form of the prophetic books of the Old Testament, called "Lamentation" or "Doom Song" (Isaiah 13:19-22; 34:11-15; Jeremiah 50:39; 51:37; Zephaniah 2:13-15). Clearly, its written content is far away from the Christian doctrine of forgiveness, and has to be accepted only for its cryptic meaning.

18:1. *'Another angel coming down from Heaven':* John's vision is set on Earth and, consequently, the angel messenger has to come down from Heaven. *'Great authority':* The aspect of the angel was in accordance with the importance of the message. *'The Earth was illuminated by his splendor':* The angel was clearly coming from the presence of Yahweh, as such he was "radiant" of His luminosity. His "splendor" and "great authority" attest that his message comes directly from Yahweh.

18:2. *'With a powerful voice...':* To be heard by all of Yahweh's Creation. *'Fallen is Rome <Babylon>':* So certain is John of the fall of Rome announced in ch. 17 that now, in ch. 18, beginning with the present verse, he

announces the actual fall of Rome and of her Empire as if it had already happened. *'She has become a home... and a haunt...'*: The pagan gods and demons are depicted as disconsolately dwelling in the ruins of the temples which once had been theirs. (An explanation for the existence of pagan religions and of this "survival" of gods and demons, can be found in: Thoughts: Satan's existence and activity.) *'Unclean and detestable birds'*: Birds which, like the vulture, eat the carcasses of dead animals -and men (Leviticus 11:13-19).

18:3. *'All the nations have followed her immoralities <drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries>'*: As the dominant power, Rome obliged all the nations under her domination to follow her corrupted customs and the Emperor worship. *'The kings of the Earth went along <committed adultery>'*: Another vivid picture of Rome as the great corrupting agent among the nations. *'The merchants... grew rich'*: Clearly, the rich market of Rome was a huge opportunity for merchants selling luxurious goods. *'From her excessive luxuries'*: This is symbolic of the luxury of Rome and of the lustful way in which her riches were used.

18:4. *'Another voice from Heaven'*: The voice of Jesus Christ calling his faithful people. *'Come out of her...'*: An invitation both to leave Rome before her fall -to avoid physical suffering- and not to take part in her sinful way of life -to avoid spiritual harm. Similar warnings can be found in: Genesis 19:12-14; Numbers 16:23-26; Isaiah 48:20; 52:11; Jeremiah 50:8; 51:45.

18:5. *'Sins... piled up to Heaven'*: The seriousness and the number of sins in Rome had reached unbelievable levels. *'Yahweh has remembered her crimes'*: A classical Old testament phrase indicating that Yahweh, after leaving somebody or some nation the possibility of acting on his own, has taken the matter (good or bad) in His hands.

18:6-8. *'Give back...'*: These verses speak in Old Testament's terms of punishment. But the instruction to punish Rome is given to the angel, not to men. *'Pay her back double... Mix her a double portion...'*: This image comes from Isaiah 40:2, and has the meaning of "full" punishment. *'From her own cup'*: A punishment strictly proportional to what she was doing to others. *'Give her as much...'*: There is no getting away from Yahweh's justice; from the fact that punishment follows sin, especially if that sin has involved the cruel treatment of other men. *'In her heart she boast...'*: Rome was very proud of herself -the "queen" of the Empire. To remember that precisely pride had been the main sin of Satan against Yahweh. *'I am not a widow, and I will never mourn'*: The men of Rome did not die in battle any more, as the Roman Army was mainly composed by soldiers coming from all the nations of the Empire. *'In one day her plagues...'*: At a certain point,

with their sudden surprise, the inhabitants of Rome will discover that not only the Empire but Rome, too, is attacked and under siege. (The fall of the Empire was so sudden that in the AD 240 the Emperor Aurelian had to build a wall around the central part of Rome as protection against the barbaric invasions.) *'Mighty is [Yahweh] the Lord who judges her'*: The Lord is much more powerful (He is Almighty) than the most powerful Empire.

18:9-20. In these verses, modeled after Ezechiel's lament over Tyre (Ezechiel ch.s 26-27), three groups strictly linked to the wealth of Rome lament over her fall: The kings (vv. 18:9-10), the merchants (vv. 18:11-16), and the seamen (vv. 18:17-19).

18:9-10. *'Kings of the Earth who went along <committed adultery>'*: A repetition of v. 18:3. *'Shared her luxury... will weep...'*: With the fall of Rome, all these "kings" -or, more generally, rich rulers- lost their privileged positions. *'Terrified... they will stand far off and cry: Woe!... O Rome <Babylon>...'*: At the moment of her fall, none of Rome allies -actually, subject nations- came to help her against the invading barbaric armies.

18:11-16. *'The merchants... will weep...'*: The merchant of v. 18:3. The lament of the merchants is purely selfish. All their sorrow is because the market from which they drew so much wealth was gone. *'Cargoes of...'*: This is a list of 29 luxurious commodities, 15 of which appear also in Ezekiel 27:12-22. *'Bodies and souls of men'*: Slaves are the thirtieth commodity; a commodity absolutely essential for the keeping of Rome's luxurious lifestyle. *'The merchants... will stand far off... and cry...'*: It is significant that both the kings and the merchants don't give any help to Rome; they were never linked to Rome by some affection; their only bond was the power and the money coming from Rome. *'Dressed...'*: As in v. 17:4, this is the picture of a wealthy courtesan, actually a prostitute, dressed to seduce rich men. It is symbolic of the luxury of Rome and of the lustful way in which her riches were used.

18:17-19. *'Every sea captain...'*: It is clear that the seamen's lament is caused by the loss of the trade which brought so much wealth. *'Will stand far off... and... cry...'*: As for the kings and the merchants, even in this case the actual lament is not for Rome but for themselves.

18:20. *'Rejoice... Heaven... faithful <saints>...'*: This is the fulfillment of the promise made to the martyrs of v. 6:9.

18:21. *'Large millstone'*: A millstone large enough to require a donkey to turn it. *'Rome <Babylon> will be thrown down, never to be found again'*: A picture taken from Jeremiah 51:63-64. As the great boulder is thrown into the sea where it disappears as if it had never existed, so it will be with Rome.

18:22-24. *'Music... Workman... Millstone... Lamp... Bridegroom... never... again'*: In other words, Rome is to become a terribly silent desolation. *'Your merchants... your magic spell ...'*: The punishment of Rome will come for certain definite reasons: Because she worshipped wealth and luxury, finding no pleasure except in material things. Because she led men astray with her sorceries. Because *'She was guilty of <in her was found> the blood of prophets and of the faithful <saints>...'*: A reference to the persecution and the slaughter of the Christians martyrs in the Roman Empire.

Hallelujah! (19:1-10)

(19:1) *After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in Heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to [Yahweh] our God, (2)for true and just are His judgments. He has condemned the great Rome who corrupted the Earth by her immoralities. He has avenged on her the blood of His servants." (3)And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." (4)All the elders and the cherubs adored and worshipped Yahweh, Who was seated on the Throne. And they cried: "Amen! Hallelujah!"*

(5) *Then a voice came from the Throne, saying: "Praise [Yahweh] our God, all you His servants, you who fear Him, both small and great!"*

(6) *Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For [Yahweh] our Lord Almighty reigns. (7)Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory! For the Communion of the Christ has come, and his people have made themselves ready. (8)Fine linen, bright and clean, was given them to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the faithful).*

(9) *Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the Communion Supper of the Christ!'" And he added, "These are the true Words of Yahweh."*

(10) *At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant as you and as your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship Yahweh! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."*

19:1. *'I heard...'*: This is the rejoicing which was called for in v. 18:20 for the fulfillment of the promise made to the martyrs of v. 6:9. *'Great multitude'*: The great multitude of v. 7:9. *'Hallelujah!'*: This word appears four times in this chapter (here, and in vv. 19:3,4,6) and nowhere else in the New Testament. It derives from the Hebrew words "halal" -which means praise- and "Yah" -which is the Name of Yahweh- and means "Praise Yahweh"

(Psalms 111-113; 117; 135; 146-150 all begin with "Praise the Lord"). *'Salvation and...'*: Only Yahweh can take the initiative and bring back to Himself all men, in spite of Satan's opposition.

19:2. *'True and just are His judgments'*: This declaration of the angel is intended to comfort the Christians suffering under the Roman persecutions, assuring them that Yahweh is always right in everything He does. *'He has condemned the great Rome <prostitute> who corrupted the Earth by her immoralities <adulteries>'*: Often in the Old Testament both pagan and disobedient cities are described as prostitutes. The symbolic idea behind this is that those cities leave their Creator and concede themselves to Satan. *'He has avenged...'*: The judgment of Rome is the demonstration that Yahweh never forgets or abandons His people.

19:3. *'Smoke... for ever and ever'*: The fall of Rome, the end of her powerful Empire, is final; Rome will never more be powerful again.

19:4. *'All the <twenty-four> elders'*: They are the symbolic representation of all the people of Yahweh. *'The cherubs <four living creatures>'*: They are a high order of angelic beings whose task is to guard the Throne of Yahweh. *'Adored <fell down>'*: The cherubs and the elders praising Yahweh re-present all of His Creation giving Him their tribute of praise. *'Amen'*: Shall it be!

19:5. *'A voice came from the Throne'*: The voice of an angel messenger. *'Servants'*: The prophets, the martyrs, and all the faithful. *'Small and great'*: All Christians, of all intellectual capacities and social grades.

19:6-7. *'Great multitude'*: The multitude of v. 19:1. *'Roar of rushing waters. Loud peals of thunder'*: Attributes giving emphasis to the quantity of people praising Yahweh. *'Yahweh... reigns. Let us rejoice...'*: These phrases come from Psalm 97:1. *'The Communion <wedding> of the Christ <Lamb> has come, and his people have <bride has> made themselves <herself> ready'*: Yahweh has given to men His Son who, with his sacrifice on the Cross has opened the Kingdom of Yahweh -the possibility of being in spiritual communion with Yahweh, Jesus Christ, and all other men- to all people. The imagery of the wedding, symbolizing the intimate relationship between Yahweh and His people, has its roots in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5-7; Hosea 2:19). Jesus has given the same image saying: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The parable of the wedding banquet. Mt 22:2).

19:8. *'Fine linen...'*: As the angels' dress in v. 15:6, this is the heavenly dress. On Earth that was the dress of the princes, the kings, and the High Priest. *'Given them <her> to wear'*: The wedding dress -the opportunity of

being in spiritual communion- is "given" to all the faithful <saints>, that is, to all who accept His invitation.

19:9. *'Blessed are those who are invited to the Communion <wedding> Supper of the Christ <Lamb>':* This image comes from the Jews' idea that, when the Messiah comes, Yahweh's people would be invited to a great Messianic Banquet. In Christian terms, the spiritual Communion is seen as a Supper taken by all the faithful gathered around Jesus their Master and Yahweh their God. *'The true Words of Yahweh':* No doubt is left; Yahweh has spoken.

19:10. *'I fell at his feet':* It was John's instinct to worship the angel messenger. *'Do not do it! I am a fellow servant as you and...':* In the early Church there was a tendency to worship angels. In certain circles of Judaism the angels were seen not only as Yahweh's messengers but also as intermediaries between men and Yahweh. Clearly, some of the Jew-Christians brought this special reverence for the angels with them, forgetting that with the coming of Jesus no other intermediary between Yahweh and man is necessary. *'Who hold to the testimony of Jesus':* All men who follow Jesus Christ's message and teaching. *'Worship Yahweh!':* John insists that the angels are no more than the servants of Yahweh; and that only Yahweh -and Jesus Christ- must be worshipped. *'The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy':* The testimony of absolute faith in Yahweh brought by Jesus with his sacrifice is the actual essence and completion of all the Old Testament prophecies.

The rider on the white horse [the fall of Rome]. (19:11-21)

(19:11)I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is Christ, the Faithful and True. With justice he judges and condemns. (12)His eyes are blazing like fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. (13)He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is Word of Yahweh. (14)The inhabitants of Heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. (15)Out of his mouth comes the perfect judgment with which to condemn the nations. "He will rule them with protective strength." He treads the winepress of the execution of the justice of Yahweh the Almighty. (16)On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

(17)And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the faithful, "Come, gather together for the Great Battle of Yahweh, (18)so that you may fight against kings, generals, and mighty men, and horses and their riders, and against all people, free and slave, small and great."

(19) Then I saw the Roman Emperor and the kings of the Earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the Christ and his followers. (20) But the Emperor was defeated, and with him the Antichrist who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deceived those who had received the certificate of compliance and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into hell. (21) The rest of them were condemned by the perfect judgment of the Christ, and all the faithful rejoiced for their defeat.

19:11. *'I saw Heaven standing open and...'*: Here John sees Jesus Christ as Yahweh's conqueror, a picture which is essentially Jewish, corresponding to the Jewish idea of Yahweh's Messiah-King, who will lead Yahweh's people to the final victory, smashing all His enemies. *'White horse'*: As in the case of the horse of v. 6:2, the white color symbolizes victory. The whole background of this picture lies in the Jewish expectation of the future and has little to do with the Jesus of the Gospel of peace, affection and mercy. *'Whose rider is Christ, the <called> Faithful and True'*: During his terrestrial life, Jesus Christ was totally faithful to Yahweh and true to His Word, always following the will of his Father. For that he is also called "faithful witness" (v. 1:5), the witness of the truth of Yahweh, who speaks from his first-hand knowledge of the Father. *'With justice he judges and condemns <makes war>'*: Jesus Christ was given by Yahweh the task to judge all men with His perfect justice which, if the case is so, involves the necessary punishment (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 2).

19:12. *'His eyes are blazing like fire'*: This image comes from Daniel 10:6, and is a symbol of penetrating insight. *'On his head are many crowns'*: The Greek word used here for crown is "diadema," the "royal crown," not the "crown of life" promised to the faithful in v. 2:10. The many crowns symbolize that Jesus Christ is the King of all the kingdoms of the Earth. *'A name... that no one knows'*: But in the following verses (vv. 19:13,16) John writes down the two parts composing this name.

