



END TIMES

What happens, when?

An attempt to piece together the various pieces of that
seemingly, impossible jigsaw puzzle

Sermon Notes on a series preached at
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Unless otherwise stated all Biblical References are from the English Standard Version (ESV) which perversely uses American, English. I have taken the liberty to anglicise American spellings.

1. Introduction

As a Christian whose faith was first formed in the Brethren tradition, I have long held an interest in the study of end-times. I guess if I wanted to turn off any readers immediately, I could declare that my current position is that of a hesitant pre-tribulation, premillennialist. This is me falling into the trap of presuming that most folk understand these terms and are familiar with the basics of end-times. A false position, I accept and that the teaching of my former churches in the conservative wing, do not necessarily reflect that of the more mainstream church.

My challenge then is to present my thoughts without any of my pre-conceived ideas I have ingrained in me but rather to revisit scriptures and from first principles see what is taught there. Basing this on my assumption of the infallibility of scripture. So, these long held views that I have developed over many years, will be held in abeyance as I try to start afresh at looking at this topic.

It is my intention then to begin with the Lord's teaching in Matt 24 and using this as our foundation as we seek to, from first principles if you want, build a rational and probably view of End-Times, which scripture consistently supports.

I am starting to write this in January 2020. The primary purpose of this document is to help give me continuity as preaching notes, as I seek to give perhaps ten or so sermons throughout this year. These then I can refer to, so that I know what I have previously said and perhaps allow me to review, even change my thoughts and ideas, if necessary as I try to give this balanced, Biblical view throughout the year. Losing the plot mid-way through is apparently an age thing.

We are then, as many like to think, at the start of a new decade. Twenty years ago, when we entered this new millennium, much was made of the significance of the date, as if 3 zeroes mean anything. Significantly this was 2,000 years or so it was thought from the birth of Christ. For some this meant an anticipation and expectation of end-times based simply on the numbers, holding to the erroneous view that Christ was born in the year 0. He wasn't, in fact there wasn't even a year 0, so the first year of this so-called common era was the year 1. Although I shall persist with the ancient and perhaps non-politically correct Latin designation, AD. Therefore, the decades, centuries or millennia, strictly speaking, start when the last digit is a 1, not a 0, however, I digress.

We should of course point out that in the Western World, we live under a secular and relative modern calendar, devised originally by Caesar and later tweaked by

Pope Gregory. God's calendar given to man, was an adaption of the lunar calendar, that sees the year begin with the first, new moon after the vernal equinox. This has its roots in.

Ex 12: 2 "This month shall be for you the beginning of months. It shall be the first month of the year for you.

Moreover, from the prospective of a "spiritual," calendar the key event isn't the birth of Christ, and this we shall return to throughout these utterings, but rather the death, burial, resurrection of Christ and the birth of the Church some 50 days later. We are then, entering that decade which is 2 millennium after these earth-changing events, and then should there be any significance in the concept of 2 millennium, then there will be significant things to occur in this decade. Some of which, I would dare to suggest are already revealing themselves.

Those that know me, know that I am a dates and numbers man. My previous attempts at writings based on scriptures have been on Old Testament times and then trying to contextualise them in terms of other World Powers and our Gregorian calendar. This will be the basis of this study. Perhaps I have a touch of OCD, but I like to have things compartmentalised and everything in its right place. Perhaps I take the concept of God being a God of order, a little too far, but I do appreciate that this is not necessarily the done thing, when considering End Times, particularly if we are trying to position them in history and forgive me, date them, after all;

Mt 24:36 But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Earlier, this week I received a phone call from an old church member, who was way before my time. She had gotten my phone number from the Church Website and was enquiring as to when a funeral of another ex-member was. I made a few phone calls and promised to reply with the details she was looking for. Although the deceased had been very sick for a long time, the powers that be deemed it necessary to undertake a post-mortem investigation. Somewhat cheekily, I responded by text, that there was to be a post-mortem, so currently the "day and hour no one knows."

However, while we might not know the exact timing, we do know that this dear lady has died and we would, sooner rather than later have her funeral. This has

long been my view on End-Times and who knows, perhaps a little of this might permeate these following pages.

Mt 16:3 And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

2. The Lord's Teaching (Matt 24 Part 1)

2020 is barely three weeks old and the world seems crazier than usual. Climate change seems to be very much in vogue as fire rage and floods, well I suppose flood. Unnatural, natural phenomenon appear to be breaking out all over the place. Even today I was hearing of Biblical plague like locusts, threatening Kenya. Word too is starting to filter through, of a new SARS type virus emerging from China. Perhaps here at St. George's we have a larger degree of concern and awareness with the fires in South Eastern Australia than most in the UK, due to our church contacts in that part of the world. There are huge concerns about the air quality and how this might affect the Australia Open tennis tournament in Melbourne. We would certainly sit up and take note if Wimbledon, our equivalent tournament was affected by climate issues, aside from the rain that is.

In Australia, great swathes of land have been destroyed, many people have been displaced, livestock killed, trees and bushes burned to the ground. The trees and bushes might appear to be the least of the problem, and this is probably true in the short-term, but these are the filters of life. It is our greenery that takes the carbon dioxide from our atmosphere and converts it back to oxygen. Companies negate their carbon footprint by planting trees. So not only are these fires adding to the "greenhouse gasses," they are destroying the very mechanism that helps to reduce them.

Perhaps the magnitude of these fires is now starting to filter through to our UK psyche, helped no doubt by news from the tennis, but the events in Indonesia are gloriously underplayed in our media. Early in the New Year, it was Jakarta that was badly affected with flooding. 60 lives were lost with over 30,000 people being displaced. Two weeks later there are over 7,000 affected by new floods and landslides in Samarinda.

Just before Christmas we were all made aware of a volcanic eruption in New Zealand, now three weeks later Taal's volcano in the Philippines drives an ash plume 9 miles into the sky. The most powerful man on earth, and a 17-year-old schoolgirl from Sweden, argue two different viewpoints about climate change, in the annual Davos Economic Conference.

Now taken in isolation it might be argued that there is nothing new in bush fires, flooding or volcanoes and of course we would have to concur. However, it seems

to me, the uninitiated, that these things are bigger, fiercer and more frequent than ever before.

We have been informed¹ that the previous ten years to 2019, have constituted the warmest decade since records began. 2019, according to NASA, NOAA and the UK's Meteorological Office was the second warmest on record, sitting behind 2016 when temperatures were boosted by the El Niño phenomenon. The last 5 years were the hottest in the 170-year series, since records began in 1850. Fires, that we are currently being experienced in Australia will be the norm in the future, so says this article, in this new warmer world.

Away from the natural world we are seeing tensions rising in the Middle East. Qasem Soleimani, a General in the Iranian Revolutionary Guard responsible for extraterritorial military, clandestine and intelligence matters was killed, or rather assassinated, in a US drone strike. In response, the Iranians fired off a few missiles in what appears to be a gesture of national appeasement, a small slap in the face of the US, this resulting only in a few cases of concussion in these US bases in Iraq. Then tragedy struck, a Ukrainian airliner leaving Tehran airport was mistaken by the Iranians for a retaliatory, incoming cruise missile and shot down killing all 176 innocent people on board.

In amongst these headlining grabbing news stories, the humanitarian crises in Syria and Yemen, seem sadly neglected, at least by the Western press if not by the suffering collateral damage, the poor and marginalised, themselves.

Russia has chosen to change its constitution which it appears to me to be a means whereby President Putin can extend his leadership over that country. It does appear, that all over the world, the general populace are looking for leaders to be, playground bullies, ignoring any means of accountability, including impeachment in the case of the USA.

This sense of frustration we might feel with our world is the mood I feel the disciples may have had when they questioned the Lord in Matthew 24. This was in the middle of Holy Week. That week that was bookended by His triumphant entry into Jerusalem and His Passion the following weekend. The highs of Palm Sunday were continually eroded through the week by the constant questioning and attempts to trick the Lord in His teaching. The events of Matthew 23 may have

¹ www.bbc.co.uk Science & Environmental Climate Change: Last decade confirmed as warmest on record

shocked the disciples as they witnessed the Lord, “tear into,” their religious leaders. Perhaps they were still too excited by the reception of the “Messiah,” as He was welcomed into the city, that but a few days earlier. They were still struggling to come to terms, with the truths of His purpose, that He was frequently repeating to them. He of course, appeared completely relaxed despite the heightened tensions all around, after all He was still going about His Father’s business.

In fact, as the disciples became more aware of the growing hostility and their anxiety grew, so the Lord’s condemnation of the religious leaders became more vocal. Matthew 23, spoken in the temple was a “no-holds barred,” onslaught by the Lord on the religious leaders of the day. Any hopes the disciples might have had of a “negotiated settlement,” was now left lying in shreds on the temple floor. This was to be His last public teaching and the sense of inevitability of His arrest was becoming more visibly apparent. For the disciples who had started out, expecting some form of Messianic revival, there was now that realisation that this was going to be very much different. The exhilaration of former days had now given way to a sense of frustration and despair. But there was hope wasn’t there? They only had to look at the magnificence of the temple in whose grounds they stood.

Yet, this renewed sense of hope too floundered, when they tried to point out to Jesus, the magnificence of this Jewish temple, surely this was something that stood as a testimony to the wonders of God, the ability of His people? This was quickly dashed when Jesus, explained that even the temple would be razed to the ground and that no stone would stand upon another. It was in this context then when next alone with Him, on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, that they asked him.

Matt 24:3b “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the close of the age?”

Perhaps they thought that they were asking Him a single question, but it appears that the Lord treats them as three separate questions. Then in a very general sense, He paints a broad outline of what events will characterise this period, before telling of a very specific event that will usher in his return and then those final events at the close of the age. This I suggest is the breakdown of Matthew 24. Although as usual, they are covered in mystique and alternative superficial viewpoints seem possible. However, when taken in conjunction with other

scriptures perhaps we might find, like that Killer Sudoku puzzle that beguiles me, there is only one solution, where everything fits perfectly.

Matt 24:4-15 And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray. And you will hear of wars and rumours of wars. See that you are not alarmed, for this must take place, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and there will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are but the beginning of the birth pains. “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake. And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand),

The first point Jesus would make though, in response to their questions, and perhaps one of the practical reasons for this response, is so that they are not to be deceived. People are going to be spouting all sorts of nonsense making all sorts of claims, and with the evidence of things happening around these might seem plausible for a while at least. We are not to be deceived, like these thoughts we need to reflect on the principles and teaching of scripture and test everything out against them.

This is equally applicable to us today, for neither are we to be alarmed by the events of the day; wars, famines and earthquakes are but the beginning of the birth pains, says Jesus. Crazy, scary things are on the horizon, but He has told us in advance, so we are to expect them. In difficult days and in challenging circumstances it is hard to be encouraged but as we familiarise ourselves with God’s word, we can mirror our circumstances with those He talks about, and therefore be re-assured that the full and final realisation of our hope is not so very far away.

Please note this very, important fact that Jesus is firstly looking forward, and secondly what He sees is not good, this is far from being a world that will sort itself out. Therefore, this will rule out any possibility of Jesus applying this teaching retrospectively to those events 2 centuries earlier when the temple was

abused by Antiochus IV Epiphanes. That certainly has lessons and parallels for us, and more of that in a little while but I repeat Jesus is looking forward in time, not back.

Now, I am also reluctant to accept that this teaching is the Lord giving a summary of those things that were to happen in the days immediately after His ascension into heaven. Although in this instance this is certainly looking forward in time. This is to that period of time when there was the persecution of the apostles and disciples by both Rome and Judaism. This would then lead to the destruction of the temple in AD 70. To associate these events with the Lord's words here, would need us to shoehorn the facts to uncomfortably fit with the general gist of this teaching. In addition, this view is relatively short-sighted and implies that the birth-pains and end times were already on the horizon in AD 30. Which granted in the "there and then," may have appeared to have been the case but surely, and with the benefit of 2,000 years of hindsight, a bigger picture is in view.

These events 200 years before and 40 years after Jesus, which we have referenced above, have been the foundation of alternative end-times theories but while we are discounting them here, they do have a part to play in our journey. But are these the End-Times that Jesus had in mind, well with the benefit of 1,950 years since the destruction of the temple, I think we can reply with an irrevocably no!

Jumping ahead of ourselves for the moment, there are indeed similarities in what the Lord is describing and what his disciples would go through in the coming years. For in a few verses time and dealt with in our next chapter we shall be looking at a key expression that Jesus uses in Matthew 24, "*abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place.*" This is going to be a key marker for us, throughout this study. This has to be understood as a very specific event, where the holy place, that temple area derived from the Holiest of Holies in the Old Testament, is going to suffer desecration. This is the abomination of desolation.

Now at first glance this can refer to several things, one the abomination by Antiochus IV mentioned above, in 167 / 8 BC. This falls at the first hurdle, in that these events are retrospective to the Lord's teaching in the temple courts. This is not looking forward. However, there is no doubt, as we shall see that this was indeed an "abomination that causes desolation," and it stands as the marker, or type of what the Lord has in view.

An alternative possibility is the destruction of the temple by the Romans in AD 70. Although I understand this might be rather farfetched in that the temple's destruction, abominable though it was, did not involve the abusing of the Holy Place associated with this expression. It would be very convenient to have Matt 24 related to this destruction, after all as we have noted above, it is contextual, for the questions were raised in response to the Lord's comments about the stones of the temple not standing on top of each other. The Romans had under General (later Emperor) Titus, destroyed Jerusalem, razed and destroyed stone by stone, the temple. While this undoubtedly was an abomination to the Jews, but this again, is not preceded by those birth pains detailed in the previous verse, nor do historians present any picture of any violation inside the temple.

The third option then and the one we hope to develop further is that the Lord has in mind some future event, a future event that is both preceded by birth-pains (v8), and then some future (v9, "then they will") persecution.

Jesus uses this expression to say that following these birth-pains there will follow a period of religious persecution when those that follow Jesus, will be persecuted, and put to death. Again, we must recognise that the disciples suffered tremendously for the sake of the gospel, both from the Jews and the Romans until the time of Constantine but can this be what Jesus had in mind? For what followed afterwards? The church eventually became strong, dominant in the world and regrettable corrupt. This doesn't fit in with the picture that I think Jesus is painting here. Surely, there is some sense of continuity in His dialogue?

If then the Lord has in view AD 70 as the abomination, which we are not even sure there was, then in the generation between his departure and the destruction, would have seen wars, rumours of wars, famines and earthquakes. Although there was no doubt, a rising sense of discontentment with Rome I am not sure that that is a historical reality. Of course, after AD 70 there was increased persecution of both Jew and Christian, as Roman emperor after Roman emperor, enjoyed the sport of the Coliseum. (Consider the church at Smyrna, which we will review a little later.) This persecution would of course have added to the sense of abandoning faith, as the cost of discipleship for some would have been too high. But, and it's a big but, this all ended under Constantine. Although had I lived in those days, I would be confident that this was what Jesus was describing. Indeed, in many things regarding End-Times, we can see examples from history of those things that are to come – although I maintain they are but "antitypes." The mere

fact that we are still discussing them many centuries later, surely completely undermines the fact that these could possibly be, “End-Times.”

Further, as we have already alluded to in our introduction, I also believe we can see significant evidence of these birth-pains today.

These birth pains, the forerunner of the real troubled times that are to come are described from verse 9 and seem to me to be a good description of the 20th Century and beyond. A century of two World Wars, the war to end all wars, and then the nuclear bombs that did end, its successor. This besides innumerable other conflicts and genocide. A magnitude of violence, perhaps simply through the technology of destruction, that was rather lacking through the previous 17 centuries. Rather than, these events that the Lord is describing after these birth pains (v9 – 14), have for me, a ring of future times as seen in the Revelation...

Rev 6:9 When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne.

... about it. These seals are part of a judgement on the earth, that occurs during a period, known as the tribulation, or perhaps the “*time of Jacob’s trouble.*” This is something that will be considered, in a few other places later as we meander through our studies. But this period now known as the tribulation, is a key component preceding the return of the Lord. And if anyone thinks these are troubled times, then regrettably I must suggest, “that we’ve not seen anything yet.” Tribulation (v9), and (v21) great tribulation are not man-made descriptions but rather expressions the Lord uses Himself to describe these times. Of course, the Lord uses them as adjectives, words to describe those days. But they have by common usage, become proper nouns, to designate these periods of time. A fact not always abundantly clear from the various translations we have but, the translators of the ESV (as do the NKJV) choose to use this very expression of tribulation here, rather than “*afflicted*” (KJV), or “*persecuted*” (NIV) and (NLT).

Matt 24:9 “Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name’s sake.

During this time of trouble and persecution there will be a general falling away from the church, and a turning of churchgoers onto each other. I use the expression churchgoers, to describe those who perhaps go to church without necessarily having the love or commitment to Christ that would mark out a true believer. Those whose faith is greater and can endure, these are those I imagine to

be those who shall persevere to the end, where they will be delivered, as opposed to the more ambiguous use of the word, “saved.” (NIV)

So, what succinctly we have in view, what the Lord is teaching, is that there will be a period of birth-pains (Matt 24:5-8), this is a time of difficulties marked by wars and rumours of wars. After these things, there will be a time of coldness and a general rejection of the truth and believers turning against each other leading to a time of trouble, where perhaps surprisingly, there would appear to be a period of time where the Gospel of the grace of God will be proclaimed, throughout the world. Then the end shall come (Matt 24:9-14). which appears to be in two parts separated by this concept of, ‘*the abomination that causes desolation spoken of through the prophet Daniel.*’

To that then, we must refer to that wonderful Old Testament, prophet.

3. The Abomination that causes Desolation

In the Biblical context an abomination is usually taken to be a detestable thing, or an idol. This is consistently something that appears to be taking the place of God. Specifically, and yes perhaps determined retrospectively, it is used of those things that don't only take the place of God but enter those unique places that the Jews see as being the place of God alone. This would be the tabernacle, temple but particularly the Holiest of All. The dwelling of God, the Shekinah Glory and entered by man, one man the High Priest and that but once a year.

Therefore, the desecration is not only an abomination for being in that place but also because it completely undermines the special things of Judaism, the things of God. This is what the Lord is describing in Matthew 24. It is also the reason why the destruction of the temple by the Romans, detestable though it was, is not considered an abomination.

The good news is that the Lord tells us in Matt 24 that He is explicitly referring to that instance which was spoken of by Daniel. The bad news is that it is an expression that Daniel uses on 3 different occasions in his prophesy and it might be foolhardy to immediately accept them as being different references to the one, same event.

Therefore then, looking at each one in turn.

Daniel Chapter 9.

24- 27 "Seventy 'sevens' are decreed for your people and your holy city to finish transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for wickedness, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy and to anoint the most holy. "Know and understand this: From the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem until the Anointed One, the ruler, comes, there will be seven 'sevens', and sixty-two 'sevens'. It will be rebuilt with streets and a trench, but in times of trouble. After the sixty-two 'sevens', the Anointed One will be cut off and will have nothing. The people of the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end will come like a flood: War will continue until the end, and desolations have been decreed. He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven'. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing [of the temple] he will set up an **abomination that causes desolation**, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." (NIV)²

We shall in a couple of chapters time be looking more fully at this concept of Daniel's 70 weeks, this as in Daniel's first vision in Chapter 5. It specifically details that time when sin will end, and everlasting righteousness is ushered in. Therefore, this is a fundamental and critical foundation of the study of End Times. For sin cannot end, and everlasting righteousness be established until He returns and sets up His kingdom. This, for me, is an essential tenet, of the Christian Faith.

However, it is impossible to look at all these pieces of our jigsaw in a coherent, logical, and straightforward manner and immediately understanding how they apply, for many of them are so inter-changeable. It is a 3D puzzle being done in a 2D linear context. Therefore, it behoves us then to introduce concepts before we have fully discussed them, concepts in the analogy that belong to another plane, so please bear with me on this. So, the fuller development of these seventy weeks will follow later but succinctly Daniel's 70 weeks are representative of a week of years (the arguments for which will also be dealt with later), so 70 weeks of years are to be thought of as 490 years. For by this way of reckoning a day is equivalent to a year.

