

The book of *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*—an exciting title to one who had worked his way through 39 wonderful books that prepared him for the revelation of Jesus Christ, followed by 26 books in which he had assumed that Jesus was fully revealed.

“This must be the revealing of Jesus either in heaven or in the future,” Curious said, and he trembled as he said it because although to this point the Bible had showed him far more than he would ever have thought to inquire about—and no great discomfort had arisen from it—if this book claiming to be *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* was to reveal more on top of that, he was afraid that he might be overwhelmed, leaving him vulnerable to disappointment. He remembered the time when beauty in nature spoke to him of a magnificent Creator, but when he looked close at the world he discovered evil so strong it undermined his tender hope that goodness prevailed.

1 *The revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave to him to share with his bondservants: things which must shortly come to pass. He made it known by sending his angel to his bondservant John who bore witness to the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ, even of all things that he saw.*

“It’s not quite what I thought,” muttered Curious. “It’s inside intelligence John obtained about what was coming—coming very soon, apparently. And a very official one too—no leak this one, and no indirect inference.”

Yes, Curious, after Jesus ascended to heaven our learning came through the apostles’ writings. This supplementary book lifts the curtain on his future and yours too.

“Very impressive,” said Curious as he noted how this advances well beyond the channels by which Old Testament prophets received their revelations. “It reminds me of Jesus saying, *the words I say to you I speak not from myself, but the Father dwelling in me does his works.*”

In other words, Curious was curious about the words of God being more than words, something the angel or John *saw*. He wanted to get his head around that before moving on. It sounded like they will deliver *works*, not merely words. He theorized that these words of God are multidimensional, like pictures or holographs, which would require that the angel make an intelligible testimony from them before sharing them with John.

“Anyway, it does seem to be alerting the reader of an unprecedented revelation,” he said. “Even Isaiah got no angelic certification like this to go with his oracles.”

Blessed is he who reads or hears the words of this prophecy—and heeds the things written herein—for the time is at hand.

This was a letdown, and Curious wished it had not said what it said, because the time period for the blessing surely would have passed by now. But after reading it again he realized it did not have to mean simply a fixed period of time at all: it could just as well mean an ongoing time—a time that had begun but not necessarily ended.

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

Curious stopped to admire the patterns in this: the threes and the sevens. Was this a stylistic feature of this book, or was there some fundamental reason for the prominence of three and seven? If seven is not a poetic device, then what makes these seven churches special? Of course, seven is significant as a symbol of completeness, for it echoes the Creation week. Were the seven churches likewise typical? Did they in some way represent all churches? If so, this blessing of grace and peace would certainly be welcomed by all churches everywhere, not just in Asia Minor. That seemed likely and proper to Curious.

Curious also admired the dual three-part descriptions of Jesus Christ.

"That's a compact summary of what he did and will do, yet it's perfect!" he said.

But "seven spirits" was a revelation in itself. If literal, "seven" would seem to fractionate the Spirit, which did not fit with what Curious already knew.

"By 'seven spirits' John must mean the *full* Spirit, not seven separate holy spirits in God. In Zechariah, the seven lamps were like eyes of the Spirit. Also I remember Isaiah listing five or six spirits, but they were all about the Spirit of Yahweh."

After confirming integrity in the Spirit, the threes stood out. The one on the throne, the one Spirit before the throne, and Jesus Christ were a trinity. Also Christ was summarized in three successive phases of his ministry. Yet not to be ignored were the twin sevens: seven churches parallel the seven-fold Spirit. Curious fancied this being a multifaceted picture of the whole church enjoying all ministries of the Spirit of God.

Unto him who loves us, who loosed us from our sins by his blood, and who made us a kingdom of priests unto his God and Father, to him be glory and the dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

"Another set of two threes," Curious observed as he meditated on this benediction. The first was like the whole past, present, and future of the church accumulated in Christ. The second was like defining God in three dimensions: glory in heaven (vertical); dominion on earth (horizontal); and everlasting (the dimension of time).

Curious was impressed again by the perfect summary that linked Jesus to his servants: sins loosed by his *blood* in order to populate a kingdom of *priests* for the first time on earth—in which God is sincerely welcomed and allowed dominion without end.

