

Part 3

The Four Series of Seven

Chapter 3

Rev 4-5 and the Seven Churches of Rev 2-3

"Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden lampstands is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches" (Rev 1:19-20).

The Importance of Context

How shall we account for the discrepancy between the respective timeframes of Rev 1 and Rev 4? If Rev 1 takes place in John's day, as it obviously does, how can we argue that Rev 4 takes place in modern times almost 2000 years later? What happens to our regard for context in all of this?

Bear in mind that two other chapters come between Rev 1 and 4. They are also part of the context. The seven letters of Rev 2-3 do not confine themselves to first century events. John is commanded to write about "what is now and what will take place later" (Rev 1:19). The seven letters lead us by an entirely natural progression from the one period to the other. They form a bridge between John's day and our own.

The letter to the church at Ephesus applies to the entire church during the first Christian century. The letter to Smyrna applies to the church which endured persecution for "ten days" (Rev 2:10) throughout the Roman Empire in the time of Diocletian.³⁶ The

³⁶ "The accession of the Emperor Diocletian is the era from which the Coptic Churches of Egypt and Abyssinia still date, under the name of the 'Era of Martyrs.' All former persecutions of the faith were forgotten in the horror with which men looked back upon the last and greatest: the tenth wave (as men delighted to count it) of that great storm obliterated all the traces that had been left by others. The fiendish cruelty of Nero, the jealous fears of Domitian, the unimpassioned dislike of Marcus, the sweeping purpose of Decius, the clever devices of Valerian, fell into obscurity when compared with the concentrated terrors of that final grapple, which resulted in the destruction of the old Roman Empire and the establishment of the Cross as the symbol of the world's hope" (Arthur James Mason, quoted in Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2: Ante-Nicene Christianity AD. 100-325 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1910], pp. 64-65). Diocletian issued in A.D. 303 three edicts of persecution, followed by a fourth from his colleague Maximian in 304. Diocletian himself retired in 305. Before Diocletian's death in 313 by suicide Galerius in 311 issued an edict of toleration. But for two more years both Maximian and Maxentius (son of Maximian and son-in-law of Galerius) continued to harass the church in various ways. It was Constantine who defeated Maxentius in battle and forced Galerius, another colleague, to issue a new edict of toleration in 313 and forced Maximian to sign it that same year. The persecution had

third church (Pergamum) represents a third period later than the first two, and so on down to the seventh, which applies especially to people living now during the judgment. Having come to the last of the seven churches, or epochs of the church, it only remains for John's attention to be shifted from events on earth to events in heaven taking place at the same time (see Rev 4:1).

The transition between each two of the seven churches involves time primarily. Each represents a different era in the church's history.³⁷ The setting doesn't change because each of the seven churches is located on planet Earth. The transition between Rev 3 and 4, however involves space. The people being judged are on earth; the tribunal that judges them is in heaven.³⁸

There is a corresponding transition back to the first century between Rev 5 and 6, discussed below. It is not the case once we come to the time of the judgment in Rev 4-5 that all of what follows in later chapters must take place then. Instead we have something similar to the book of Job, where there are two settings - one in heaven, the other on earth - with the story alternating between them. In the case of Revelation, however, there is the added element of time. The scene which takes place in heaven takes place in the second apartment of the sanctuary located in heaven and is therefore linked to a specific period of time as well as to a specific place.

Respect for context is precisely the issue in placing Rev 4-5 in the timeframe of Laodicea and the judgment. But how do we know that Laodicea represents a seventh era in the history of the church?

Content of the Letters

At least three lines of evidence support the idea that the letters to the seven churches describe major eras or periods of church history which follow one another in time. First, there is the reference to "ten days" of persecution in the letter to Smyrna (Rev 2:10). Second, there is a series of passages from Thyatira to Laodicea that have to do with Christ's second coming and build to that climax in time. And third, there is the reference to an "open door" as we go from Philadelphia to Laodicea (Rev 3:8). We consider each line of evidence in turn.

lasted from February 23,303 to early in the year 313 (see *ibid.*, pp. 64-72, *passim*) -ten years exactly, just as the prophet had foretold.

³⁷ Notice something about this series that is so obvious it would be easy to overlook, i.e. it ends. In the same way the series of metals in Nebuchadnezzar's image ends and in fact is quite short. Just as our Creator brought human history into existence initially, he also brings it to an end at the second coming of Christ. We have become accustomed of Christ's return as being interminably delayed and sometimes speculate that our model is misconceived because have waited so long. God does not see things in the same light that we do.

³⁸ The heavenly tribunal judges more than Laodicea, of course. From Rev 6 up to and including Rev 18 we have a catalogue of evidence to be presented in the judgment. This spans the time from Christ's first coming to His second. Beyond *ibis*. God's dealings with mankind from Adam to Christ is on record as our Old Testament. Everyone who has ever claimed a relationship with God will be brought before this judgment.

The great persecution

I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Rev 2:10)

The prospect that the church would suffer persecution for ten days might not be all that frightening if what we are talking about is literal time. But in that case why does Jesus single out this particular persecution for attention. Many Roman emperors persecuted the church for periods longer than ten days. It would be more reasonable to assume that the "ten days" are in fact ten years and that what we have is yet another illustration of day-year symbolism. Only in this case does the enormity of the events fit the seriousness of the warning.

From history we know that the most intense persecution the church was to face during its early centuries did indeed last ten years (from A.D. 303 to 313). It extended throughout the Roman Empire during the last years of Diocletian, with special severity in the East. It was Diocletian's purpose to wipe Christianity from the face of the earth.³⁹ Other emperors had persecuted the church from time to time but none went about the task so systematically or persistently as Diocletian and his associates.

Other emperors who persecuted the church in one way or another include Claudius (42-54), Nero (64), Domitian (81-96), Trajan (98-117), Hadrian (117-38), Marcus Aurelius (161-80), Septimius Severus (193-211), Maximinus the Thracian (235-38), Decius (249-51), and Valerian (253-60).⁴⁰ Claudius, at the beginning of this list, expelled the Jews from Rome and since Christians in the first century were considered Jews he expelled Christians as well. This was a prelude to the first truly violent persecution under Nero. At the other end we could add Aurelian (270-75), who issued an edict of persecution before his death, though it was never implemented. From A.D. 260-303 the church again had a brief period of rest.

If the persecution of Diocletian is the one described in the letter to Smyrna, that fact establishes a framework for interpretation that we should be able to apply in other letters. If the second letter (Smyrna) represents the second major period of church history, it would be reasonable to assume that the third letter represents a third period, and so on down until we come to Laodicea, which deals with the church's condition during the time when the judgment is in session.

The second coming passages

The above model finds support in the letter to Thyatira (#4) and following where Jesus says, "Only hold on to what you have until I come" (Rev 2:25). He does not say when that will be, but merely reminds Thyatira that at some future time He will come.

³⁹ It is ironic that up until the persecution began, "His own wife Prisca, his daughter Valeria, and most of his eunuchs and court officers, besides many of the most prominent public functionaries, were Christians, or at least favorable to the Christian religion" (idem, p. 65).

⁴⁰ See idem, pp. 44-63.

In the letter to Sardis (#5) Jesus says, "Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (Rev 3:3). Again Christ does not give a time for the event, but He does raise the church's level of anticipation to a new level. They should begin to look for His coming. Otherwise they will be caught off guard when it happens.

In the letter to Philadelphia (#6) Jesus says, "I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown" (Rev 3:11). And in the letter to Laodicea (#7) He says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20).