19:13. *'Robe dipped in blood'*: The blood shed by Jesus Christ for the salvation of all men. Jesus freed all men from sin, he "bought" them paying the price of their possession with his own life. *'His name is Word of Yahweh'*: This is the first part of the name of Jesus Christ written on John's vision. Here we have to remember which was the Jewish idea of the "Word of Yahweh." It was not merely a sound; it also meant bringing things into existence. It is by His Word that Yahweh created the Earth, the Heavens and everything in them. Calling Jesus Christ the Word of Yahweh means that

he is the embodiment and the realization of everything that Yahweh has said and promised in the Old Testament.

19:14. *'The inhabitants <armies> of Heaven'*: The angels and the people of Yahweh -the elders and Jesus Christ's followers, who help Jesus Christ to win his triumph and, so, share of his glory. *'Riding on white horses'*: Victorious as Jesus Christ who, too, is riding a white horse (v. 19:11). *'Dressed in fine linen, white and clean'*: Dressed as the angels of v. 15:6. This is a usual description of the faithful, where the white symbolizes spiritual purity.

19:15. *'The perfect judgment <a sharp sword>'*: A short sword for close fighting which symbolizes the cutting quality of Jesus' judgment. *'With which to condemn <strike down> the nations'*: The perfect judgment of Jesus Christ has to be followed by the condemnation of all people and nations hostile to Yahweh and to the Christians. *'He will rule them with protective strength <an iron scepter>'*: A quotation from Psalm 2:9, which is a royal Psalm, originally composed for the coronation of Davidic kings, in light of Yahweh's covenant with David. Here it refers to Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Yahweh of Davidic lineage. *'Will rule'*: Literally "will shepherd" (a common metaphor for the verb "to rule".) *'<Iron scepter>'*: Symbolic of the strength of his rule. *'He treads the winepress of the execution <fury> of the justice <wrath> of Yahweh'*: The winepress of vv. 14:19-20, where the harvesting angel throws all the wicked. A winepress was a trough hollowed out of the rock, or built of bricks, with a channel leading to a lower and smaller trough. Grapes were thrown into the upper trough and tramped with bare feet. The juice was collected in the lower trough. The treading of grapes is a common Old Testament figure for the execution of divine justice <wrath> and stands for the suffering of the punishment in hell (Isaiah 63:3; Lamentations 1:15; Joel 3:13).

19:16. *'King of kings and Lord of lords'*: This is the second part of the name of Jesus Christ written on the vision -the first is in v. 19:13. This definition emphasizes the supreme sovereignty of Jesus Christ. As usual, the image is taken from the Old Testament, where it is referred to Yahweh (Deuteronomy 10:17; Psalm 136:3; Daniel 2:47).

19:17. *'An angel standing in the sun'*: To be clearly seen by everybody. *'All the faithful <birds flying in midair>'*: The angel calls all men faithful to Yahweh -those who live on Earth but don't "belong to the Earth" and aren't yet in Heaven, that is, <"birds flying in midair">- to take part in the final fall of Rome. *'Gather together for the Great Battle <Supper> of Yahweh'*: "Battle of Yahweh," because it is a battle against the evil forces of the Roman Empire, that is, of Satan. "<Supper> of Yahweh," because all the faithful are gathered together as for a great, common Supper.

19:18. *'You may fight against <eat the flesh of> kings... and <of> horses... and against <the flesh of> all people...'*: The concept here is that in this great battle the faithful -men living on Earth- will fight against their terrestrial enemies -men living on Earth- while Jesus Christ -who in this vision is depicted as victoriously riding a white horse in Heaven- and all the inhabitants of Heaven -the spiritual <armies> of Yahweh- will fight against their spiritual enemies -Satan and his devils. Again, this picture is taken directly from the Old Testament (Ezekiel 39:17-19), a picture in line with the Jewish Apocalyptic expectations, not with the Gospel of Jesus.

19:19. *'I saw the Roman Emperor <beast>'*: The beast coming out of the sea (v. 13:1), which represents Rome and the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor. Here, it is important to remember that v. 13:2 declares that all the power and the authority of Rome come from Satan. *'The kings of the Earth... gathered... to make war...'*: The kings of the Earth -that is, of the nations constituting the Roman Empire- were gathered -that is, convinced by the evil spirits of v. 16:13, sent by Satan- to make war -that is, to spread the persecution- against the Christians all over the Empire. *'The Christ <rider on the horse> and his followers <armies>'*: The image of Jesus Christ as Yahweh's conqueror (v. 19:11), followed by the inhabitants of Heaven (v. 19:14).

19:20. *'The Emperor <beast> was defeated <captured> and with him...'*: A very short, clear and simple declaration: Jesus Christ the conqueror (v. 19:11) has defeated Rome and the evil powers behind her. *'The Antichrist <false prophet> who ...'*: The "false prophet" of v. 16:13. Since no explanation is given about his identity, we must assume that, at the time of John's writing, the readers knew who it was. Anyway, if we consider vv. 13:12-14 ("The Antichrist... performed great and miraculous signs"), it is evident that the false prophet is the Antichrist. *'Deceived those who had received the certificate of compliance <mark of the beast> and...'*: By means of his miraculous signs, he convinced some of the Christians to accept the idea of religious compromise, formally accepting the request of the Emperor worship. *'Thrown alive into hell <the fiery lake of burning sulfur>'*: After physical death, all men are still spiritually alive. So, both the Emperor and the Antichrist of the moment were condemned to the punishment of hell (which, anyway, is temporary, formative, and redemptive.) As usual, the picture of the condemned suffering "physically" in a "burning" hell, is in line with the Old Testament imagery.

19:21. *'The rest of them were condemned by <killed with> the perfect judgment <sword that came out of the mouth> of the Christ <rider on the horse>'*: The sword of Christ is his Word, which is the Word of Yahweh. In

the Word of Christ there is the judgment for sin, followed by the invitation to come back to the affection of Yahweh. There is the assurance of salvation; for it makes a man understand his sins and repent of them, and it assures him that he can be saved in the name of Jesus Christ (that is, by having faith in Jesus Christ's power of salvation.) In essence, the fighting power of Jesus Christ is his power to win men to the affection of Yahweh. *'All the faithful rejoiced for <birds gorged themselves on> their defeat <flesh>'*: This is the fulfillment of the promise made to the martyrs of v. 6:9.

THE 1000 YEARS OF CHRIST AND THE SAINTS**The Kingdom of Yahweh on Earth <thousand years>. (20:1-6)****Satan's doom. (20:7-10)****The dead are judged. (20:11-15)**

(20:1) And I saw an angel coming down out of Heaven, having the key of the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. (2) He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him till the last days. (3) He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the last days. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

(4) I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been martyred because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the Word of Yahweh, and those who had not worshipped Rome or her Emperor and had not received the certificate of compliance. They came to life and reigned with Christ till the last days. (5) (The rest of the dead did not come to life until their punishment was ended.) This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of Yahweh and of Christ and will reign with him till the last days.

(7) When the last days are near, Satan will be released from his prison (8) and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the Earth -Gog and Magog- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. (9) They marched across the breadth of the Earth and surrounded the camp of Yahweh's people, the City He cherishes. But fire came down from Heaven and devoured them. (10) And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into hell, where the Emperor and the Antichrist had been thrown. They will be punished day and night for very, very long.

(11) Then I saw a great white Throne and Him who was seated on it. Earth and sky passed away, and they were no more. (12) And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the Throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. (13) The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. (14) Then Death and Hades were thrown into hell. Hell is the second death. (15) If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into hell.

Note: As it is, this chapter constitutes the foundation document for the doctrine called "Millennialism;" the only passage in the New Testament in which it appears. The picture in it is that, after the final fall of Rome, Satan will be segregated into the Abyss for a thousand years. Then the martyrs and the faithful will be resurrected -but not the rest of mankind- and Christ will reign with them on Earth for a thousand years. After that Satan will be released for a short time and will organize -after deceiving again all the nations of the Earth- a last general battle against Yahweh and His people, battle which will end with Yahweh's complete and final victory. At this point, Satan will be sent for ever to the punishment of hell. Then there will be the Universal Resurrection, with the Universal Judgment of all men who will be either accepted in the Kingdom of Yahweh or sent to the punishment of hell.

As it can be clearly seen by reading the Gospels, this doctrine -which traces its origins to the Jewish beliefs about the Messianic Age- does not correspond at all to Jesus' teaching. Actually, Jesus never spoke of "a thousand years" Christian Earthly Kingdom free of Satan's influence. On the contrary, he always affirmed that Satan will be heavily influential on Earth, till the "end of the age," as it results from the following passages taken from The Gospel of Jesus Christ:

-*"Let us not fall into temptation, but deliver us from evil"*: Temptation and Satan's influence will always exist, without any interruption (Mt 6:9-13; Lk 11:2-4).

-*"The field is the world, and the good seed stands for the sons of the Kingdom. The weeds are the sons of the evil one"*: Good and evil people will always coexist, till the end of the world (Mt 13:38).

-*"Do you think I came to bring peace on Earth? No, I tell you, but division"*: There will never be peace on Earth (Lk 12:51).

The point is that the Revelation -a cryptic kind of writing- has a hidden "true" meaning, which usually differs substantially from the literal one. The picture of the "true" meaning of this chapter is that, with the end of the terrible Roman persecutions, the Kingdom of Yahweh on Earth will grow and spread all around the Earth. And its very existence -with all its imperfections- means that Satan's activity on Earth is limited -but clearly not eliminated. Towards the last days Yahweh will give Satan another chance -giving him complete freedom of action- to repent and to come back to Him. But Satan will refuse Yahweh's offer and will try again to gain supremacy -which is impossible as Satan, a created being, can't be more powerful of his Creator. So Satan will be defeated and sent to his punishment. In the mean time, the existence of the Earth and of the human race will come

to the end and there will be the Universal Resurrection and the Universal Judgment of all men.

Other important points are the concepts of "first resurrection" and of "second death." The "first resurrection" is when -immediately after physical death, or after a period of redemptive punishment in hell- the soul of a person is accepted in the Kingdom of Heaven. The "second death" is when the soul of a person -after the personal judgment- is judged in need of reformation and, as such, sent to hell for the necessary formative and redemptive period. Furthermore, it is important to remember that, as all souls at a certain point will accept Jesus Christ, the "second death has no power over them."

20:1. *'An angel coming down out of Heaven'*: John's vision is set on Earth and, consequently, the angel messenger has to come down from Heaven. *'The key of the Abyss'*: The Abyss was conceived by the Jews as the intermediate subterranean place of confinement of Satan and evil spirits (It appears in: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The healing of a demon-possessed man. Lk 8:31, where the Legion of demons ask Jesus "not to order them to go into the Abyss"). In the Revelation, their final place of punishment is the "lake of fire," that is, hell. *'Holding in his hand a great chain'*: To limit (not to stop completely) Satan's activity on Earth by putting him in chains.

20:2. *'Dragon. Ancient serpent. Devil. Satan'*: This verse gives a clear list of the ways Satan is called. And he can be even called "the Ruler of the World" because, from the moment he was finally cast out of Heaven, he exerts all his evil influence directly among men. *'Bound him till the last days <for a thousand years>'*: Here, "a thousand years" clearly stands for a long and undetermined period of time -actually the duration of the world- till "the end of the age."

20:3. *'He threw him into the Abyss, and... until the last days <thousand years were ended>'*: In other words, here John is telling his persecuted fellow-Christians that, after the fall of the Roman Empire, Satan will be forbidden to persecute the Christians so heavily as he was doing at the time. This is the actual key point: The bounding of Satan in the Abyss will only reduce, not eliminate, his power on Earth, because the Earth was "given to him" when Adam and Eve followed his advice in the Garden of Eden. As Satan says to Jesus: "All this... has been given to me" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The temptation of Jesus. Mt 4:9; Lk 4:6-7). *'Set free for a short time'*: Short, compared to the other period, that of the Kingdom of Yahweh on Earth. Jesus clearly taught that there will always be wars and revolutions, and all the evil accompanying them (even with Satan bound in the

Abyss). But, towards the "end of time" (with Satan totally free again on Earth) there will be a heavy worsening of the situation (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Signs of the end of the age. Mk 13:31; Mt 24:35; Lk 21:33).

20:4. *'Those who had been given authority'*: In v. 2:26 Jesus promises the position of authority -to stand at his right hand- to the faithful. Those who will be faithful to him in their terrestrial life will enter the Kingdom of Yahweh in Heaven immediately after their physical death and will have the better "positions" -that is, at a deeper level of spiritual communion with Jesus and Yahweh (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4). *'Souls of those who had been martyred <beheaded>'*: The martyrs of v. 6:9. *'Those who had not worshipped Rome <the beast> or her Emperor <his image> and had not received the certificate of compliance <his mark on their foreheads or their hands>'*: All men, all around the Roman Empire, had to worship the Emperor as a deity. When a man had burned his pinch of incense to the godhead of the reigning Emperor and said, "Caesar is Lord," he was given a certificate attesting that he had done so. But a Christian could obtain this certificate, this mark, only at the cost of denying his faith; of becoming the slave of Satan (slaves were marked on their bodies with the mark of their master.) Those who refused to comply were subject to social and economic boycott. To note that the martyrs and those who did not worship false gods, actually include all men who have accepted Jesus Christ and his teaching and who, for this reason, are accepted in the Kingdom of Yahweh immediately after their physical death. *'They came to life and reigned with Christ till the last days <a thousand years>'*: To be accepted in Heaven is to be given the true life.

20:5. *'Rest of the dead'*: Those still undergoing the punishment of hell. *'Until their punishment was <the thousand years were> ended'*: The actual length of the "thousand years" of punishment in hell depends on how a particular person was judged and, then, on when that person will accept the preaching of Jesus in hell. *'This is the first resurrection'*: The moment when -immediately after physical death or a period in hell- a man is judged good by Jesus and accepted in the Kingdom of Yahweh.