"Here is the happy resolution of the story of God's love," said Curious. "Why does Revelation have the reputation of being about wars and terrors? So far it's all good!"

7 Behold, when he comes with the clouds every eye will see him, including those who pierced him, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn and wail because of him. Even so, let it be. Amen.

Curious remembered Jesus saying to the high priest, "*You will see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of Power and coming with the clouds of heaven,*" which came to mind because that priest was party to "those who pierced him." But now he was finding this lumped together with "all the tribes of the earth"—all of them having knowledge of Jesus' death on the cross, apparently, which certainly could not have occurred within that high priest's lifetime.

This kind of puzzle was not new to Curious: it troubled him whenever Jesus, speaking in the gospel accounts, made predictions that seemed to tie the future to the present. Here's a clue, Curious: if there is life after death, can you be certain that your high priest of Jesus' day would have no ability to witness the future?

"Assuming the high priest lives in some spiritual embodiment after his death, he might witness Jesus coming regardless of when it takes place," Curious reasoned.

Yes, and furthermore, that would indicate that Jesus was as much aware of the eternal spirits of people as he was of their temporal souls, would it not?

"After all, when Jesus looked at a person he must have been aware of their soul and its disposition too," Curious added. "Maybe this bodes well for that high priest, but I rather doubt it."

Since this was connected to a broader unresolved puzzle, Curious went back and found in Matthew where Jesus was telling his disciples, "*Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun and the moon will be darkened, the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of man will appear in heaven and all the tribes of the earth will mourn as they see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. He will send forth his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*"

Revelation

Curious remembered his effort to analyze this picture Jesus left with his disciples to assure them of his return. He had noted that the word “heaven” appeared five times and “earth” only once. The mourning was definitely attached to earth, but the gathering of the elect was expressed in a way that made it seem at least partly detached from earth: some of the elect might have been in heaven and were being gathered in resurrection on earth to participate in his kingdom.

“By whatever means the resurrection unfolds it will require a flat-out miracle superseding normal laws of space *and time*,” said Curious, emphasizing time.

He had encountered this idea of participating in the kingdom on earth in passages like the one he recently read in Second Timothy: *Faithful is the saying, if we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him.* And Paul had written in First Corinthians: *Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?*

Curious recalled the first time this concept made an impression on him. It was in the book of Daniel: *The kingdom and the dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people, the saints of the Most High; his kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions will serve and obey him.*

Now, what it came down to for Curious was this question: if some of the followers of Christ are still alive on earth, will they be taken to heaven *before* the return of Christ? Reason told him that preparation in heaven would be needed by everyone in order to participate in the kingdom. But he thought the best way to make sure of this was to find out the purpose of the “tribulation in those days.” He remembered that a “day of wrath” was spoken of and described in similar terms. He found an instance of this in Zephaniah: *That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasting and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.*

The word “wrath” was chilling. Curious concluded that since the saints will not be experiencing the wrath of God, then they must be present and accounted for in heaven before the dispensing of the wrath.

He reviewed this memorable passage in Romans: *Who can lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God who justifies, so who can condemn? Christ Jesus died for us (yes and was raised from the dead), and being at the right hand of God he makes intercession for us. What can separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation or anguish or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword?—as it is written, “For your sake we are killed all day long; we were like sheep for the slaughter.” No, in these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. I am persuaded that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

“The ‘tribulation’ mentioned in that passage is not the wrath of God,” he concluded.

But he did find a mention of the “wrath to come” in First Thessalonians: *... and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

“To wait for his Son That surely doesn’t mean waiting for God’s wrath,” he said.

And in the same book he ran across this again:

If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. We tell you this by the word of the Lord: we who remain alive until the coming of the Lord will not precede those who have fallen asleep; for the Lord himself will descend from heaven—with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God—and the dead in Christ will rise first, and then we who are left alive will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. You may take comfort in these words.

“There’s the gathering of the elect who are still alive—the famous Rapture,” he said.

But something was not quite right. What he had just read was a resurrection scene, and no doubt it meshed with the “gathering together of the elect.” But here was the problem: the spirits of those who are still alive at this resurrection will have no opportunity to experience spiritual heaven because “resurrection” means they stand up in new bodies fit for this physical earth, not heaven; they are equipped to participate in the kingdom that will come when the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven because Jesus Christ will have taken up his throne in Jerusalem.