Now what these weeks are, and when they start are a constant theme of debate and we shall address this later but for the time being we shall accept the "dispensational," view, that 69 of those years have already passed in history.

² Unfortunately, my beloved ESV renders this; "And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate,"

After these 483 years, there is to be a hiatus before Daniel's 70th week. This hiatus has been described as the "Church Age," or, "The Day of Grace," and is the time and opportunity for salvation through grace alone. Again this is something we will more fully detail when we consider the Visions of Daniel, but for now, we are seeking to determine, why the Lord referenced Daniel in Matthew 24, and what that means in the context of His teaching.

So, in the context of Matt 24, this 70th week is to start at the end of verse 8, the Birth Pains. Verse 9, with the little word, "then" starts the clock on this period of this 70th week, 7 years, until verse 16 when in the middle of that week, "he" establishes this, "*abomination that causes desolation.*" As seen in Dan 9:27 repeated for convenience.

Dan 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven'. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

Although I have not used the ESV here for reasons detailed below, it does have the advantage of using the expression; "*And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate,*" That is that the "he," who will confirm the covenant will also put an end to sacrifice and offering, and in the third reference "he", the one "who makes desolate," is as yet in our study, undetermined character.

Now, who the person is referred to three times in this verse has been debated long and hard. For many years, the favoured option was the Lord, the Anointed One of verses 25 and 26. After all He is the one who makes the covenant, through blood between God and man, and through His blood made one sacrifice for sins for ever. Thereby putting an end to sacrifice and offering. However, it is entirely wrong, to suggest that the Lord's Christ can ever set up an abomination. I also think it grammatically wrong, to use the pronoun in the same paragraph to refer to two different people, so we cannot argue that the first two "he's" are Christ and the third someone else.

Now from a very basic linguist point of view, it is my understanding that the use of the pronoun "he," refers to the last-named person, of whom it can be applicable. After the reference to the Anointed One, in Daniel 9:26 there is another "he", mentioned by name, "*the ruler who will come will destroy the city and the*

sanctuary.” What we then have in view, is that after the birth-pains, there will commence a period of time, of seven years, when some character will establish a new covenant with many for seven years, in the middle of which, after three and a half years, he will abandon sacrifice and offering and set up the abomination. A slight problem with this is that temple sacrifices don’t exist today, nor does the temple.

Last year (April 19th, 2019)³ the Israeli 24-hour news network i24 reported that the political nomination of Israeli “right-wing hardlines,” could see the commencement of animal sacrifices and drive a political agenda to see the construction of the Third Temple. This is already in planning by some, as even a cursory glance at Google will reveal.

Nor do we have any idea, of who this “Prince,” might be. However, he has come to be referred to, as the Antichrist. Drawing on an expression used five times in the epistles of John.⁴

2Jo 1:7 For many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not confess the coming of Jesus Christ in the flesh. Such a one is the deceiver and the antichrist.

We will, as I say, be looking at the ins and outs of this in a chapter’s time, but in the context of the Lord’s teaching of Matt 24, this seven-year period could be seen to be that time described as being of tribulation, that marks the end. Hence forth we will capitalise this as Tribulation, specifically the first half of a seven-year period. This is followed by a second period of 3 ½ years, which commencing with this abomination, is determined to be an acceleration of the troubles; usually defined as being, “The Great Tribulation.”

³ <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/politics/1555676456-next-year-in-jerusalem-sacrifices-on-the-temple-mount-police-officials-say>

⁴ 1John 2:18 (2x including plural), 1John 2:22, 1John 4:3, 2John 1:7

Daniel Chapter 11 (Daniel's 4th Vision).

The second instance of the three we mentioned early of this concept of the “abomination that causes desolation,” occurs a couple of chapters later, in Daniel 11.

Dan 11: 31 Forces from him shall appear and profane the temple and fortress, and shall take away the regular burnt offering. And they shall set up the abomination that makes desolate.

Daniel 11 is a chapter whose detractors insist must have been written many years later than its conventional historical dating. This conventional date, is the history of his life, commencing with the carrying away of him and his contemporaries around 600 BC. There he lived for the 70 years of the Captivities and lived to see Cyrus the Persian come to power. This is in much the same way, that some insist that the prophecy of Isaiah was written in different times and by different writers, so too is this section of Daniel undermined. Why? Simply because of the unerring accuracy of these prophetic words, that pragmatic, rational and unspiritual minds cannot accept as being written before the events themselves unfold.

So, when they come to consider the pre-historical record of Daniel 11, they suggest that it was written as a reaction by the Jews to the Greek / Macedonian / Syrian king Antiochus, during the Maccabean period. For undoubtedly, this anti-hero is very much in view in this chapter. Which we hold to be a prophecy written and revealed to Daniel, concerning those events which would occur in Persia after Daniel's time. We should re-iterate that while these were future to Daniel, they are to us today ancient history, but still pertinent in that we can understand from them, what the abomination will look like.

We remember that Daniel was a young Jewish noble, taken into Babylon and who prospered under his captor, King Nebuchadnezzar. He maintained his position as an advisor to the king as the Babylonian kingdom gave way to the Medo-Persian and then Persian empire, under Darius and Cyrus.

In chapter 11, he is given an insight, in what is his final vision, to those things that would later happen. He starts by saying that after (Darius) three more Persian kings⁵ would rise to be followed by a richer fourth⁶ emperor. He would become

⁵ Cambyses II Reign 530 – 522, Bardiya 522 and Darius I 522 – 486. Wikipedia List of Monarch of Persia

⁶ Ibid Xerxes I reign 485 – 465 BC

strong and fight against Greece. In fact, Persia invaded Greece in 480 BC and fulfilled this prophecy. Of course, history records that Alexander the Great, the “mighty king,” of Dan 11:3, would later in a hundred- and fifty-years’ time rise to prominence. He would conquer all the known world and in so doing avenge Greece in Persia, this is historically accurate and found its fulfilment in 334 BC. Alexander dies a young man broken hearted, because there were now no more (known) worlds to conquer. After his death, His Grecian Empire was split into four separate factions, all arising from Greece but independent and seeming continually at war with each other.

This sacred text gives a very accurate insight into what happened to a section of this now fragmented Greek Empire. In particular, the conflict between the kings of the North, which were the Seleucid dynasties in Syria and in the South, Ptolemy in Egypt. Israel was but a pawn in between, but whose relative position determines the geographical names of the kings. The political machinations, intrigue and violence between these Hellenistic factions is complicated and confusing but Daniel gives a valuable understanding to all the to-ing and fro-ing of the period.

It was during the time of the Maccabees, that the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes, having been thwarted in his attempt to invade Egypt by Ptolemy VI, returns home via Jerusalem. The Jews having heard erroneously that Antiochus had been killed in battle, rebel against Menelaus, Antiochus’s puppet High Priest in Jerusalem and install Jason into the role. Rather narked at his failure in Egypt and now seeing the rebellion in Jerusalem, Antiochus ransacks the city and re-instates Menelaus. In an apparent act of spite and vengeance, he desecrates the temple by raising an altar to Zeus and sacrificing pigs, to the Jewish mind an unclean animal. This is in this context that Daniel writes here of the, “*abomination that makes desolate,*” and can be dated to 167 BC. It is this that gives rise to the Maccabean revolt.

This proven and established historical event is then to be distinguished from the abomination of Chapter 9, which is a future event and is scheduled to occur in the middle of the seven-year period of Tribulation / Great Tribulation. Of course, by building into Matthew 24, the (admittedly contextual) destruction of the temple in AD 70, this abomination, which would cause desolation and rebellion during the Maccabean period, there is a great temptation to try and force these events into the Lord’s teaching in Matthew 24, but the pieces simply do not fit, in any shape or form, not least of all in that the severity of the persecution that occurs thereafter, which to a large extent dwindled out after Cornelius. Of course, the most obvious

reason this is not the abomination that Jesus has in mind is that He is looking forward in time, not back.

Except for, from verse 35, of this chapter the narrative becomes a little more confusing than a simply record of things that happened between the Testaments, that Maccabean Period. It seems that Daniel's vision of Antiochus, merges into a much-later future vision, which parallels a far more sinister character with the Syrian. The insertion of the expression, "*until the time of the end,*" in Dan 11:35, 12:4 and 12:9 gives the clue that a bigger picture is in view than simply that (which to us is a) historical record. That this narrative looks more to our future than simply history, albeit prophetic at its time of writing, but now well in the past.

Daniel Chapter 12 (Daniel's 4th Vision cont.)

This then is the third reference in Daniel.

As we have already said, the verses immediately following this reference to the abomination in chapter 11 become somewhat confused, two stories are being told as one. This double fulfilment or two-fold expression of prophecy is not a unique instance, it is a common tool amongst the prophets. One needs only to think about the First and Second Comings of the Lord, and the prophetic texts that are partially realised in the first but await their complete fulfilment in His return.

For while the theme remains the historical narrative concerning the Hellenistic empire and succeeding dynasties, somewhere along the line the emphasis changes into end times. This continues into chapter 12, appearing to be one continuous narrative.

Superficially at least it appears that when we reach verse 40 in chapter 11, we still have this ongoing conflict between, these kings of the south (Ptolemy) and north (Seleucid). Now though, we see the expression, “the time of the end,” regularly appearing in the prophecy and we need to revise who and what the north and south, now are. The king described in Dan 11:36, can no longer be Antiochus IV, who is but a type of this *antichrist* character reference early, or the sinister character⁷ described in...

2Thess 2:3-4 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

This, “man of lawlessness,” according to Daniel will be successful until the completion of the time of wrath. Although Paul, does not use the expression, the abomination that causes desolation, there can be little doubt that what he is describing here, falls into this category.

Yet as a “renewed,” king of the North, he will too be subject to attacks from the king of the South. This time though I think these kings will not be limited to the geographical regions of Egypt and Syria. This “Son of Destruction,” is to be dispassionate, materialistic and above everything else completely ruthless. Yet, he

⁷ What the bible teaches: Daniel J.R. Baker 2011, Ritchie p162

is not seen to be completely invincible and that reports from the North and East, geographically; Russia and China presumably, will alarm him.

Of course, in our immediate context, we are looking out specifically for the “Abomination that causes Desolation,” that Jesus has referred to in Matt 24, and Paul infers in his reference from 2 Thessalonians above. These other skeleton pictures will be fleshed more fully out as we journey through the other writings in their context.

Having therefore ruled out Antiochus in Chapter 11, we note that this reference to the abomination, here in Chapter 12, is simply used as a “benchmark,” for time. There is no immediately obvious reference to when and how this man, causes this abomination, except perhaps the hint that...

Dan 11:45 And he shall pitch his palatial tents between the sea and the glorious holy mountain. Yet he shall come to his end, with none to help him.

And as we pass from Daniel chapter 11, into 12, we recognise similar conditions prevailing that we have seen in the first fourteen verses of Matthew 24, those birth pains that are to be experienced before the time of tribulation comes. However, the fact that there is hope here, is evident here with the arrival of Michael the great Prince, although this initially brings with it great conflict before we have our first indication of deliverance.

Dan 12:1-2 “At that time shall arise Michael, the great prince who has charge of your people. And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time. But at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

This idea of a book of life, a record of a man’s life is first found in the Psalms.

Ps 69:28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.

And continues through to the Revelation.

Re 20:15 And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Do we judge that the “at that time,” when Michael shall arise is consistent with the “at that time,” of the deliverance of God’s people both dead and alive? I think so, for this is immediately before this time of trouble. With these words the vision in verse 4, effectively closes before Daniel (another vision?) can eavesdrop on a conversation between, we presume two angels. Their discussion is about how long will it take for these astonishing things to be fulfilled. Here we are introduced to the expression, “time, times and half a time,” where the Holy People, Israel are to be handed over. Knowing as we do, that the equivalent passages refer this to be 3½ years, we can see that a time is a year, times 2 years and half a time 6 months, getting us to the same 3½ years.

One of the ways in which I am sure that we will never be able to determine the day and the hour, is in the way in which Scripture treats dates. The God-given calendar was based on the moon, and each month commences when the smallest sliver of the new moon became visible. The orbit of the moon around the earth is complicated in that while the moon, is moving round the earth, the earth is also moving around the sun and so the visible orbit of the moon is longer than one circumference of the earth. This is around 29 ½ days, and so the modern Jewish calendar has alternate month durations of 29 and 30 days, and leap months every so often, to accommodate the true cycle of the earth around the sun, of a little less than 365¼ days. However, in antiquity, and since the days of Noah, the month was reckoned to be thirty days.

Ge 7:11 In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month,

Gen 7:24 And the waters prevailed on the earth 150 days.

Ge 8:4 and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat.

As mentioned above the expression described as a time, a times and half a time, is generally taken to mean 12 months, (a time), 24 months (a times) and 6 months (half a time), This 3½ year period is described as being 42 months, or 1,260 days. The 30-day months, relating back to this time of Noah.

Re 11:3 ¶ And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.”

It is almost then as a throwaway comment that in conclusion the angel adds,

Daniel 12: 11-12 "From the time that the daily sacrifice is abolished and the abomination that causes desolation is set up, there will be 1,290 days. Blessed is he who waits and arrives at the 1,335 days.

Obviously, this is different from the 1,260 days that mark the split in the seven years of trouble, with the abomination. This period of 1,260 days is the time from the start of the Tribulation until the abomination, this period is from the abomination moving forward to the return of our Lord. So strictly speaking the abomination is not precisely in the middle, and what then are the additional 45 days?

Dan 9:27 He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven'. In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him."

Now I have read some extraordinary and wondrous, wrong things on this. One a video suggested that actually the temple worship ended with Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC, this then led to the desecration which was the dome of the Mosque being fitted in AD 690, and then a further 1,335 years until the return of the Lord in 2,025. Others suggest that the daily sacrifice ended with the Romans in AD70.

However, the ending of the temple worship and the daily sacrifice in view here is consistently, concurrent with the setting up of the Abomination. Daniel 12 is referring to the self-same Abomination of Daniel 9, however the 1,260 days is counting forward to the Abomination, the 1,290 and 1,335 days is counting from the Abomination to as yet unknown future events, no doubt featuring the return of the Lord. Therefore, the Lord in Matt 24, is defining specific periods of time. The first of these is the birth pains, which I have suggested is consistent with our experience of the last century and current time. After which there will come a time, of Christian persecution, many will leave the faith and turn on each other. This period, we now know from Daniel will last for 3½ years before the Abomination that causes Desolation will occur. This will be caused by someone described by Paul in Thessalonians as a man of lawlessness.

Having visited that which was spoken of by the prophet Daniel, we will now return to the Lord's narrative having learned a little of this Abomination that causes desolation that He refers to in Matt 24:15.

4. The Lord's Teaching (Matt 24 Part 2)

Having established that the “abomination that causes desolation” is that as described in Daniel 9 as occurring in the (almost)⁸ middle of the seven year period, the Lord not only starts to describe the events that colour this time but how, we⁹ are to react to this. Run!

The Lord describes these events as, “great tribulation,” although today we normally name it as such, The Great Tribulation. That period of 3½ years, or 1,290 days of extreme and unheard-of circumstances, these are described in detail.

Matt 24:15 - 27 “So when you see the abomination of desolation spoken of by the prophet Daniel, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains. Let the one who is on the housetop not go down to take what is in his house, and let the one who is in the field not turn back to take his cloak. And alas for women who are pregnant and for those who are nursing infants in those days! Pray that your flight may not be in winter or on a Sabbath. For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. Then if anyone says to you, ‘Look, here is the Christ!’ or ‘There he is!’ do not believe it. For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand. So, if they say to you, ‘Look, he is in the wilderness,’ do not go out. If they say, ‘Look, he is in the inner rooms,’ do not believe it. For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

This will be great distress, unequalled since the beginning of time and I am sure that this is something we will see in greater detail, when we considered the events described in the later part of the first half of the book of Revelation.

However, this is seen as being the precursor to the Lord's return.

Matt 24:30 – 31 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a

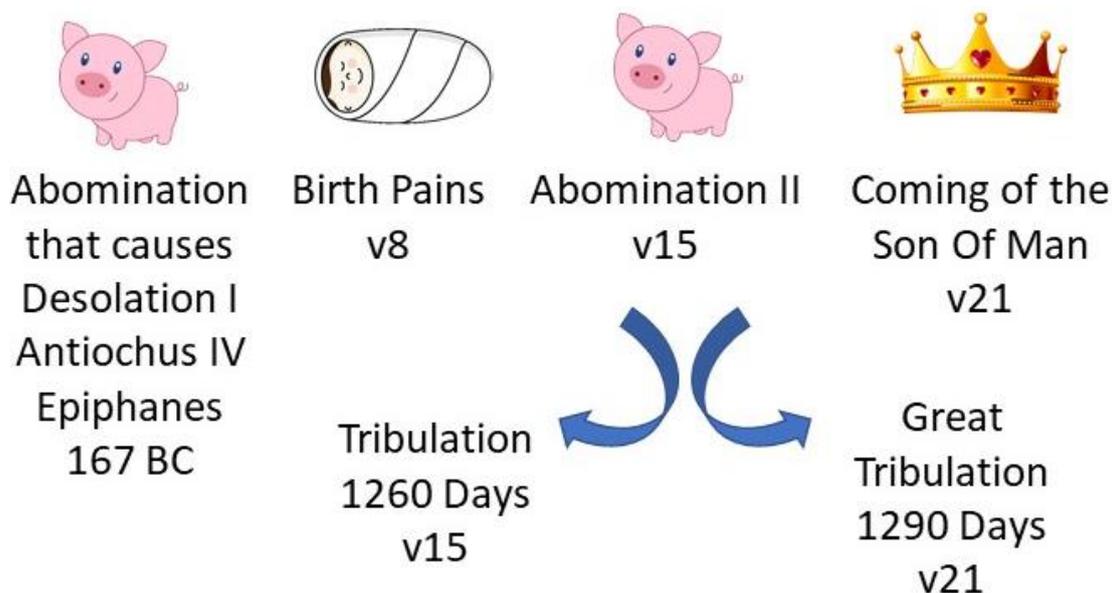
⁸ Presumably, there are 1,260 days before the abomination in the tribulation and 1,290 days thereafter.

⁹ I am fully expecting the “we” here to be the Jews, rather than the Lord's disciples or the church - to whom he is speaking, but we've not got to that point yet, so we'll take it as face value for the time being.

loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

So, the apostles asked when will these things be, the sign of your coming and of the close of the age? Jesus responds, that leads us to identify specific and distinct periods.

- Matt 24:4 – 8 Birth Pains
- Matt 24:9 – 14 Time of Tribulation
- Matt 24:15 Abomination that causes Desolation
- Matt 24:16 – 29 The Great Tribulation
- Matt 24:30 – 31 The Coming of the Son of Man



Today, I am personally in no doubt that we are living in times that can best be categorised as “*Birth Pains.*” The abnormal occurrences that today colour our world, are but precursors to end-times and while these might find their source in man’s mismanagement of the planet, to God they are entirely predictable and inevitable and remain part of his established and pre-determined calendar.

But we note and remind ourselves, that Jesus, told us these things so that we are not deceived, that we are not alarmed, and that we stand fast. For these troubled times will herald in the return of our Saviour.

5. The Visions of Daniel

Having determined that this period of Tribulation of seven years, is defined in Daniel and is the last of seventy such weeks, it seems pertinent to return to that prophet. After all the Lord directed us there Himself, and in that we must remind ourselves, that Jesus designated him a prophet and that any attempt to disregard his book as prophecy, to ascribe it to the Maccabean age, is therefore to contradict the Lord.