Notice two points. First, there is a clear progression in these passages. "Only hold on to what you have until I come" (Rev 2:25). "But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you" (Rev 3:3). "I am coming soon" (Rev 3:11). "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock" (Rev 3:20a). This progression occupies time, not space. It has nothing to do with where the seven churches are located. That is one point.

A second point is that, whereas there is timeless spiritual significance in passages such as, "If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me" (3:20b), there is also a very clear eschatological focus. The marriage supper of the Lamb is that special time, more than any other, when Christ eats with us, and we with Him (see Rev 19:9; Matt 26:29). This marriage supper is in heaven. Christ must come in order to take us there, so His reference to sharing a meal with us must be understood in the context of the second coming. Again the focus is on time, not space.

Other Comments

The central focus of the seven letters is the second coming. Ten "days" or years of persecution are of no importance when compared with future glory. Through the seven letters the church is brought down to the time of the second coming and those events which immediately precede it. We know this because of the way Christ speaks of His coming in the last four letters and because as the series nears its end the second apartment of the sanctuary thrown open in heaven and the judgment begins. It is the opening scenes of this judgment that we see in Rev 4.

Chapter 4

More on the Letters to Philadelphia and Laodicea

There are three references to "doors" in Rev 3 and 4. The first is in the letter to Philadelphia, the next in the letter to Laodicea, and the last at the beginning of chap. 4. Of these, the "door" in Rev 3:20 (Laodicea) is spiritual in nature and on earth but those in Rev 3:8 and 4:1 are in heaven. They are spoken of as being real and refer to the same object within the same context.

The "Door" in the Letter to Philadelphia

When Christ says, "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut" (Rev 3:8), why does He say this in the letter to Philadelphia? If the "door" in question is the door into the second apartment, as I claim, would it not make sense to speak of it in the letter to Laodicea?

The word "Laodicea" means a people judged (*laos* "a people," *dikē* "process of law, judicial hearing"). Philadelphia was the period of brotherly love just before this when the Millerites preached that Christ's return was immanent a Great Awakening followed. More specifically what they preached was that Christ would come out of the second apartment in 1843/44. It was only with hindsight that they learned He would go into the second apartment then. The one teaching brought a spirit of brotherly love, the other a great disappointment.

But all of this fits the text perfectly. The "door" of Rev 3:8 was something to which Philadelphia's steps would lead. The Millerites' preaching was the prelude to the event that so bitterly disappointed them (see Rev 10:8-11). Philadelphia's zeal and Laodicea's disappointment are two responses to one event. They are two halves of one whole, both predicated on an understanding of the second coming. Their different responses followed from their differences in understanding. The later group learned by bitter experience something about the second coming that the first group did not know. But this contrast has the effect of binding the two groups together. They can be contrasted, but not separated. To Philadelphia Christ says, "I have placed before you an open door" (Rev 3:8). It was before them in the sense that they would come to it as they moved forward by faith. This reference to a "door" is exactly where it should be.

Having said this, which door is Christ referring to? When is it opened? And what is the relationship between Rev 3:8 and 4:1? Let Scripture interpret Scripture. In chap. 3

Christ places before His people an open door. It is one that He leads them to. Immediately afterward, in chap. 4, John sees a "door standing open in heaven" (4:1). These are not two different objects. It is one door described twice.

In Rev 3:8 the Greek reads *thuran eneōgmenēn* "open door" (accusative case), in Rev 4:1 it is *thura eneōgmenē* "open door" (nominative case). Taking into account the rules of Greek syntax this difference is not a difference. The two expressions are fully identical. It is important to understand this fact because it links chap. 4 to chap. 3. Rev 4-5 is more than an introduction to the seals. It is that, but it is also the goal or climax to the series of churches.

Granting now that the door in Rev 3:8 is the same as the door in Rev 4:1, and that the symbolism we are dealing with derives from the sanctuary, which door is it? There are two to choose from. Is this the door to the first apartment or to the second? We have already come a long way toward answering this question. If this is the door to the first apartment, why does Christ wait until the letter to Philadelphia to call the church's attention to it? Would it not have been even more important for the church at Ephesus to know about Christ's first apartment ministry, since it began in their lifetime? But in that case He could not have held it open to them as a future prospect. Christ was already among the seven lampstands when John first saw Him in chap. 1.

No, the special message preached during the period of the church in Philadelphia had to do with the second coming, not the first. By now the issue was Christ's second apartment ministry. It was the special function of Philadelphia to call people's attention to the fact that His ministry would soon undergo a significant change. They did not know this yet. When they learned the full significance of what they had done they were disappointed. Their whole experience became bitter. But all of this was in the providence of God. The open door to which Philadelphia was moving, with or without knowing it, was the door into the second apartment of the heavenly sanctuary. What we are talking about here - what Christ was talking about in Rev 3:8 and what John witnesses in Rev 4:1 - is the beginning of the judgment in 1844.

The "Door" in the Letter to Laodicea

There is one other "door" in Rev 3. This is the one Christ stands before in Rev 3:20 in the letter to Laodicea, mentioned above. He could unilaterally place an open door before the church in Philadelphia because it was in heaven, but the one He now stands before, calling and waiting, must be opened from inside. Here the issues are spiritual.

Opening the door referred to in the letter to Laodicea implies more than letting Jesus come into our hearts. It also implies accepting what He says upon entering. The judgment and the second coming are eschatological events. So here Christ describes the condition of the church just before His coming.

There are similarities here to the parable of the ten virgins. Opening the door to Christ implies accepting His description of us and benefiting from it so we will be ready to meet Him as a welcome Bridegroom when He comes to take us into the wedding

banquet. The five foolish bridesmaids waited for their Lord just like the wise did. And all slept while waiting without distinction. But the foolish bridesmaids did not prepare for the event they professed to look for until it was clear to them that the Bridegroom was already en route.

"But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

"Later the others also came. 'Sir! Sir!' they said. 'Open the door for us!'

"But he replied, 'I tell you the truth, I don't know you.'

"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt 25:10-13).

This is the condition of Laodicea. It is a church that sleeps fitfully, neither fully asleep nor fully awake - lukewarm. It is watching for the Lord to come back and yet not watching. As regards time, in Rev 3:20 the Bridegroom has not yet arrived. The door of Matt 25:10-11 (and of Rev 3:8 and 4:1) is still open. The figure appears to be one of Christ waiting at our door while we wait at His. We are, as it were, both waiting for each other. Let us not compound our difficulties by waiting at the wrong door. It is a serious mistake to confuse the ministry of Christ in the one apartment with His ministry in the other.⁴¹

Other Comments

Consider the irony that the wealth Laodicea has found (see Rev 3:17a) is its knowledge of the law, and yet the law is what Christ uses to reveal the depth of Laodicea's poverty (see vs. 17b). The remnant's gain and its loss therefore both spring from the same source.

In all of this God wants nothing more nor less than loving obedience. He wants to be served "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24) - completely, wholeheartedly, permanently. He is a jealous God (see Exod 20:5) and as such wants to be everything to His people. Balancing this He wants us to understand that we mean everything to Him.

⁴¹ See Ellen White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1945), pp. 54-56.

Chapter 5

Rev 4-5 and the Seven Seals of Rev 6 and 8

At this point let us examine what the scroll says which is sealed with seven seals. Yes, it says what is written down in Rev 6 and the first part of chap. 8. But this is not the end of the story.

Issues Addressed by the Seals

Notice that the seven seals are attached to a scroll with writing on both sides (see also Ezek 3:1-11). Before going on, let me ask which comes first - the writing or the seals? The writing comes first and then the seals. If the scroll were sealed first, how could anything be written on it? Whatever the scroll has to say has already been written down by the time John describes it for us. We return to this point below.