20:6. *'Blessed... are those...'*: As usual, "blessed" means much more than "happy," as it describes the full happiness of being accepted in the Kingdom of Yahweh -that is, of being in spiritual communion with Jesus, Yahweh and all believers. This corresponds to the blessing of v. 19:9 addressed to those who "are invited to the Communion Supper of the Christ." This image comes from the Jews' idea that, when the Messiah comes, Yahweh's people would be invited to a great Messianic Banquet. In Christian terms

the spiritual Communion is seen as a Supper taken by all the faithful gathered around their Master and Yahweh their God. *'The second death has no power over them'*: The second death, after the physical death which every man must undergo, is the death of those who are undergoing the punishment (even if temporary, formative, and redemptive) of hell. But nothing in life or in death, in time or in eternity can separate those who stand all tests and trials for faith in Jesus Christ. At the time of their personal judgment they will be accepted straight away into Heaven. Anyway, the second death, which is to be sent to hell for the necessary formative and redemptive punishment, is not for ever, as it is sufficient to repent and accept the word of Jesus for being released from hell and accepted into Heaven (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4). *'Priests of Yahweh'*: This is an Old Testament designation of the Israelites, which in the New Testament is applied to the Christians. Through Jesus men can become true sons of Yahweh and they can have, being Yahweh's priests, direct access to Him -that is, they can be in spiritual communion with Yahweh. *'Will reign with him till the last days <for a thousand years>'*: This is, practically, a repetition of v. 20:4.

20:7. *'When the last days <thousand years> are near <over>, Satan will be released'*: As already announced in v. 20:3.

20:8. *'The kings and their subjects <Gog and Magog>'*: "Gog" was an unknown leader whose name appears only here and in Ezekiel. "Magog," in Hebrew, means "the land of Gog." In Jewish tradition, they symbolize the nations of the world as they band together for the final battle against Yahweh. The overall Old Testament background is in Ezekiel ch.s 38-39. *'In number they are...'*: In that period of total freedom of action on Earth, Satan will convince most of the men living at the time to go against Yahweh.

20:9. *'Across the breadth of the Earth'*: From all over the Earth which, at the time, was believed to be flat and square. *'The City He cherishes'*: Jerusalem. A final attack on Jerusalem by the hostile nations is one of the standard pictures of the last times in Jewish thought. Actually, the "battle" will be against the Christian Church on Earth, not limited to a particular city or geographical area. *'Fire came down from Heaven'*: Symbolic of Yahweh's direct intervention in this final, great battle.

20:10. *'Thrown into hell <the lake of burning sulfur>, where the Emperor <beast> and the Antichrist <>false prophet> had been thrown'*: After his final defeat Satan, too, will be condemned to the punishment of hell -which, anyway, even for him will be temporary, formative, and redemptive (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 5). As usual, the picture

of the condemned suffering "physically" in a "burning" hell, is in line with the Old Testament imagery. *'Punished <tormented> day and night for very, very long <ever and ever>'*: Those who have complied with the Emperor worship will deserve a particularly long ("ever and ever") and harsh ("no rest day and night") punishment. Of course to them, as to any other sinner, is always open the door of repentance and acceptance of Jesus' teaching (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4).

20:11. *'Great white Throne'*: The Throne of Yahweh (v. 4:2), white to symbolize His absolute purity. *'Earth and sky passed away <fled from His presence>, and they were no more <there was no place for them>'*: A description of the end of the physical world, at the end of the age (Psalm 102:25-27; Isaiah 51:6; The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Signs of the end of the age. Mk 13:31; Mt 24:35; Lk 21:33).

20:12. *'The dead, great and small'*: This is the Universal Resurrection, with the Universal Judgment of all men. *'Standing before the Throne'*: The Throne of Yahweh, at the center of which stands Jesus Christ (v. 5:6), who is the appointed judge. *'Books were opened'*: The picture of the books with the record of all the actions and thoughts of each man comes from Daniel 7:10. The symbolism is that all through life each man is "writing" his own destiny. *'Another book... the Book of Life'*: In the New Testament the "Book of Life" refers to Yahweh's list of those destined to eternal life. To have a man's name erased from this book would indicate the loss of "citizenship;" that is, of the possibility of entering straight away into the Kingdom of Yahweh. Of course, all the "erased" ones will have the possibility to be included again by accepting, in this life or in the next, the redemption offered them by Jesus Christ (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 4). *'Judged according to what they had done'*: Judged by Jesus Christ, with the perfect knowledge and judgment of Yahweh. Jesus said: "The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Life through the Son. Jn 5:22).

20:13. *'The sea gave up the dead... Death and Hades gave up the dead...'*: This is the Universal Resurrection of all men, wherever and in whatever way they died. *'Each person was judged...'*: A repetition-explanation of v. 20:12.

20:14. *'Death and Hades were thrown into hell <the lake of fire>'*: The meaning is that, at the physical end of the world and of the human race, even Death and Hades -here seen as the personification of physical death

and of the well known place of confinement for the souls of the dead- will cease to exist because useless. *'Hell <the lake of fire> is the second death'*: The second death, after the physical death which every man must undergo, is the death of those who are undergoing the punishment (even if temporary, formative, and redemptive) of hell. But nothing in life or in death, in time or in eternity can separate those who stand all tests and trials for faith in Jesus Christ. At the time of their personal judgment they will be accepted straight away into Heaven.

20:15. *'If anyone's name was not... in the Book of Life, he was thrown into hell <the lake of fire>'*: As usual, the picture of the condemned suffering "physically" in a "burning" hell, is in line with the Old Testament imagery.

THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN**The New Jerusalem. (21:1-27)**

(21:1) Then I saw a new sky and a new Earth, for the first sky and the first Earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. (2) I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from Yahweh, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. (3) And I heard a loud voice from the Throne saying, "Now the dwelling of Yahweh is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and Yahweh Himself will be with them and be their God. (4) He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

(5) He who was seated on the Throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then He said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

(6) He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the Water of Life. (7) He who gets through will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (8) But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -their place will be in hell. This is the second death."

(9) One of the angels who had the bowls full of the last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the New Jerusalem, the City of the Christ." (10) And he carried me away lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of Heaven from Yahweh. (11) It shone with the Glory of Yahweh, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. (12) It had a great, high wall with twelve gates and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. (13) There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. (14) The wall of the City had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the Twelve Apostles of the Christ.

(15) The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the City, its gates and its walls. (16) The City was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the City with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. (17) He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits high, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. (18) The wall was made of jasper, and the City of pure gold, as pure as glass. (19) The foundations of the City walls were

decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, (20)the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. (21)The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the City was of pure gold, like transparent glass.

(22)I did not see a Temple in the City, because [Yahweh] the Lord Almighty and the Christ are its Temple. (23)The City does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the Glory of Yahweh gives it light, and the Christ is its Lamp. (24)The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the Earth will bring their splendor into it. (25)On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. (26)The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. (27)Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Christ's Book of Life.

21:1. *'A new sky and a new Earth':* The dream of a new world, free from evil influence, was deep in Jewish thought (Isaiah 65:17; 66:22). *'The first sky and the first Earth had passed away...':* John's vision is now set in the "time" after the end of the physical world, after the end of time itself.

21:2. *'The New Jerusalem, coming down...':* The faithful ones will be citizens of the City where there is always the presence of Yahweh. The New Jerusalem, the "Heavenly City," actually is the Kingdom of Heaven. So it can come only from Yahweh. The New Jerusalem was a constant dream of the prophets and John brought together all their different visions (Isaiah 54:11-12; 60:10-20; Ezekiel 48:30-35; Haggai 2:9) into his own. Here we can see the faith of the Jews who, even after Jerusalem was obliterated, never lost confidence that Yahweh will restore it. *'Prepared as a bride ...':* The imagery of the wedding, symbolizing the intimate relationship between Yahweh and His people, has its roots in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament (Isaiah 54:5-7; Hosea 2:19). Jesus has given the same image saying: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who prepared a wedding banquet for his son" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The parable of the wedding banquet. Mt 22:2).

21:3. *'A loud voice from the Throne':* The voice of an angel messenger. *'The dwelling of Yahweh is with men and...':* Practically, the words of Leviticus 26:11-12 (found also in Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 37:27). In Christian terms, the meaning is that all men will live for ever in Heaven in spiritual communion with Yahweh and Jesus Christ.

21:4. *'He will wipe every tear'*: An image from Isaiah 25:8. Yahweh will accept all the faithful in His Kingdom. *'No more death or... for the old order... has passed away'*: This passage, practically the same of v. 7:16, comes from the promise of the restoration of Israel (Isaiah 49:10). Here in the Revelation there is a spiritual promise, the promise of the ultimate satisfaction of the needs of the human soul, and of the end of the spiritual suffering. Jesus has pronounced similar words in: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The beatitudes. Mt 5:6; Lk 6:21; Jesus the bread of life. Jn 6:35.

21:5. *'He who was seated on the Throne'*: Yahweh is speaking. *'I am making everything new!'*: Again, this is one of the dreams of the ancient prophets (Isaiah 43:18-19). *'These words are trustworthy and true'*: Men can always trust Yahweh, He always keeps His promises.

21:6. *'It is done'*: This is the announcement of the coming of the New Jerusalem; in Christian terms, the opening of Yahweh's Kingdom to all men. *'I am the Alpha and the Omega...'*: Alpha is the first letter and omega the last of the Greek alphabet; the phrase "alpha to omega" indicates absolute completeness. Yahweh is the beginning and the end of everything, and He rules over all human history. *'The spring of the Water of Life'*: Yahweh provides the "Water of Life" through Jesus Christ (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman. Jn 4:10,14).

21:7. *'He who gets through'*: See the emphasis on getting through -to bear the persecutions with faith- in the letters to the Churches (vv. 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21). *'I will be his God and he will be My son'*: In the Old Testament something very near to this promise was made to Abraham (Genesis 17:7), to Samuel, the son of David (2 Samuel 7:14), and to the Messiah (Psalm 89:27). Now, in the New Testament, the promise is made to each man.

21:8. *'But the cowardly...'*: All those who did not bear the persecutions. *'Their place will be in hell <the fiery lake of burning sulfur>'*: After physical death, all men are still spiritually alive. So, those who "did not get through" are condemned to the punishment of hell (which, anyway, is temporary, formative, and redemptive). As usual, the picture of the condemned suffering "physically" in a "burning" hell, is in line with the Old Testament imagery. *'Second death'*: The second death, after the physical death which every man must undergo, is the death of those who are undergoing the punishment of hell.

21:9. *'One of the <seven> angels who had the <seven> bowls full of the <seven> last plagues'*: The angels introduced in v. 15:1, carrier of the third and severest series of plagues. *'I will show you the New Jerusalem <bride>, the City <wife> of the Christ <Lamb>'*: After the new sky and the new Earth (v. 21:1), now John sees the New City of Yahweh and of Christ.

21:10. *'Lifted up by the Spirit of Yahweh <in the Spirit>'*: In a state of spiritual exaltation, of ecstasy -this was not a dream, but a vision. *'A mountain great and high'*: The same way Ezekiel describes his experience (Ezekiel 40:1-2). *'Jerusalem, coming down of Heaven from Yahweh'*: The New Jerusalem, the "Heavenly City," actually is the Kingdom of Heaven. So it can come only from Yahweh.

21:11. *'It shone with the Glory of Yahweh, and its brilliance was like...'*: The New Jerusalem is the eternal dwelling of Yahweh. So, the City shines of Yahweh's "luminosity" (v. 4:3). *'Clear as crystal'*: The most pure material existing at the time.

21:12-14. *'It had... twelve gates, and... On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. Three gates on the east,... The wall... had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the Twelve Apostles of the Christ <Lamb>'*: A picture taken from Ezekiel 48:30-35. The number 12 emphasizes the continuity between the Old Testament people of Yahweh and the New Testament Christian Church.

21:15. *'To measure the City'*: Analogous to the measuring of the Temple in Ezekiel ch.s 40-41. In v. 11:1 the measuring was to ensure the protection of the faithful; here it serves to show the size and symmetry of the eternal dwelling place of the faithful.

21:16. *'12,000 stadia'*: 1,400 miles, or 2,200 km. *'Length... wide... high'*: Thus a perfect cube, as was the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle and the Temple. This shape occurred in Ezekiel's visions of the New Jerusalem and the New Temple (Ezekiel 41:21; 43:16; 45:2; 48:20). The size of the City is really immense, to symbolize that in it there is ample space for all men.

21:17. *'144 cubits'*: 200 feet, or 65 m. There is no comparison between the small height of the wall and the great size of the City; the wall is not for defense, as there are no more enemies, but only to delimit the area of the City.

21:18-21. *'The wall was made of jasper. The City of pure gold. The foundations... were decorated with every kind of precious stone. Jasper... amethysts. The twelve gates were twelve pearls. The great street... was of pure gold...'*: The City of Yahweh was made of the most precious and pure materials.

21:22. *'I did not see a Temple'*: The City was built in the shape of a perfect cube, indicating that the City itself was the Most Holy Place; the place of the presence of Yahweh. *'[Yahweh] the Lord Almighty and the Christ <Lamb> are its Temple'*: The New Jerusalem is the Christian Church, the place of the presence of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ.

21:23. *'The Glory of Yahweh gives it light'*: From ancient times the Glory of Yahweh (the "pillar of fire" in Exodus 13:21) gives light to His People.

'The Christ <Lamb> is its lamp': Jesus said that the Christians are the "light of the world" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The light of the world. Mk 4:21; Mt 5:14-15; Lk 8:16), and this is because he is the "Light of the Christian Church."

21:24. *'The nations will walk... the kings...'*: All men will be in the Kingdom of Yahweh and all of them will glorify Yahweh with their presence (the kings, that is, the most faithful, will give their "splendor" to the "light" of the City.)

21:25. *'There will be no night'*: During the night which, with its darkness, was synonymous of danger, the gates of all towns were shut. But in the Kingdom of Yahweh there is no night and no danger, so there is no need of shutting the gates.

21:26. *'Glory and honor of the nations'*: The best characteristics of all the peoples will accompany them in the Kingdom of Yahweh.

21:27. *'Nothing impure... but only those whose names are written in the Christ's <Lamb's> Book of Life'*: Nobody, without having accepted Jesus and his teaching, will enter in the Kingdom of Yahweh. Those who were faithful during their terrestrial life, will enter in the Kingdom immediately after their physical death. All the others, those whose names were erased from the Book of Life, will anyway have the possibility of entering by accepting the redemption offered them by Jesus Christ.