So, we look to Daniel to determine what these other weeks of years are, to try to help us build our jigsaw of end-times. No piece of this jigsaw stands alone, so while we might find ourselves covering old ground, this then will add weight to the consolidated end-result.

Superficially at least the twelve chapters of Daniel break down into two sections of six chapters. The first six being predominately the historical narrative of Daniel in Babylon, under both Nebuchadnezzar and then Darius the Mede. In between these two rulers, there was a lesser known Babylonian ruler, the son or more correctly the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar named Belshazzar, interestingly (perhaps) Daniel was given the Babylonian name, Belteshazzar. Belshazzar was the emperor who gave the banquet, when the writing of the wall appeared. Words that Daniel was able to give the meaning to. This was that the Medes (Medo-Persians) were going to attack that very night capture Babylon and have themselves established as the New World Order.

The latter half of the book, the prophetic history of end-times has four distinct dates of writing, commencing with Chapter 7 being dated to the first year of Belshazzar's reign, or perhaps immediately before the chronological narrative in Chapter 5. Similarly, the visions of chapters 8, 9 and 10 are dated to the reigns of the pertinent monarch. But more of that later. I use the word superficially to describe the split of the book into two halves of history and prophecy for there are some matters of prophecy in the former half which we should consider. Strictly speaking this is not Daniel's vision but that of Nebuchadnezzar to which Daniel gives the interpretation of. You might remember the Sunday School story; Nebuchadnezzar is perplexed about a dream he has had and wants his wise men to give the interpretation of it. This with the added challenge of not telling them the dream. Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that under those terms no man could give any explanation, but that there was a God in Heaven who could.

Nebuchadnezzar's Image

Nebuchadnezzar had dreamt of a statue; this was a great image exceedingly bright which had stood with its frightening appearance in front of the king. Its constituent parts were made of a variety of materials. The head was made of fine gold, its chest and arms were made of silver, and its middle and thighs were of bronze. Finally, it had legs of iron and feet of iron and clay. As Nebuchadnezzar viewed this image, a stone not cut from human hands, struck the feet which broke into pieces. Then the rest of the statue too was broken in pieces and like the chaff of wheat being threshed this was carried away by the wind, so that not a piece remained. The stone became a mountain and filled the whole earth.

Not content with simply relating to Nebuchadnezzar his dream, Daniel proceeds to give the interpretation too. He explains that he, Nebuchadnezzar was the head of gold. He was the ruler overall. After him another, a different but inferior kingdom of silver would rise, before the third of bronze. Then the fourth would have its turn, which would be a kingdom of iron. It would be strong as iron and would crush all things. Later there would be a further kingdom made with iron but mixed with clay. That is that it would have the firmness of iron, but with the brittleness, of the clay.

There are some distinguishing features between the feet and the toes, and the use of different expressions for clay, (ESV), either, potter's clay, soft clay, or simply clay. The NIV uses only; baked clay and clay, whatever they are they do not mix well together with iron. The toes it has been suggested may co-relate to ten horns that we should see later, and the different uses of the words for clay may indicate some inconsistencies in the mix. Perhaps, we shall see more of this later as we investigate different visions, of the same overall picture.

In the days of those kings we read that God will set up a kingdom in heaven, surely identified by that stone not cut from hands. A stone that would smash all other kingdoms, while the kingdom of God would endure forever. This was the dream and its explanation. It does of course detail those kingdoms that would come after Babylon, which would at the time have been unknown both to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar.

We, however, now have the benefit of hindsight and know from history what happened through the following 600 years. In the first instance, Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonians were displaced by the silver of the, (Medo-) Persians, to be followed by the bronze Greeks before finally the Roman legs of

iron. This we know and has been long established, however the challenge we face is in coming to understand what is meant by the feet, and feet and toes of iron and clay.

There is no plausible explanation except that the iron of the feet and toes are consistent with the, iron of the legs. Therefore, in this yet to be, mixed kingdom, a key component must surely be a revised Roman Empire, for I cannot accept that there could be mixed metaphors in the one vision. The question that begs to be asked is what is the clay representative of?

One prevailing view is that the Roman Empire today, is the confederation of European states which we as a country are trying to untangle ourselves from. It is a mixture of iron type states, such as Germany and France and other inferior, (numerically, financially and politically) states. Perhaps, these can be seen to be represented as the clay, mingled with the iron.

Alternatively, and if we were to look at other references in the Scripture, and I accept that it is dangerous to compare different imagery in different situations, we find these references to clay.

Isa 64:8 But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand.

Jer 18:6 “O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter has done? declares the LORD. Behold, like the clay in the potter’s hand, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel.

Ro 9:21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honoured use and another for dishonourable use?

Consistently from these three different sources, we see a theme in the symbolism of God as the potter, and his people, as the clay. Granted this is the Jews in the first two verses, and humankind with a tenuous link to Pharaoh in the third. This would give us a very strong indication that in the feet and toes that we are looking at some incompatible alliance between the power of a Roman Empire, and a people that God uses. They are in principle incompatible, they don’t mix.

Had I been looking at this 1,000 year ago, or at least before the Reformation, I would be hard pressed to see the iron and clay, as anything other than the Roman, or the Holy Roman Empire, its supposed continuance and the church and the

uneasy and tenuous relationship between them. But, the Holy Roman Empire, which was as Voltaire stated neither; Holy, Roman nor an Empire, was ended by Napoleon in 1805, and that option with its on / off relationship with the church seems somewhat distant.

However, we do have a European Union, but this appears, at least for the moment, to have no relationship with the church, and if it had it, could it balance the Catholicism of the Latin nations with the Lutheran derived Protestantism from the Germanic states. Many of the older commentaries on this subject, foresaw the need for a Jewish state, long before one came into being.

So, that's not to say it wouldn't happen, after all the iron and clay don't mix and there must then be some sense of a marriage of convenience, perhaps a temporary arrangement. Nevertheless, this remains a strong and prevailing view, especially amongst Protestant Evangelicals, that this iron / clay confederacy is an alliance between the European state and the church of Rome, which has a greater union and European identity than the diversity of the Protestant churches.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, do these represent reasonable and pertinent arguments based on our limited evidence available from history and Daniel's prophecy? Remember we are trying to build one cohesive and complementary "jigsaw," from all the pieces. With the pieces currently before us, it would be foolhardy I judge, to leap to such a conclusion now and hence I am reluctant to make any categorical assertions at this point. However, once we start to investigate some of the imagery from later in Daniel and from the Revelation we might be able to add some meat to these particular bones.

I should make mention of the fact that there are other visions in this the first half of Daniel's prophecy and one of these is to be found in Chapter 4. This vision as I am positive has no end-time significance and like the one found in Chapter 2, this is not Daniel's vision but rather belongs to Nebuchadnezzar and is to do with his insanity and fall from power. A prophetic word that has had its complete fulfilment. Then of course, there are the events surrounding the writing on the wall during Belshazzar's banquet but this like the vision of chapter 4, this found its complete fulfilment that night and is detailed in the subsequent verses, and this has, I judge no end-times significance.

Daniel's 1st Vision

As we mentioned earlier, it was in the first year of the reign of Belshazzar that Daniel had his own vision. In this dream, strange and different beasts were seen to be emerging from the sea. The first, a lion with eagle's wings which were soon plucked off, was made to stand on a man's feet before the beast was given a human mind (ESV), or heart (NIV, KJV).

The second beast in the form of a bear, stood towards one side. This animal had three ribs in its mouth and was encouraged to go and eat much flesh. The third was a leopard with four bird's wings. This had four heads and to them was given dominion, or presumably their own authority.

The fourth beast is described as terrifying, powerful and strong but this creature is not paralleled to any known animal. It had iron teeth. It had ten horns, perhaps as we suggested earlier, mirroring the ten toes, of Nebuchadnezzar's image, which also had an iron component. As Daniel considered these horns, an additional little horn appeared, this horn had the eyes of a man and was speaking great things.

Daniel's vision then notices thrones in place, and the Ancient of Days sat down. The Ancient of Days, is an expression peculiar to Daniel, occurring three times and is generally used, not to necessarily express the eternal existence of God, but rather the old-age and wisdom of the Son of God. However, in the second of the three instances found in chapter 7, where two distinct characters of the Godhead are seen, this would lead me to the rational conclusion that it is God the Father, rather than the person of the Son of God, that is in view as the Ancient of Days, but we'll come to that in a moment.

Dan 7:13 I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him.

Undoubtedly though what is in view is the fact that a million, (1,000 x 1,000) served the Ancient of Days and a further hundred million (10,000 x 10,000) stood around this throne. This was set in a court room. This surely is the great judgement throne where the Ancient of Days is sat, surrounded by fire. The little horn continued to speak forth "great words," translated "boastful," by the NIV, holding Daniel's attention, until the beast, rather than simply the horn, was slain, its body destroyed and thrown into the flaming fire.

Daniel's vision continues; the other three beasts can live for a while longer, albeit without their sovereignty. It is in this context, that the Son of Man approaches the Ancient of Days. To the Son of Man, is given dominion, glory and a kingdom, that all people should worship Him. His dominion unlike those of the beasts was to be an eternal one that could not be destroyed.

Confused? Well how do you think Daniel felt, he was grieved, and troubled by all these things, so he chatted with one of those who stood by and he gave to Daniel, the explanation of these things.

We know that in the Bible, the sea consistently speaks of the mass of humankind and therefore I am happy to assume that these beasts speak of peoples coming from the general populace of the earth. This is precisely what is explained to Daniel, and so, these four beasts are those four kings that shall arise out of the earth, or rather they are representatives of kingdoms and we immediately start to think back to Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the image.

This vision takes place, in the first year of Belshazzar¹⁰, who although residing as "top-dog," in Babylon never formally took the throne from his father, Nabonidus. (Although Belshazzar is referred to as Nebuchadnezzar's son, that was Nabonidus, son frequently being used to refer to those descendants of later generations.) Nabonidus had left the city in 552 BC. I was going make some crass joke about him seeing the writing on the wall, but that was his son 😊. Nebuchadnezzar came to the throne, in 605 BC, and his vision of the image in chapter 2¹¹, occurs in the second year of his reign. Therefore, there were fifty years between Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image and this Daniel's first vision.

Was Daniel then able to co-relate the four kings, these beasts that shall arise from out of the sea, with the various materials and body parts of Nebuchadnezzar's statue? That is assuming that the various commentators are correct and that these beasts are consistent with the vision in Daniel 2, which seems more than a reasonable assumption to make.

The first beast the lion, is then associated with the Babylonian kingdom, or the head of gold of the head of gold of Nebuchadnezzar's image. It is said that many

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_kings_of_Babylon

¹¹ There is some debate regarding this date as in Daniel 1:5, we note that Daniel was prepared for 3 years for this role, although I would content that at this time he had not formally entered the service of the "Wise Men," and wasn't then invited to give the interpretation of the dream.

artefacts of winged lions were found amongst Babylonian ruins. Mighty as a lion, swift as a bird, its strength and speed are compromised when its wings are plucked out and is given a human heart and made to stand on human feet. With only personal interpretation, I do wonder if this relates to the humiliation of Nebuchadnezzar, who had wanted to exalt himself but rather suffered madness.

The bear represents the Medo-Persian empire and by leaning to one side perhaps emphasizes the greater might of the Persians. The three ribs have been said to represent¹², those that Cyrus conquered to unite the nation: Astyages 550 BC, Anatolia 547 BC, Croesus of Lydia, ~ 547 BC. The bear is told to devour more flesh and perhaps this alludes to its expansionist policies which saw Xerxes go on to conquer Greece in the middle of the 5th Century BC.

When we come to the 3rd beast, Greece is represented by the leopard. Renowned for its swiftness, this beast speaks well of the speed with which Alexander the Great, conquered the known world. However, in the vision this had four heads, and surely this is speaking of the four divisions that came out of this empire: Ptolemy in Egypt, Seleucus in Syria, Antigonos, Turkey and Cassander, then Antipater in Macedonia / Greece. It also had four wings perhaps indicating the speed with which the empire broke into these four parts, after Alexander's demise.

However, the interpreter doesn't mention these beasts to Daniel, stating quite categorically that the saints of the Highest shall take possession of the kingdom. In fact, it seems that the interpreter doesn't even want to dwell either on the character of the fourth beast, but appears to be pressed on this, by Daniel.

At this point we can now draw together the image of Nebuchadnezzar and that of Daniel, for Daniel is told that this fearsome fourth beast so unlike the others, presumably in the sense that there is no animal to which it could be compared, represents the fourth world power. Comparable to the fourth kingdom of the image represented by the legs of iron, he was notable for his iron teeth.

This fourth kingdom, which we have already established as being Rome, is different from the other three kingdoms, in its ferocity. It devours the earth, trampling and crushing with those iron teeth and bronze claws. Now there is nothing of clay about this beast, but we note the bronze of Greece in its claws. Is

¹² ESV Study Bible, Crossway 2001, Notes on Daniel 7:5

this simply the presence of Greece in the revised Roman Confederacy, a European Union?

The ten horns of the beast surely represent ten kings, who rule the empire. We are not told specifically whether these kings reign, sequentially or simultaneously. There is a school of thought that suggests that these horns are 10 Roman Emperors of antiquity, see the church at Smyrna, later. I am not convinced about this view, after all this “new,” little horn, will at the eleventh hour, shortly before the judgement will rise and subdue, perhaps usurp, three of the other horns, suggesting to me that they are all ruling concurrently. Therefore, it seems to be that this fourth kingdom will have ten separate kings, but that 3 of them will be put, or put themselves into subjection to this, “little horn.”

Now until this point, we have had nothing that allows us to correlate between Daniel’s visions and that which the Lord spoke of in Matthew 24. But here we find such a link, for we read that this little horn will defy the Most High, oppress His people, change their feasts and festivals, and will have them in subjection for a time, times and half a time. Surely then this is Matt 24, and the aforementioned, “abomination that causes desolation.”

In addition, we shall be later looking at the Book of Revelation where we read.

Re 12:3 And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.

Is that because, three of the horns have lost their diadems, to this little horn? And then similarly, ...

Re 13:1 And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads.

The ten horns surely align this fourth beast to both these images, although we see here a more spiritual element, with the red dragon coming from heaven, rather than with the (fourth) beast who came out from the sea both in Revelation and here in Daniel 7. In other words, based on existing metaphors, the beast is from humankind, and the dragon is spiritual.

The images are different in that those in Revelation have 7 heads and ten horns but perhaps these seven heads are the “heads” of the ten horns, that the little horn has subdued? We’ll look at this in more detail when we turn to Revelation

later. Nevertheless, we are now seeing a pattern in the terminology and symbolism used that is tying these different views and visions together.

Now, there is a very prevalent view¹³ that this little horn is our old friend, the Seleucid, “Antiochus IV Epiphanes.” This I cannot accept. This says the interpreter is the fourth world power. At times I might be a little hesitant of what I read, a little unsure of what we might have in view but of this one thing I am certain, this fourth world power is Rome, and the Greek Antiochus is from the third world power. However, I will concede this point, as we have previously seen from Daniel 11 and into Daniel 12, Antiochus is the antitype of the “man of lawlessness,” we have already introduced, from the book of Thessalonians.

Now we can start to build our picture, as the jigsaw pieces from Matt 24, merge with Daniel 7, and we see the revealing of the “Man of Lawlessness,” or “Man of Sin” (much less typing) at the abomination that causes desolation and becomes the source of extreme suffering and misery during the Great Tribulation, that second half of the seventy week. And that he somehow or other, comes from within a revised Roman Empire, where he subdues 3 of the countries within the kingdom.

However, and although we see nothing of the clay in this beast, we do know that there will be at that time, an unholy alliance between the iron, the Roman Confederacy and the clay, potentially the church. In Daniel 7, this is symbolised by the fierce beast with ten horns, until this eleventh little horn displaces three of the ten kings. Could it be, that this little horn is then something of the clay that is brought into the iron confederacy, an outsider who gains control of three separate parts of the empire, someone who usurps their kings before rising to prominence in the Empire, leading up to the time of the abomination? After all this little horn is said to be “*different*” from those other horns.

After which the court, the Ancient of Days will both destroy the beast and give all the kingdoms under heaven, that is their sovereignty, power and greatness will be handed over to His people. This is the surely, the stone not cut from human hands. Giving the kingdoms of the world to little old you and me! And this says Daniel, is the end of the matter. Then two years later

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_7

Daniel's 2nd Vision

Two years pass and we are now into the third year of the reign of Belshazzar. Now if I am being honest, and having read a commentary on this, I was ready to quickly skip over this chapter. For although prophecy, it is according to Pollock¹⁴, an understanding of the events surrounding Antiochus and that abomination of the temple dating back to 167 BC. Of this there can be no doubt as it paints a very vivid picture of this time. However, stuck in the middle of that chapter we come across these verses.

Dan 8: 17 So he came near where I stood. And when he came, I was frightened and fell on my face. But he said to me, "Understand, O son of man, that the vision is for the time of the end."

And then ...

19 He said, "Behold, I will make known to you what shall be at the latter end of the indignation, for it refers to the appointed time of the end."

The latter end of the indignation, in the context of Antiochus, is I judge when the Maccabees overcome the Seleucid Empire and the sacrifices are re-started under Jonathan, the installed High Priest. That was 2,200 years ago but somehow or other this refers to the appointed time of the end.

Therefore, I am not entirely convinced that we can limit these events of Daniel 8, to Seleucid history and as we have already alluded to, there are parallels to be drawn between the events of this king from the third kingdom, and the expected "man, of lawlessness," from the fourth. There is it seems, a "double prophetic," element, or for some reason the events 2 centuries before our Lord, do indeed refer to the appointed time of the end. Although this is a rather difficult concept to grasp, haven't we already seen in Daniel 11, how that the (now) historical narrative concerning Antiochus, merges into those future events concerning the Man of Lawlessness?

Now, the chapter quite definitely starts with the second and third kingdoms, as outlined in Nebuchadnezzar's image and in Daniel's vision of the previous chapter. Of this I am certain because Gabriel says so. Although this time the beasts of Daniel 7, the bear and the leopard, are replaced by a ram and a male goat. The ram

¹⁴ Things which must shortly come to pass. AJ Pollock 2nd Edition 1936 BTP

had two horns, a smaller one, we assume, representing the lesser kingdom of the Medes and the larger, the Persians. It raced; north, south and westward like a demented ram, but interestingly not eastward, doing as he pleased. The goat is the kingdom of Greece (or Macedonia) and his horn is its first king, Alexander the Great. We can almost see this picture as this goat races eastward and butts the ram, smashing the two horns and then trampling the ram underfoot. Persia had given way to Greece.

This horn then breaks at the height of its strength, and four other horns appear. This we have consistently seen before, the splitting of the Greek Empire into its four distinctive parts. And of course, one of these little horns we now know to be the Syrian part of this Greek Empire and that from this, “Antiochus IV Epiphanes,” grows. His mistreatment of God’s host, the people of Israel, even some of the stars of heaven, is documented earlier and he ends the regular burnt offering in the sanctuary, which is of course in the 2nd century BC, in the Temple in Jerusalem. Even to the abomination that causes desolation, which we earlier viewed in the (Matthew 24) perspective of an historical event, not a future occurrence.

However, what is new in Daniel 8 and has been the source of much scholarly debate, is the final words of the vision, before Gabriel comes and gives the interpretation, is these words.

Dan 8: 13 - 14 Then I heard a holy one speaking, and another holy one said to the one who spoke, “For how long is the vision concerning the regular burnt offering, the transgression that makes desolate, and the giving over of the sanctuary and host to be trampled underfoot?” And he said to me, “For 2,300 evenings and mornings. Then the sanctuary shall be restored to its rightful state.”

Firstly, I note this conversation between the two “Holy Ones,” is like that we saw in Dan 12, where Daniel is permitted to listen into the conversations presumably between two angelic beings. Where it is revealed to him, and we must assume deliberately, some further revelation about these visions.