Content of the seals

What did the writing on the scroll say? One way to answer this question is to read Rev 6 and 8. But after we read the words, there is still a question what they say. What sorts of issues are addressed by the words recorded in the scroll? And do the seventeen verses of Rev 6 plus the first verse of chap. 8 exhaust their content? Is there more?

Dan 7 also speaks of written records. Can we learn more by studying these chapters together than by studying them separately? In the belief that we can, I now quote Dan 7:9-10.

"As I looked,
 "thrones were set in place,
 and the Ancient of Days took his seat.
His clothing was as white as snow;
 the hair of his head was white like wool.
His throne was flaming with fire,
 and its wheels were all ablaze.
A river of fire was flowing,
 coming out from before him.
Thousands upon thousands attended him;
 ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.

The court was seated,
and the books were opened." (Dan 7:9-10)

So far we have only succeeded in transferring the problem to a different venue. We must now ask what the "books" in Dan 7 say. Do they say the same things as the "scroll" in Rev 5? We have always taught that the "books" of Dan 7 contain the record of people's lives and that when they are opened that is the investigative judgment - investigative because the contents of the books are examined by the heavenly court. In Revelation we have been less clear. Perhaps the scroll with seven seals is prophetic.

Is it the case that the "scroll" in Rev 5 tells about things that would happen in the future whereas the "books" in Dan 7 records past events? In this case the parallel between them breaks down. The book of Revelation is certainly prophetic. So is Daniel, and yet what Daniel prophesied in chap. 7 was that a record of past deeds would be opened to public view. I would like to explore the possibility here that the two documents in question are identically the same and that they are both historic in nature. Both record past events. Both are opened at the same time.

The scroll is sealed in Rev 5 because the events it describes have already happened. The related facts that this scroll is both filled with writing and sealed help to answer the question when its seals are broken. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the sealing of the document must follow its composition. In the same way, the books of Dan 7 were opened when the court was seated, not before.

Does this mean that the seals of Rev 6 and 8 describe events during and after the judgment? On the contrary. The fact that the books are opened in 1844 is our best evidence that what they describe happens before that time. Books must first be written before they can be read. Events must first happen before they can be reviewed. But are these documents prophetic? Those in Dan 7 are not.

Timeframe of the seals

Rev 2-3 leads us step by step down through history to the time of Laodicea, i.e., to the time when God's people (*laos*) are judged (<*dikeō*). After describing the poverty of those whose wealth is their knowledge of the law, whose pride is condemned by the source of their pride, the scene shifts from earth, where the Laodiceans are, to heaven, where the judgment they love to teach about is in session. This much is prophecy. But as regards the substance of what is said in the judgment, that is a review of past events - of things which must already have taken place. This part is history.

The events we are talking about here are all those that have ever impacted the people of God. These include what happened on the day of Pentecost in the century A.D., when the church first went out into an unbelieving world as a conqueror winning souls for Christ (see Rev 6:2). It includes the "rebellion" Paul speaks of 2 Thess 2:3 which led the church from divine power to human coercion as its source of strength, and so on through the various seals.

This concept leaves some loose ends, not because what has been said is incorrect but because not everything has been said. First, if judgment begins with the family of God (see 1 Pet 4:17), not all of God's family have lived between A.D. 31 and

1844. What about all those saints of past ages mentioned in Heb 11 and in other similar passages? The Old Testament heroes of faith must not be forgotten. And what about Laodicea itself? I have argued that the judgment is a judicial review, that it deals with past events. So is Laodicea (the people judged) excluded from the judgment that gives that group its name, because their lives are lived too late to be recorded in the seven-part scroll? Not at all. Everyone who has ever claimed any relationship with God is included in the investigative judgment.⁴²

What does it mean that no one could open the seven seals except the Lamb? What does this fact tell us? Recall that without a special revelation from the Holy Spirit the two disciples from Emaus in Luke 24 would not have known that Jesus was sitting in front them bodily at their own table. This fact should teach us humility. Without the Holy Spirit to teach us how each event affecting the church of Christ finds its context in Christ, the history of His body on earth will be misapplied and misunderstood. He is the One who gives events their meaning and without Him at their center we cannot interpret them correctly. Furthermore, without Him the judgment could not precede. He is the only link between heaven and earth (see Gen 32:22-32; John 1:51).

And so it is only the Lion of the "tribe of Judah" (Rev 5:5), the "Lamb, looking as if it had been slain" (vs. 6), who could open the seven seals. He alone could lead His people through the vicissitudes of history. And only He could make the meaning of those events clear once they had happened.

Here we are talking about what would happen to the church in the centuries that follow Christ's first coming. These events are described in very broad outline in chaps. 6-18. The background for the church's experience in every subsequent age is described. The context in which every life has been lived is clarified. God does nothing in a superficial manner so when it comes to the final review of every person who has ever named the name of Christ, His work is thorough and complete.

Other Comments

Notice a number of other facts. Daniel calls what is opened in the judgment "books" (plural) (Dan 7:10), John calls it a "scroll" (singular), and Ellen White calls it a "book" (singular). These are all one and the same object.

⁴² Let us not abandon the term "investigative judgment" as though it contained some error. It does not. At issue is not whether people's lives are investigated in the judgment. They are. At issue is the source and purpose of the information thus gained. It is not that the court must inform God as to what decisions He should make. Instead God informs the court as to what decisions He has always known would be necessary. Unfallen creatures investigate God's dealings with mankind and pronounce His judgments right and fair. People are judged, it is true, that is part of the judgment. But more importantly God is judged. His system of government comes under review as its implications are seen in the lives of all His professed people. "And he said unto me. Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Dan 8:14). The word "cleansed" means to set right or vindicate, in the judgment the records of all God's dealings with mankind are investigated and His system of government is set right or vindicated. The sanctuary, i.e., the seat of God's government, is vindicated. He is shown to "be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus" (Rom 3:26). Both factors are at work in the judgment. "Investigative judgment" is still a good term. Let us continue to use it.

As regards time, Ellen White says, "Their decision [that of the Jewish leaders] was registered in the book which John saw in the hand of Him that sat upon the throne."⁴³ The decision she is referring to was made in the first century A.D. in the timeframe of the crucifixion. But then she says, "In all its vindictiveness this decision will appear before them in the day when this book is unsealed by the Lion of the tribe of Judah."⁴⁴ In the day when this book is unsealed? What day is that? Whichever one she has in mind, it is at least clear that she is not talking about the first century any more. She placing the unsealing of the "book" in her own day.

If, as Ellen White claims, the "book" contains a record of people's decisions - among other things " and if it is being unsealed now, in the judgment for example, then what we are talking about is a historical record (past decisions) which come under later review (it is still being unsealed now). I suggest that we expand our concept of what this book contains. Yes, it contains Rev 6:1-17 and 8:1, it contains the book of Daniel, it contains a record of the Jewish leaders' decision to crucify Christ. But when we say this much have we fully understood the book's contents? These are just glimpses.

What do men's decisions have in common with the prophetic (or historic) words of Scripture? One is man's will, the other God's will. But both document God's dealings with mankind. This is the issue in the judgment: not primarily men's dealings with each other, or even men's dealings with God, as important as these things are. At issue is not whether men have been good, and fair, and just. "There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23). Instead the issue is whether God has been good, and fair, and just.