The River of Life. (22:1-6)

(22:1)Then the angel showed me the River of the Water of Life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the Throne of Yahweh and of the Christ (2)down the middle of the great street of the City. On each side of the river stood the Tree of Life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (3)No longer will there be any curse. The Throne of Yahweh and of the Christ will be in the City, and His servants will serve Him. (4)They will see His face, and His Name will be on their foreheads. (5)There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Yahweh the Lord will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

(6)The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. [Yahweh] the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show His servants the things that must soon take place."

22:1. *'River of the Water of Life'*: A picture taken from Ezekiel's vision, where the water which flows from under the altar of the Temple has healing

and life-nurturing properties (Ezekiel 47:1,9). *'Flowing from the Throne of Yahweh and of the Christ <Lamb>'*: Yahweh provides the "Water of Life" through Jesus Christ (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman. Jn 4:10,14).

22:2. *'Down the middle of the great street'*: Making the Water of Life available to all the inhabitants of the City, that is, to all men. *'Tree of Life'*: The tree which, in the Garden of Eden, was giving eternal life, without death, to those who eat its fruits (Genesis 2:9; 3:22). Now the fruit of the Tree of Life is no longer forbidden; it is there, along the main road, for all to take. A similar tree appears in Ezekiel's vision (Ezekiel 47:12). *'Twelve crops...'*: There is always great abundance of fruit. *'The leaves... for the healing of the nations'*: The comforting shade of the Tree of Life is not reserved only to the Jews; its beneficial effects are for all people, of all nations.

22:3. *'No longer...'*: Here there is a spiritual promise, the promise of the ultimate satisfaction of the needs of the human soul, and of the end of the spiritual suffering. Jesus has pronounced similar words in: The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The beatitudes. Mt 5:6; Lk 6:21; Jesus the bread of life. Jn 6:35. *'The Throne of Yahweh and of the Christ <Lamb> will be in the City'*: The Heavenly Jerusalem is the Christian Church, the Most Holy Place, the Throne, the place of the presence of Yahweh and of Jesus Christ. *'His servants will serve Him'*: Here "servants" -as in v. 1:1- means "faithful believers." All men will be with Yahweh in Heaven, having reached the ultimate purpose of their creation; to be in full spiritual communion with Him.

22:4. *'They will see His face'*: Because they will live eternally in Heaven with Yahweh. *'His Name will be on their forehead'*: This image comes from Ezekiel 9:4. The seal (the Name of the Lord stamped on the forehead of His followers) is a sign that those people belong to Yahweh and are under His power, authority and protection.

22:5. *'No more night'*: During the night which, with its darkness, was synonymous of danger, the gates of all towns were shut. But in the Kingdom of Yahweh there is no night and no danger, so there is no need for shutting the gates. *'They will not need... for Yahweh the Lord will give them light'*: From ancient times the Glory of Yahweh (the "pillar of fire" in Exodus 13:21) gives light to His People. In Christian terms, Jesus Christ is the Light: Jesus said that the Christians are the "light of the world" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The light of the world. Mk 4:21; Mt 5:14-15; Lk 8:16), and this is because he is the "Light of the Christian Church." *'They will reign...'*: Not by political supremacy, but by living for ever following the example of Jesus Christ. The Old Testament background of this picture is in Daniel (Daniel 7:18,27).

22:6. *'These words are trustworthy and true'*: Once again the angel stresses the truth of all that John has seen and heard. In v. 21:5 these are the words of Yahweh Himself. *'God of the spirits of the prophets'*: The meaning is that the message John is receiving comes from Yahweh, who did inspire the minds of the prophets who, in Old Testament time, were the few people in spiritual communion with Him (a better explanation of this point can be found in App. 2). *'To show His servants...'*: The Revelation is addressed to all believers in Jesus Christ.

Jesus is coming. (22:7-15)

(22:7)"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

(8)I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. (9)But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant as you and as your brothers the prophets and as all who keep the words of this book. Worship Yahweh!"

(10)Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (11)Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

(12)"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. (13)I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

(14)Blessed are those who are faithful, that they may have the right to the Tree of Life and may go through the gates into the City. (15)Outside are the wicked, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who likes and practice falsehood."

22:7. *'Behold, I am coming soon!'*: Jesus ascended to Heaven "in a cloud" and, as the angel told his disciples: "This same Jesus... will come back in the same way..." (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The Ascension. Ac 1:11). In this passage John states his full confidence in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, who will save all Christians and will bring them to eternal life. In this way John was giving strength and comfort to his fellow Christians, who were suffering from the cruelty of their enemies, and for whom faith meant death. *'Blessed is he who keeps...'*: This is the sixth of the seven beatitudes listed in the book. "Blessed" means much more than "happy," and here it describes the fact that is a great privilege to be put in condition of following the requests of the prophecy -whether command, instruction or prediction- written in this book.

22:8-9. *'I, John, am the one who...'*: Here, as in vv. 1:1,4,9, John identifies himself as the author of the book. *'I fell down to worship... Do not do it... Servant as you and... Worship Yahweh!'*: As in v. 19:10, it was John's instinct to worship the angel messenger. In the early Church there was a tendency to worship angels. In certain circles of Judaism the angels were seen not only as Yahweh's messengers but also as intermediaries between men and Yahweh. Clearly, some of the Jew-Christians brought this special reverence for the angels with them, forgetting that with the coming of Jesus no other intermediary between Yahweh and man is necessary. Consequently, John insists that the angels are no more than servants of Yahweh; and that only Yahweh -and Jesus Christ- must be worshipped.

22:10. *'Do not seal up the words of the prophecy'*: In contrast to the older Revelation of Daniel, where the instruction is to seal them till a distant future (Daniel 8:26; 12:4).

22:11. *'Let him who...'*: The Old Testament background is in Daniel 12:10 and Ezekiel 3:27. The meaning is that a man can refuse to take the way of Jesus Christ, who will not force the man's choice; every man is writing his own destiny.

22:12. *'Behold! I am coming soon!'*: A repetition of the beginning of v. 22:7. *'My reward... according to what he has done'*: Every man will be judged by Jesus Christ, with the perfect knowledge and judgment of Yahweh, which takes into account everything the man is and everything he has done. Judgment based on works is taught by Jesus: "The Son of Man... will reward each person according to what he has done" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus predicts his death. Mk 8:38; Mt 16:27; Lk 9:26), even if it has to be clear that the possibility and capability of doing "good work" is always a gift of the grace of Yahweh.

22:13. *'I am the Alpha and the Omega...'*: Alpha is the first letter and omega the last of the Greek alphabet; the phrase "alpha to omega" indicates absolute completeness. Yahweh is the beginning and the end of everything, and He rules over all human history.

22:14. *'Blessed are those who are faithful <wash their robes>'*: This is the last of the seven beatitudes of this book. *'The right to...'*: The right to enter the Kingdom of Yahweh and to live eternally into it.

22:15. *'Outside are...'*: Nobody, without having accepted Jesus and his teaching, will enter in the Kingdom of Yahweh. Those who were faithful during their terrestrial life, will enter in the Kingdom immediately after their physical death. All the others, those whose names were erased from the Book of Life, will anyway have the possibility of entering by accepting the redemption offered them by Jesus Christ. *'The wicked <dogs>'*: A term applied to all types of ceremonially impure persons.

Epilogue. (22:16-21)

(16) "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you all this testimony for the Churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

(17) The Spirit of Yahweh and the Christian Church say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the Water of Life.

(18) I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, Yahweh will add to him the plagues described in this book. **(19)** And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, Yahweh will take away from him his share in the Tree of Life and in the Holy City, which are described in this book.

(20) He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

(21) The grace of the Lord Jesus be with Yahweh's people. Amen.

22:16. 'I, Jesus, have sent my angel to...': At the closure of the Revelation there are the same words found at its opening. The Revelation is the "communication" of future events, given by Yahweh to Jesus and by Jesus to John. And Jesus guarantees the truth of all John has seen and heard. The Revelation is a foretelling of the near future, addressed to the Christians of John's time, and does not have to be used as a kind of mysterious timetable to work out what is going to happen thousands of years later. The things John deals with are to happen in his immediate future and, so, the Revelation has to be interpreted against the background of its own time. '*The Root and the Offspring of David*': This title comes from the vision of the prophet Isaiah who, after the Assyrians conquest and the Babylonian exile had destroyed the Kingdom of Judah, looked forward to the Messiah, the King in the line of David and of his father Jesse (Isaiah 11:1-10). '*Bright Morning Star*': The morning star is the herald of the day which chases away the darkness of the night. The coming of Jesus is the herald of the Kingdom of Yahweh which chases away the darkness of sin and death. Jesus said: "I am the Light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: The validity of Jesus testimony. Jn 8:12). The background is the Messianic prophecy of Numbers 24:17: "A star will come out of Jacob."

22:17. '*The Spirit of Yahweh*': As stated in v. 1:1, the Revelation was given to John by Jesus who received it from Yahweh. '*The Christian Church <Bride>*': As it was proclaimed in v. 21:9, the Bride (Wife) of the Christ

<Lamb> is the New Jerusalem (City), that is, the Christian Church. *'Come!'*: An invitation -from Yahweh, Jesus Christ, and the whole Christian Church- to each man to accept Jesus Christ and his teaching. *'Let him who ears say, "Come!"'*: Every Christian is to be a missionary, he who has already accepted Jesus must find others for his Master. *'Whoever is thirsty...'*: In the Old Testament, a similar invitation is in Isaiah 55:1. Jesus himself made that call: "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus the bread of life. Jn 6:35). *'Whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the Water of Life'*: Practically the same words pronounced by Yahweh (v. 21:6). Yahweh provides the "Water of Life" through Jesus Christ (The Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus talks with a Samaritan woman. Jn 4:10,14).

22:18-19. *'I warn... If anyone adds... If anyone takes words...'*: Clearly, the warning is against distorting the teaching of the book. To note that at the time, since all books were hand-copied by scribes and it was easy to make mistakes in the copying, it was a regular custom to insert at the end of a book a solemn warning against any change.

22:20. *'He who testifies...'*: Jesus Christ. *'I am coming soon'*: Here, as in vv. 1:7; 22:7,12, John states his full confidence in the triumphant return of Jesus Christ, who will save all Christians and will bring them to eternal life. In this way John was giving strength and comfort to his fellow Christians, who were suffering from the cruelty of their enemies, and for whom faith meant death. *'Come, Lord Jesus'*: An expression used by the early Church asking for Jesus' comfort and help.

22:21. *'The grace...'*: A typical greeting of the early Church.

APPENDIX 1

The Text of "THE REVELATION" **(Holy Bible, New International Version)**

Prologue. (1:1-3)

(1:1)The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, (2)who testifies to everything he saw -that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. (3)Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.

Greetings and doxology. (1:4-8)

(1:4)John,

To the seven churches in the province of Asia:
Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, (5)and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

To him who is fond of us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, (6)and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father -to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

(7)Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him;
and all the people of the earth will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.

(8)"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

One like a Son of Man. (1:9-20)

(1:9)I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (10)On the Lord's Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, (11)which said: "Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea."

(12)I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, (13)and among the lampstands was someone "like a son of man," dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. (14)His head and hair were white

like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were blazing like fire. **(15)**His feet were glowing like bronze in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. **(16)**In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.

(17)When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: "Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. **(18)**I am the Living One; I was dead and, look, I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.

(19)Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. **(20)**The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches."

To the Church in Ephesus. (2:1-7)

(2:1)"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: **(2)**I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. **(3)**You have persevered and have endured hardship for my name, and have not grown weary.

(4)Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first, fervor. **(5)**Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. **(6)**But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.

(7)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches. To him who gets through, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."

To the Church in Smyrna. (2:8-11)

(2:8)"To the angel of the church in Smyrna write:

These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. **(9)**I know your afflictions and your poverty -yet you are rich! I know the calumny of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. **(10)**Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

(11)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches. He who gets through will not be hurt at all by the second death."

To the Church in Pergamum. (2:12-17)

(2:12)"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-hedged sword. **(13)** I know where you live -where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city -where Satan lives.

(14)Nevertheless, I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to instigate the Israelites to sin eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. **(15)**Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. **(16)**Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.

(17)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches. To him who gets through, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

To the Church in Thyatira. (2:18-29)

(2:18)"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are blazing like fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. **(19)**I know your deeds, your affection and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

(20)Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. **(21)**I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. **(22)**So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. **(23)**I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. **(24)**Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): **(25)**Only hold on to what you have until I come.

(26)To him who gets through and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations, just as I have received authority from my Father. **(27)**'He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery.' **(28)**I will also give him the morning star. **(29)**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches.

To the Church in Sardis. (3:1-6)

(3:1)"To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. **(2)**Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. **(3)**Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.

(4)Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. **(5)**He who gets through will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never erase his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. **(6)**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches."

To the Church in Philadelphia. (3:7-13)

(3:7)"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. **(8)**I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. **(9)**I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars -I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I had been fond of you. **(10)**Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.

(11)I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. **(12)**He who gets through I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. **(13)**He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches."

To the Church in Laodicea. (3:14-22)

(3:14)"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. **(15)**I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! **(16)**So, because you are lukewarm -neither hot nor cold- I am about to spit you out of my mouth. **(17)**You say,

'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. **(18)**I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see.

(19)Those whom I am fond of I rebuke and discipline. So be zealous and repent. **(20)**Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

(21)To him who gets through, I will give the right to seat with me on my throne, just as I got through and sat down with my Father on his throne.

(22)He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit of God says to the churches."

The Throne in Heaven. (4:1-11)

(4:1)After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." **(2)**At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. **(3)**And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. **(4)**Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. **(5)**From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. **(6)**Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. **(7)**The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. **(8)**Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying:

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come."

(9)Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, **(10)**the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say:

(11)"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory
and honor and power, for you created all things, and
by your will they were created and have their being."

The scroll and the Lamb. (5:1-14)

(5:1) Then I saw in the right hand of him who set on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. (2) And I saw a powerful angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" (3) But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. (4) I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll and look inside. (5) Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

(6) Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. (7) He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. (8) And when he had taken it, the four living creature and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, consisting of the prayers of the saints. (9) And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and nation. (10) You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

(11) Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. (12) In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"

(13) Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (14) The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshipped.