Of course, what immediately catches my eye as someone who is interested (pre-occupied, perhaps) about dates and times is the 2,300 days. Now, we are going to be looking at “days,” in a little more detail later, where the days are not simply a period of 24 hours. Because of this, I believe that describing these 2,300 days as being evening and morning, is in the first instance defining them as being a usual day, a period of 24 hours. This order of evening and then morning, is as detailed in

Genesis 1, where the evening and morning were the first (substitute second, third, fourth, etc. as appropriate) day. This is the reason why the Jews consider each day to start and end at dusk.

2,300 days using the 30 days in a month rule equates to $76 \frac{2}{3}$ months or around 6 years and 4 months. Using the $365 \frac{1}{4}$ days in a year, theory this equates to a fortnight less. One thing is for sure, this is inconsistent with the time, times and half a times we have already thought of being as the period of the Great Tribulation, or even the seven-year period of the general tribulation.

Another point of view is that this could read that the 2,300 refers to 2,300 sacrifices, this being the evening and morning sacrifice which would leave us with 1,150 days. However, even if we were to consider that these were 1,150 days, which while not significantly different with the 1,260 or 1,290 days of the Great Tribulation, remains different none the less. I am inclined then to follow the argument put forward by Rick Lanser¹⁵ as to the meaning of these days. He in turn references Fred Miller¹⁶, for the pertinent dates.

“He points out that precise dates for the beginning and end of Antiochus' desecration of the Second Temple are known. 1 Maccabees 1:54 gives us the date of the abomination as Kislev (December) 15, 167 BC, while 1 Maccabees 4:52–53 tells us the Temple was rededicated on Kislev 25, 164 BC.”

Consistently we see, in scriptural prophecy that the Jewish year is 360 days long, so the 3 years and 10 days of this desecration gives us 1,090 days. I am assuming that this was the presumed length of a year in these days of antiquity. This is wrong in two counts.

The Jewish year is based on lunar months and they are strictly speaking either 29 or 30 days long. It takes the moon about 27.3 days to orbit the earth. This is the sidereal orbit; however, this is very difficult to measure, what we can measure though is the appearance of the new moon, each month. Indeed, this was the Jewish (and other Middle Eastern cultures) method to mark each new month, until the twelfth century. This synodical orbit occurs because in the time needed for the moon to complete one full orbit, the earth relative to the sun has moved

¹⁵ <https://biblearchaeology.org/abr-projects-main/the-daniel-9-24-27-project-2/4362-understanding-the-2-300-evenings-and-mornings-of-daniel-8-14?highlight=WylyLDMwMCIsImV2ZW5pbmdzliwiMiwzMDAgZXZlbnluZ3MlXQ==>

¹⁶ <http://www.moellerhaus.com/2300.htm>

further round, in its orbit. This orbit, or lunar month is then 29.5 days long rather than the 30 proposed by antiquity. So, in effect the Jewish year can consist of 353, 354 or 355 days.

The additional problem with this lunar calendar is that this differs from our natural solar calendar, which determines the seasons. The solar calendar is a more accurate methodology to determine a year, for we want our equinoxes, our longest and shortest days to be consistent from one year to the next. Otherwise we will soon find out that our seasons become out of step with the dates and that at some point the UK summer will be in December. More importantly we need our calendars to reflect the seasons so that we are planting and sowing at the correct time each year, to correctly produce our harvests.

Not that we always got it right, and the Julian Calendar, of Julius Caesar fame, was revised in 1583 by Pope Gregory XIII to give us today's calendar. Of course, our solar calendar is around 365 days in a year, but even that is slightly less than the time taken for the earth to travel around the sun. This is slightly under 6 hours longer, so every 4 years we add an extra day. The Gregorian change was to drop the leap year on those years that end in 00, to more accurately reflect the duration of the earth's journey around the sun.

The changes to the basic Middle Easter calendar were in place by the 9th century¹⁷ although it was not until 1178, that the calendar was determined by mathematical calculation, rather than the visible appearance of the New Moon. So, the general premise that a year, was 360 days long and comprised 12 lunar months of 30 days was the accepted norm, during the writing of scripture. However, dates to be found in the footnotes, headings and the likes, of our Bibles are all based on the retrospective application of the Gregorian calendar.

The Hebrew, lunar calendar has then a far greater error and this is resolved by having leap years, in which, rather than an additional day being added, a month is added. This month, being a lunar month, has then either 29 or 30 days. There are seven such leap years, in any 19-year period.

It is suggested that two of the 3 years of the hegemony of Antiochus in Jerusalem were such leap years.

¹⁷ <https://www.timeanddate.com/calendar/jewish-calendar.html>

The Lanser / Miller hypothesis is then that the 2,300 evening and morning sacrifices, relate to the period between the dates given above. Being namely, 3 years as supposed, of 360 days, 10 days in December between the dates and 2 leap months of 30 days. $1,080 + 10 + 60 = 1,150$.

Having said all that, we do note that these days are specifically to do with the desecration of the temple by Antiochus, and the re-establishment of the Jewish worship under Jonathan. We have already established that the future desecration will last for 1,290 days.

That notwithstanding Daniel 8 has a further verse that assures me, that this prophecy, partially fulfilled by the Seleucid dynasty, has not had its final completion and that is to be found in the following.

Dan 8:25 By his cunning he shall make deceit prosper under his hand, and in his own mind he shall become great. Without warning he shall destroy many. And he shall even rise up against the Prince of princes, and he shall be broken—but by no human hand.

I am in no doubt that Antiochus, set himself up against God. He had coins minted with his image and the expression, “God manifested¹⁸,” on them. Further his disease, falling from his chariot and drowning at sea, all various causes of death a cursory internet search reveals, are all deaths that can be attributed to “no human hand.”

But, I find it difficult to accept that the expression “Prince of princes,” is a generic title for God, but I much rather prefer that this is a specific reference to His Son, and the being broken by no human hand, is surely a parallel to the destruction of the statue of Nebuchadnezzar’s vision, which includes all kingdoms not simply the partial Greek kingdom (Seleucid) of Antiochus.

Dan 2:34 As you looked, a stone was cut out by no human hand, and it struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces.

Therefore, I can sympathise with those whose view on Daniel 8, Daniel’s 2nd vision is that this has had its fulfilment in Antiochus IV Epiphanes, for there is very little in it that remains unfilled. Nevertheless, there are suggestions of future fulfilment that reinforce my contention that the, as yet, unrevealed “Man of Lawlessness,”

¹⁸ ESV Study Bible footnotes on Dan 8:25

or “Man of Sin,” is to be found in one, who isn’t the Antiochus of history but one of whom he is very clear antitype.

And yes of course, we do have a significant problem with Antiochus being an antitype, for if this, “Man of Sin,” is to similarly desecrate the temple – where is the temple today? Or, is the involvement of the temple an invalid presumption from the “abomination that causes desolation?”

We remind ourselves though that a little over seventy years ago there was no such thing as a state of Israel. Today, we are very conscious of Middle Eastern peace plans being touted by Donald Trump, part of which would see Jerusalem re-established as the capital city of Israel. There are many in Israel, who await not only the Messiah but, what is euphemistically known as the Third Temple.

Undoubtedly then, there are many challenges to seeing this prophecy fulfilled but there are signs emerging that would give an indication of this is where things are headed. Nevertheless, I concur it is complex and confusing to fully understand it all, not least of all what Daniel is being shown and told. Poor Daniel found it hard too, his immediate reaction was to faint and to be sick for some time, before the 3rd vision some years later.

Daniel’s 3rd Vision

Is to be found in the following chapter Daniel 9, and will lead us to our objective of trying to understand the meaning and the context of Daniel’s 70 weeks. Although, in truth, Daniel 9, is less about a vision and more about a prayer. A prayer to which Gabriel in response, speaks so the Daniel might “understand the vision.” The starting point for this is Daniel’s understanding of scripture, and his prayerful preparation to see this scripture fulfilled.

Like the proceeding two chapters, Chapter 9, is dated in verse one. Daniel 7 is in the first year of Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, probably 552 BC, when his father Nabonidus, departed for Tayma. Chapter 8 is in the third year of his reign, presumably 550 BC. Chapter 9 is then in the first reign of Darius the Mede. Now, we are as yet unsure as to who this character of antiquity was and whether as a Mede, he was co-regent with the Persian king Cyrus. However, he is not to be confused with the more evident Persians Kings that carry that name; Darius I (Reign 522 – 486 BC), Darius II (424 – 404) nor Darius III (336 – 330)

Interestingly, we might also note that Daniel 10, is dated to the 3rd year of Cyrus, and the interpreting angel in the first verse of Daniel 11, references this to the first year of Darius.

We should also note that the Persians (Iran) had a different approach to their subjugated nations than had the Babylonians (Iraq). The latter liked to plunder both the wealth of a nation and take key, gifted personnel, such as Daniel into captivity, minimising the opportunities for rebellion and insurrection. The Persians on the other hand, seemed to encourage their captives to flourish in their own culture and to develop a sense of loyalty to their conquerors, who encouraged a sense of liberty and national identity.

Our history books tell us that Cyrus the Persian took Babylon in 539 BC, as the first ruler of the Persian Empire in Babylon. He of course, was barely in the job when he issued that famous decree, recorded in consecutive books of the Bible.

2 Chron 36:22-23 ¶ Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever is among you of all his people, may the LORD his God be with him. Let him go up.’”

Ezra 1:1-2 ¶ In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing: “Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah.

Now assuming that Darius was contemporary with Cyrus, as he was with his co-regent Darius the Mede, we then get a significant insight into where Daniel’s mind is. He prays this great prayer of contrition on the failure of Israel. You see he had been reading the book of Jeremiah, written at the beginning of the captivities and containing these famous verses, brackets mine.

Jer 25: 11- 12 This whole land (Judah) shall become a ruin and a waste, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. Then after seventy years are completed, I will punish the king of Babylon and that nation, the land of the

Chaldeans, for their iniquity, declares the LORD, making the land an everlasting waste.

What Daniel was now experiencing and expecting with the demise of the Babylonian empire was the fulfilment of this prophecy, the end of God's judgement on Judah (the Southern Kingdom of Israel) and punishing Babylon for their excesses in desolating the land. He now was fully expecting this prophecy to be fulfilled and a return to Jerusalem and in some ways a return to the old ways, including the temple worship. So, he asks that God would make His face shine on the sanctuary. Not because of the righteousness of the Jews but simply because of God's mercy. In other words, what Daniel was expecting was never going to be accomplished until the end of time.

His prayer must therefore be seen in that context and as Gabriel steps in to give insight and understanding what he has in view is not what Daniel is expecting to hear about immediate restitution but rather the longer term view, the everlasting righteousness and the end to sin. He asks Daniel to consider the word and to understand the vision. He continues,

Dan 9:24 – 28 “Seventy weeks are decreed about your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place. Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks. Then for sixty-two weeks it shall be built again with squares and moat, but in a troubled time. And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing. And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall come one who makes desolate, until the decreed end is poured out on the desolator.”

These then are what we know as Daniel's Seventy Weeks. An enigma wrapped up in a paradox, shrouded in a conundrum if ever there was. To which there have been a multitude of views expressed as to its meaning.

Now strictly speaking the original Hebrew word for weeks here is (pronounced) *shawbooh* and refers to seven or a period of seven. Therefore, we are thinking of

seventy sevens and that contextually in the mind of Daniel as he considered the seventy years from the Captivity to the fall of Babylon. In other words, Daniel's mind is set on seventy years, but Gabriel is drawing him to think on, not simply seventy years but rather seventy weeks of seven years. In other words, the utopia, that Daniel is dreaming of and praying for, was not going to be achieved with Jeremiah's predicted return from the captivities, but some considerable time later. And so, this seventy weeks, or seventy sevens, has been almost without exception been taken to mean seventy periods of seven years. No doubt inspired by,

Lev 25. 8 "You shall count seven weeks of years, seven times seven years, so that the time of the seven weeks of years shall give you forty-nine years.

This is detailing the Jewish year of Jubilee, which is the fiftieth year that follows on after seven times seven years, so the context is of a tremendous jubilee, where the 6 blessings of Daniel 9:24 will be fully realised. Included amongst them is to put an end to sin and to atone for iniquity. That is then after 490 years, which are broken into 3 groups of 7 weeks meaning 49 years, 62 weeks, 434 years before one final period of seven years.

However, we must also note in the vocabulary used, expressions that are becoming more familiar to us; abomination, desolation and the half of a week, as we journey through this study of end times. That together with the picture painted in verse 24,

to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, and to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal both vision and prophet, and to anoint a most holy place.

leads me to believe that this is a future kingdom and cannot be merely attributed to the Lord's first coming, the Roman's destroying the temple in AD70, Antiochus, or anything else that has been experienced in man's history. These things can only mean the return of the Lord to earth, the establishment of His kingdom and His rule on earth. You might note so far in our studies heaven seems to be incidental in all of this, it's place and purpose is the dwelling of God. These are things on earth, the dwelling place of man.

We started this journey by thinking of the apostles, dejected on the temple steps, asking the Lord a question, which transpired to be three questions and the Lord answering these questions but perhaps not as the apostles expected. Now we have a similar thing, Daniel sees the end of 70 years of Babylonian hegemony over

Israel coming to an end through Cyrus (or Darius the Mede). This is that the number of years he knows from reading Jeremiah that the captivities will end has almost ran its course and he now wants to know when the temple and the Jewish practices will resume. To that end, he prepares himself and the nation by praying intently for forgiveness. After his prayer of contrition, he then is given that answer by Gabriel, not seventy years, but seventy weeks of years.

Of course, I should point out that Jeremiah's prophecy was indeed fulfilled in Cyrus's decree but as with much we are studying there was a greater, more realisation in view.

Now I have read many, many books and articles on this subject and haven't found an entirely satisfactory conclusion on this. Perhaps the one that has yet really to be superseded, perhaps the de facto standard on the topic is "The Coming Prince," by Sir Robert Anderson, dated to 1895. Sir Robert was, only the second, Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police but that's another story.

It seems to me that many commentators have a valid and accurate point to make but appear disinterested in the ancillary points and then make approximations and try to shoehorn in things that do not fit exactly to argue their position. Although there is much to commend in many writings, it seems to me that all only have part of the picture. And as I don't really hold with the view that God is a God of approximations, it is not enough for me that the numbers are, "close enough." For example, Jean Calvin's commentary on Daniel, perhaps originally dating back to 1550, has given me the best understanding of the break between the 49-year period (7 weeks) and the 434 period (62 weeks,) and Anderson, whom I am a great fan of, assumes that this period dates from Nehemiah to Malachi, with little substantiation, when everything else he suggests is dated to the day.

The first challenge we face then is in determining what is meant by, "*from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem*" This most obvious answer, is that one we have already viewed in Chronicles and Ezra, this made by Cyrus who is the first year of his reign. He had been charged by God to re-build the temple that is in Jerusalem. We can be certain that this decree was issued either in 539 or 538 BC. 490 years later, the full seventy weeks, we are still a couple of generations before Christ and therefore this decree would appear to rule itself out.

Through opposition the work was stopped by royal decree while the royal archives were searched for Cyrus's original decree, before being re-issued in the

reign of Darius I (522 – 486 BC, Ezra 6), who allowed the Jews to return to Jerusalem. The building of the temple was then completed in 517 BC, 70 years after its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BC. Thereby fulfilling the prophecy of Jeremiah and meeting Daniel's initial expectations.

However even 517 BC, is too early to be considered the decree, referred to by Gabriel in Daniel's seventy weeks. The next royal decree that was issued was that given to Ezra. Ezra's heart was to study and to teach the re-establishment of Jewish Law in Jerusalem. For this he sought and received the approval of the king.

Ezra 7:7 And there went up also to Jerusalem, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes the king, some of the people of Israel, and some of the priests and Levites, the singers and gatekeepers, and the temple servants.

Ezra 7:12 -13 "Artaxerxes, king of kings, to Ezra the priest, the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven. Peace. And now I make a decree that anyone of the people of Israel or their priests or Levites in my kingdom, who freely offers to go to Jerusalem, may go with you.

As this was in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (I) (Reign 465 – 424 BC) this can then be reasonable dated to, 458 BC as can Nehemiah's¹⁹ decree be dated to 444 BC. Nehemiah's desire was of course to rebuild the wall, and the city.

Neh 2:1 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

Neh 2:5 And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favour in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."

The challenge then is to determine which of these two words, if either to rebuild Jerusalem is in view, for this period of 483 years, ending we believe with the crucifixion of the Messiah.

¹⁹ Originally, I had followed Robert Anderson's views on this but have latterly been persuaded with Hoehner's Chronological Aspects of Christ, Zondervan. (The terminus ad quem of the sixty-nine weeks) and the fact that this is 444 BC and not 445 as suggested by Anderson. One of the additional "gains" from this is that this take us to AD 33 for the crucifixion of the Lord, a year when the Passover fell on Good Friday.

And after the sixty-two weeks, an anointed one shall be cut off and shall have nothing.

If we assume Ezra decree in 458 BC add 483 years, we arrive at the year 26 AD there being no year 0, between 1 BC and AD 1.

If Nehemiah, then 444 BC would bring us to 40 AD. Neither of these dates sits comfortably with me. Although in my heart, I want the answer to be Nehemiah, as the decree to Ezra was more to do with the re-establishing of religious teaching as opposed to the physical work in rebuilding the city and its walls. To find our answer, we need again to look at the correlation between the lunar years in force at this time in antiquity and apply these to our Gregorian dates being used in these king lists.

To do that then we must consider these years as literal days. In which case, 483 years, is as Daniel would have understood it is 173, 880 days, in a 360-day year. In Gregorian years, dividing this number by 365.242²⁰ this is 476 years and 24 days.

Adding 476 years rather than 483, would Bring “69 weeks,” from Ezra to AD 17 but Nehemiah’s decree to AD 33.

My contention is that the anointed being “cut off,” must be the death, burial and resurrection of the Lord. Although others suggest that this was in fact, a week earlier on Palm Sunday paralleling the Lord’s anticipated return. Others suggest 50 days later at Pentecost, the birth of the church, and the ushering in of the “Church Age.” All valid arguments but in the context of 483 years, a small discrepancy, although perhaps someone with great patience and more intellect than mine, can identify the true Gregorian start date, from,

Neh 2:1 In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence.

Having only, the month Nisan to go by and no date of the month being given, the complications of the ancient and modern Hebrew calendars and the Gregorian equivalents makes it a difficult task to identify the exact endpoint. Nevertheless, I am encouraged that this date is in Nisan, that first month of the Jewish year, and

²⁰ Earth’s Orbit Wikipedia “Earth orbits the Sun at an average distance of 149.60 million km (92.96 million mi),^[1] and one complete orbit takes 365.252 days”

the month, of course of the Passover. Anderson, argues that the absence of the date suggests that this should then mean the first of the month, but it is still possible that any date from Pam Sunday to Pentecost could fit the date from any date in Nisan of Artaxerxes', twentieth year. Without the benefit of an astrological calendar and calculator, and the exact date of the decree, I think we might be fighting a losing battle to fully understand the endpoint of the 69th week.

Although Anderson, starting from the presumption that Artaxerxes 20th year was in Nisan 1st, 445 BC (14th March) counts these 173,880 days to Nisan 10th, AD 32 (6th April.) Of course, the problem with AD 32, is that Good Friday, doesn't then tie in with the Jewish Passover and the killing of the Passover Lamb on the 14th Nisan.

1Co 5:7 Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.

However, if we were to assume Hoepner's argument, and accept that the 20th year of Artaxerxes reign was indeed 444 BC, then this period commences Nisan 1st, 444 BC (March 5th), ending with the triumphant entry, and the taking and keeping of the Passover Lamb on Nisan 10th AD 33, (March 30th), which our lunar calendars tell us, the Passover fell on Good Friday that year.