As regards mankind the judgment is a forum in which God announces decisions whose outcome He has always known from the beginning. And yes, there is a work of cleansing on earth that accompanies those decisions in heaven. But as regards God the judgment is a very real tribunal. His government is at stake and with it the well being of the entire universe - not just a handful of people on earth, or even an innumerable multitude of people on earth.

Dan 8:14 does not say, Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the worshipers in the sanctuary be cleansed, although it is true that they will be. But what the text says is, "Unto two thousand and three hundred days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed" (Dan 8:14, KJV) – the sanctuary itself, the seat of God's government. This is what requires vindication in the great controversy.

And so if God is to be vindicated completely, His dealings with mankind must become known completely. The only way to do this is to lay open the record of His dealings with each person who has ever responded to Him. The result is that our record is reviewed in exhaustive detail, but more than this and more significantly that this, His record is being reviewed. He does not open our life record to the universe in order to embarrass us because of our faults but to vindicate His own perfect character.

Here is the context for breaking of the seven seals. Only Christ could break the seals because only He can reveal the Father - to us on earth and to the heavenly court as everyone sees what God has done in human lives for their eternal benefit. It is no

⁴³ Ellen White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 294.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

wonder that the four living creatures, and twenty-four elders, and innumerable angels and other unfallen beings fall down and praise God as these scenes unfold.

Chapter 6

More on the Seventh Seal

Under the seventh seal there is silence in heaven "for about half an hour" (Rev 8:1). The reason for the silence is that no one is there. The seven angels with the plagues are already on earth. Christ, His Father, and the other angels are en route. Heaven is temporarily deserted and so there is silence for a short period.

How long a period are we talking about here? How long is half an hour? If we apply the well-established principle that a day represents a year in Bible prophecy and if an hour is the twenty-fourth part of a day, then an hour of prophetic time should represent the twenty-fourth part of a year. Since there are twelve months in a year, half a month, or about two weeks, would be consistent with what we are saying here. It is also consistent with the following spirit of prophecy statement published in Francis D. Nichol's book entitled, *Ellen G. White and Her Critics*:

"About four months since I had a vision of events all in the future. I saw the time of trouble, such as never was. Jesus told me it was the time of Jacob's trouble, and that we should be delivered out of it by the voice of God. Then I saw the four angels cease to hold the four winds. And I saw famine, pestilence and sword as nation rose against nation, and the whole world was in confusion. Then we cried to God day and night for deliverance, until we began to hear the bells on Jesus' garment. And I saw Jesus rise up in the Holiest, and as he came out we heard the tinkling of the bells and knew that our High Priest was coming out. Then we heard the voice of God which shook the heavens and the earth, and gave the 144,000 the day and hour of Jesus' coming. Then the saints were free, united, and full of the glory of God, for he has turned their captivity. And I saw a flaming cloud come where Jesus stood. Then Jesus Said off his priestly garment and put on his kingly robe, and took his place on the cloud which carried him to the East, where it first appeared to the saints on earth - a small black cloud which was the sign of the Son of man. While the cloud was passing from the Holiest to the East, which took a number of days, the synagogue of Satan worshipped at the saint's feet."⁴⁵

Jesus stays in the sanctuary so long as there is anything for Him to do there, i.e., He stays there until the judgment is over. Then He stands up (see Dan 12:1) and comes here (see Rev 19:11-21). From this, and from the above quotation, it follows that the time it takes for Jesus to come from heaven to earth at the second coming is "a number of days."⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Nichol, *Critics* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1951), p. 625.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

This is the time during which the plagues fall. They do fall during the judgment on those who still have an opportunity to repent, nor do they fall after the return of Christ on those who have been destroyed "by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess 2:8). They fall during the interim, i.e., between the time when Jesus leaves heaven and the time when He arrives here. How long does it take Jesus to return to heaven once He has rescued His saints on earth?

Then Jesus' silver trumpet sounded, as He descended on the cloud, wrapped in flames of fire. He gazed on the graves of the sleeping saints, then raised His eyes and hands to heaven, and cried, "Awake! awake! awake! ye that sleep in the dust, and arise." Then there was a mighty earthquake. The graves opened, and the dead came up clothed with immortality. The 144,000 shouted, "Alleluia!" as they recognized their friends who had been torn from them by death, and in the same moment we were changed and caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

We all entered the cloud together, and were seven days ascending to the sea of glass, when Jesus brought the crowns, and with His own right hand placed them on our heads. He gave us harps of gold and palms of victory. . . .⁴⁷

The time it takes for Jesus to return to heaven once He has gathered His saints from the earth is "seven days."⁴⁸ If Jesus spends a comparable amount of time coming to the earth and returning to heaven, then the total period during which He and the Father and all the angels are absent from heaven is about two weeks.

"When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Rev 8:1), or the twenty-fourth part of a day. We do not need to look for a time after the saints have taken up their positions "before the throne of God [to] serve him day and night in his temple" (Rev 7:15) as a fulfillment of Rev 8:1. It is fulfilled at the second coming.

⁴⁷ Ellen White, *Early Writings* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1945), p. 16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Chapter 7

Rev 4-5 and the Seven Trumpets of Rev 8-9, 11

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm. (Rev 11:19)

Sequence of Events

Anciently the feast of trumpets had the function of announcing and leading up to the day of atonement (see Num 29:1-6 and 7-11 respectively). When that day began their work of announcing it was over. From this I draw that, if the parallel holds, we can expect the antitypical trumpets in Revelation (see Rev 11:15-19) to bring us to the beginning of the antitypical judgment in 1844 and no further.⁴⁹ On the other hand, if the parallel does not hold then we are at sea without chart or compass. So I maintain that the trumpets stop when the judgment begins based on the Old Testament types. And if we cannot draw on these types for understanding, i.e., if we cannot allow Scripture to interpret Scripture, what shall we use in its place?

The plagues could hardly be poured out on those who have had no opportunity to decide on the issues that are raised in the judgment - as outlined in the three angels' messages of Rev 14 and 18 - so they fall afterward. The plagues begin when the judgment ends. The churches and the seals, on the other hand, cross the 1844 dividing line between the antitypical daily and yearly services in the heavenly sanctuary.

⁴⁹ When the twenty-four elders say, "The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Rev 11:18), this takes in the beginning of the judgment (judging the dead), the end of the judgment (rewarding the prophets and saints), and the end of the millennium (destroying those who destroy the earth). Since times are referred to no one timeframe is going to fit them all. But it should at least be clear that we cannot come to the end of the millennium before its beginning, or to the end of the judgment before it starts. The time brought to view is the beginning of the judgment, from which these later events would naturally follow.

There is a question whether the events of Rev 4-5 precede those of Rev 11.⁵⁰ It is true that chap. 4 comes before chap. 11 within the book, but what does that fact mean? Rev 11:19 says "God's temple in heaven was opened," while Rev 4:1 says "before me was a door standing open in heaven." Granting that the door in question is the same in both cases, which happens first? If a door has been closed in the past, does it stand open before someone opens it? When we answer this question we will have more insight into the relationship between these two chapters.

In chap. 4 we have a result (the door stands open), in chap. 11 the process that causes it (the door, which had been closed previously, is opened). So if one or the other set of events must come first, Rev 11:19 precedes Rev 4:1 and not the reverse. We do not have to wait until chap. 11 in order to read about second apartment events in the book of Revelation.

Actually I would not want to make a strong case for sequence here in either direction. My point is that Rev 4-5 does not describe a time significantly earlier than Rev 11, as some claim.⁵¹ But in saying this I am not trying to establish the opposite position, i.e. that Rev 11 describes a time significantly earlier than Rev 4-5. That is not the case either. Instead both chapters describe the same events in the same timeframe, i.e. at the beginning of the judgment.