“When they’re resurrected from their graves it will definitely *precede* the period of wrath, so where will they be if they’re not going through it?”

Curious knew the answer. He saw that the time element was the entire difficulty. He knew that time on earth is not the same as time in heaven; therefore, the resurrection must involve the “wings of eternity” time shift as well as a shift in terrestrial location.

“That wouldn’t diminish the miracle of the resurrection,” said Curious.

I take the liberty of giving a hypothetical illustration. A body that was buried in Rome in the year 100 could be resurrected in 2090 and appear in Jerusalem in 2100. Or some saint living in 2090 could be caught up in the clouds and also appear in Jerusalem in 2100. Then would the first soul have spent 2000 years in heaven and the second only 10 years in heaven? What do you say, Curious?

“I figured this out in the first chapter of Genesis: time in the Creator’s heaven is Creator’s time, not our time. Our time is a property of the created universe. As far as I can see, the only consideration to be taken into account regarding the dating of those events is the condition or qualification of the saints. Since it will be like a harvest, they should be in prime condition and ready for the next step.”

What do you mean by “ready for the next step,” Curious?

“To be ready to reign with Christ is the next step.”

Like having a degree in political science?

“They would have to be incorruptible; otherwise the world will be back in the same mess. Who qualifies for that, I don’t know. Some preparation in heaven is needed.”

That was a long detour away from the Revelation text. You know how it is. Curious gets these fits of curiosity. Finally, he continued reading where he had left off.

8 *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” the Lord God says. “I am he who is and who was and who is to come—the Almighty one.”*

Curious wondered about this statement because it surprised him that the God of the Hebrew Scriptures would make use of the Greek alphabet. Then, remembering that this book was directed to churches in Asia Minor where Greek would be in use more than Hebrew, it seemed not only an accommodation but a declaration that Jesus in his glorification speaks Greek just as well as any language, for he is one with Almighty God who knows all things. Curious will discover that angels seem to know Greek too.

9 *I John, your brother and partaker with you in the tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

As he tried to get the gist of “tribulation and kingdom and patience in Jesus,” which sounded rather comprehensive, Curious’ curiosity paid off when he amplified and rearranged the words slightly: waiting for the kingdom took patience, especially with the tribulation that came as a result of publicly testifying for Jesus and his return—which his readers would understand because they were partakers of the same.

“Why was he on that island?” Curious muttered. “*For the word of God and the testimony of Jesus* is pretty vague.”

I agree. It could go either way. Was John there to testify about Jesus, or was he sent to Patmos in order that his testifying be arrested?

Revelation

“I don’t know anything about Patmos,” said Curious, “but a small island is not the sort of place where this ‘son of thunder’ would spend time if he had a choice.”

10 I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet, saying,

“What you see, write in a book and send it to seven churches: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea.”

Thus far the flow had been turbulent and hard to follow. Curious stopped and scratched his head as if he expected it would stimulate comprehension. Initially, this book seemed to be addressed to all servants of Christ, and then the scope suddenly narrowed to seven churches. Then the scope opened again and seemed to address all who will be in the “kingdom of priests,” which would include more than seven local churches.

“It would make more sense if those seven churches stood for something,” Curious muttered. “Is there a Spirit before the throne for every church, not just those seven?”

As you can see, Curious remained certain that seven signified nominal, not essential, divisions of the Spirit.

“The messages they receive will address their need for patience as they wait for the promised return of Christ,” Curious conjectured. “Maybe there’s a good reason why patience was needed in those particular assemblies.”

But he wondered: if these seven churches were representative, might they represent seven different approaches to testifying for and revealing of Jesus, each perhaps motivated by one of the seven spirits? But that did not fit very well with the unity of the Bible’s teaching that had come before this.

As he was thinking that “patience” might be the key, it dawned on him that the seven churches might correspond to seven periods in the long history of the movement that had lately begun. In that type of seven-fold division no disunity of doctrine would be imposed, only seven phases of growth or development of culture—and how they *all* needed patience in waiting for the Lord’s return! This made sense, but why was it stated as if it were about seven particular churches? Curious decided to go with the plain meaning and file the historicist interpretation as a theory in need of testing.