Ex 12:3 Tell all the congregation of Israel that on the tenth day of this month every man shall take a lamb according to their fathers' houses, a lamb for a household.

This is of course, assuming that the decree from Artaxerxes went out on the 1st of the month.

Now, I have perennially struggled to understand the period of 49 years. We recall that these 69 weeks are divided into 62 and 7. Or rather in the order 7 and 62. The assumption by Anderson, is that these 49 years, or 48 applying our prophetic / Gregorian ratio dates to the time of Malachi. Although, this is possible there is nothing to substantiate it and from the reading of the book, nor anything significant recorded in history on which we could identify this end point. Further it seems more probable that Malachi is contemporary with Nehemiah, rather than 49 years later.

Discounting that theory then, where do these 49 years fit in? I have always assumed that this was at the beginning of the 483 years period. A logical assumption reading as we do that the 7 weeks is read before the 62. Adding 49 years, or pro-rata ($49 \times 360/365.256 =$) 48 years and 108 days, to 444 BC, brings us

into 396 BC. A look into the historical records shows that this date had the Battle of Veii and the Romans conquering the Etruscans, this perhaps then the seed of the Roman Republic leading to the Roman Empire. Which didn't come into being until Caesar Augustus in 27 BC. The significance or rather insignificance of this on End-Times, is lost on me. However, Calvin has convinced me of a more viable alternative. He takes me back to John 2, the commencement of the Lord's ministry in Jerusalem, at His first recorded Passover there.

John 2:19 - 20 Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?"

This was the Lord's first Passover and predated His Galilean ministry and Luke dates this to the reign of Tiberius.

Lu 3:1 In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene,

His reign begun in 18th September AD 14,²¹ and we can reasonably presume that this introduction to Luke 3, before the baptism of the Lord by John, takes place sometime between this September anniversary and Easter AD 29.

The temple, despite the best efforts of Zerubbabel, Ezra and Nehemiah never did achieve the splendour of the first temple of Solomon. This post-Babylonian temple, named the second temple would not reach its splendours so admired by the apostles at the start of this study until the time of Herod.

I read this;²²

None of the restorations or extensions of the Second Temple of Zerubbabel could compare with the work begun by King Herod I (the Great) at the beginning of 19 BC.

If the end of the 483-year period, that is 62 and 7 weeks of years, occurred in AD 33 with the Lord's sacrificial death, then this dialogue regarding the temple would have taken place around AD 29. This would then be consistent with the 46 years (to build the temple) to the commencement of the work of the temple in 19 BC.

²¹ <https://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tiberius>

²² https://www.bible-history.com/jewishtemple/JEWISH_TEMPLEHerods_Temple00000006.htm

Or, if you prefer 49 years before Calvary, factoring in our 360 / 365.242 ratio, or if you prefer one week of seven years.

Calvin suggests that it is Jewish practice to list the smaller number before the larger, although it seems more credible to me, to list them in chronological order. That is that if this does indeed refer to Herod's temple, the listing of the seven years of seven should chronologically come after the sixty-two. However, there is a synergy with the events of 19 BC and Herod's rebuilding of the temple and the prophecy that I find compelling. And finding nothing significant in 396 BC, the Battle of Veii aside, then I find myself falling into line with Jean Calvin's views.

Indeed, this could fit in with a double application of the decree, being attributed to both Artaxerxes, 483 years previously, and the then Herod the Great 49 years earlier. It also might add more credibility of the contention of Anderson and other, that the date in view is indeed Palm Sunday, the coming of the Prince.

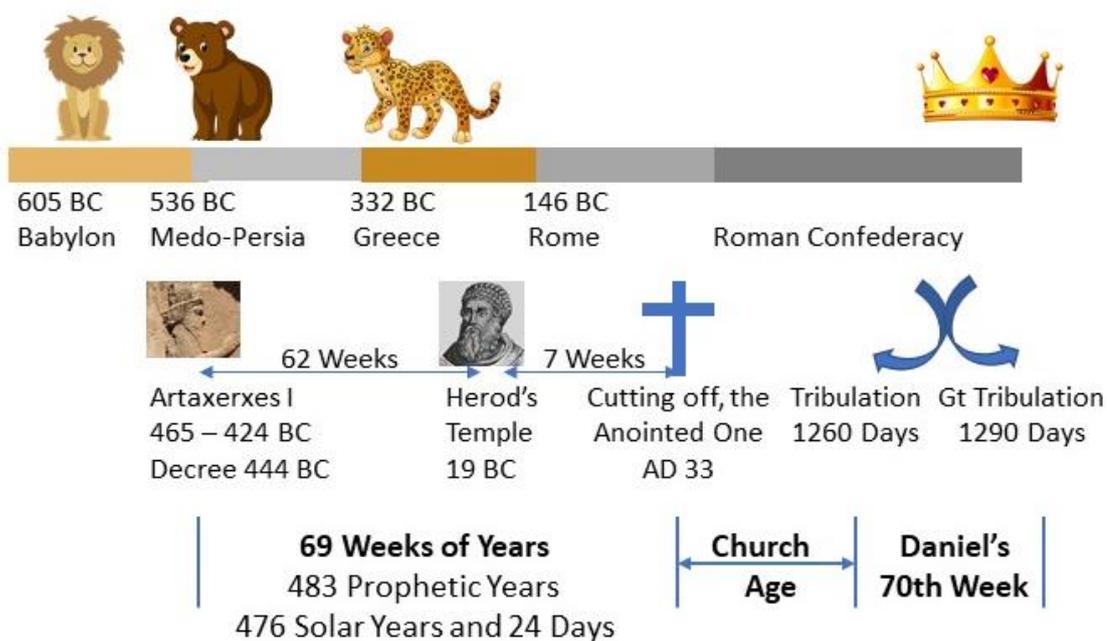
Know therefore and understand that from the going out of the word to restore and build Jerusalem to the coming of an anointed one, a prince, there shall be seven weeks.

So, after 483 years after the initial decree from Artaxerxes to Nehemiah, we discover that the Anointed One is to have nothing, and then follows, these words.

And the people of the prince who is to come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. Its end shall come with a flood, and to the end there shall be war. Desolations are decreed. And he shall make a strong covenant with many for one week, and for half of the week he shall put an end to sacrifice and offering.

Of course, we have already looked at this as we referenced the Lord's teaching in Matt 24, and determined that this last week, comes at the end of time. This would lead us to assuming, without any suggestion from the text, that there is a hiatus between the "cutting off," of the Anointed One and the people of the prince who is to come, that is the fulfilment of the type of Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Otherwise, the complete fulfilment of these seventy weeks would have been come to pass, and we would have already seen, amongst other, the end of sin and the reign of righteousness. This long-established position of a gap between Daniel's sixty-ninth and seventieth week, is key component of the "Dispensational View of End-Times."

There is no doubt in my mind that this gap has been brought in, to make sense of these last few verses of Daniel 9. I would concur, with those detractors that would say that this is a very unscientific method, and certainly not a modern method. However, I would also point to the words of Sherlock Holmes, who said, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” Perhaps then as we journey onwards we are building on a house of cards, and shouldn’t then be surprised if our theories and contentions fall around our ears but by the same token, the longer we go on, on this journey, and the more we see of this jigsaw, then the more probably these views become.



Introduction to Daniel's 4th Vision

This is simply included here for completeness, it has little in the way of end-time prophecy although there are some matters worthy of our consideration. It is though, a precursor to those future things that will be spoken of in the following two chapters, which we looked at in our third chapter. The first consideration is a chronological one. For a casual reading would imply that those things being revealed in this chapter to Daniel occur in the 3rd year of Cyrus the Persian, but the start of Daniel 11th, is given as the 1st year of Darius the Mede. We know that, Darius replaced the Babylonian king, Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, but that He was fact was co-regent with Cyrus, in the Medo-Persian empire. That is that this would appear from a casual reading to be two years after the following chapter.

However, a closer reading of the text reveals that actually Daniel 11:1 should more correctly belong in the previous chapter and refers to an event that had happened 2 years previously. In which the prince of the kingdom withstood the speaker for twenty-one. The speaker was helped by Michael the Prince.

This, the third year of Cyrus would indicate that his decree had already gone out to return to Jerusalem and to build there, The House of the Lord. The fact that this was not wholehearted received by the Jews and only a few under Zerubbabel returned, may have been the cause of Daniel's mourning. There were though, 43,260 but they were soon discouraged. It is often asked why Daniel not returned to Jerusalem, he would of course be around 84 years old, at this point.

Ezra 4:4 - 5 Then the people of the land discouraged the people of Judah and made them afraid to build and bribed counsellors against them to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

So, Daniel mourns and prays for three weeks, or twenty-one days. At the end of which a man clothed in linen comes to him. Now the more important thing to consider here is who this messenger that speaks with Daniel, He is described as being.

Daniel 10: 5 - 6 I lifted up my eyes and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen, with a belt of fine gold from Uphaz around his waist. His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

Many describe this as being an angel, a messenger sent from God, perhaps even Gabriel, but consider how John saw Christ in Patmos.

Rev 1: 13 – 15 And in the midst of the seven candlesticks [one] like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle. His head and [his] hairs [were] white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes [were] as a flame of fire; And his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters.

And again, as the message was delivered to the 4th church at Thyatira and a subset of the appearance, is attributed to each church, we read there.

Rev 2: 18 ¶ And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet [are] like fine brass;

I therefore find it difficult to accept that this messenger in Daniel 10, described as He is, is any different to the Lord himself, appearing to John. It seems inconsistent to me, to have almost identical descriptions, written in two different languages almost 700 years apart describing two different personages.

Although that it itself makes what He has to say to Daniel even more perplexing and this is the reason that others cannot accept that this person, is Christ. The issue being that the prince of the Kingdom of Persia had withstood Him twenty-one days and it appears that it was not until Michael one of the chief princes came to help that this Persian prince was overcome. I think we can safely assume that this was the archangel, someone who was not unused to fighting against satanic forces. (We note the use of the singular archangel).

Jude 1:9 But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you."

The argument being, is of course would the Lord have struggled for three weeks and then needed reinforcements? And why would the kingdom of Persia withstand our Christ? Hadn't God moved the hand of the Emperor, to issue a decree for the Jews to return, no more than a couple of years earlier.

But why shouldn't Christ struggle? I know we think of God in the physical realm, as all powerful, omnipotent as He is, and that He can do anything. After all He created the world and everything in it, He placed the stars and put their planets into their orbits around them.

What though about the Spiritual Realm, what about the temptation in the wilderness, or His struggles in Gethsemane. Now I know, not least of all because of these studies, that God and His Christ will prevail, but for reasons unknown to me, this will not be merely the "flicking of a switch." There are these constants and continuing battles in the spiritual realm. This idea of battles in the heavenly places, in the spiritual realm is one that continues to perplex me, why doesn't God just claim the victory, why do these wars persevere. I might be perplexed about their continuance, but I am in no way confused about their outcome.

So, in a practical way this too affects our earthly sojourn, this is Ephesians 6 territory:

Eph 6:11 -12 Put on the whole armour of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.

And the fact that this is in the spiritual realm, then clears to our minds to that point regarding the Kingdom of Persia and its prince. This is not it's ruler, or emperor, this is not Cyrus nor Darius, or any of the ones that follow but a prince, in the spiritual realm.

Eph 2:2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—

As He says, that after this,

Dan 10:20 Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come.

Although he had apparently succeeded after twenty-one days, (oh and by the way hadn't Daniel been struggling in prayer for just this time, is there a correlation here?), he was now going to return to the fray, and after that, he would content with the prince of Greece, not Alexander but the forces that might influence him. The next world power, the constant battle in influencing nations, but then don't we know.

Ro 13:1 Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.

In many things in this world, it seems that the prince of the air prevails, we know very little about the struggles that occur in the Spiritual Realm. Yet, in some small way, we are conscious of the struggles in our own lives between the influences of good and evil. Perhaps, if we knew more about these battles then the complexity of the events of the End Times, would become more understandable.

6. The Churches of Revelation 1 (1 – 4 Rev 2)

Returning then to the New Testament, we know this is a loose chronological record of New Testament times. Following His four biographies, at the start of the book of the Acts (of the Apostles) Jesus then ascends into heaven, and a few days later at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit is given. This is the birth of the church, and with it the Church Age is ushered in. The good news of salvation by grace is proclaimed, and the gospel is taken into Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and to the uttermost parts of the earth. So begins this epoch and the remaining books of the New Testament, record the history of the church, the teaching to the church and to individuals as to what is to be a follower of Christ. That is, until we get to the book of Revelation and in a way not dissimilar to Daniel, John the youngest of the apostles, the disciple Jesus loved, is given a vision, or several visions which he dutifully records.

Re 1:19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

In this we have given all three tenses, past, present and future, and perhaps then it up to us to determine where each section fits into each time frame.

Rev 22: 10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.

After his general salutation, John sees Jesus moving among seven candlesticks that are described as being the seven churches of Asia. These churches are all located in the south-western corner of Turkey and can very loosely be seen to be sitting on the circumference of a circle. The second and third chapters of this book, is in fact seven letters addressed to the angels, of each of these seven churches. They were all situated on an established circular trade route²³, which then was presumably the delivery route of these letters.

As we start to reach each of these small epistles, we are immediately faced with a challenge. When we read the more “standard,” epistles Pauline, or otherwise we are usually seeing words of the form:

²³ <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/end-times/what-do-the-7-churches-in-revelation-represent-summaries-and-explanations.html>

Rom 1:7 To all those in Rome who are loved by God and called to be saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Eph 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, To the saints who are in Ephesus, and are faithful in Christ Jesus:

Jam 1: 1 James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

1Pet 1: 1 Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who are elect exiles of the dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,

That is that each of these epistles is addressed to a church, a person, or a group of people. Quite rightly we use these books for our understanding, encouragement, and direction, but their primary objective was to that church, at that time for that exact purpose, therefore the letter was addressed to someone specific. These seven letters though are not addressed to the church, they are addressed to the angel of that church.

Rev 2:1 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands.

And this consistently to each of these seven churches. So, starting at Ephesus, at 7 o'clock in this circle, words are given to each of these churches or rather to the “Angel of the Church in ...,” as they are all addressed in turn, as we move in a clock-wise direction until finally the last word is for the angel of the church at Laodicea at 5 o'clock. The hands of time move clockwise from Ephesus to Laodicea. Although I might have preferred Laodicea to be at 12, but then many of us finished work at 5!

Now, the angel of the church, seems to be to me, the prevailing spirit and attitude of the body of that particular church. Yet, in among all these churches, of all these types of churches, are those within them that will overcome, overcome that prevailing spirit to realise the blessings that God would have for them.

However, I should also draw to your attention, that each church was to read what was written to the other churches and to learn, from their letter too. This is repeated after each of the words in these mini epistles.

Rev 2:7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

And Rev 2:11, 2:17, 2:29, 3:6, 3:13 and 3:22

Now we must presume that these were seven real churches, with seven real experiences and therefore seven messages pertinent to each of their individual situations at the time of writing in AD 90, or thereabouts. More so than that, these are pertinent letters to any church, or individual whose circumstances mirror those experiences at that church, at the point in time. This then is three applications of these words, words the angel of that church then, to any church at any time going through similar events, or indeed to any individual. Is there though, a fourth application and is the clue to this to be found in the fact that the letter was not addressed to that church, but it's angel?

Coming as it does at the start of a book, whose purpose is to give John an insight on the things that are to be hereafter (KJV), "*the words of prophecy of this book,*" I am intrigued by the suggestion that this could be a general view of this "dispensation²⁴" of the Church Age. That is that this period, between Daniel's 69th and 70th week, where there is ushered in a Day of Grace, and where salvation is to be found through faith.

That in the context of this book, a book which is explicitly about future things, specifically End-Times, they then suggest something of the various stages of the church through the various ages of this hiatus between Daniel's 69th and 70th week. That is coming as it does after the Lord's ascension, the early 1st century church expansion and before those events of the time of trouble, as seen in Matt 24, and described in detail from Revelation 5, onwards.

In the last chapter of this treatise, we were taken up with the suggestion that, specifically the Lord, was contending against the prince of Persia. We concluded that this was a conflict in the spiritual realm, with the dark influences over a nation, that after fighting with this prince of Persia, he would next be challenged by the prince of Greece. In the same way that there was a "prince" over the nations, could there then be an "angel," (perhaps also a prince, too?) over each of the churches, to inspire them, guide them and to influence their character? So while the individuals and generations through any of these specific church ages, pass the spirit or the angel of the church continues, that the character of that church is broadly consistent over, in some case, many hundreds of years.

²⁴ A Christian concept that there are distinct periods of time, where God's dealings with his people are under different administrative concepts.

Whether this is a strictly consecutive journey through seven distinct ages of the Church is a much-debated point. Certainly, it is difficult to state categorically that each church today must conform to, for example, a Laodicean profile, when there are obviously different issues affecting the whole host of disparate churches with their styles of worship, and theology throughout the world. Even if we could generalise this, again for this perceived instance of the Laodicean Age of the Western Church, would this be applicable to the younger church, in say, South Korea?

Nevertheless, it is a view that fascinates me, so we shall look at each church in turn and judge for ourselves whether we think these are prophetic words on the development of the church through these ages. If we think not, then at least we will have seen seven distinct types of church. Thereby we might judge where we fit into these profiles and what word then is especially applicable to the angel of our church here, in St. George's Street. Or indeed to the angel, of each of our own lives. I should note here that there are many valuable lessons to be learned from these churches, their experiences, their commendations, and rewards. However, this is not my remit here, as I consider the historical aspect of these distinctive times of church history.

So then, before John sees his visions of things in, and from heaven he is introduced to the seven churches of Turkey.

Ephesus

Rev 2:1-2 “To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: ‘The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false.

The church at Ephesus is perhaps the best known of all these churches having its own (mainstream) epistle and featuring frequently in Paul’s Missionary journeys in the book of the Acts. It was a place where Paul was based for two or three years, perhaps from late AD 53 and detailed in Acts 19. Lloyd-Jones²⁵ says of their epistle, “It is very difficult to speak of it in a controlled manner because of its greatness and because of its sublimity.”

Perhaps, surprisingly then and despite their continuing endurance they are said to have left their first love. This to my mind speaks of a church, working hard but forgetting why it is they are working hard. They have it seems a sense of righteousness and hate those that fail to live to that standard but again, forgetting why it is they have these standards. The church becoming churchy because it thinks that is what it is to be a church. Forgetting that we love Him because He first loved us.

Now if we try to look for any historical context here we would be struggling, there is nothing in their epistle to suggest why they were growing cold, although in his closing comments, Paul does pray that they may have, “love with faithfulness.” But surely this is an abiding view that any church, or individual, while not necessarily losing their first love, can see their love abate through time. Things then happen through habit and practice and become routine. How many of us, still have that fire and enthusiasm we first had, when we discovered that Christ died for each of us. Therefore, for me the Communion Service is so very important, that we repeatedly remind ourselves how it is that we became recipients of God’s favour, what it cost God, and that this love may continue to be kindled.

However, in their favour they are said to hate the work of the Nicolaitans. It is suggested that the Nicolaitans were a Christian sect derived from Nicolas. A man

²⁵ God’s Ultimate Purpose Eph 1:1 – 23 David M Lloyd-Jones 2004 Reprint pp11

who was chosen out as a deacon for the waiting on tables, along with Stephen and Philip.

Ac 6:5 And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch.

It is also proposed²⁶ that his wife was so beautiful, that he abandoned her so that others would enjoy her beauty. This commenced a sect, where debauchery was commonplace, and the practice of the (Gentile) cult prostitutes started to find its way into the Christian church. Unlike the later church at Pergamos it is to the credit of the church at Ephesus, that they would have nothing to do with this creed. This would then have this church at Ephesus being synonymous with the Apostolic Age before the period of the persecuted church.