Sequence of Clauses

Let us focus now on the text of the seventh trumpet more closely. The clause that says God's temple was opened comes last, after the description of what John sees within it. Why is this?

The clause about opening God's temple comes last because of literary considerations having to do with the structure of this section of the book and what it is designed to emphasize. The feast of trumpets anciently announced the day of atonement and led up to it. It was their function to make sure that the people were ready to participate in the day of atonement meaningfully and with the right attitude. That is

⁵⁰ See Maxwell's discussion under the heading, "The Sanctuary Is a Friendly Place," in *God Cares* 2:162-67. Maxwell traces the association of the seven churches with the lampstands (see Rev 1:12-13), the seven seals with the table of consecrated bread (4:2 if.), the seven trumpets with the golden altar of incense (8:3), and the great controversy theme involving God's commandments with the ark of the covenant (11:19). In this model the throne of Rev 4:1 is the table for consecrated bread inside the first apartment. I discuss this concept at greater length in another chapter. For now it is enough to notice that if Rev 4-5 is identified with the first apartment and if Rev 11 is identified with the second apartment, then Rev 4-5 precede those of Rev 11 in its time of application as well its place within the book.

⁵¹ See Maxwell, *God Cares* 2:167 and related discussion. In my view the Strand-Maxwell concept of the structure of Revelation is a breakthrough, but it could be used to limit as well as augment our understanding of individual chapters. Are we to argue that the churches do not extend to the end time, or that the seals or trumpets do not? They occur in the "historical" half of the book. How can they have an end-time application? But by whatever means they obviously do have precisely such an application. Each series begins in John's day when Christ was in the first apartment, but each extends to our own day when He is in the second apartment.

also the function of the seven trumpets in the book of Revelation. They direct people's attention to the judgment on the great antitypical day of atonement in and after 1844.

Notice that in NIV we find the word "Then" at the beginning of vs. 19 ("Then God's temple in heaven was opened"), as though everything else happened first and afterward the temple was opened. The Greek simply says *kai* "and" (i.e., "And God's temple in heaven was opened"). The literary focus is on the opening of the temple. This is what accounts for the placement of the clause. The trumpets end when the day of atonement begins. But in fact the entire scene depicted in Rev 11:15-19 takes place within the area opened in this way.

Other Comments

Both Strand and Maxwell include vs. 19 with what follows in chap. 12. Section C(a) is defined 12 8:241:18 and section C(b) is 11:19-14:20. In the case of chap. 8 there is good reason to begin a new section at vs. 2. The seals end in vs. 1 and the trumpets begin in vs. 2. But here there is no reason why our outline should not agree with an established chapter division. The two men agree in setting it aside, but both are wrong. Chapters 11 and 12 are divided as they should be. We can take the printed text just as it reads.

Chapter 8

More on the Seventh Trumpet

*T*he situation under the seventh trumpet is similar to what we find in Rev 4-5. In my view this is the beginning of the judgment. The trumpets have all sounded, warning the world of judgment to come and now it is here.

Content of the Passage

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said:

"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of
our Lord and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever."

And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying:

"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign,
The nations were angry;
and your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who reverence your name,
both small and great –
and for destroying those who destroy the earth."

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm, (Rev 11: 15-19)

Here the twenty-four elders are already "seated on their thrones before God" (vs. 16) and the proceedings are about to begin. It is in anticipation of this that the elders say, "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign" (vs. 17).

And it is in anticipation of the results of the judgment now starting that they add, "The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who

reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (vs. 18).

We can be sure that some such interpretation as this is required because the time for judging the dead is not the same as that for rewarding God's prophets and saints, nor is the latter the same as the time for destroying those who destroy the earth. The time for judging the dead was 1844 and following. The time for rewarding God's prophets and saints is the second coming. The time for destroying those who destroy the earth is after the millennium. So if these three times are all different from each other we cannot at least two of them are being mentioned out of sequence. Which two? To know this we have to find out when the elders are speaking, not just what they are talking about.

I submit that the time when the statement of vss. 16-18 is made, as contrasted with that when the events described there apply, appears in the next verse: "Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm" (vs. 19).⁵² When was God's temple in heaven opened? Whenever that is, that is when the twenty-four elders say what they do in vss. 16-18. In my view this is the beginning of the judgment. Thus, when they say, "The time has come for judging the dead" (vs. 18a), that is in sequence with goes before and with vs. 19. When they add, "and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great - and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (vs. 18b), that is proleptic. The timeframe for the seventh trumpet is that time when "God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant" (vs. 19) at the beginning of the judgment in 1844.

Is Vs. 19 Part of the Passage?

Both Strand and Maxwell argue that vs. 19 does not belong there. In the outlines of both men they take Rev 11:19 with Rev 12-14 and not with the rest of Rev 8-11 (apart from 8:1 which is the seventh seal). So let us not give a hasty answer. There is something here that requires discussion.

Ironically, Maxwell does not discuss it. On p. 310 he refers to "Revelation 12-14 (as we'll call our present division, even though it really starts with the last verse of

⁵² The thunders of Rev 11:19 and those of 10:3-4 should be studied together. "The special light given to John which was expressed in the seven thunders was a delineation of events which would transpire under the first and second angels' messages. It was not best for the people to know these things, for their faith must necessarily be tested. In the order of God most wonderful and advanced truths would be proclaimed. The first and second angels' messages were to be proclaimed, but no farther light was to be revealed before these messages had done their specific work. This is represented by the angel standing with one foot on the sea, proclaiming with a most solemn oath that time should be no longer" (Ellen White, quoted in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* [Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1957]: 7:971). What the first angel's message says, once more, is: "Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come." (Rev 14:7).

chapter 11). . . ."⁵³ Later on the same page we read in passing that it is an "Introductory sanctuary scene. . . ." Why is it an introductory sanctuary scene?

According to Strand there needs to be a reference to the sanctuary at this point in the book because Rev 4:1-8:1, 8:2-11:18; and 11:19-14:20 all start with a "Victorious Vision" and end with a "Glorious Climax."⁵⁴ This is a strong argument, if it is correct, but saying this much is not the whole story.

The parallel with Rev 4-5

Recall that in Rev 4-5 John sees the four living creatures and twenty-four elders in the context of a door being opened in heaven. Here also he sees the four living creatures and twenty-four elders in the context of a door being opened in heaven. Is this a coincidence? I think not. John sees the same things in Rev 4-5 and Rev lib because the same events are taking place in both passages. So there is the parallel with Rev 4-5 to consider.

The parallel with vs. 1

There are also some structural relationships within the chapter that we need to take into account. Below I quote the first and last verses of the chapter along with some context in the case of vs. 1.

I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, "Go and measure the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. (Rev 11:1-2)

Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and earthquake and a great hailstorm. (Rev 11:19)

Rev 11:1 describes a time in history when God's people are to give special attention to the sanctuary. They are to study it closely. They are to measure it in all its details. When did they do this? The rest of Rev 11:1-14 talks about the "42 months," the "1,260 days," and the events that would happen when these prophetic time periods would come to an end. In this context vs. 1 seems out of place. It has to do with 1844, whereas the rest of the section has to do with 1798. Then we come to the seventh trumpet and with it vs. 19, which also seems out of place. At least Strand and Maxwell feel it is out of place. But when taken together these two misfit passages form an inclusio around the chapter. They stand in chiastic relationship to each other. To do an effective job of removing vs. 19 from this chapter and putting it with the next we would also have to remove vs. 1. Let us not go to either extreme. The text already reads just as it should.