The seals. (6:1-17)

(6:1) I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, "Come!" (2) I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest.

(3) When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" (4) Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider

was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

(5)When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. (6)Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

(7)When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" (8)I looked and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

(9)When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. (10)They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"

(11)Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

(12)I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, (13)and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a tree when shaken by a strong wind. (14)The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

(15)Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. (16)They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! (17)For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

144,000 sealed. (7:1-8)

(7:1)After that I saw four angels standing at the four corner of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. (2)Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: (3)"Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God."

(4)Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. (5)From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, (6)from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, (7)from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, (8)from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

The great multitude in white robes. (7:9-17)

(9)After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. (10)And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

(11)All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshipped God, (12)saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!"

(13)Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes -who are they, and where did they come from?" (14)I answered, "Sir, you know."

And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. (15)Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. (16)Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. (17)For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The seventh seal and the golden censer. (8:1-5)

(8:1)When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

(2)And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

(3)Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, consisting of the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. (4)The smoke of the incense, consisting of the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. (5)Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar,

and hurled it on the earth: and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

The trumpets. (8:6-13;9:1-21)

(8:6)Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them.

(7)The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.

(8)The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea was turned into blood, **(9)**a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.

(10)The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water -**(11)**the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the water turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.

(12)The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night.

(13)As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: "Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blast about to be sounded by the other three angels!"

(9:1)The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. **(2)**When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and the sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. **(3)**And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. **(4)**They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. **(5)**They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when he strikes a man. **(6)**During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them.

(7)The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. **(8)**Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. **(9)**They had breast-plates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of

their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. **(10)**They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. **(11)**They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

(12)The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.

(13)The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. **(14)**It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." **(15)**And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of man-kind. **(16)**The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number.

(17)The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breast-plates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. **(18)**A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. **(19)**The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

(20)The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshipping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood -idols that cannot see or hear or walk. **(21)**Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.

The angel and the little scroll. (10:1-11)

(10:1)Then I saw another powerful angel coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. **(2)**He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, **(3)**and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. **(4)**And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven say, "Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down."

(5)Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. **(6)**And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, "There will be no more delay! **(7)** But in the days when the seventh angel will sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

(8)Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: "Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land."

(9)So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, "Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey." **(10)**I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. **(11)**Then I was told, "You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings."

The two witnesses. (11:1-14)

(11:1)I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshippers there. **(2)** But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Pagans. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months. **(3)**And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." **(4)**These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. **(5)**If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. **(6)**These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

(7)Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. **(8)**Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. **(9)**For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. **(10)**The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.

(11)But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. **(12)**Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on.

(13)At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.

(14)The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.

The seventh trumpet. (11:15-19)

(11:15)The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

(16)And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshipped God, (17)saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign.

(18)The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

(19)Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The Woman and the Dragon. (12:1-17)

(12:1)A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. (2)She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. (3)Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. (4)His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment he was born. (5)She gave birth to a Son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. (6)The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

(7)And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. (8)But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. (9)The great dragon was hurled down -that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

(10)Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.

(11)They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they had not been fond of their lives so much as to shrink from death.

(12)Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

(13)When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. (14)The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. (15)At that time from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. (16)But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. (17) Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring -those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The beast out of the sea. (13:1-10)

(13:1)And I stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. (2)The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. (3)One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. (4)Men worshipped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshipped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?"

(5)The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. (6)He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. (7)He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. (8)All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast -all whose names have not been written from the creation of the world in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain.

(9)He who has an ear, let him hear. (10)If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

The Beast out of the Earth. (13:11-18)

(13:11)Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. (12)He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and his inhabi-

tants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. **(13)**And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. **(14)**Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. **(15)**He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that he could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. **(16)**He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, **(17)**so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

(18)This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

The Lamb and the 144,000. (14:1-5)

(14:1)Then I looked, and there before me there was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. **(2)**And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. **(3)**And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. **(4)**These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. **(5)**No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

The three angels. (14:6-13)

(14:6)Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth -to every nation, tribe, language and people. **(7)**He said in a loud voice, "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the seas and the springs of water."

(8)A second angel followed and said, "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."

(9)A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, **(10)**he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. **(11)**And

the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." (12) This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus.

(13) Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

"Yes," says the Spirit of God, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them."

The harvest of the Earth. (14:14-20)

(14:14) I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one "like a son of man" with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. (15) Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, "Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." (16) So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

(17) Another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. (18) Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." (19) The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. (20) They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.

The seven angels with seven plagues. (15:1-8)

(15:1) I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues -last, because with them God's wrath is completed. (2) And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God (3) and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. (4) Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you. For your righteous acts have been revealed."

(5) After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. (6) Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore

golden sashes around their chests. (7)Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. (8)And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

The seven bowls of God's wrath. (16:1-21)

(16:1)Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth."

(2)The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshipped his image.

(3)The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

(4)The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they turned into blood.

(5)Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: "You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; (6)for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve." (7)And I heard the altar respond: "Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments."

(8)The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. (9)They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

(10)The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony (11)and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

(12)The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. (13)Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. (14)They are demonic spirits performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.

(15)"Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stay awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed."

(16)Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

(17)The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, "It is done!" (18)Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earth-quake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. (19)The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. (20)Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. (21)From the sky huge hailstones of about a talent each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

The woman on the beast. (17:1-18)

(17:1)One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. (2)With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries."

(3)Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. (4)The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. (5)This mysterious title was written on her forehead: "Babylon the great, the mother of prostitutes, and of the abominations of the Earth." (6)I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

When I saw her, I was greatly astonished. (7)Then the angel said to me: "Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. (8)The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come.

(9)This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. (10)They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. (11)The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.

(12)The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with

the beast. (13)They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. (14)They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings -and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers."

(15)Then the angel said to me, "The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. (16)The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. (17)For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God's words are fulfilled. (18)The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth."

The Fall of Babylon. (18:1-24)

(18:1)After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. (2)With a powerful voice he shouted: "Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. (3)For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from their excessive luxuries."

(4)Then I heard another voice from heaven say: "Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, that you will not receive any of her plagues; (5)for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes. (6)Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. (7)Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boast, 'I sit as a queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' (8) Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her.

9)When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. (10)Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!'

(11)The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more -(12)cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; (13)cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep;

horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men.

(14)They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' **(15)**The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn **(16)**and cry out: 'Woe! Woe O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!'

(17)Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. **(18)**When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' **(19)**They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin!'

(20)Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you!'

(21)Then a powerful angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: "With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. **(22)**The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. **(23)**The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world's great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. **(24)**In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth."

Hallelujah! (19:1-10)

(19:1)After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, **(2)**for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his servants." **(3)**And again they shouted: "Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever." **(4)**The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshipped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: "Amen! Hallelujah!"

(5)Then a voice came from the throne, saying: "Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!"

(6)Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of ru-

shing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. (7)Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. (8)Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

(9)Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God."

(10)At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant as you and as your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

The rider on the white horse. (19:11-21)

(19:11)I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. (12)His eyes are blazing like fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. (13)He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is Word of God. (14)The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. (15)Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. (16)On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: King of kings and Lord of lords.

(17)And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, "Come, gather together for the great supper of God, (18)so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great."

(19)Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. (20)But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. (21)The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

The thousand years. (20:1-6)

(20:1)And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key of the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. (2)He seized the dragon,

that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. **(3)**He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

(4)I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God, and of those who had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. **(5)**(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. **(6)**Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Satan's doom. (20:7-10)

(7)When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison **(8)**and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth -Gog and Magog- to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. **(9)**They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he cherishes. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. **(10)**And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The dead are judged. (20:11-15)

(11)Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. **(12)**And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. **(13)**The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. **(14)**Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. **(15)**If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

The New Jerusalem. (21:1-27)

(21:1)Then I saw a new sky and a new earth, for the first sky and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. **(2)**I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. **(3)**And I heard a loud voice

from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. **(4)**He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

(5)He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true."

(6)He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. **(7)**He who gets through will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. **(8)**But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars -their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

(9)One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." **(10)**And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. **(11)**It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. **(12)**It had a great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates. On the gates were written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel. **(13)**There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west. **(14)**The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

(15)The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. **(16)**The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. **(17)**He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits high, by man's measurement, which the angel was using. **(18)**The wall was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. **(19)**The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, **(20)**the fifth sardonyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, and the twelfth amethyst. **(21)**The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl. The great street of the city was **(23)**The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. **(24)**The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring

their splendor into it. (25)On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. (26)The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. (27)Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

The river of life. (22:1-6)

(22:1)Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb (2)down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. (3)No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. (4)They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. (5)There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever.

(6)The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

Jesus is coming. (22:7-15)

(22:7)"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

(8)I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. (9)But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant as you and as your brothers the prophets and as all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!"

(10)Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. (11)Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy."

(12)"Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. (13)I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End.

(14)Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. (15)Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who likes and practice falsehood."

Epilogue. (22:16-21)

(16)"I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you all this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."

(17)The Spirit of God and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

(18)I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. (19)And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy ci-ty, which are described in this book.

(20)He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon."

Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.

(21)The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God's people. Amen.

Jesus Christ, who went to preach when dead to the souls of the dead

From "Thoughts" - Cogito ergo credo

After Jesus' death his body lay in the tomb waiting for Resurrection, while his Spirit -his Soul- went to the "Land of the Dead" to preach to their souls. Traditionally, and wrongly, we are accustomed to say that Jesus, after his death, "descended into hell." This mistake is due to an improper translation of the words that appear in the original Greek versions. The word used in Greek is Hades, Sheol in Hebrew; and it did not represent hell, but the land of the dead, the place where men's souls were going after their physical death.

Before Jesus' Resurrection, the doors of the Reign of Yahweh were not yet opened to all men. As a consequence the souls of all the dead -with the exception of the few who had been chosen by Yahweh for some particular mission and for this reason were in personal spiritual communion with His Spirit- had to go to this Land of the Dead which, anyway, does not have any of the connotations of torture and punishment that the word hell includes; in this last case the word normally used by the New Testament writers was Gehenna, that is, the place of punishment of the wicked.

Jesus' Spirit did not only go to this land of the dead; he preached to them, to their souls, announcing his Gospel -the Good News- and declaring the remission of sins, which was received by those who believed in him, in the same way he did on Earth with the living. Jesus preached to all men who lived and died from the beginning of the human race and who never heard of him; not only to those who in every age and generation and in every race and nation lived rightly, but to all the souls of the dead who never had the opportunity to receive the Christian Gospel. From this moment on, it is always valid and true that, either in this life or in the life beyond physical death, all men are offered the Gospel of Yahweh's Truth and Affection.

This means that there are no limits in space and time to the Grace of Yahweh which continues to operate in whatever other world and whatever other life there may be; that the whole universe in time and in eternity, here and after here, belongs to Yahweh; and that He has not only time, but also eternity to win all men to Himself. Therefore, the result of Jesus Christ's mission is destined to be complete and total because, in the end, not only all men will be saved, but even Lucifer will repent and will enter for ever -with all his angels- the Reign of Yahweh.

Jesus Christ, who is second only to the Father, who gave him the task to improve the human physical and spiritual condition, and to administer justice to the living and the dead thus making everybody suitable to enter His Reign

From "Thoughts" - Cogito ergo credo

"Forty days" after resurrecting, Jesus "ascended to Heaven," in such a way indicating the continuity between the end of his presence and mission on Earth, and the beginning of his presence and responsibility in the Reign of Yahweh.

By dying on the cross, Jesus opened to everybody the doors of the Reign; from that moment on, to all men is given the possibility -the grace- to live near Yahweh, to be in communion with Him.

By "ascending to Heaven," he -the Son of Yahweh- settled in His Reign holding the highest position, immediately after Yahweh Himself -"seated at the right hand of Yahweh," and, "all authority in Heaven and on Earth had been given to him"- and taking charge of the responsibilities that Yahweh assigned him -to be the "Lord of men" and "to judge the living and the dead." In other words, from the moment of his Ascension, Jesus has been second only to the Father, Who gave him full authority; position of power and responsibility that came as a consequence of what he did, following the will of his Father, for the redemption of the human race.

Jesus is the Savior of all men and, as such, was given two tasks:

a) To improve -as much as possible within the competition still existing between Yahweh and Satan which, as we know, will stop only after "the end of time" and of the world, and after the total conversion to Christianity of the last man- the human physical and spiritual condition on Earth by convincing more and more people of living a "Christian Life." It is necessary, at this point, to remember that there will never more be on Earth a perfect condition as it existed in the "Garden of Eden." This condition was lost for ever because of Adam and Eve, and the possibility to reinstate it is not part of Yahweh's plans about the destiny of the human race.

b) To make everybody suitable to enter His Reign by administering justice during life and after death. The Reign of Yahweh is the final destination of all the spiritual beings He has created; men and angels, and is the place where, at "the end of time," all men and angels will live together an everlasting life in full spiritual communion with Him and everybody else. Men are suitable to enter Yahweh's Reign only after having satisfied His justice -the perfect justice possible only to the omniscience of Yahweh. This condition can be fulfilled during life -by the sufferings of life- and after death -by the sufferings of hell. At this point it is necessary to remember that not all the sufferings of life are for the administration of divine justice; part are tests people are subject to for making them even more suitable to the Reign, for allowing them to enter in a better and deeper communion with Yahweh. Part are for giving some people the occasion and possibility to express and demonstrate their Christian faith and piety by helping those who are in need.

The administration of justice is a consequence of a judgment, and both the functions of judgment and of administration of justice belong to Jesus, to whom they were given by Yahweh. Now, if we consider that it is a matter of common experience to see that rewards and punishments -which are a consequence of the administration of justice- are only partially allocated in this life, it follows that Jesus' judgment and administration of justice, with the balance of rewards and punishments, have to take place after the end of each man's terrestrial life.