He was curious about the location of these cities and found that they were all in one region of what is Turkey today. But he also noted that the well-known church at Colossae was not included, even though it was in the same region and close to Laodicea—which was a strike against the literal interpretation. Then there was the fact that all were to be included in one book, which made less sense if they were specifically to the needs of separate churches—another strike against the literal interpretation. But Curious was still not ready to abandon the straightforward approach without a definitive reason why the messages were not meant for churches in those particular cities. What would a test look like? If they were not meant to be entirely literal, he thought that probably there would be no contemporary names included in the messages. He would watch for that.

Curious reasoned that since John admitted he was “in the Spirit,” the apostle would have received impressions that did not come through his physical senses.

“That great trumpet-like voice must signal something in itself,” he said as he tried to remember other places in Scripture where a trumpet sounded like a voice (or vice versa), and he came up with this in Isaiah 58: *Cry aloud, spare not, lift up your voice like a trumpet and declare to my people their transgression*

“If that’s what this means, then those churches are in for a scolding,” said Curious. “At least in Isaiah it’s way more serious than impatience.”

You could be right, Curious. Keep reading, and if it turns out that this trumpet-voice is explained by something in Isaiah, then expect to find many more connections like it.

12 I turned to see the voice that spoke to me, and having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands was one in the form of a son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot and girded about at the breasts with a golden girdle. And his head and his hair were white, as white wool, like snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; and his feet were like burnished bronze that has been refined in a furnace; and his voice was as the voice of many waters. He had in his right hand seven stars. Out of his mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword, and his countenance was as the sun shining in his strength.

Here was an astonishing vision of the man John had touched with his hands and known so well in the flesh, who had risen to glory and now appeared to him in overwhelming brightness, a frightful figure beyond human and beyond touching.

"That would be slightly discomfoting to John," Curious said in his dry manner.

By what means did John perceive this, Curious? He said he turned and saw this figure of Christ that must have been blinding in its glory, yet he describes details.

"This is really dream stuff," muttered Curious. "It's a holy caricature."

Of course Curious knew it was not meant to be a realistic picture. *Many waters* rang a bell, and he went back and found this in Ezekiel: *The glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east; his voice was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory.*

"The brightness and the voice 'like many waters' links this to Ezekiel's vision of God," noted Curious."

That should not be surprising.

"But I know I read about this same vision before. Not in Ezekiel. Now where was it?"

Daniel, chapter 10, Curious.

"Most likely it was in Daniel. ... Here it is:

I lifted up my eyes, and looked, and behold, a man clothed in linen whose loins were girded with pure gold of Uphaz. His body was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, and his eyes were as flaming torches. His arms and his feet resembled burnished bronze, and the voice of his words were like the voice of a multitude. ... Yet I heard the voice of his words, and when I heard the voice of his words I had fallen into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground. And behold, a hand touched me and set me upon my knees and upon the palms of my hands.

"John didn't make this up, and he didn't copy Daniel," said Curious.

Why is there any difference at all, O Curious one?

"Clearly they both saw an unearthly being. Could Daniel have seen Christ back then? I thought it was an angel when I read Daniel originally, but now I wonder."

He told Daniel about his struggle among angels for nations.

"He said, *I am he who is and who was and who is to come.* Now I wonder if that refers to more than time and includes manifesting differently in times past and present and future."

He has opposition in all time, terrestrial as well.

"There's remarkable symbolism here that's consistent. Eyes are for receiving light, but these eyes in both cases send out light."

Okay, what do you think that means as a symbol?

"That's a sign I would assign to Jesus because he said he's the light of the world."

Don't be too sure of that. Flames of fire could mean scorching weapons. What about the voice? How do you explain the voice here in Revelation being like many waters while in Daniel's vision there is that voice of a multitude?

"What is the voice of a multitude? It's indistinct and impossible to get meaning out of it. Actually, it sounds like a waterfall."

Revelation

What about the sword? It's so startling. Why is it missing in Daniel's vision?