²⁶ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nicolaiism>

Smyrna

The second of these seven churches is to be found at Smyrna and this is where we might start to see some evidence of there being a historical context, we read of this church.

“I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the slander of those who say that they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and for ten days you will have tribulation. Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.

This church is still to be found at Smyrna (Izmir), as it is the only one of these cities that remains, although it had been destroyed several times. The letter is sent from one, who is therefore pertinently described as having been dead but is now alive.

Now if we are trying to place this into a historical context, we would have no problem identifying this as the Roman persecution of the church prior to the edict of Milan AD 313. This was after Constantine claimed a vision of a cross, had led him to converting prior to the battle of Milvian Bridge in October 312. Victory here saw him claim the emperorship in the West of the Empire and in conjunction with his rival Licinius in the East, they from that point forward granted tolerance for Christianity in the Roman Empire.

The ten days of tribulation have been taken to mean that there were ten distinctive periods of tyranny upon God’s people attributed to ten various Roman Emperors. These being identified as²⁷;

Nero	AD 54	Domitian	AD 81	Trajan	AD 98
Adrian	AD 117	Septimus Severus	AD 193	Maximin	AD 235
Decius	AD 249	Valerian	AD 254	Aurelian	AD 270
Diocletian	AD 284				

I think it is safe to say that Pollock writing in 1918, did not have access to Wikipedia or Google that we have today and that some of these dates are very evidently wrong. For instance, it is more generally held that the period of persecution started with the Great Fire of Rome, wrongly attributed by Nero, to the Christians in AD 64 and hence this his period of persecution. This then continued through to

²⁷ Things which must shortly come to pass AJ Pollock BTP 2nd Edition pp 83

the Edict of Milan. This generally was a time of great persecution under Roman tyranny, but it is thought that under these Emperors, there were ten distinctive peaks of subjection hence the ten days.

There are those who try to equate these ten days of persecution under ten different Emperors with the ten horns of Daniel 7, or indeed the ten horns we shall later see in the middle of the book of Revelation. This is not a view I can endorse, for the problem with this idea is then who is the little, eleventh horn that would appear to usurp three of these horns?

Pergamum

The third church is that one to be found at Pergamum and with it the return of our old friends the Nicolaitans.

“I know where you dwell, where Satan’s throne is. Yet you hold fast my name, and you did not deny my faith even in the days of Antipas my faithful witness, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells. But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.

Pergamum (Pergamos) was a church set on a hill. They had their own times of persecution, and this was evidenced by the death of Antipas. Although we must note that this death is inconsistent with the chronological assumed prophetic history of the book, Antipas being martyred in AD 94. We must also stop a moment here and note here, that although the previous church, Smyrna was marked by sustained persecution for that metaphorical ten days, this does not mean that other churches did not live under similar conditions. Indeed, it does not mean that those features which were prevalent or marked out these distinct church times, are not evident in this or any other particular church age. Pergamum is commended in that, despite the death of Antipas, they held their faith.

As a Roman city, it rivalled Ephesus in idol worship and one of the main gods worshipped there, was Asclepius, the son of Apollos and Coronis. He was considered the god of healing. His image as a human form, was marked by having a serpent entwined staff, presumably this image of the serpent was what led to the accusation that this was where Satan dwells. The literal church was characterised by compromise and the holding of views, that were inconsistent with Christianity, ideas held by those that followed Balaam and Nicolas, in earlier times.

Symbolically, and as the third church of this Church Age, this was then the first “accepted” church coming as it did after the conversion of Constantine and the “legalising,” of Christianity. Having become legal and acceptable, the door was opened, and many would adopt this new legal faith, or at least superficially. They brought with them into the church their own views and ideas, refusing to accept the literal teaching of the church, particularly regarding idol worship and sexual immorality. This then is the compromised church, and while we might,

prophetically think it to be representative of the Church Age of the 4th to 6th Centuries, we must surely acknowledge that this is a challenge to today's church, to hold true to the teaching of scripture regardless of political correctness or other of the world's changing degrees of acceptability. We still want church in our image, to suit our own idiosyncrasies.

Thyatira

Finally, the fourth church of this chapter, is to be found at Thyatira and the church is addressed by the Son of God, who has eyes of flaming fire and fine brass. The character of Christ in the eyes, is seen here to be perceiving and piercing. A description, we have already noted in the character of Christ, speaking with Daniel, in his tenth chapter.

Da 10:6 His body was like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a multitude.

This is a church who were being led or misled and they could not discern the evil that was among them. In many ways they were in an opposite scenario from Ephesus. For there they could discern evil, but they had lost their first love. Here in Thyatira they are being commended for their love but criticised for their lack of discernment.

The feet of Christ are described as burnished or white brass. Brass is usually associated with the altar, the place of sacrifice. Brass that is melted in a fire, has the impurities burnt off, not of course that Christ has any impurities, but the picture is of his sinless, spotless sacrifice. So, I think we have in this double picture of Christ, his revealing look, exposing the error of the Thyatira, but walking among them as the sacrifice, a sacrifice tried and tested with fire. We need to remind ourselves that this is the Church Age, the Day of Salvation and the piercing eyes revealing our failings are made with a sense of conviction of sin, rather than punishment for sin.

This difference between the churches at Pergamum and Thyatira are to me then only different by degree. Both were faithful and persevered, but both failed under the influence of others. In Pergamum, this was the Nicolaitans and Balaam, which led to sexual immorality and eating food offered to idols, this same condemnation was applicable in Thyatira, but this time this is attributed to the influence of Jezebel. This was the transition of the church into the Dark Ages.

Jezebel, in New Testament times is unknown. This is the only reference to her. Obviously in the Old Testament, we know her as the foreign wife of Ahab, at the time of Elijah who lead Israel astray and into idolatry. And as it seems we are expected to know who she is; she must then have her type in Ahab's Jezebel.

2Ki 9:22 And when Joram saw Jehu, he said, “Is it peace, Jehu?” He answered, “What peace can there be, so long as the whorings and the sorceries of your mother Jezebel are so many?”

So, when viewed in that regard it is difficult in a historical context to determine, if this is indeed the case, when it was that the Church made the transition from the Pergamum Period to the Time of Thyatira. Reading a variety of commentators, we note that some say 500 AD, others 600 AD and some 538 AD. Now these first two dates are obviously generalisations, when this state endorsed church, reached this transition in, a greater level one presumes of decadence. However, 538 AD seems unlikely to be a number which has been pulled out of the air.

According to the Theology Department of Avondale University²⁸, this was the year in which Justinian I, the Byzantine Roman Emperor, declared himself a theologian rather than a soldier. By this time, the Western side of the Empire had collapsed, (Italy in Rome, East being Turkey and Constantinople) and although the title did not come into play until around 300 years²⁹ later and not officially used until the 13th century, it is thought that these events in AD 538 marked the start of what was to become The Holy Roman Empire. Noted for being neither, holy, Roman nor an Empire. This was to be the fourth church age. We have previously seen that the Holy Roman Empire, is an unholy alliance between church and state, Thyatira, and Jezebel and as we have already observed may make an appearance in later End Time considerations.

This was then to be a period of the best part of a thousand years, where the church grew corrupt, selling indulgences, such that its patrons could pay money such that their relatives languishing in purgatory, could be expedited to Paradise. Of course, it was also an age of the commencement of international trade, and Portugal led the way in exploitation and slavery, as well as forced conversion to the Christian faith as it was practised then.

There is an argument, made by Pollock³⁰ and others that this church, representative of the catholic church before the reformation continues to the end of time. He offers the final blessing, to those that overcome the prevailing spirit of the church as proof of this.

²⁸ https://research.avondale.edu.au/theo_papers/135/

²⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Roman_Empire

³⁰ Things which must shortly come to pass. AJ Pollock 2nd Edition 1936 BTP, pp 86 - 87

Rev 2:28 *And I will give him the morning star.*

7. The Churches of Revelation 2 (5 – 7 Rev 3)

Now we slipped into the very end of the previous section, the possibility that Thyatira representative of the catholic, as in all embracing, church could potentially continue to the end of time. Now I know that some Catholics adhere to their general view that they, and they alone are the universal, one true church, then this is a distinct possibility, endorsed by chapter 3.

For if we are holding to the view that these seven churches follow a consecutive sequence of different ages, where Smyrna follows Ephesus, which is then followed by Pergamum, etc., etc., then we do hit a problem here. For when we enter into chapter 3 of Revelation, and we consider the Blessing given to the 5th and 6th churches of Asia Minor; Sardis and Philadelphia, we read.

Rev 3: 3 Remember, then, what you received and heard. Keep it, and repent. If you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come against you.

Rev 3: 10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.

You see the problem here? If Sardis, is to be followed by Philadelphia and that by Laodicea, how is it then that churches 5 and 6 are going to have End Time experiences, surely that would be the prerogative of Laodicea alone. Aren't these consistent with verses earlier in the New Testament, describing the last days.

1Th 5:2 For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Matt 24: 9 "Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and put you to death, and you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake.

Personally, speaking I found Pollock's "proof," that the overcomers in Thyatira being given the, "morning star," a little thin but together with the promises given to Sardis and Philadelphia, this thesis gains, to my mind at least, a far greater credibility.

So then while I personally hold with the basic premise of the historical context of these seven churches reflecting seven distinct periods of time, in church history, I

also hold that the final four churches, while starting at later times than the others, now currently run concurrently, for I judge from these scriptures that these three church models will persist until the Day of the Lord, or in the case of Philadelphia being raptured before the tribulation.

So in that case, we will then in the context of this study, look at both the historical and chronology development of the church but also seek to discover what the following three churches represent in the type of church we have before us today.

However, I must stress two key points made previously.

One, that the criticism, observations, and blessings made to all these churches, should be noted by all, who have an ear. So, while we might identify that specific type of church that we most resemble, we must not simply concentrate on that but notice and learn from what is said to all, these disparate church types.

Secondly, these little epistles are written to the angel of the church, which we have taken this to mean, the prevailing attitude of that type of church at that point in time. We could take a view, that says why would any believer want to belong to a church, that is displaying characteristics that are incurring the criticism of God?

Regardless, of the conduct or style, prevailing spirit if you want of any church, it remains God's purpose for His people. Even if then that collective "church-type," is dead to Christ, it is the place where His people are, and those that are truly His, who have a part in His inheritance they then are the overcomers.

Sardis

The first thing to note about this church was the description chosen of the one, who it was that wrote it. This is, “The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.” The spirits are dwelling in, as far the overall description in chapter one, from who a snippet is chosen for each of the seven churches, undoubtedly the Lord Jesus. He has these seven spirits of God, that is the complete, (seven typically in the Bible being the number of completeness and perfection) facility of the Godhead dwelling in Him. The seven stars we do know to be the angels of these seven (types) of church. Until Sardis, there had been only one church, now there are seven. Again, I take it to be a metaphorical number to indicate the whole church in its various divisions, not literally seven types of church.

Now if we are adhering to our historical context, then Sardis must mark the time when the church splits from one. Today, there are now a multitude of churches instead of the one that existed at the start of the 16th century. Although in this, I do discount the separation of the Eastern and Western sides of the Roman Empire and the Church, into the Roman and Orthodox churches, this was fundamentally political, and exasperated between the usage of the Latin and Greek languages. the church fundamentally remained one, under God. It was only through time that these differences were exasperated.

Then in 1517 came the Reformation, Martin Luther and his 95 theses. The breaking away from the established catholic church, of the protestors, the Protestants. For the first time, God moves among the churches, plural. We can say whatever we want about each church type or group, but God moves among them all.

Almost three years ago, I was caught up in the buzz around the 500th anniversary of the Reformation and at that time read two or three interesting books on the subject. Perhaps it was a few months before this, and somewhat coincidentally I was gifted by James Tooth, a popular book, a best seller by Peter Frankopan, called the Silk Roads³¹. The book was a good read, but it became a tremendous disappointment to me, in that it revealed the spread of Christianity was frequently motivated by trade rather than faith. And the behaviour of the explorers, missionaries and traders was truly awful. Rather naively at the time, I suspected this to be a secular, prejudiced view of the church.

³¹ The Silk Roads, Peter Frankopan Bloomsbury Publishing (2015 Edition)

And for the Reformation, I read a couple of books by Nick Page, somewhat tongue in cheekily, called “A Nearly Infallible History of Christianity,³²” and “A Nearly Infallible History of the Reformation.³³” Much as I enjoyed Nick Page’s books and his own indeterminate style, the content was a wakeup call to me. For as a Protestant with a Catholic history, I thought the Reformation a great thing, a thing to be rejoiced in. This was recognised by the Catholic Church and their need to reform, which was instigated by the Council of Trent in 1554.

But for me, the recognition that the bible was the final authority on the Word of God and that salvation was by faith alone, these were truths to be celebrated. But what followed was perverse and distasteful as the division of the church and the sub-division of the subsequent Protestant Denominations were characterised by division, persecution, and bloodshed. What did Dickens say about the Tale of Two Cities, this indeed was “the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

The church that should have been alive, with its newfound faith, the availability of scripture, instead became dead and many had, as at Sardis soiled their garments. Their works were incomplete and needed to wake up to the reality of their calling. Frankopan’s views were endorsed and supported by Page.

Sardis itself was a city set on a hill, it was easily defensible but twice it had succumbed to invaders, the Persians in 546 by Cyrus the Great, and then by the Greeks under Alexander (notice how he and Cyrus have the same middle and surnames) in 334 BC. It had become complacent; it had failed to be watchful.

The church had struggled to determine the truth and having identified what truth was to their own eyes, they sought to defend it vigorously. Like this city set on the hill, the battle was about protecting what they had but in so doing they neglected the core of their calling, what they were as Christians. This became less important than the dogma they determined to protect. They thought they were alive to their faith but to the core principles; loving God and your neighbour as yourself, they were completely dead.

Perhaps Sardis, then reflects the pedantic and obtuse church that holds exclusively to its own doctrine and breaks off fellowship with those you see things

³² A Nearly Infallible History of Christianity, Nick Page Hodder and Stoughton (2013 Edition)

³³ A Nearly Infallible History of the Reformation, Nick Page Hodder and Stoughton (2015 Edition)

slightly differently. Yes, they stand aloof on top of their hill, thinking themselves safe, but they are ready to die because, for their works are far from perfect.

Philadelphia

This, the city of brotherly love, known today as Alaşehir. The one that moved among them was described as the Holy One, the True One, the one who has the key of David. This description is a direct quotation from Isaiah;

Isa 22:22 And I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David. He shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open.

Of course, the Lord was David's greater son and David was the King of Israel. This key then must be the key to the kingdom, perhaps metaphorically similar to those given to Peter.

Matt 16:18-19 And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

And of course, the rock referenced here is the acknowledgement that, "Jesus is the Christ the Son of the Living God." The foundational principle of the church, to which Peter is given the keys. This would have been pertinent to the Philadelphians living in a city known for its earthquakes, perhaps too then this is why the blessing, offered to the overcomers here, would to be a pillar in that heavenly city.

Now this is my favourite of these seven churches, yet it is far from attractive, for it has only a "little power," but God, the One who has the key of David, has set before it an open door. Now surely, we must take this contextually to align the key and the open door.

It is stated³⁴ that by 1648, and the end of the Thirty Years War, that religious identity by culture rather than personal faith was established in most of Western Europe, and that motivated by faith as opposed to commerce, the Missionary Movements broke out, Christians reaching out to others'

This is the church of the Open Door, we shall see in the later church, that the door is closed, that Jesus stands outside and knocks, but the church at Philadelphia with key and opened door, sought to welcome people in. But unlike that church at Laodicea, this church was weak, or had little strength.

Despite, its lack of power and despite it like Smyrna that persecuted church, being among those of the synagogue of Satan, they held fast to the Word and refuse to deny their Lord. Those of the synagogue of Satan, were not devil worshippers as such, but those that made themselves out to be Jews but who were not.

³⁴ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/church-history-iii-early-modern-1500-1789>

Interlopers trying to discourage and turn the believers away from the truth of the Word of God. They were not to be dissuaded. It is interesting to note, that these so-called religious people would recognise in the Philadelphian believers something of their worth, something of their faith. I am sure the expression,

Rev 3:9 I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.

does not necessarily mean, that they came to believe, not does it mean that they are literally worshipping these believers. Rather they are recognising in them, the love of God for them. How do others see what love God has for us? It is not to be found in power or authority for the church at Philadelphia had neither of them, but rather this is to be found in the working out of this love of God. God loves us, so we love God, and we love. This is what even those of the Synagogue of Satan, recognise in the true believer. It is then up to them, to continue in their unbelief, or to turn and repent. After all the door is open, here.

To them, they were to be kept from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole earth. This is quite key, pardon the pun, to me. If this hour of “temptation (KJV),” is associated with the time of tribulation and while the expression used for trial is quite generic, the hour of trial is specific. This would lead me to believe that this Philadelphian Church perseveres to End Times and that the seven churches cannot then be truly successive. However, and perhaps more importantly it gives our first indication, thus far in our study, that the church, or this church at least will be taken before the Tribulation, a concept known in Christian circles, as the Rapture, but more of that later.

Laodicea

Perhaps the best known of all the churches because many like me being taught the successive nature of these churches of Asia Minor, have been confronted the expression, “Laodicean Age.” That is that we are living in the last days, the days of the last church at Laodicea.

So, “learning,” my faith, I was frequently exposed to the blessings, history and failings of this church and how it accurately reflects the church today. That was scary because this was the church to which I belonged, after all this was this last of the successive church ages and by inference, my church age.

Laodicea literally means, “people’s rights,” and perhaps this started with the great awakening of the 20th century, the rise of communism in the east, the ending of the “big house,” culture in the west. The original city was prosperous and politically important, it had a very valued medical school and was watered by two springs, from which water was piped in, one cold, the other hot, well hot at source but by the time it had travelled the two or three miles, it was lukewarm. At least that was how it saw itself.

Yet, the One who is “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God’s creation,” saw it rather differently. They were to His eyes; wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. He exhorts of them to buy from Him gold, that is to lay up treasure in heaven, to wear his robes, and to put salve on their eyes that they might truly see what they were.

We have put forward an argument that rather than there only being one church persevering until the End Times, there are four characterised by, these churches at Thyatira, Smyrna, Philadelphia and Laodicea.

Thyatira, being the universal, catholic church. Smyrna, that self-righteous Pharisaic dogma embracing church, and that faithful, evangelical church at Philadelphia, to these can be added Laodicea. An apparently rich, and self-assured church, a church like that Emperor of Old, who says look at me, look at my new clothes, when in truth he is naked.

Now, we must stress these church types, these spirits, the prevailing cultures of these churches are not attributes that belong to all their adherents, for within their number are those described as the overcomers, those who seek and find the truth within them. Nor do I think that the qualities of the church, are necessarily

those brought to the congregation by their leadership. But nevertheless, there are churches today, that are by their nature proud and arrogant. Churches that are like Laodicea, politically influential, and happy to be so.

People pamper to them because of their supposed fine clothes, they offer them their platitudes, but God says they remain, wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. Whereas in direct contrast those poor, weak folk of Philadelphia have those outside, those even of the synagogue of Satan, falling at their feet and appreciating that God loves them, being able despite their own personal failings to recognise that in them.

Ostensibly, Laodicea had much in the world's eyes to commend it. Its intellect, wealth and philosophy. They were proud of it. So too aren't we in this 21st century, proud of our achievements, our wealth, our laws and equality and like Laodicea our medical achievements. Except a little virus emerging probably from a back-street market in a city, that until recently I'd never heard of changes everything.

The door that was open in Philadelphia has been rudely slammed shut, for we are alright, Jack, aren't we. But He waits outside.

Rev 3: 20 Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

Waiting to be invited in, the Lord stands outside the church waiting for the overcomers to invite Him in. And those that overcome, the conquerors, to them will be given that right, to sit with Him on His throne.