⁵³ See also God Cares, 2:370,381,387.

⁵⁴ *Interpreting the Book of Revelation*, p. 48.

Why Rev 12-14 cannot begin with a reference to the sanctuary

We must go beyond the matter of simply saying that 11:19 does not introduce Rev 12-14 with a reference to the sanctuary and make the stronger claim that no reference to the sanctuary could ever go there. It would be out of place.

We now quote the opening verses of the passage that Strand and Maxwell want to introduce with a scene from the sanctuary. "A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth" (vss. 1-2). She was about to give birth? So she had not given birth yet. Was Christ a Priest before He became a man?⁵⁵ Consider a number of passages from the book of Hebrews.

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, Set us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb 4:14-16)

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Heb 5:8-9)

Such a high priest meets our need - one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. (Heb 7:26-27)

Every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices, and so it was necessary for this one also to have something to offer. (Heb 8:3)

Was temptation something that Christ had to endure in order to be High Priest for those who are tempted? If so, then Christ could not be a Priest in the timeframe of Rev 12:1-2. If not, then why was He needlessly exposed to it? Would we be able to "approach the throne of grace with confidence" if the One seated there had not "been tempted in every way, just as we are - yet was without sin"? Can we have Heb 4:16

⁵⁵ At the beginning of this century Albion F. Ballenger taught that angels were priests in the first apartment up until Christ's death and that when He returned to heaven Jesus went immediately into the second apartment (see Roy Adams, *The Sanctuary Doctrine: Three Approaches in the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, Andrews University Seminary Doctrinal Dissertation Series, vol. 1 [Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1981], pp. 112-15). In Ballenger's system Christ never ministered in the first apartment, i.e., before the cross. My point is that nobody ministered before the cross.

without vs. 15? Christ "learned obedience by what he suffered" before He was "designated by God to be a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek" (Heb 5:8-9).

And what shall we say about Christ's death? Was it necessary "for this one also to have something to offer" (Heb 8:3) as the text implies? The answer to that question is found in Matt 26:39 ("My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me"). If it had been possible to remove this particular cup from His Son we can be sure that the Father would have done so. But there was no other way. Jesus had been born to die and now it was time to make good on all His promises.

But in Rev 12:1-2 none of this had happened yet. So what does Rev 12:1-2 have to do with opening the sanctuary? The context is wrong for this reference or any other that is similar to it. The section in question consists of Rev 12-14 alone. It does not include Rev 11:19.

Chapter 9

Rev 4-5 and the Seven Plagues of Rev 15-16

After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in dean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed. (Rev 15:5-8)

The seven last plagues occur after the judgment and before the second coming. So the amount of time they occupy is the same as the amount of time it takes for Christ to leave the great judgment hall in heaven and make His way here. The plagues fall while Christ is en route to the earth.

When the angels who pour out the plagues on the earth leave the sanctuary or temple in heaven the door must be opened for them because by this time it had been shut (see Rev 15:5, quoted above). John sees this same door standing open in Rev 4:1 and 11:19. The reason why it is closed now is that the judgment is over. No one can enter the temple again until the seven plagues have finished their work. This much has to do with time.

In the next chapter I emphasize location to illustrate a point about how the plagues relate to each other in groups of 4+3. But this is not all that could be said. Maxwell brings the plagues together in a slightly different way to illustrate a point about how the plagues relate to the trumpets.

We have noticed more than once that there are striking similarities between the seven plagues and the seven trumpets. The first four in each case are directed against the earth, sea, rivers and springs, and heavenly bodies. The fifth in each case is associated with darkness, the sixth with the river Euphrates, and the seventh with a loud voice or loud voices.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ We have noticed more than once that there are striking similarities between the seven plagues and the seven trumpets. The first four in each case are directed against me earth, sea, rivers and springs, and heavenly bodies. The fifth in each case is associated with darkness, the sixth with the river Euphrates, and the seventh with a loud voice or loud voices" (Maxwell, God Cares, 2:429).

There is much to learn from the plagues as we study them in relationship both with each other and with other passages outside Rev 16. But here the emphasis continues to be on the element of time.

The plagues fall after the judgment is over while Christ is en route to the earth, which takes about one week, and nothing - absolutely nothing - happens on earth during His return trip. Those of the wicked who survive the plagues are destroyed "by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess 2:8).

During the week or so that it takes for Christ to come here it would not be hard to imagine a cacophony of sound on the earth. As the plagues fall people cry out in misery. "And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible" (Rev 16:21). So the sound of cursing mingles with the horrendous sounds of all nature being torn apart, and there is the sound of fervent prayer too as God's saints cry out for deliverance. All the while there is perfect silence in heaven (see Rev 8:1).

By the time Christ gets through there is silence on the earth as well. The sleeping saints have been raised and taken away. "After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1 Thess 4:17). The wicked, on the other hand, are all dead. Those who were alive when Christ came and tried to flee have been destroyed "by the splendor of his coming" (2 Thess 2:8). So the living are gone and the dead provide little company. There is no middle ground between life and death and therefore no third group.

At this point there is nothing for Satan to do but think. He is surrounded by his handiwork in a form of solitary confinement and as he considers what he has lost a deep silence settles in on the devastated planet that will last not for two weeks only, but for a thousand years.⁵⁷

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

⁵⁷ As Christ was the active Agent in creation (see John 1:1 -3) so Satan is the antichrist behind his human pawns. As such his work is to replace the work of Christ with its opposite counterpart. In this context consider the following statement: "That the expression 'bottomless pit' represents the earth in a state of confusion and darkness is evident from other scriptures. Concerning the condition of the earth 'in the beginning,' the Bible record says that it 'was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.' Genesis 1:2. Prophecy teaches that it will be brought back, partially at least, to this condition. Looking forward to the great day of God, the prophet Jeremiah declares: I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, to, they trembled, and all the hills moved lightly. I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down.' Jeremiah 4:23-26" (Ellen White, Great Controversy, pp. 658-59).

Chapter 10

Overview of the Four Sevens

Below we bind together some threads of thought exposed in earlier chapters of part 2. In dealing with the four series of seven of the book of Revelation we must understand how the sevens relate to each other and also how they relate to adjacent chapters.

The Four Sevens in Relation to Each Other

I would like to propose the following set of relationships among the sevens themselves. The boundary line at 1844 is crossed between the sixth and seventh churches and between the fifth and sixth seals. The trumpets all precede 1844 and the plagues do not fall until after the judgment. See fig. 3 below.