During this life and, if necessary, after death, each man is offered the grace of having faith in Jesus; grace that the man has the privilege to accept or the responsibility to refuse; in the second case even many times. To accept means to repent and, for this, to have the privilege of being received by Jesus and allowed to enter the Reign of Yahweh. To refuse means to go on carrying the full responsibility for all the sins -the "non-Christian" facts and aspects of a person's life. The refusal to repent makes necessary a judgment which at or after the end of life, carries the due punishment for not accepting the grace and the forgiveness offered. The place of such punishment is "hell," that is, the place where Yahweh is not, characterized by His total and absolute absence. Hell does not exist only for making possible the proper administration of Yahweh's justice; it exists mainly as a tool, an absolutely necessary tool, of Yahweh's grace. It is just through hell that Jesus can -by offering His grace many and many times- make everybody, even the worst man, suitable to enter his Father's Reign.

At the end of time, everybody will be with Yahweh, a direct consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection*From "Thoughts" - Cogito ergo credo*

Many Christians have some doubts about the possibility of hell being only temporary and about the justice of a final situation, after the end of time, with everybody -both those who were good and those who were bad- living together with Yahweh. And they have even more doubts on the convenience of spreading such a belief -even though correct- fearing the relaxation of moral values it could engender.

Yet at the "end of time" everybody, that is, all men and angels, without any exception, will be admitted to the Reign of Yahweh to live in His presence and company -that is, in spiritual communion with Him and everybody else. This final situation of general communion of Yahweh's creation is not only the only possible consequence of both His justice and His affection, but, furthermore, is perfectly right and just even if, apparently, it puts those who were "bad" during their earthly life at the same level of those who were "good."

Let us now discuss and demonstrate that this final situation of everybody's communion is a consequence of Yahweh's justice and affection, is right and just, and is proportionate to His saving action.

1) It is a consequence of Yahweh's justice.

A perfect and total justice has to give and guarantee a punishment exactly tuned to the crime committed; not a bit too soft, not a bit too harsh, and, even more important, not an end to itself, but focused on correcting and changing positively the behavior of the punished; therefore making him, at the end of the punishment, a better person. At this point we have to notice that the length of human life, compared to the age of the universe and to eternity, is a very short flash. Even if we consider the worst man who could ever have lived on Earth; and suppose that he was put in a position of power and authority so great that he was able to afflict whole populations with his evil doings; that, furthermore, he lived an exceptionally long life, long as the life of the first human generations. Well, then, even in this worst case, it is evident that the "quantity" of evil done, although huge, is still limited. The relevant punishment, as a consequence of a perfect justice, has to be perfectly proportional to the evil done; then, it has to be exceptionally long and harsh, yet limited and, moreover, tuned to obtain repentance. Of course, from our point of view, as human beings living on Earth, we have an objective difficulty in understanding how it is possible for such a kind of evil person to be still accepted by Yahweh. We can manage it only by remembering that Jesus came on Earth to announce the good news that the doors of the Kingdom of Yahweh are open to ALL men of the past, of the present, and of the future; even to the most evil man who ever existed:

"Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the Kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among people... and people brought to him all who were ill... and he healed them." (Matthew 4:23-25)

"Jesus went to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of Yahweh. 'The time has come, 'he said, 'the Kingdom of Yahweh is near. Repent and believe the good news.'" (Mark 1:14-15)

"The people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. Moreover, demons came out of many people." (Luke 4:40-41)

As we can see, not only Jesus announces to everybody the good news, which refers to the future life, but even his practical actions -in this case healing any sickness and liberation from demon possession- are available for everybody; both the good and the evil.

Let us go back to the extremely powerful and evil person mentioned above, who, for the position of power he holds, is surely full of earthly riches. Well, the Gospels declare that even these people so rich and powerful will be allowed to enter -obviously after repenting; that means after the due, just punishment- the Reign of Yahweh, because for Yahweh "all things are possible:"

"Jesus said to his disciples, 'I tell you the truth, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Yahweh.'

'Who then can be saved?'

Jesus... said, 'With man this is impossible, but with Yahweh all things are possible.'" (Matthew 19:23-26; Luke 18:25-27)

Surely Yahweh has many ways to distribute punishment, the harshest being hell, which has the purpose, with the sufferings it carries, to administer His justice to all men who have something evil for which they have not sufficiently atoned during their terrestrial life. As a consequence of the administration of justice, the punishment of hell -which is both expiatory and corrective- has to be limited and cannot last for all future eternity. Moreover, surely at a certain point in the future, the human race will cease to exist; after a further "period of time," which could even be dramatically long, the punishment of all bad people will reach its end and, as a consequence, even the last man will leave hell. It follows that hell has to be temrary; because, being corrective and redemptive, at a certain point -when there will be no more people to correct and redeem- it will be an empty place and even the reason for its existence will end. In this way we know that after death -end of terrestrial life- there will almost surely be a more or less long period of instruction, followed by the offering of Yahweh's grace. At this point, repentance and salvation, after leaving hell and going with Jesus Christ to Yahweh, will constitute the reality of the first stage of our future life; waiting for the general judgment and for the physical resurrection.

"I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Yahweh and those who hear will live." (John 5:25)

"This is why it [Psalm 68:18] says: 'When he [Jesus] ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men.' (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very One who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe)." (Ephesians 4:8-10)

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to Yahweh. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit of Yahweh, through Whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when Yahweh waited patiently in the days of Noah." (1 Peter 3:18-20)

"For this is the reason the Gospel was preached even to those who are now dead..." (1 Peter 4:6)

After his physical death, Jesus' spirit went to the "Land of the Dead" to preach to the souls of the dead, announcing the good news and declaring the remission of sins. All who believed in him were immediately admitted to the Reign of Yahweh. From that moment, it is always true that either in this life or in the life beyond physical death each man -good or bad, Christian or not- will be offered Yahweh's grace by Jesus Christ and, when he accepts it, he will be converted to Christianity. This conversion can take any "time,"

from a very short to an immensely long one, and involves the sufferings of hell as a necessary expiatory and corrective tool. In other words, souls in hell are ill and Jesus keeps going there, trying to heal them. After a man's repentance and conversion, his period in hell ends and he goes, passing through personal judgment, to the Reign of Yahweh.

"Jesus said to them, 'It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but the sinners.'"

(Mark 2:17. Similar words are in Matthew 9:12-13 and in Luke 5:31-32)

Salvation during life, at the end of it, and after death is always in Jesus' hands: his spirit went, in the period between his earthly body's death and his resurrection, to preach to the souls of the dead -all the dead- and left the place where they were staying, carrying with him all who had declared repentance.

"All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. And this is the will of Him Who sent me, that should lose none of that He has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:37-39)

The same situation is repeated again and again; Jesus keeps going to preach to the souls of the dead. He who repents, follows him in Yahweh's Reign; he who does not want to repent -to repent or not is a decision left to individual freedom- is left there for another period of punishment and instruction. Anyway, at a certain point, all people will have repented and gained admittance to Yahweh's Reign; at that moment, after the demonstration that all men have accepted to live with and not against Yahweh, even Satan, Lucifer, will repent and will rejoin for ever -accompanied by all his angels- Yahweh in His Reign.

2) It is a consequence of Yahweh's affection.

The essence and center of the Christian concept of Yahweh is that Yahweh's affection is unlimited and going in its fullness to each and every man. Such an affection must not only be expressed, but can never be complete and satisfied until it is returned; we can say that Yahweh needs persons He can be fond of and who will be fond of Him. If we consider that man was created by Yahweh, male and female, to be like Him and to resemble Him, and that, furthermore, man's spirit is derived, through Adam, from Yahweh's Spirit, it follows that Yahweh, Who is fond with a perfect affection of His spiritual creatures, certainly cannot accept not being together with all of them for all future eternity. Yahweh's fondness for man is clearly stated in the Gospel of John:

"For Yahweh was so fond of the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For Yahweh did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him."

(John 3:16-17)

Another demonstration of Yahweh's fondness comes from how much Jesus was active in healing the sick and liberating the demon possessed, showing that even the human condition on Earth and its improvement -within the possibility left by the still existing competition between Yahweh and Satan- is important and is part of the Good News:

"Jesus went through all the towns and villages... preaching the good news of the Kingdom and healing every disease and sickness." (Matthew 9:35)

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick." (Matthew 14:14)

"The people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon possessed... and Jesus healed many... he also drove out many demons..." (Mark 1:32-34)

"A great number of people from all over... who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured... healing them all."
(Luke 6:17-19)

Similar situations are described in many passages, together with plenty of cases in which Jesus is taking material and spiritual care of single individuals, as in:

"Jesus heals the official's son." (John 4:46-50)

"The man with leprosy." (Matthew 8:2-3; Mark 1:40-42; Luke 5:12-13)

"Jesus drives out an evil spirit." (Mark 1:23-26; Luke 4:33-35)

"The faith of the centurion." (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:2-10)

"Jesus heals a paralytic." (Matthew 9:2-7; Mark 2:3-12; Luke 5:18-25)

"A dead girl and a sick woman." (Matthew 9:18-25; Mark 5:22-42; Luke 8:41-55)

"Jesus heals the blind and mute." (Matthew 9:27-33)

"The faith of the Canaanite woman." (Matthew 15:22-28; Mark 7:25-30)

"The healing of a boy with a demon." (Matt. 17:14-18; Mark 9:17-27; Luke 9:38-42)

"Two blind men receive sight." (Matthew 20:30-34)

"The healing of a deaf and mute man." (Mark 7:32-35)

"The healing of a blind man at Bethsaida." (Mark 8:22-25)

"Jesus raises a widow's son." (Luke 7:12-15)

"A crippled woman healed on Sabbath." (Luke 13:10-13)

"A blind beggar receives his sight." (Luke 18:35-43)

"The healing at the pool." (John 5:5-9)

"Jesus heals a man born blind." (John 9:1-7)

"The death of Lazarus. Jesus raises Lazarus from the dead." (John 11:1-44)

In all these cases, we can see that the only necessary condition for being healed is to have faith in Jesus' capacity to do what was requested.

The hypothesis of a final situation, after the end of time, with the creation split in two; the good ones with Yahweh and the bad ones with Satan, is really absurd and unacceptable because a situation of eternal separation would not only leave Yahweh totally unsatisfied and full of sorrow but, furthermore, would leave the final demonstration, and the final victory, to Satan, not to Yahweh. Yahweh's perfect fondness, with its unlimited tolerance and patience, gives all the freedom to behave badly -tolerance- and in the meantime tries, without ever giving up -patience- to convince the bad of becoming good.

"I [Jesus] tell you that... there will be more rejoicing in Heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent." (Luke 15:7)

"I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of Yahweh over one sinner who repents." (Luke 15:10)

Yahweh, the Creator, is everybody's Father; as Father He is fond of all His creatures, all His children, nobody excluded. A clear picture of His affection is expressed by the parable of the lost son, in Luke 15:11-32. This parable depicts a son who "sins" and leaves his father's home but, in the end, repents and comes back to him in full humility. The father, sad over his son's departure, was patiently waiting for him to come back. And, when at last the son comes back, the father forgives him totally and completely (the punishment was already constituted by the conditions in which the son lived during his separation), rejoices, and wants everybody else of his house to rejoice with him.

How could it be possible for Yahweh to spend all future eternity at the same time full of joy over all who are with Him and of sadness over all who are not? The fondness of Yahweh will bring all people to His Reign -to a condition of perfect communion with Him- after, obviously, having satisfied His perfect justice. This satisfaction is possible both during life -by the sufferings of life- and after death -by the sufferings of hell.

3) It is a right and just situation.

At the end of time, all men will be with Yahweh in His Reign. To demonstrate that this situation -which apparently places at the same level those who were bad and those who were good- is right and just, we have to take into account two essential points:

a) Who are, from the point of view of a perfect justice, the good and who are the bad people? This takes into exact account all the circumstances of every person's life -country and epoch, social reality, family, education, hereditary and acquired diseases, physical and psychical dysfunctions, etc. Only He Who is in condition to administer the perfect justice is also in condition to give the proper answer.

b) Having decided who are the good -those going straight to Heaven at the moment of their physical death- and who are the bad -those going to Heaven after a more or less long period in hell- it is necessary to remember that the "physical" resurrection -physical means with a resurrected body, different from the material, earthly one- maintains unaltered the original individual personality. This means that the complete history of all the actions and thoughts of each single individual and of their consequences is kept intact and made clear to everybody else. In the condition of perfect harmony and communion with Yahweh, among all the angels and men there will be no secrets and no envies, only full comprehension and satisfaction; there will be no need, for the bad, to be ashamed of the bad actions and thoughts of their lives; neither will there be need, for the good ones, to be proud -with a feeling of superiority- of the good actions and thoughts of their life.

An individual's history, his life on Earth and in hell, defines the "quantity" of affection, of satisfaction, and of mutual communion he can enjoy -receive and give. To be in communion does not mean to be fused to, to become part of, or to be canceled as an autonomous entity. Communion is the highest level of relationship that different, independent beings can reach. It is due to their free choice and leaves them totally unaltered and independent. Each man -and, as far as it can apply, each angel will conserve his individual personality as it was formed by his parents -inherited physical and mental characteristics-, by his earthly life -acquired physical, mental, and spiritual characteristics-, and by the possible spiritual life preceding his admission to the Reign of Yahweh -spiritual characteristics. There is, anyway, a substantial difference between entering the Reign of Yahweh immediately after death -as a result of a "Christian" life and of a prompt acceptance of the grace offered during personal judgment- or after a bad life and a long period in hell: the "spiritual scars" left by a bad life and by the punishment in hell will always be evident and will constitute a limit to the maximum possible level of communion between this particular person and Yahweh.

Reusing the old example of the pots full of water, we can say that a very good person is comparable to a big, extremely beautiful pot; a very bad person to a small, really ugly one. But, once both pots are full of water, their capacity -to receive and contain water- is totally used and satisfied. Looking from a place inside the pots, an observer can see that both of them are full and, so, fully satisfied, as they cannot hold one more drop of water. Looking from outside, an observer can see that the beautiful pot is pleasant to look at and

consider that it is more useful because it contains more water. But the water is the same for both pots, and both are filled to their maximum capacity. Something similar applies to people in Heaven: the "good" ones are more "beautiful" and more "recipient;" as such, all the others feel joy and satisfaction from "looking at them" -by being in communion with them. Those who were "bad" are less "beautiful," or more "ugly," and a lot less "recipient;" the quality and quantity of the communion that they receive from and can give to others are much inferior. But, from the point of view of the single individual -envy does not exist in Yahweh's Reign- satisfaction is complete and each individual is fully conscious of his own and of everybody else's characteristics, defects, and qualities.