The historical and prophetic view of the churches of Revelation

Seven Stages of Church History³⁵			
Church	Church History Typified	Dates	Verses
Ephesus	Apostolic Church	A.D. 33-100	Rev. 2:1-7
Smyrna	Church of the Roman Persecution	A.D. 100 - 313	Rev.2:8-11
Pergamum	Church of the Age of Constantine	A.D 313 - 538	Rev. 2:12-17
Thyatira	Church of the Dark Ages	A.D. 538-1517	Rev.2:18-29
Sardis	Church of the Reformation	A.D. 1517-	Rev. 3:1-6
Philadelphia	Church of the Missionary Movement	A.D. 1648-	Rev.3:7-13
Laodicea	Church of the Apostasy	A.D. 1900-	Rev.3:14-22

³⁵ www.biblestudytools.com 15.1.5 Representative of Seven Stages of Church History

8. The Rapture of the Church

Now we need to make the unequivocal statement before we start to unfold those events that come after the church age, that nowhere in the Bible, is the expression, “rapture,” ever used. It is not a Bible word, however, it has become synonymous with this Bible passage, where we see how it is that the Lord and His people are united together. That the living and dead are snatched up from the earth and from their graves or resting places to meet Jesus in the clouds and that the fundamental and joyous truth of this is.

1Thess 4:17b , and so we will always be with the Lord.

Perhaps this is the whole nub of the thing, that He is not only coming back but that we are going to be forever with Him, and He with us, surely this is something to get excited about. Whether its Coronavirus, Cancer or Climate Change, He is coming back, and all this will be sorted out, for good – make no mistake about that - and we will be with Him.

Our original starting point, some time ago now, was that we had identified 5 key elements, or agenda items, from the teaching of the Lord, on the mount of Olives, after leaving the temple with His disciples. These were;

Birth Pains

Time of Trouble

Abomination that Causes Desolation

Great Tribulation

Coming of the Son of Man

Again, nowhere in this list, nor in the Lord’s teaching do we read of the rapture, either by name or in description. So, our thoughts this morning are going to be centralised around these verses to this church in Thessaloniki. We will do this by looking at three little subtopics, asking ourselves three small questions.

1. How are we going to meet Jesus?
2. How will we prepare to meet Jesus?
3. When will we meet Jesus?

How are we going to meet Jesus?

Pauls says these words to the Thessalonians;

1Thess 4:13 - 18 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep

This was a book Paul had written to this church in Thessaloniki after having visited and spent some time there. Perhaps, when he had been there he had already spoken to them, taught them face to face about the Second Coming of the Lord and while they anxiously waited for this, some of their number had died. Perplexed by this, and perhaps wondering whether they by their death now they miss out on the Lord's return they wrote to Paul, and this epistle, perhaps occasioned by this question is his response. What happens to the dead when Jesus comes back?

Now we need to remember that Thessalonica is in Greece, for it is important to note that, this was a predominately Greek church, which would have less of a Jewish history than other churches. The Jews would believe, with the exception of the Sadducees, strongly believe in the resurrection of the dead, this was inbred to them, and certainly more so than the more cultural Greeks, who generally had a very pessimist view of death, and hence Paul's desire that they would not be, "uninformed."

Now, the Bible consistently uses the expression, "sleep," to mean what we would consider to be death. We only need to consider the conversation the Lord had with his followers concerning Lazarus, to understand this.

John 11:11 - 13 After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

Perhaps the usage of the word sleep is to distinguish this from that final and eternal judgement, the second death. That final and ultimate death. That what we know as death is a temporary arrangement. Do not be mistaken what we know as death is not the end, not for anyone. So, Paul is talking about those who have physically died in this church in Greece.

So, regarding those who have died, had fallen asleep, Paul says to the Thessalonians, they will come with Jesus, the Son of Man, when he returns...

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

He goes on to say that we who are still living, when He comes will not precede, that is go before those who have died, those who have fallen asleep. That is that the dead in Christ, those believers who have died, and we must note that this is not all the dead, those who are not “dead in Christ,” will be raised at a later occasion, a topic for later in this series.

So, the dead in Christ will rise first, followed by those believers who are still living and we can see how Paul describes this scene.

For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

Now please note the noise element here Jesus will shout a command, there will be the voice of an archangel as well as the trumpet sound of God, this will not be subtle, this will not be missed by anyone. It is not some subtle, discreet, spiritual experience, it is a physical, noisy, noticeable event. This will not go unnoticed.

Because it is at this time, and only at this time that the dead in Christ will be raised, resurrected to life, they have been sown in corruption, raised in immortality and all that. This is the fulfilment of all those words, those promises we remind ourselves of, at the funeral services.

Which then of course, then raises questions about Lazarus being in Abraham’s bosom or side, as the Lord related in Luke 16 – if there hasn’t been any bodily resurrection at that point. Remember the story;

Lu 16:23 - 25 In hell, where he (that is the unnamed rich man) was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, ‘Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.’

And then it continues.

Lu 16:27 "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house,

So, the inference must be, that before the dead in Christ are raised first, at this fanfare of noise, they are in some sort of intermediary stage – this place with Abraham. That for the believer after death there is some form of spiritual existence, before a physical and bodily resurrection. And of course, so there is too for the non-believer, but in a different place, and for them too, there will be a later resurrection.

Now in this place, this waiting room if you want – and if we take the parable literally, and why shouldn't we, there is an awareness, a consciousness of where they are, and what is happening around them,

So, these spirits, their spirits will be raised and resurrected into a new body and although they will be raised before us, we will somehow ascend into the clouds and meet them there, presumably in a similar vein to the way that the Lord ascended.

Acts 1: 9 And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight.

There we, with the raised dead will meet the Lord in the air to be forever with him.

How will we prepare to meet Jesus?

John say's this

1 John 3:2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

Now there are two methods of preparation to meet the Lord, and that is determined by whether we are dead or alive, when he comes. And to understand a little of this we need to consult that great chapter on resurrection, 1 Cor 15. A fact that is clearly stated.

1 Cor 15:20 – 21 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead.

And in this chapter Paul, goes onto describe how this will be achieved;

1 Cor 15:35 - 38 But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?" You foolish person! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. And what you sow is not the body that is to be, but a bare kernel, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.

And then he continues

1 Cor 15:42 - 44 So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body.

So, we see the analogy with the seed the body sown into the ground as dust. Listen, I had Tom help the boys from the Academy plant some potatoes, and I found one in among the carrots, although it may have been left over from last year – but the thing is as I pulled the plant out, the husk, the rotten old potato could readily be seen, wasting away, and as well as the vegetation growing above ground, there were the signs of tiny new potatoes in the roots, the new life out of the old.

New bodies, created and raised to meet with the Lord but presumably being reunited with spirit and / or soul, the essence of our being formed into one complete, perfect, sanctified, and yes, physical being – this is the Face to Face with Christ my Saviour moment – and the dead will be ready for it.

But not those of us that remain, we are still a work in progress, we are still being sanctified, this is the truth of the verse, in Philipians.

Php 1:6 And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

And so Paul continues to tell the Corinthians what is to be become of us, how it is that we are become to perfect us for His coming.

1 Cor 15:51-54 Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and

*the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:
“Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

Death is swallowed up in victory, for both the dead, and those remaining, will put on immortality, a new eternal body, that will persist. Did you ever wonder about the longevity of those antediluvians, Methuselah 969 – that perfect Edenic environment, will be recreated.

We shall not all sleep, that is not all of us will go through this article of death but we will all be changed, the dead as a seed planted, but we in a twinkling of an eye, will be supernaturally changed, that good work started in us, will be completed.

When will we meet Jesus?

And now onto the controversy...

For the question that dogs this subject, and persists through Christendom and will continue to do so until He returns when we’ll know for sure, is when will these things occur, where in the Lord’s fivefold agenda, does this event, this rapture occur. There are I think only two options available.

Will the dead be caught up, with those of us who are still alive to meet Jesus in the clouds, to then spend seven years in heaven, to keep us away from the tribulation and therefore before His Second Coming to the earth? Or will we be caught up in the clouds to meet him and then for us to turn around and to escort Him back to the earth. Which would of course mean that the believers, the church would go through the tribulation.

In other words, does the Bible teach that the church goes through the tribulation or not? Is the rapture, this being snatched away from the earth, pretrib, before tribulation, or posttrib, after. The simple answer is we cannot be 100% certain either way, there are many brighter minds that can argue this point vehemently from both perspectives.

I don’t want then to be categoric, for I cannot be definitive and it would be unfair for me to press my personal view on anyone – and don’t read too much into the fact that I can considering the rapture before the tribulation, which will be next time on this subject, but that might have to wait until after our summer series, and our thoughts on the “scene in heaven,” from Revelation 4 and 5.

Last time we were confronted by a statement that was made to the angel of the Church at Philadelphia. This was that they were “to be kept from” that hour of trial.

*Rev 3:10 Because you have kept my word about patient endurance, I will **keep you from** the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world, to try those who dwell on the earth.*

This then introduces to us, this concept that the church, or this particular church, will be kept from an hour of trial that is coming to the whole world. This is we believe to be that which Jesus, explained to His disciples as being a time of Tribulation, and of Great Tribulation. Christianity has through time changed these adjectives into proper names.

The detractors from this point of view, would argue that this church is being kept through the tribulation, in the same way that the church has been kept through other periods of trouble, in its history. But this word “from” which is the Greek “ek,” together with the verb, “tereò,” means away from, apart. To quote J. Allen³⁶, “this allows no other idea than, preserve from, protect from, keep out of.” By saying that the church will be kept through the tribulation, is I judge, doing a disservice to this verse. Whether it is someone fathering a son, or words from heaven, or the Prince of life being raised from the dead, there is always a sense with this word, of moving away from. That God is moving that church, keeping that church away from the time of trouble.

Nor can the church simply be hidden in away in some, small corner on earth during the tribulation, we will see when we come to the subject that the tribulation will affect the whole earth.

For those that are familiar with the “Left Behind³⁷,” series of books and films³⁸, this is the premise on which they are based. That, the church is taken into Heaven, leaving others “left behind,” amidst earthly carnage.

³⁶ J. Allen What the Bible Teaches, Revelation. John Ritchie 2nd Edition 1999

³⁷ series of 16 best-selling religious novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins,

³⁸ *Left Behind: The Movie* (2000), *Left Behind II: Tribulation Force* (2002), and *Left Behind: World at War* (2005). *Left Behind*, remake with Nicolas Cage 2014

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As an off-the-wall remark, that is one I haven’t heard expounded elsewhere and one that instinctively doesn’t seem to be very plausible, but could it be possible that the Philadelphian type church, and that only the Philadelphian church would be kept from the hour of trouble. That somehow unlike the other church types, of; Thyatira, Sardis and Laodicea, that the Philadelphia model-church would be excused a time of trial and testing because their faith has already been established, through their faithfulness and endurance.

Now this coming of the Son of Man to earth, the Second Coming, as opposed to the rapture, His coming to the earth, not the air, is very evidently after the Great Tribulation, this is abundantly clear, and I don’t think can be realistically debated, Jesus said;

Matt 24:29 -31 “Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

Superficially at least, this then would seem to argue strongly against a rapture of the saints before the period of the tribulation. For after the tribulation he will gather his elect from the four winds. Is the church the elect? Those who hold with a pretrib view, would argue not. For we cannot be sure that this isn’t simply applicable to the Jewish elect, or a remnant who find salvation through the times of trouble.

Further, if we had read chronologically through John’s Revelation, we would move through the Church Age (Rev 2 and 3) that we saw last time, to the Scene in Heaven (Rev 4 and 5) and from then to the Opening of the Seals in chapter 6, nowhere are the saints of God, expressly mentioned in this scene set in heaven. It

³⁹ series of 16 best-selling religious novels by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins,

⁴⁰ *Left Behind: The Movie* (2000), *Left Behind II: Tribulation Force* (2002), and *Left Behind: World at War* (2005). *Left Behind*, remake with Nicolas Cage 2014

is not impossible, that the saints are represented in some of the imagery present in the scene in heaven, represented by the 24 elders perhaps, a thought for next time. Although it is a pertinent question, where are the saints, if Jesus is now in Heaven ready to open the seals on the earth? That is, to start the tribulation, when the seals are opened in chapter 6.

Although, the pretrib school, would argue that the presence of John being brought into heaven, albeit in spirit, has connotations of the church presence there. Although, this seems to me to be more wishful thinking, than a credible argument.

However, the crux of the “church will go through the tribulation,” the posttrib argument is in another little Greek word, loosely translated in our English language Bibles as the verb to “meet,” which is found in verse 17.

*1Thess 4:17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds **to meet** the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.*

The clouds in the air, in the sky, is somewhere but nowhere really. It is neither heaven nor earth, it is not where Jesus is coming from, not we are leaving, it is somewhere in between. So why are we meeting in no-man’s land but to bring and welcome someone in. This Greek word translated here as “meet,” is used in only three other places and that in two separate contexts. The first of these is in the parable of the bridegroom and the ten virgins.

Mt 25:6 But at midnight there was a cry, ‘Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him.’

And, in verse 1 of the same chapter in the same context, that of the virgins going out to meet the bridegroom, who was coming to them, to return back with the bridegroom with them. The second of these is when Paul goes to Rome and an entourage comes out to meet him, and bring him into the city.

Ac 28:15 And the brothers there, when they heard about us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage.

These occasions together with our verse from Thessalonians, is the only place where we encounter this Greek word.

Is Jesus then coming to welcome us into heaven, or as seems more likely from the Thessalonian text, that we are going to meet Him, to turn around and come with Him back to the earth. So that He was taken into the clouds and so He will return, as the angels said...

Acts 1: 11 and said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.”

That is as believers, every having died or still alive will be caught up to meet Him in the air, as a welcoming party to come with Him, as He returns in that way in which He left.

Again though, we remind ourselves how does the promise made to the Philadelphian church about being preserved from the tribulation that is coming onto the whole world, fit into this.

I have lost count of the many times in my life I have vacillated between believing the rapture will come before or after the tribulation. The key argument to my mind boils down to whether “meet” (*apantesis*) is exclusively used to go out to welcome someone with the intention of going back with them, doing a U-turn. Or as to whether the Angel of the Church of Philadelphia will be kept from, rather than through, that hour of trial. It is a argument that seems to hinge around two, little four letter English words, “from,” and “meet.” Subtle and slight things, that still have a hung jury in the court of Evangelical Christian Eschatology

But then perhaps I am missing the point. The fact is that Jesus, is coming back for us, in a physical and bodily manner, that I am going to be changed to be like Him, and so will I ever be with the Lord. In that grand scheme of things then, perhaps the detail is less important than the bigger picture, that is that we are to comfort one another with these words. Words that tell us that Jesus is coming back for those that are His, and so shall we forever be with our Lord. Amen

9. The Scene in Heaven (Rev 4 and 5)

The picture of Revelation chapter four is of the scene in heaven. John uses vivid imagery, pictorial and metaphorical language and many have debated over many ages, what the pictures are really of, or what do they actually represent, so that it is then hard for me, again, to be entirely dogmatic, or specific. NO doubt there will come a day when we might say, “oh that’s what John / Ezekiel, were meaning. I can see it now.”

The book of Revelation, comes in three parts, divided by their place in time. For John at the outset is instructed to write of those things

Rev 1: 19 Write therefore the things that you have seen, those that are and those that are to take place after this.

So now as we move into chapter four,

Rev 4:1 “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.”

These then are those things that are to take place after this; this is after chapters two and three, the things that are, the Church Age.

In this picture of heaven there are different from Ezekiel’s vision, but there are things that are remarkably similar. So, some things of these in heaven are eternal, belonging to an Eternal God, but also perhaps, and it is a difficult concept to grasp, outside of time.

But there are also those things that belong specifically, to a place in time, a fixed event, for these are the things that must take place after this. And while it is difficult to be dogmatic with time, in relation to an eternal God, there are things in these chapters that would place this scene at a point in time, which we feel must be after the Church Age but before the Tribulation. A momentous event that symbolises the transition from one age to another.

As this is a future event, John views this in the spirit, although we should note that by comparison Ezekiel’s vision was revealed by the heavens being opened, while he looked into heaven from the banks of the River Chebar, in Babylon.

So I think we should be careful of describing this as purely a spiritual realm, for the whole tenet of the passage, has this feel of a real occurrence, albeit a yet to be one, these are physical events in the heavenly realms.

John's eye is immediately drawn to the one sat on the throne, surely this is the Almighty God, but rather than seeing an image of God, He is seen to be as like a Jasper and a carnelian or as rendered elsewhere a Sardius stone. Now these are the first and last of the twelve stones on the breastplate of the High Priest and they correspond to the tribes of Reuben and Benjamin, the oldest and youngest of the sons of Jacob. Perhaps as the first and last tribes, they are representative of the whole, we read in Exodus.

Ex 20:17 You shall set in it four rows of stones. A row of sardius, topaz, and carbuncle shall be the first row;

20 and the fourth row a beryl, an onyx, and a jasper. They shall be set in gold filigree.

Whether this is pertinent or not, I shall leave you to judge, but I remain to be convinced.

Those who know about these things suggest the carnelian or sardius is a bright red stone, although there is much debate about the jasper, and some have suggested that this has a brown hue, others compare it with a diamond. I favour the latter view, simply because of its further description later on in this book.

Re 21:11 having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Perhaps though the most pertinent question is what do these stones mean, why is our God being likened to these two precious or semi-precious stones? Anything we say on this, or anything else on this chapter is purely conjecture, but I like to see these stones representing the clarity and purity of God, in the jasper and the scarlet of the carnelian representing the grace of God, that is to be found through the blood of Christ.

The Rainbow we might think to be the covenant, the promise between God and Man, that he would never destroy the earth again, by flood. The fact that this rainbow is set in emerald, rather than the more traditional seven colours from the refraction of light, perhaps indicates that this covenant is with the earth.

Similarly, the identification of the 24 Elders who are around the throne, is uncertain, although the proposal I like to think of these as being the most appropriate is that this is the 12 patriarchs of Israel, that is the fathers of the twelve tribes, and the representatives of the church as to be found in the apostolic fathers, with Paul replacing Judas Iscariot. I cannot readily accept the

alternative view that these twenty-four are exclusively of the church, for who then are they?

This bright and colourful scene is somewhat compromised with the vision of thunders and lightnings, as we imagine, smoke lights and noise coming out from this throne of God. Where we are told that the lamps of fire to be the spirits of God. Is this then an indication of the judgement of God about to come on the world, with His awesome majesty and might being brought to bear?

The seven spirits of God is another difficulty but this expression springs up again in the following chapter, where we read.

Rev 5:6 ¶ And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth.

As these spirits are the seven eyes of Jesus, and we know that Jesus neither had seven eyes nor seven horns, these then must speak metaphorically of Jesus reaching out into the world and seeing all that is happening. Seven is of course, God's number of perfection and the horns have we have already noted earlier in this series are representative of the heads of the empires. It has been suggested that seven is always the number of continents, and that Jesus is both the head, and the all-seeing One in each of these.

In front of this throne was a Sea of glass, a sense of tranquillity amongst all the noise and commotion coming from the throne. Round about this throne, there were then four living creatures, comparably but different with those described by Ezekiel.

With their six wings, some have compared these creatures with the seraphim we commenced this service with. Others see them as representing all of the living created work, being typified in the lion, as the wild creatures, the calf, those domesticated, the face of a man, mankind, and the birds of the air being represented by the eagle.

All this imagery then seems to be set in the midst of a scene of perpetual worship, to the One sat upon the throne.

But in amongst this timeless imagery there appears to be a problem appearing. This is the problem to be solved, for the One, who sat upon the throne, the Almighty God holds in his right hand a scroll, this is closed with seven seals. This is

an event set in time, an event that sits between the end of the Church Age, and the commencement of the tribulation, a time of trouble.

Rev 5: 1 Then I saw in the right hand of him who was seated on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.