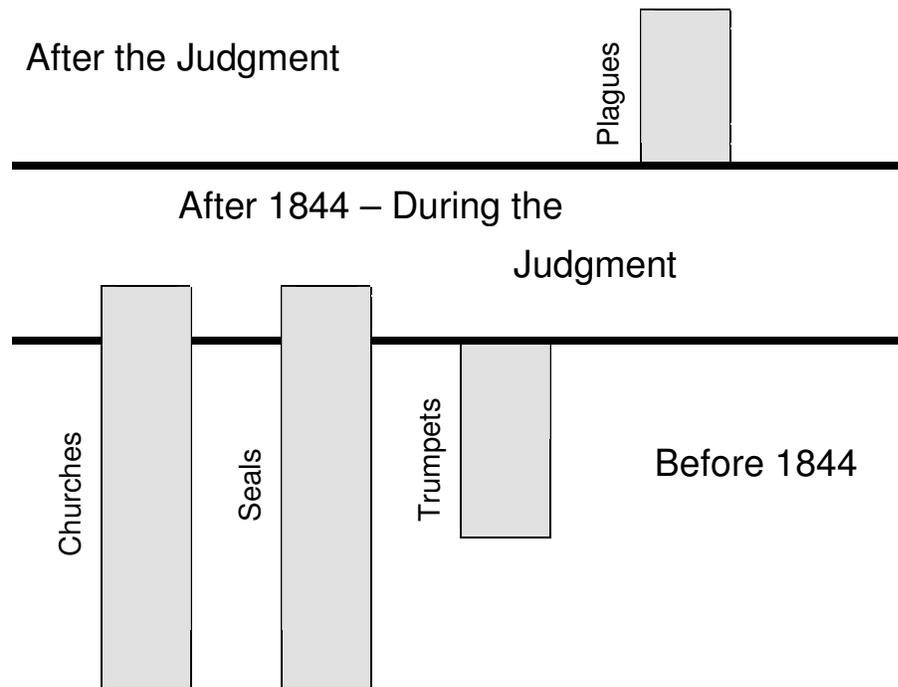


Fig. 3. Application of the seven churches, seals, trumpets, and plagues to history with special reference to the judgment.

We now review some internal facts about the structure of the four series of seven in the book of Revelation. In doing this my point is that both the churches and seals cross the 1844 boundary and that the judgment is therefore in session by the end of both of the first two sevens. The last two sevens are closely related to the judgment but do not occur while it is in session.

First arrangement: 4+3

It is a well-known fact that the seven trumpets are arranged in groups of 4+3. The last three are called "woes" (see Rev 8:13). The first four plagues appear to be universal (earth, sea, rivers and springs, sun), while the last three use the language of specific places (throne of the beast, river Euphrates, Armageddon).

In the case of the churches and seals, the first four seals follow a shared horse motif (4) while the rest do not (+3). Less obviously, we find the same pattern in the churches. A number of parallels bind Ephesus and Smyrna to Sardis, Pergamum to Philadelphia, and Thyatira to Laodicea.⁵⁸ Each letter has an introduction, a body, and a conclusion. Here I list only those parallels that occur in the letters' introductions and conclusions. See tables 3 and 4 below.

⁵⁸ See Hardy, "Structural Characteristics of the Letters to the Seven Churches in Rev 2-3," *Historicism* No. 4/Oct 85, pp. 39-64.

Table 3
Parallels in the Introductions to the
Seven Letters

	Group 1	Group 2
(1) Ephesus and Smyrna / (2) Sardis	(a) "who died and came to <i>life</i> again" (Smyrna), (b) "who holds the seven <i>stars</i> in his right hand" (Ephesus)	(a) "who holds the seven <i>spirits</i> of God," (b) "and the seven <i>stars</i> "
(1) Pergamum / (2) Philadelphia	"who has the sharp, double-edged <i>sword</i> "	"who holds the <i>key</i> of David"
(1) Thyatira / (2) Laodicea	"whose <i>eyes</i> are like blazing fire"	"the faithful and true <i>witness</i> "

Table 4
Parallels in the Conclusions to the
Seven Letters

	Group 1	Group 2
(1) Ephesus and Smyrna / (2) Sardis	(a) "will give the right to eat from the tree of <i>life</i> " (Ephesus), "will not be hurt by the second <i>death</i> "; (b) "in the paradise of God" (Ephesus)	(a) "will not be hurt at all by the second <i>death</i> "; (b) "before my Father and his angels"
(1) Pergamum / (2) Philadelphia	(a) "a white <i>stone</i> "; (b) "a new <i>name</i> "	(a) "a <i>pillar</i> "; (b) "the <i>name</i> of my God and the <i>name</i> of the city of my God"
(1) Thyatira / (2) Laodicea	(a) " <i>authority</i> over the nations"; (b) "just as I received <i>authority</i> from my Father"	(a) "the right to sit with me on my <i>throne</i> "; (b) "just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his <i>throne</i> "

From these tables it is clear that the churches from Ephesus to Thyatira represent one group and that Sardis to Laodicea represent another. Thus the letters, like the trumpets and seals, can also be arranged in groups of 4+3.

Second arrangement: 6+1

Having said this much, three of the four series of sevens in the book of Revelation exhibit a 6+1 arrangement as well. I do not find it in the plagues. In the seals and trumpets, however, there is overwhelming structural evidence for the proposed 6+1 arrangement. The first six seals occupy Rev 6 and with the seventh separate from the rest at the beginning of Rev 8 and chap. 7 intervening. Similarly, the first six trumpets occupy Rev 8-9 with the seventh separate from the rest in Rev 10 and chaps. 10-11 intervening.

In the letters to the seven churches the 6+1 pattern is thematic rather than structural. The first five letters precede 1798 and the time of the end, but the first six letters precede 1844 and the beginning of the judgment. This is the point to notice here. The first six letters all occur during the 2300 days of Dan 8. Only the seventh letter goes beyond that time.

Summary

The important thing here is to understand the 6+1 arrangement of the churches. The 6+1 arrangement of the seals and trumpets is less important and so is the 4+3 arrangement of the churches, seals, trumpets, and plagues. The 6+1 arrangement of the churches, however, has a direct bearing on our understanding of when the "door" of Rev 4:1 is thrown open. More specifically, if chaps. 2-3 brings us down to modern times, and if there is any viable thematic link, what would be more reasonable than to place what follows in the same timeframe as the chapters that have just finished bringing us there? The burden of proof rests with those who would place Rev 4-5 in some other different timeframe.

More on the Churches and Seals

If we claim that the series of churches in Rev 2-3 brings us through history in a systematic manner starting in the first century and eventually coming to and beyond the end of the 2300 days of Dan 8, why is it difficult to suppose that John's attention shifts in Rev 4-5 from events on earth during the judgment to events in heaven during the judgment? What John sees in heaven is whatever happens there in the timeframe he has brought us to in the series of churches.

And what is that? What happens during the timeframe of Laodicea? What does the word itself mean? If we are Laodicea what is happening in heaven now? That is what John sees in Rev 4-5.

There is an irony to notice as we compare events at the end of chap. 3 and the beginning of chap. 4. As the judgment begins and the entire universe looks on with riveted attention, the church on earth sinks into a deep lethargy. As the interest of the unfallen worlds heats up, the interest of the church dies down until it is lukewarm to all that is going on in heaven and to its own spiritual surroundings on earth.

The letters to the seven churches in chaps. 2-3 provide a natural link between chaps. 1 and 4, i.e., between the first century and the nineteenth when the 2300 days end and the judgment begins. The opposite counterpart of this is the opening of the seven-part scroll, which provides a link in the other direction from the judgment back to events that are discussed in the judgment. Not one bit of this challenges any traditional Seventh-day Adventist teaching.

The Interlude Between the Sixth and Seventh Seals

The sixth seal depicts both the signs that immediately precede the second coming and the second coming itself. When Christ appears in the clouds He is accompanied by all the angel armies of heaven. When those who had opposed Him in the person of His saints see these things happen they are thrown into helpless consternation. Daniel describes this scene from the perspective of the rebellion's leadership. "Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him" (Dan 11:45). John describes it from the perspective of those who have been misled.

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Rev 6: 15-17)

When John says, "The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind" (Rev 6:12-13), those are the signs that precede the second coming. When he says, "The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place" (Rev 6:14). that is the second coming itself, as described in vs. 15-17 (quoted above). See also Rev 16:20 ("Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found"). So the timeframe for this much is secure.