4) It is proportionate to His saving action.

One more consideration supporting this belief of everybody's final admission to the Reign of Yahweh is the following: "Is it logical and rational to think that the ultimate saving action of Yahweh -to have generated His own Son and allowed him to suffer and die as he did- was implemented to reach only a partial result; to bring to Yahweh only some of the human beings, and doing nothing at all for the fallen angels? It is obvious that only a complete result, the final admission to the Reign of Yahweh for all His created beings, can be proportionate to His saving action. This action, this direct intervention of Yahweh, is more than enough proof to demonstrate His decision to achieve a final, complete result by taking, or re-taking, all men and angels to Him.

Let us now discuss the convenience of spreading the belief in the final salvation of all men. First of all, we have to recognize that this belief is clearly stated in many passages of the Bible and that it has always been deeply rooted in the thinking of the Church:

"And all mankind will see Yahweh's salvation." (Luke 3:6)

"The living God, Yahweh, Who is the Savior of all men..." (Timothy 4:10)

"But I [Jesus], when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself."
(John 12:32)

Is it right to conceal this with the only justification that it could cause some relaxation of moral values? Going back to the beginning of the Christian Church, the first great exponent of it was Origen, in the third century. He held that the fire of hell was a purifying fire, and that the souls of men are purified through their torments. Even if his belief was considered heretic, we have to note that he never denied hell and its punishment, but always affirmed that the punishment is also corrective and purifying. In a few words, Origen believed that at the end of time Yahweh through Jesus would call all His creatures to Him,

"The result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men."
(Romans 5:18)

"For as in Adam all died, so in Christ all will be made alive." (1 Corinthians 15:22)
that this will be thanks to the voluntary submission of each man to Yahweh.

"The Lord... not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."
(2 Peter 3:9)

and that the end must be like the beginning; as the world began by being Yahweh's world, so ultimately it has to end by being again Yahweh's world in the completeness of all its parts.

"And He [Yahweh] made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure, which He purposed in Christ, to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment -to bring all things in Heaven and on Earth together under one head, under Christ." (Ephesians 1:9-10)

It is clear that, from an earthly point of view, the belief in everybody's final salvation removes from the hands of the Church one of its main weapons, the threat and terror of eternal punishment; if universal salvation is granted, then why worry about living in a correct way, as everything will be all right in the end? Origen, although convinced of the final salvation of all men, nevertheless said that, to avoid causing people to live a sinful life, it was inappropriate to talk about this subject in the presence of everyone. However, as Christians, we know that, if a thing is true, it must be openly stated and, if a thing is false, it cannot be used simply because it happens to be useful.

"Yahweh our Savior, Who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." (1 Timothy 2:3-5)

To accept a doctrine for its convenience rather than truth is indeed cynical. We can't absolutely accept the idea that the Christian Church needs to teach fear; that the weapon of the terror of hell has to be used to drive a man into Heaven.

Finally, we have to consider that the concept of universal salvation does not destroy at all the concept of free-will and free-choice because each single man's salvation will never be produced by coercion, but only by the persuasion of Yahweh's grace. Each offer of Yahweh's grace and salvation brings with it the responsibility of acceptance or refusal; every offer is a privilege and a responsibility. To accept means to repent and, for this, to have the privilege of being received by Jesus and allowed to enter the Reign of Yahweh. To refuse means to go on carrying the full responsibility for the sins of life. A refusal to repent makes necessary a judgment which carries the due punishment for not accepting the grace and the forgiveness offered. Therefore, as we have already discussed, all men reformed by the punishment of Yahweh, both on Earth and in hell, will have on themselves its indelible marks, as a demonstration and result of having exercised their free-choice.

Expiatory and corrective punishment of sins for everybody's final access to the Reign of Yahweh

From "Thoughts" - Cogito ergo credo

After his resurrection, Jesus was appointed by Yahweh "Lord" and "Savior" of the human race. As Lord, he is the Master of all people; all of them belong to him and have to recognize him as such, sooner or later. As Savior, he has to be sure that everybody will be part of the Christian community and will enter, at least at the end of time, the Reign of Yahweh. For this purpose, to make every single person suitable for the Reign of Yahweh, Jesus has to administer justice; the appropriate, perfect justice that only the omniscience of Yahweh makes possible. The administration of Yahweh's justice is possible both during earthly life -by the sufferings of life- and after death -by the sufferings of hell. It is important to remember that not all the sufferings of life are due to this reason, as it was and still is the Jews' point of view. Actually, most of the sufferings are tests people are subject to in order to make them even more suitable, to enter in a better and deeper spiritual communion with Yahweh. Anyway, immediately after death, each soul is brought in front of Yahweh for the personal judgment, when each person -good or bad, Christian or not- will be offered Yahweh's grace by Jesus Christ, who will ask him to repent -to feel deep sorrow and regret for his sins and omissions- and to become, fully and totally, a Christian. At this point, each soul is totally free and fully responsible for accepting or rejecting the offer of Yahweh's grace. By accepting, the person gives proof of being ready to enter the Reign of Yahweh; or by rejecting, of not being ready, and in this case is sent, for a certain period, to hell -the place where Yahweh is not. After this period, the possibility of accepting Yahweh's grace is offered again and again until it is, finally, accepted.

The purpose of hell -of the sufferings of hell- is the administration of Yahweh's justice to all men who have something for which they have not sufficiently atoned during their terrestrial lives. Hell, and the expiatory and corrective punishment it carries on, is not "eternal" in the sense of "without end;" it cannot be because eternal punishment would leave an eternally divided universe, with part of Yahweh's creatures living in spiritual communion with Him and part totally separated from Him. Here, we have to remember that Yahweh is not only Justice, He is also and above all, benevolence. As a consequence, a situation of eternal separation would leave Yahweh totally unsatisfied and full of sorrow; it would actually leave the final demonstration, and the final victory, to Satan; not to Yahweh.

From the point of view of perfect justice, it would not be of any justice to impose, for the sins of a life-time, an eternal punishment; it would be a disproportionate penalty. It would be hard to recognize perfect justice in an infinite penalty for that which was done in the very short time of a human life. Eternal punishment would impose limits on the operation of the grace of Yahweh; instead, Jesus' descent to Hades is a demonstration that the offer of the grace of Yahweh extends to everybody and beyond time as we know it. Only the restoration of all people and angels can lead to a situation of perfect unity with each person in full spiritual communion with Yahweh and with everybody else.

After satisfying Yahweh's justice and becoming fully and totally a Christian -this process can take any time, from a very short to an immensely long one- hell is over; the person enters, passing through the final personal judgment, the Reign of Yahweh. During this judgment, Satan will point to all the bad actions of each one; Jesus will point to the

good ones, to the person's tests and sufferings, and to the fact that he has acquired all people by his Death and Resurrection. As a result, at the end of time, all people will gain admittance to the Reign of Yahweh even if at different levels of spiritual communion with Him, because of their different individual capacity, which is a personal characteristic that depends on both the earthly life of each person and his attitude at the moment of the personal judgment. There is a substantial difference between entering the Reign of Yahweh immediately after death -as a result of a "Christian" life and of a prompt acceptance of the grace offered during the personal judgment- or after a bad life and a long period in hell: the "spiritual scars" left by a bad life and by the punishment in hell will always be evident and will constitute a limit to the maximum possible level of spiritual communion between this particular person and Yahweh.

It is, indeed, obvious that hell -the place where Yahweh is not- is temporary; at the end of the human race, after the conversion of the last man, it will be an empty place and, for that, the reason itself for its existence will end. At this point, having had the final demonstration that all people have accepted to live with and not against Yahweh, even Lucifer will be convinced of his mistake, will repent, and will enter for ever -accompanied by all his angels- the Reign of Yahweh.

Satan's existence and activity, a reality we have to consider and understand, not to overestimate, not to underestimate

From "Thoughts" - Cogito ergo credo

Even though we don't have to give too much emphasis to Satan and his powers nor, even worse, to consider him too close, in terms of these powers and capabilities, to Yahweh, we don't have to consider him very much inferior. In effect, we don't have to forget nor to not properly consider that Satan, Lucifer, was created -by Yahweh- so powerful to be second only to Himself. Furthermore, Yahweh did not reduce Satan's powers after his rebellion.

The fact that Satan exists and is always very active in trying to attain his purposes is a reality we absolutely have to be aware of, so we won't be unprepared for his attacks. We also have to recognize that, in the present historical period, there is a general tendency not to consider Satan properly; a sort of shyness of speaking and discussing about him, his existence, and his activity. Whereas, in other historical times, there was an opposite situation; too much importance and consideration was given to him, generating a different kind of trouble, harm, and suffering for the people of the epoch. In both cases this is clearly due to Satan's activity; he tries to blind people -especially the hierarchy of the Christian Churches- in order to hide the fundamental truth from them.

As Christians, it is essential to remember that the very existence and essence of our religion, and the reality of the life, sacrifice, and death of Jesus Christ are a direct consequence of Satan's existence and activity; of what he did in the distant past, beginning with the creation of our part of the the universe. Without such actions -without his "rebellion" against Yahweh and all that followed it- there would not have been any necessity for Jesus Christ to sacrifice himself on the cross for the redemption of the human race which, in this case, would not have had any need of being redeemed.

Only by knowing Satan for what he actually is -how powerful he was created, in what way he rebelled against Yahweh, what his activity was and is- we do not risk falling in the dualism Yahweh-Satan; which, in reality, not only does not exist, but cannot even be proposed because, whatever he does, it is always and only within the limits of Yahweh's permission.

The real problem is that very often, almost always, we cannot understand why Yahweh gives Satan the permission to do so much evil, to generate so much suffering. The fact is that our understanding of Yahweh's reasons is very much limited by the physical part of our beings; since all the suffering so widespread on Earth is relevant to this physical part, it follows that, physically, it is too difficult -nearly impossible- to understand and justify. Anyway, even though we do not understand it, this is the fundamental reality for which we have to try, even taking into account our limitations, to give at least a partial, even if unsatisfactory, explanation.

First of all, we can see immediately that the dualism Yahweh-Satan does not exist. Dualism means antagonism and fighting between two parties who, by having the same level of capacities and powers, compete at the maximum of their capability and do not allow each other to have any freedom of action. Now, even if it is true that Satan's powers are very close to those of Yahweh, by granting or not His permission to act, Yahweh fully maintains His total supremacy. But then, why is Yahweh giving His permission? It is because He is continuously trying, in this way of His which we have so much difficulty in understanding, to convince Satan to come back to Him; something that will

have to happen as a consequence of Satan's own conviction and decision, without any coercion from Yahweh. To Satan, to all the angels, and to us men was given the "freedom" to accept or to reject Yahweh and His grace, that is, to live with Him or against -separated from- Him. This freedom of decision is absolutely necessary for beings who, if they accept, are in condition of being in communion with Yahweh as independent entities.

To know about Satan and his activity, we have to refer to the only historical document available, the Bible. By reading it carefully we can go back to what happened before man came into existence, at the very moment of the creation of our part of the universe. In the Bible we can find the actual account of how and why a being of incredible power, named Lucifer, rebelled against Yahweh and became Satan.

Satan was created by Yahweh as the Cherub Lucifer, the one who, in our part of the universe, let's say the Solar System, was second only to Yahweh Himself. The powers he received were so great as to allow him to go against Yahweh even when he was still living and operating in direct contact with Him. During the creation of the Solar System, Lucifer was given by Yahweh, as His main collaborator, the responsibility for the practical implementation of the creation and for the evolution of the first stages of the Solar System. Having been given the responsibility of the implementation, he was practically given the direct control of the Solar System from the beginning, and, as a consequence, he had -and has- substantial power over it. Because of what he did later, because of his rebellion, Lucifer became Satan, the Adversary, the Accuser; he always wants to demonstrate, moment after moment, by the small facts as well as by the big ones, that Yahweh does not have the control of the situation; that he, Lucifer, can show -given Yahweh's approval- that the creation does not follow Yahweh's, but his orders; that he has the real control and the real power over everything and everybody. Anyway, it is essential to understand and remember that, whatever Satan does, it is only with Yahweh's permission, and that such permission is given only for the purpose of convincing him to repent, by his own freedom of choice, without obliging him by force.

A very clear description of this concept, of this relationship which looks so strange -almost unbelievable- to us, is in the book of Job. Let us look at it:

"One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord [Yahweh], and Satan [the Accuser, in Hebrew] also came with them. The Lord [Yahweh] said to Satan, 'Where have you come from?' Satan answered to the Lord [Yahweh], 'From roaming through the Earth and going back and forth in it.' Then the Lord [Yahweh] said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on Earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears Yahweh and shuns evil.' 'Does Job fear Yahweh for nothing?' Satan replied. 'Have You not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch Your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse You to Your face.' The Lord [Yahweh] said to Satan, 'Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.' Then Satan went out from the presence of the Lord [Yahweh]." (Job 1:6-12)

A very similar situation is found also in Job 2:1-7, where particularly interesting and illuminating is the phrase:

"And he [Job] still maintains his integrity, though you [Satan] incited Me [Yahweh] against him to ruin him without any reason." (Job 2:3)

As we can clearly see, Satan -the accuser- is given permission to afflict, but is kept under precise guidelines as he cannot exceed Yahweh's instruction and authorization. It follows that, in all his evil among men and in nature, Satan is always under Yahweh's power. To understand this, we should not forget the main point; that Yahweh does not want to lose him -as He does not want to lose even one of us- and is using all His patience and all His affection while waiting for the moment of repentance and reunion. Lucifer was one of the best beings ever created by Yahweh, and Yahweh cannot accept leaving him in a condition of rebellion, of separation. Yahweh is doing whatever He can to convince His creature, and all the fallen angels, to return to Him. The difficulty we face in understanding and approving Yahweh's ways is due to our present limitations; and, with Satan working hard on all of us against Him, it is very easy to reject and refuse His ways. Anyway, surely, after the final resurrection -not limited any more by our earthly bodies- we will finally be in a position to understand and approve.