And the cry then goes up, who is worthy to open the book, to release the seals. Apparently, no one is found able to, for no one is worthy. This then of course, is metaphorical, it is a demonstration for John, to be recorded for our benefit, that there is One, and only one who is able to open the seals. John, who weeps at the fact that appears to be no one able is met with the response.

Rev 5:5 And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals."

This then is the prevailing One, for this word conquered, or prevailed in the Authorised is from the same root word, that we derive victory from, nike...

1Co 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is that Jesus has won the victory, that He alone has the right, the worthiness to open the seals. This victory, at least in the context of 1 Cor 15, is that He has defeated death, and sin. Death is defeated in the sense that this is the ultimate end of sin, this is the price of sin.

Ro 6:23 For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

But by surrendering to the cross and having proven that death had no claim on him, because of His sinless life, He not only defeated death for Himself but by paying the wages of sin, for everyone, He has defeated sin and death, He has prevailed.

Hence the proclamation, the worship in heaven takes on a different perspective. For, suddenly there is then a change in emphasis in the worship in heaven. For in chapter 4, God was worshipped by the elders and the living creatures, with the words.

Rev 4:11 "Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created."

God is being worshipped, for He is God, He is worthy of all our praise, simply because He is God and He is our creator, there needs to be no other reason for God to be worthy of our praise, that He alone is God, and that of course remains true and is ever true. But as we come into chapter 5, and seeing now that the lamb is found to be worthy, because He has prevailed, He has conquered, the worship of an innumerable company becomes.

Rev 5:9 - 10 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation, and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth."

We proclaim, that through His blood, through the blood of the lamb, we are redeemed, the ransom has been paid, and we have become a kingdom and priests, and we shall reign on earth.

10. Tribulation - Seals

I have been trying to build up a chronological picture of how I think the Bible describes the progression to and through the End Times. If we are to take, and I acknowledge not all do, if we are to take the Book of Revelation as a chronological trawl through these times, remembering John was instructed to write;

Rev 1:19 "Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later.

Then we might recall that we considered chapters 2 and 3 of the books where the seven churches of Asia, or South West Turkey are described, we thought of these as being typical of quite distinct periods of the church's history. This then gave way to the description of an eternal God, in heaven in chapter 4, before the specific act of the Lamb taking the book from God.

Rev 5: 6 – 7 Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the centre 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. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne.

This has parallels with Psalm 2, where we read of God, enthroning His son;

Ps 2:6 "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill."

And this in reaction to the rebellion of people against His Son, His anointed.

Ps 2: 2 The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One.

Now I must confess to have a leaning towards a concept called Dispensationalism, that is the idea that God, through the ages has managed, administered or dealt with people through time, in different ways. At its simplest level we can think of the Old Testament and the New. When Jesus dies on the cross, He ushered in the gospel, replacing the law of the Old.

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Before this time of grace, sometimes described as God's righteousness or redemption, at Christ's expense, before this there was the law, but the law was

given to Moses on Mt Sinai, what happened before then, and before the flood, and in the garden. You get my point. So, today we are living, in a period of time, known as the Church Age, the day of God's grace and typified by these 7 churches of Asia. This is what Paul describes to that church in Corinth

2Cor 6:2 For he says, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." I tell you, now is the time of God's favour, now is the day of salvation.

But while this might be the day of God's grace and favour, it is not widely accepted and the general reaction, of folks to this, is how this Psalm starts;

Ps 2:1 ¶ Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain?

And continues, through the anointing and enthroning of His Son, to the time of judgement, a time when the day of God's grace will have expired.

Ps 2 9 - 11 You will rule them with an iron sceptre; you will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.

You, see what the Psalmist had in view here, was firstly the rejection of the Lord, then the proclamation of God, on the person of His Son, and then His judgement on the world. This is what we come to in Revelation 5, when the book, although this would be in fact a scroll, is taken from the hand of God by the lamb.

Now it would be fair to say that we are not entirely sure what the scroll contains, some suggest this to be the councils of God, others suggest that perhaps this might be the lamb's book of life, in which the believers names are written

Re 21:27 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.

But before the scroll could be read or even opened, the seals had to be removed and the removal of these seals would set into motion the beginning of God's judgement on the earth. This then is Revelation 6.

These we remember are things that are going to happen, in a future date at the conclusion of the church age. Now we are not told precisely what these images mean, or why it was that the four beasts, seen as being round the throne, introduce them we remember but this is simply how John sees, and understands it, we can only imagine what it was that John was perceiving, but it was the beasts who introduce the first four seals.

Rev 4: 6 - 7 Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the centre, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and behind. 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.

So we don't know why exactly it was that these four beasts was used in turn to introduce John to each of these four horsemen, but we do know that it was the Lord who had opened the seal, these on the scroll that he had received from the Father. So, we must therefore conclude, that these events are part of God's purposes for this world – even if it is evil that is used to enact these purposes.

First Seal

Rev 6:2 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.

The first horseman, on a white horse has been assumed by some to have been the Lord himself, as He will later appear as King of kings and Lord of lords, this on a white horse too, but it seems improbable to me that having opened the seal, that He then would then be this character on the horse.

In fact, it seems to me that it would be pure and wild speculation to try and guess who any of these horsemen are meant to be, whether they are characters that are to appear on the world stage, or spiritual beings. It would rather appear to me that the key point is what characteristics are these horsemen ushering into the earthly sphere, rather than who, if anyone their riders might be.

There is no doubt in my mind that warfare is in view here, or at least the threat of war. For here, in comparison to the second horseman there is no mention of the removal of peace, nor of killing, no indication of spilt blood. In comparison to the knife, the sword of even the spear, other weapons of the era, the bow is a considered a long-range weapon, so perhaps the conqueror goes forth, with only the threat of violence, and conquers with skilful negotiation giving the impression, or menace of war.

Second Seal

If in the first instance, the threat of war and bloodshed was only implied, it then becomes real on the opening of the second seal.

Rev 2:4 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.

Now we are seeing violence, struggles and death, perhaps as a response to the bloodless conquest of the first horseman. Perhaps, I am alone in thinking, that this great sword, as opposed to the bow of the previous horseman, is more about civil war and unrest, than the international conquests of the previous.

Now, I am going to fall into a trap that I promised I would not. But and it's a big but, if we were to superimpose these events onto today's world, I could easily imagine this could be, potential Islamic Terrorism. We might think of the Twin Towers, the rise of Al-Qaeda, Islamic State, the Manchester Arena, and even as I write this, the beheading of a French Teacher in Paris. This sense of taking peace and installing fear and terror. Rather than threats of international war.

Of course, these actions are not going unnoticed and while, governments, security organisations and the like seek to prevent and quell those whose intentions are to instil a sense of fear into us, I suspect we will see more and more people taking action into their own hands. Prompting a rise in the nationalist and far right movements. Surely, it is something of this type of scenario we can imagine here with the opening of the second seal.

Third Seal

I have for a long time held the view that the Ten Plagues in Egypt did not necessarily involve ten distinct acts of God. Rather that God had set into motion a sequence of events, many of which were consequences of previous events. I have a similar view on the opening of the seals, that whilst they are distinct, and separate acts occurring as a consequence of the opening of that particular seal, quite probably they have their source in the trials of the previous seals. So, the white horse, and the red horse inevitably lead to those things associated with the black horse.

Rev 5 – 6 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. Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

A quart of wheat, I am told is a person's daily allowance, three quarts, was enough to feed a family or a horse. In other words what is being ushered in, was a time of famine, where one's daily needs cost a day's wages, and that was administered rigorously with the beam scales, used to measure out the cereals. In other words, this is a situation arising where to be fed every day, a person had to work every day, and that without supporting his family or dependents, it is a totally unsustainable scenario.

Yet, in amongst it all, the command goes out not to damage the luxury goods, the oil and wine. The implication here is clear, the difference between the haves and the have nots will too, colour these end times. Then the ordinary man in the street will struggle to feed his family on his wage, but the rich will remain relatively unaffected. Some might even suggest, we are seeing a foretaste of this during the pandemic, where the extremely affluent, are seeing their worth increase, whilst others, even among the so called middle classes are starting to see their savings eroded.

Fourth Seal

These first four seals, seem to be four parts of the same, in that they are all introduced by each of the different four beasts around the throne, who tells John to, "Come." (The KJV uses the expression, "come and see," but newer translations, omit the "and see.") For, there is a significant point to be found at the start of the third sentence here, and that is the word, "they," and as we've already indicated these four horsemen, whilst individual are at the same time complete as a unit.

Rev 6:8 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.

And so being part of the same group of the so-called "four horsemen of the apocalypse," this then is the inevitable consequence of all the previous horsemen, that death by the sword, and we note again not by the bow of the first horseman, but from the second horsemen and famine by the third. What is not represented in the horsemen but noted here is death by plague and wild beasts.

They were to be given power over the fourth part of the earth. This is not that a quarter of the earth will be killed but rather their domain will be limited to a fourth of the world. We have already thought about a revised Roman Empire, and it is my

intention that once we have thought through Revelation 6 -8, that we will refer back to the Lord's teaching in Matthew 24, and parallel those distinct but yet similar passages, with this section of God's word.

And we note that in passing, that the first horsemen, who conquers, with the bow and only the threat of violence, and of whom it could be argued that in his conquest he brings peace, is the forerunner of the deadly consequences that follow in the other horsemen. Something we will pick up on, on another occasion.

We should also note that death by plague and wild beasts only mentioned in passing in this verse, is so far removed from the Garden of Eden, God's paradise made for man, where we were to have control over all living things of the earth,

Ge 1:26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." (ESV)

And while, I see little evidence of wild beasts, save for the odd shark off the coasts of Australia, killing many, we are all too aware of the virus among us and the havoc that is wrecking, so it is becoming more credible to see how these things can come about. But, if we think them punitive, we need to remind ourselves that this is what is required to get us back to Eden, and for humankind, to again have control over all that God is made.

And so, what follows the previous horsemen is death, closely followed by the grave, or the place of departed souls. Now, typically, Hades is associated with the wicked, we need only think of the rich man and Lazarus.

Lu 16:23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. (ESV)

I am therefore more apt to hold to the view, that the church has been removed from the scene at this time, and that nicely leads us into the...

Fifth Seal

Where we read

Rev 6:9 – 11 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. 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?" 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.

I don't particularly want to dwell too long on this scene, for there are too many views given to who these saints might be, and from what era. A strong view is that they perhaps are from those martyred during this time of calamity, but if that is the case, and if we are holding to the view that the church has been raptured then these are those who have come to faith, during this time of trouble. Another view is that these are they simply those of faith who have been martyred for their faith through the whole of history and time. Again, this is a point we shall be returning to later.

Sixth Seal

We have already noted that there are seven seals. The opening of the seventh seal in Rev 8, starts another sequence of calamities that is to befall the earth. This after an intermission, in the text at least, in chapter 7. But the last seal of this chapter, the sixth brings about significant events both in the earth and heaven, we read;

Rev 6:12-13 When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale.

Now I have said that in due course, it is my intention to compare these events of Rev 6 and 8, with the Lord's teaching in Matt 24, but we cannot help notice the similarity of this verse with...

Matt 24:29 "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

Now, this too is something we will be coming back to in the coming days, as we see the further acts of calamities happening on the earth from the blowing of the seven trumpets and the pouring out of the seven bowls. Each set ending with a great earthquake.

As we read them, we naturally take them as read and that is as happening in a chronological order, yet I wonder. For there is a degree of finality and parallelism

in these events, for although we can imagine that the appearance of the sun turning black and the moon red could be caused by pollutants in the atmosphere, if it was literal then this would have to be final.

And so, I wonder, and we will dig deeper into this, whether these different series of calamities of Revelation are different views on the same, for if these events that we have read here occurring with the opening of the sixth seal, are consistent with Matt 24:29, we should note what the Lord says happens in the next verse;

Matt 24:30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

This great consolation is that these events will usher in the return of the Lord, and as we have suggested are necessary to return us to those Edenic days.

11. Revelation Seven

Revelation Chapter 7 is to be considered to be a parenthesis. That is a posh way of saying that it is in brackets, that this chapter is an aside to the main dialogue. Chapter 6 closes with the opening of the sixth seal, chapter 8, with these words.

Rev 8:1 ¶ When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.

So, there is that sense in which chapter 6 comes immediately before chapter 8, both in a literal and chronological sense but and that chapter 7, is an interjection into the narrative. Something that is happening alongside the main narrative.

And we also need to remember what we have in view here, is what John is being shown, all those things that are to be hereafter. Some might be literal, some metaphorical, and perhaps some John's interpretations of what he is shown. And there are then those some questions, that spring immediately to mind about this parenthesis and these groups of people.

When, where and who?

When?

Perhaps this is the easiest of the three questions,

Rev 7:11 ¶ After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners 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.

The first verse tells us that this is, "after this," that is this is after the sixth seal had been opened, the earthquake and the stars from heaven falling, and as we have said this is a parenthesis, but that doesn't mean that it is not also chronological coming after the opening of the sixth seal, and immediately before, or at least concurrent with the opening of the seventh seal at the start of chapter 8. The seals are but the first set of a series of calamities that are to be poured out on the earth, and as such, there are many others to follow, before we can even start thinking about the return of the Lord.

And as we noted last time around, this could then be slightly complicated in that this sixth seal, described similar events to those the Lord had described in Matt 24?

Matt 24:29 "Immediately after the distress of those days "the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

This then ushers in the return of the Lord.

Matt 24:30 "At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.

For the simple reason of chronology then, I cannot see – with all that is still to happen in the Revelation narrative, before the Lord's return in Rev 19, that this sixth seal can then be synonymous with Matt 24, but rather that the sixth seal is a foretaste of the future, and more severe calamities that will happen on the earth, those final earthquakes and the like.

So, at this point in time, after the opening of the sixth seal, in the first phase of the time of trouble, things are literally, or metaphorically called to a halt, if even for a moment in time. This to hold back the winds, so that the earth, the seas and the land would not be harmed until these servants of God are sealed. A Spiritual time-out if you want.

Now we need to remind ourselves, that all the saints of God, are sealed.

Eph 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

But while the sealing with the Holy Spirit of God, is sealed towards that day of redemption, we are set aside before our redemption becomes finally realised, this is only outwardly manifested in our behaviour, there is no visible mark of this seal. However, this sealing here, this with the seal of God, is a visible marking in their foreheads. A mark, or brand showing that they belong to God, and is therefore visible to all.

Where?

So where then is this taking place. I think that this is self-explanatory, this first part is happening on earth and I would take exception to those that suggest that the 144 000 are being sealed in heaven. There are two reasons for this. Why do they need to be sealed in their foreheads if they are being marked out in heaven? Everyone in heaven is God's, and all such carry the seal of the Holy Spirit.

And if they were being sealed in heaven, why then would there be this need to have this hiatus from the calamities on earth to seal them. No, this sealing is being done on the already ravaged earth. This then should give us some clues as to who there 144 000 are.

However, there can be no such debate as to where the second company, were, they were before the throne.

Rev 7:9 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.

We will in a moment look to who they might be, but first what was the first company?

Who?

The greater question of the three is then is, who are these two companies then, what are they doing, where are they from and are they literal or symbolic?

It seems a strange question, since we are giving a rather full and specific description of who they are. These are according to the words on the page, 144 000, of the children of Israel, with 12 000 from each of the twelve tribes as listed in the text. Now we can take this literally, and there is no further room for debate, except perhaps to try and understand the anomalies in the tribe listing mentioned above, or as many have done see this as something more metaphorical.

For, many have challenged this literal view. For example, last week, and the week before that, as we looked at the Ephesian epistle, where I was at pains to point out;

Ga 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

If there is neither Jew nor Greek, in God's eyes, why is there this distinction made now? Those detractors from the literal view would argue.

The other objection usually made, is one which I think with God is not insurmountable. The question raised is where are these tribes? The Assyrian invasion of the Northern Territory of Israel, in 720 BC and the carrying away into captivity of Israel, saw eight, nine or ten of these Northern tribes, depending on how you view it, lost. Any semblance of Judaism and their distinctive ways were lost as they were assimilated into the Assyrian nation. That is that all Jewish identity was lost during this captivity. But as I said, I don't think it is beyond the omniscience of our God, to be beguiled by this.

I must confess I find it hard to go beyond the meaning as presented, and as presented this specifically in the text. Why can't these 144,000 be faithful Jews? While there might be no difference between the Jew and Greek, in Christ, is it not possible that these Jews are just that, Jews and not Christians? Not in Christ?

Somewhere along the line, in this study and that for completeness I am going to have to introduce some of the teaching of Ezekiel. In that book we read of faithful Jews, perhaps not having God's seal per se, in their foreheads but rather having a mark, the Hebrew letter tau. Ezekiel is looking forward to a day, when judgement is coming to Jerusalem and those with this mark, or if you want seal, will escape the judgement.

Eze 9: 4 and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it."

This is that executioners are going to go through the city and destroy those there, and this because of the abominations that are happening in the temple and the Holy City. Those with the mark will escape the executioners. This evidently has echoes of the Lord's teaching in Matt 24 of the abominations, and of course to Daniel, to whom the Lord is referring. Could these be two visions of the same things? That is that these righteous Jews are those that will experience the abomination of the temple and will despite it all remain faithful and true, a faithful Jewish remnant sealed with the mark in their foreheads, a remnant that will re-appear in chapter 14.

The second company is explained to John, although he needs to be asked the question first, before receiving the answer from the elder.

Rev 7:13 - 14 Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes— who are they, and where did they come from?" 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.

Now these are then the martyrs from the Great Tribulation. We might remember a similar company, those that had been slain for the word of God, and for their testimony, on the opening of the fifth seal.

Rev 6: 10 – 11 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?" 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.

These then in Rev 7, are surely those fellow-servants and brothers who were and are being killed, for their faith during this time of trouble.

Now the only problem I have with this, is that chronologically in the book of Revelation, we have not reached the Great Tribulation yet, or has the parenthesis now become, timewise at least, somewhat out of kilter. However, as an aside to the main narrative, I don't think this parenthetical text is constrained to the same chronological timeframe as the main narrative and that these verses serve as re-assurance that whatever the circumstances prevailing on the earth, that God will have His all His people secure, even if they have to persevere through difficulties and challenges in time.

In summary then I accept that this morning's theme and Revelation 7 in particular is both difficult and challenging. However, if we want to look at this whole subject of End Times, and that in its entirety and not to just cherry pick those verses of interest, it is a necessary step along the way. In the context of our jigsaw, it is a small but nevertheless important piece of the puzzle and as such cannot be neglected. How it effects specifically the church and their place in End Times, can perhaps be questioned.

However, the truth of the matter, is that if we are experiencing some of the Birth Pains associated with End Times, then we should note, the closing verses of the chapter, for we cannot escape the fact that the End Times will bring their own challenges, Paul could write to Timothy and say,

2Ti 3:1 This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. (KJV)

Times that are described as being dreadful (ESV) or terrible (NIV), and as such this thought is barely uplifting. But the concluding verses of this strange, difficult and challenging chapter reminds us of our hope in Him, and that we along with the martyred in heaven, before He comes, will share with them in this;

Rev 7:15 - 17 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. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the centre 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."

He will lead us to springs of living water, and that this leading them to springs of living water, brings us right back to Psalm 110, where we read;

Ps 110:7 He shall drink of the brook in the way:

12. Back to Matt 24
13. Great Tribulation (7:14)Reve 8 – 7 trumpets
14. Little Angel and the Book Rv 10
15. 42 Months Rv 11
16. 7 Personages Rev 12, 13
17. Visions in Heaven Rev 14
18. Seven Vials Rev 15, 16
19. Babylon Rev 17, 18
20. 2 000 Years and ideas from the Gospels
21. Allelujuahs in Heaven Rev 19
22. Ezekiel
23. Millennial Reign Rev 20
24. Final Judgement and the Eternal State
25. Summary

26.