In chap. 7 the sealing of the 144,000 represents the same turbulent set of events from the perspective of those who follow Jesus and have longed for His appearing. The saints are sealed at the end of the judgment before the plagues begin to fall, as we read in vs. 3: "Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God." The harming of the land, the sea, the trees, and whatever is the plagues (see chaps 15-16). God's servants receive His seal in their foreheads just before this.

Please bear in mind that as regards time the plagues fall before Christ returns, or we could say, while He is returning. So the 144,000 are not in heaven at the time John sees them in Rev 7:1-8.

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. And they cried out in a loud voice:

"Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb."

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, they fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

"Amen!
 Praise and glory
 and wisdom and thanks and honor
 and power and strength
 be to our God for ever and ever.
 Amen!" (Rev 7:9-10)

Now the scene changes. Clearly, the 144,000 are not in heaven in vss. 1-8 but just as clearly the "great multitude that no one could count" (vs. 9) are in heaven in vss. 9-17. They "have come out of the great tribulation" (vs. 14) and are "before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple" (vs. 15). In vss. 1-8 the great tribulation is about to begin. In vss. 9-17 it is already over.⁵⁹

So is the great multitude the same as the 144,000? When do the 144,000 live? They live just before the plagues fall and are miraculously preserved during that time to see Jesus come. The plagues fall while He is coming. When do the multitude of others live? We are not told directly, but consider the references to "white robes" in 7:9 ("They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands"). This is reminiscent of 6:11 ("Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed"). This happens under the fifth seal, before the signs in the sun, moon, and stars (see vss. 12-14). I conclude that the great multitude of Rev 7:9 includes God's people from all ages of history. The 144,000, on the other hand, live to see Jesus come.

Thus, in the second part of the chapter we are taken forward in time to a scene that places the harrowing experiences of the 144,000 in context. God's people will not always be objects of hatred. Those who live to see Jesus come are not the only ones who will receive the heavenly reward. And so in vss. 9-17 we see all the saints, from all generations, not on earth with plagues falling on their enemies but in heaven standing before the throne of God. This is prolepsis. It is a look forward to things that lie beyond the current story line.

⁵⁹ It would be tempting to think of the "great tribulation" in Rev 7:14 as the plagues of Rev 15-16, ready to begin in 7:3. The 144,000 go through that time, therefore the 144,000 of 7:3 is the same as the multitude of 7:14. But this cannot be. First, those who receive the white robes in 6:11 are dead before the plagues begin. And how did they die? They were martyred during the great tribulation. This is the period Christ describes: "For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now - and never to be equaled again. If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matt 24:21-22). The tribulation of Matt 24 takes place during the 1260 days in the Middle Ages. It was shortened by the Reformation, not by changing the number 1260 to some other number, but by reducing the severity of the saints' distress. This is one reason. Another is that whereas God's people were martyred during the Middle Ages, they are protected during the plagues. So the plagues cannot be the "great tribulation" of Rev 7:14. This leaves some questions unanswered. The tribulation of vs. 14 cannot be limited to the Middle Ages if those who receive white robes are the saints of all ages and from all lands. Nor have all of God's children been martyred. Some have died natural deaths. So I leave to others to say what this clause means. My point here is that it does not mean the plagues. Thus, the 144,000 and the multitude are not merely two names for one group. The 144,000 live to see the plagues and to see Christ come in glory.

In Rev 8:1 the prolepsis ends and we return to the point where we had been in 7:1-8. Jesus has just appeared in the clouds and the wicked have tried unsuccessfully to hide from His presence. It only remains to take the saints with Him back to heaven. Here is the context for the seventh seal. "When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour" (Rev 8:1).

Notice in passing that the throneroom scene of Rev 7 is different from that in Rev 4-5. The same cast of characters is there, with the addition of those who have been saved from the earth and who were not present before, but notice that the twenty-four elders are silent. They are not bowing down continually praising God. Instead it is the angels "standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures" (Rev 7:11) who say, "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" (vs. 12). One of the elders does pose a question to John (see vs. 13) and subsequently answers it (see vss. 15-17), but the dynamics of the situation have changed. The judgment is over. It comes to an end before the time when we see any saints in heaven.

Prolepsis Between the Sixth and Seventh Seals and in the Seventh Trumpet

In the interval between the sixth and seventh seals, and again within the seventh trumpet, events are mentioned that go beyond what my model predicts in regard to time. Both of these exceptional cases are accounted for by prolepsis - a literary device by which an author looks forward out of sequence to something that lies beyond his current position in the story line. There is a difference between this claim and one which says that sequence has been preserved and that the story line itself moves forward.

At issue is the position of the story line, because both in Rev 7:9-17 between the sixth and seventh seals and in Rev 11:15-19 within the seventh trumpet we are brought back to the throneroom in heaven that we had seen earlier in Rev 4-5. Having established what Rev 7 and 11 are saying I would then like to reason from what we learn in those chapters back to our starting point in Rev 4-5, showing that the latter represents the beginning of the judgment in 1844.

Summary

There is a good deal of repetition in the book of Revelation, just as there is in Daniel.⁶⁰ So it is unnecessary to argue that God's temple remains closed until it is finally opened in chap. 11. It is closed throughout the series of churches up through Philadelphia, but not during Laodicea. The seventh church describes a time during the judgment when the temple of God has been opened (see Rev 4:1). It is closed during the period of the first five seals, but not during the sixth and seventh. If the second coming is described under the sixth seal, that is after the judgment. Again the temple is closed throughout the period of the seven trumpets until they have all finished sounding, but then it is opened (see Rev 11:19).

In this model there is nothing unique in the fact that the temple is opened in Rev 11:19. It is open in chaps. 4-5 and 7 as well. John takes us over the same ground again and again. Otherwise he does not take us over the same time ground and we must find some way to interpret the book such that the order of events corresponds strictly to the order of chapters. In this case the seventh church must precede the first seal and so on. But if we shrink from accepting this idea, why should we also shrink from the implications of rejecting it, i.e., from allowing the temple to be open at the end of the series of churches (Rev 4-5) and seals (Rev 7) as well as at the end of the trumpets (Rev 11)?

Any argument that the second apartment remains closed until it is opened in Rev 11:19 is an argument that all events in earlier chapters apply before 1844. We cannot say on the one hand that the temple remains closed until chap. 11 and on the other hand that the letter to Philadelphia describes the experience of the Millerites, which brings us to the beginning of the judgment.

Speaking of the period of lethargy when Laodicea sleepily considers whether or not to open its own door to Jesus (see Song 5:2-3), John says, "After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven" (Rev 4:1). Jesus - already in this early chapter of the book - has thrown open His door to them. As He says in another passage, "See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut" (Rev 3:8). If Jesus has opened this door in chap. 3 let us not try to keep it closed until we come to chap. 11.⁶¹

⁶⁰ In regard to the repetitious style of Daniel, Shea writes that, "As a concluding observation, we should not neglect the aesthetic side of this feature of chiasmic structure. Various commentators have observed that the type of writing present in Dan 4 and 5 is very repetitious. The dullness of the repetitions to the modern eye recedes in importance, however, when it is realized that these transparently repetitious passages actually form an integral part of the larger literary design of these two chapters. Thus, instead of contributing to boredom, these repetitions should enhance one's appreciation for this work as a carefully crafted piece. The narratives of the two chapters do indeed relate history, but they do so in an aesthetically artistic fashion" (Andrews University Seminary Studies 23 [1985]: 294).

⁶¹ "Similarly, let us not try to keep it open until we come to chap. 11. It is open in chap. 3 because the events referred to there happen after 1844. If other events in later chapters happen before 1844 the door to the second apartment will be closed when they occur.