Satan, still looking like the Cherub Lucifer -neither his look nor his powers were changed because of his rebellion- was allowed by Yahweh to enter the Garden of Eden and tempt Adam and Eve. He was not free to go there on his own initiative but, once he was able to convince Adam and Eve to do the wrong thing, he became the master of the human race, and it was impossible to remove him from this position until Jesus Christ came and dispossessed him. Satan was also allowed by Yahweh to tempt Jesus, who had the capacity to resist his temptations without the slightest hesitation, in this way giving Yahweh, once and for ever, the possibility to demonstrate to Satan Jesus' total and full faith in Him.

In the book of Job, Yahweh reveals some essential information about the creation of this planet:

"Where were you when I laid the Earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone while the Morning Stars sang together and all the Angels [Sons of Yahweh] shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4-7)

In the Old Testament the titles "Morning Stars" and "Sons of Yahweh" are used only in regard to angels, who are not only of a higher level and have greater intelligence and more power than man, but also have personal audience with Yahweh. Now, when Yahweh created the Solar System, all these beings "shouted for joy" at the demonstration of His power. And, by saying that they ALL shouted for joy, we are given a clear indication of the complete harmony existing among angels and Yahweh; and, thus, of the fact that, obviously, no rebellion of any kind had taken place, at least up until that time.

Before the rebellion, Lucifer was a creature perfect in all his aspects from the day he was created. In Ezekiel we can find plenty of information about the origin of Lucifer-Satan and his conflict with Yahweh. Ezekiel 28:1-2 speaks of a ruler, the Prince of Tyre, who is described as a man who became so vain about his riches and intelligence that he claimed to be a God. In Ezekiel 28:11-15 we are introduced to somebody else, to someone who, according to the description given, is clearly a different person. He, called the King of Tyre, is the real power behind the Prince of Tyre. When Ezekiel writes about the man, Prince of Tyre, and about Satan, the King of Tyre, who is the power behind the man, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the two of them -the man being possessed so much by Satan's will- but it is anyway clear which considerations refer to Satan and which to the man. To the King of Tyre:

"You were a model of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. You were in Eden, the garden of Yahweh; You were anointed as a Guardian Cherub, for so I ordained you. You were on the Holy Mountain of Yahweh; you walked among the Fiery Stones. You were blameless in your ways from the day you were created till wickedness was found in you." (Ezekiel 28:12-15)

The King of Tyre is described as "a model of perfection, wisdom, and beauty," one the most beautiful and wise of all Yahweh's creatures. It is Yahweh Himself Who describes Lucifer as perfect and Who "anointed [him] as a Guardian Cherub." A Cherub is an angel of high rank, living in the presence of Yahweh, proclaiming His righteousness. Lucifer is called "anointed," which indicates supreme favor from Yahweh. The word used for this purpose is the same one which will later be used for the Messiah, Yahweh's Anointed King. This cherub was the ruler and the leader of the angels and led them in their praise of Yahweh and shouts of joy. The Hebrew word translated "guardian" in Ezekiel 28:14 and 16 literally means "who leads." He had been in "Eden, the Garden of Yahweh" and "on the Holy Mountain of Yahweh." He had "walked among the Fiery Stones," which is a symbol often used of Yahweh's presence. Such a description could not be applied to a mere human. Actually, this passage speaks of one of the greatest beings Yahweh ever created, one who had unequalled strength, wisdom, beauty, privilege, and authority. According to Isaiah this one was named "Lucifer" or "the Son of the Morning," a name that literally means "the shining one," and is a word for great beauty. In Ezekiel 28:15, he is described as "blameless [literally, perfect] in all your ways from the day you were created..." Of course this could not have been an ordinary man. First of all, man is not created; since Adam, all men are born. Second, no man is born perfect. The blameless, perfect Lucifer was created without any form of evil -a condition which could not have applied to any man after Adam- and with the full freedom to decide how to behave. Truly, Lucifer was perfect in his ways until "wickedness was found" in him. This fact marked the fall of Lucifer and the birth of Satan. This unrighteousness or evil is described in Isaiah 14:12-14. When reading this passage, it is important to note that Yahweh addressed Satan through the person of the Prince of Tyre; Satan is the unseen source of this Prince's arrogance and self-deification.

In Isaiah 14:12-14, a song of sorrow, more than the description of Satan, of the being who introduced suffering into the world, we see how much Yahweh mourns over this creature He had been so fond of:

"How you have fallen from Heaven, o Morning Star, son of the dawn! You have been cast down to the Earth, you who once laid low the nations! You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to Heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of Yahweh; I will sit enthroned on the mount of the assembly, on the outmost heights of the sacred mountain. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.'" (Isaiah 14:12-14)

He was described first as Lucifer, the "shining one," who was so beautiful he literally shone, and was so full of holiness because he was created with the very Glory of Yahweh. The phrase "you said in your heart" gives the actual description of evil: this is where sin originates -in the heart, which is in the mind. Five times he said in his heart, "I will," in this way filling it with rebellion; for he wanted to act independently of Yahweh. Practically he thought, "after all, since I am so magnificent, so beautiful, so filled with powers, why shouldn't I have some of the worship of the world for myself?" Moreover,

by saying, "I will ascend to Heaven," he wanted to take over from Yahweh and to be there in charge of everybody and everything. By saying, "I will make myself as the Most High," he wanted to be "God."

When Yahweh created the angels and Lucifer, He gave Lucifer great intelligence, and gave him and all the other angels self-determination; which was necessary because He wanted to have near to Himself independent creatures, who could respond to His affection and have spontaneous fellowship with Him. For that He had to give them the ability to act independently of His will, and the possibility of having the choice of rejecting or obeying Him.

Lucifer, realizing how intelligent and powerful he was, rebelled against his Creator and, after breaking his relationship with Yahweh when he said, "I will make myself like the Most High," organized a rebellion among the angels, some of whom followed him in his sedition. We have to note, again, that even after he rebelled, Lucifer did not lose his great intellect, his beauty, or the powers he had. But that, rather, he used them all to convince the highest possible number of angels to join his ranks.

When the perfect Lucifer, the one who had the responsibility of the implementation of the creation of the solar system, rebelled against his Creator, Yahweh's perfect world lost its perfection. At this moment, Lucifer's name was changed to Satan -the Resister or the Adversary- and to Devil -the Evil One, the Accuser, or the Slanderer. Lucifer became Satan and was banished from Heaven, from the continuous contact with Yahweh, and was sent, with all the angels who shared his rebellion, to a place expressly created by Yahweh for them; hell -the place where Yahweh is not present.

A demonstration that Satan did not lose his authority over the world is in Luke, when Satan personally tempted Jesus showing him all the kingdoms of the world:

"And he [Satan] said to him [Jesus], 'I will give you all their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.'" (Luke 4:6)

And Jesus did not dispute Satan's claim to the world. It is important to notice that Satan does not want a world which rejects the supernatural; on the contrary, he wants a world which is "religious" and accepts supernatural phenomena because this gives him ample possibility of being worshiped in many ways through idols, gods, world leaders, etc. An important step in reaching this goal was and is to discredit the historical validity of the Bible so that Satan's true nature and plans would not be discovered. He wants a religious world, but one of a religiousness that rejects Yahweh's offer of a personal relationship with Him through Jesus Christ.

Satan has two titles:

1) Ruler of this world. The world was given to him to rule; as such he is working very often through human governments. An example of this comes from the book of Daniel. At one time Daniel spent twentyone days in prayer, waiting for Yahweh to reveal to him the meaning of a prophetic vision. Only at the end of this period of time an angel appeared to Daniel and told him that, to come and reveal to him the meaning of the vision, he had to fight his way for twentyone days.

"The Prince of the Persian Kingdom resisted me twentyone days." (Daniel 10:13)

Of course, it was not a man holding up one of Yahweh's angels, but it was a demon -a fallen angel- who was controlling the man, the prince of Persia. Yahweh had to send Michael, one of His chief angels, to overcome the demon and send the angel messenger free on his way to Daniel. This is not an isolated case; according to the Bible, there is a continuous invisible warfare all around the world. This is clear in the New Testament:

"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms." (Ephesians 6:12)

2) God of this age. This title refers to Satan's activity in relation to religion. Actually, he is the god of all those who do not follow Jesus Christ. All men are under Satan's rule till the moment they are brought to Jesus Christ; and the Bible confirms it:

"The whole world is under control of the evil one." (1 John 5:19)

As we have already discussed, modern thought rejects the antiquated idea that Satan is at the origin of evil and has the world under his control. There are so many explanations for evil: poverty, pollution, politicians, police, parents, employers, unions, racial minorities, etc. Even the Christians are not exempt from this inability to understand where and how Satan is working. In fact, precisely because the reality of his existence has been neglected for so long, they are sometimes the least discerning of all in understanding the reality of the world system. The devil's cleverest ruse is to make people believe that he does not exist. This is the reason why we see such ridiculous pictures of Satan with horns, tail, red suit, and evil grin. There is really little harm modern people can expect from somebody whose aspect is so absurd to be only ridiculous and comic.

Satan is very active, always moving around, doing everything evil he can. When Yahweh asks Satan from where he came, the answer is,

"From roaming through the Earth and going back and forth in it." (Job 2:2)

One of the ways Satan hides behind religion, is through "false prophets" -priests and pastors: they claim to have revelation from Yahweh, but they have not; they appear to be sent from Yahweh, but they are not. They make proclamations and predictions mixed with just enough truth to make them appear plausible. The power of all these false prophets comes from Satan, who may easily work through people who appear to be righteous; and he can even make them perform supernatural feats that appear to be direct acts of Yahweh.

As we know very well, Yahweh is always working miracles; but, in the meantime, we have to be aware that Satan is allowed to counterfeit them. This is clearly stated in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15:

"For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light. It is not surprising, then, if his servants masquerade as servants of righteousness."

The devil can cite the Scripture for his own purposes and blind men's minds to the truth about Yahweh and how to understand it. He attacks the Bible and those who preach and teach from it. In Acts, Paul alerts the elders of the Church of Ephesus that from their own group there will be ministers who would teach perverted things while posing as teachers of truth:

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Spirit of Yahweh has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the Church of Yahweh which he [Jesus] bought with his own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!" (Acts 20:28-31)

Again in Acts, Paul gives the antidote to this, recommending them to rely upon Yahweh and His grace:

"Now I commit you to Yahweh and to the work of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified." (Acts 20:32)

One of the most effective ways to move people away from truth is to push them into "legalism," seeking to live for Yahweh by the principles of the law. The practical effects of legalism appear very clear if we compare the present reality and organization of all the great and minor Christian Denominations to the faith and fervor of their original founders. Unfortunately, legalism finds especially fertile soil in the life of growing believers exactly when they are trying to please Yahweh in all the aspects of their life.

At this point, we have to understand the difference between the principle of law and the principle of grace. The law is a principle that guides our behavior by setting up standards of conduct so that legalism, by setting rules, makes it very easy to "sin." After a while, all the laws, even Yahweh's Commandments given to Moses, are given totally legalistic interpretations, leading to a mere keeping of exterior forms and rituals. The law shows us what sin is and, from a certain point of view, it actually makes us sin more. On the contrary, the principle of Grace, of Yahweh's Grace, teaches that salvation is only in Yahweh's hands. It tells us to repent every time we fall into sin and to try our best not to sin again, made strong by the faith in Yahweh's grace; in the conviction that, at the end, all men will be saved -will live with Yahweh- by the intercession of Jesus Christ. Law and grace are complete systems in themselves; and, exactly for this reason, they are mutually exclusive. To mix them robs the law of the "bona fide terror" and the grace of its creative freedom.

As soon as we consider the reality of human nature, it appears clear that it is absolutely impossible not to be sinners and that, by following the principle of law, men cannot reach salvation and live with Yahweh. Nevertheless, we do not have to despair as, because of Jesus, we can live by the principle of grace, knowing that, in actual fact, Yahweh's grace allows us to overcome Satan's attacks; that every time we fail, we have to sincerely repent and have faith in Yahweh's forgiveness.

In the Christian life, the power to fight against Satan and his attacks comes only from one source; the indwelling of the Spirit of Yahweh in us. The Scripture tells us that when we become believers in Jesus Christ, we have the Spirit of Yahweh dwelling in us and that there is only one way of releasing this source; to have faith. Our only concern has to be of "walking in the Spirit," that means to have a faithful relationship with Jesus Christ. Here, it is essential to notice two points:

- 1) The indwelling of the Spirit of Yahweh does not mean that we are losing our personal freedom; the Spirit of Yahweh does not control us but, actually, gives us the freedom to call upon Him for help and forgiveness.
- 2) When we sin, sin grieves Yahweh but does not cause Him to leave us. Far from leaving, the Spirit of Yahweh still dwells in us -ready and waiting to be called to our help. To have faith means to be convinced that we are under the grace of Yahweh; that is, to be convinced that we are totally accepted by Yahweh in our present, unfinished condition.

Of course Satan is trying to hide all of this and to bring everybody to a total legalism. He has completely blinded the Churches to the fact that by keeping their people under the law -under the doctrine that makes an absolute fetish of being doctrinally pure in every area- they wipe out their Christian life, and that a true understanding of grace will never produce license, but plenty of license is always produced by legalism.

The instant we are reconciled by Jesus to the Father, and that happens the moment we believe in Jesus' death on our behalf, we are in effect "holy and blameless in Yahweh's sight." A true, powerful faith consists in the total and absolute belief in the forgiveness which Jesus acquired for us by dying on the cross and in the full awareness that Yahweh has accepted us just as we are:

"If anybody does sin, we have One who speaks to the Father in our defense -Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours, but also for the sins of the whole world. Jesus is our advocate; he defends us against Satan in the presence of Yahweh." (1 John 2:1-2)

Once we believe in Jesus as savior, it is impossible to be lost again or unforgiven; for a child of Yahweh to be lost, Jesus would have to stop interceding for him. This does not mean that Yahweh condones sin in the life of a believer, far from it. It means He has set Himself free to be ready to work in us the moment we see that we have sinned, acknowledge it, and accept His forgiveness.

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