"It says the sword proceeded out of his mouth. There's action in that, like it's not a fixed part of the figure. I think this is a case where the spiritual thing has no exact physical counterpart. Daniel might have sensed the same thing but omitted the metaphor."

Perhaps the sharp sword proceeding out of his mouth was presented to John because he had the advantage of hearing Jesus speak sharply on many occasions while Daniel, if he saw him at all, saw him from afar and never actually heard him speak before he had that vision, and would not know what the sword meant.

"I think if John were not so struck by the brightness and glory in the vision, the sword coming out of the mouth would have made him laugh—as he surely wouldn't be puzzled by it. Daniel had no New Testament, so he'd be puzzled by a sword being in that location especially on a glorious body."

You've made it seem reasonable, Curious, but remember, Daniel was a master interpreter of visions and may have read Isaiah. And another thing: are you sure it doesn't mean more than words? Christ is God, and the words of God on many occasions were devastating.

"Actually, I remember that Isaiah used a similar metaphor."

Curious searched and found what he was looking for in chapter 49.

*Listen to me, O isles,
and hearken, you far-away peoples:
Yahweh called me before I was born;
from the womb of my mother he named me.
He has prepared my mouth to be like a sharp sword
while he hid me in the shadow of his hand.
He made me a polished shaft
in his quiver and kept me close to him.*

Because of what came next, Curious had previously decided this was personified national Israel speaking; but as he read it now it became clear that the speaker was Christ telling of his own preparation in God. However, in the next verse the voice switches and becomes national Israel telling about her experience in being the womb of Christ:

*He said to me,
"You are my servant, Israel,
in whom I will be glorified."
But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I have spent my strength for naught and vanity.
Yet surely Yahweh is my judge,
and my wages are from my God."*

Then Christ speaks again:

*"And now Yahweh, who formed me from the womb
to be his servant,
to bring Jacob back to him,
and cause Israel to be gathered to him,
(for I am honored in the eyes of Yahweh,
and my God is my strength)
—he says, 'It is not enough that you are to be my servant
to raise up the tribes of Jacob and restore the preserved of Israel:
I will also make you a light to the Gentiles,
that you may be my salvation to the ends of the earth.'"*

Next the narrator steps in:

*Thus said Yahweh,
the Redeemer of Israel,
to his Holy One,
to him whom man despises,
to him whom the nation abhors,
to the servant of rulers.
Kings and princes will behold and rise,
and they will worship him
because of Yahweh who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel who has chosen you.*

The passage had been ambiguous and not clear at all when Curious encountered it the first time. Now the meaning leaped out at him (so to speak). He was astonished at how clearly this passage in Isaiah prophesied of Christ and the effect his words will have in bringing Israel back as well as extending salvation to Gentile nations. He was reminded of what Jesus told his disciples: *From Moses and all the prophets he interpreted to them the scriptures concerning himself.* And now the risen Jesus Christ was interpreting Isaiah through this vision of his Revelation and presenting it to this favored apostle.

"But unfortunately, that sword doesn't quite match up," complained Curious.

He was thinking that the sword here in Revelation was double-edged which presumably meant that it cut two ways or had a dual purpose.

"Well, Isaiah had the arrow too, which would be like cutting in the other direction," he added, thinking about the warnings of condemnation in Jesus' words that often accompanied the promise of blessing.

Also in Isaiah we might note this, which Curious did not remember: *He will smite the earth with the rod of his mouth; and with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.* And he might have noted that compared to that blunt rod the sharp sword is a discriminating tool.

But as we know, Curious did remember the reference to the sword in Hebrews: *The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.*

"If John was familiar with Hebrews, that by itself would explain this," said Curious as he imagined John rendering his vision in the spirit into meaningful words. "On the other hand, the idea of the sword metaphor was neither John's nor the Hebrews writer's. Job's friend Eliphaz used it. I think the symbol was invented in heaven."

What do you say about the feet, Curious? John took special note of the glowing feet, and Daniel noted bright metallic feet and arms too. Let's hear the meaning in that.

"I'm not Daniel, so I can't interpret everything," said Curious. "The brightness and glowing feet might just spell 'glory' in heaven's vocabulary like it does in ours."

I agree with that. It could be simply a reflection of heaven. Another case is when Ezekiel noted that the feet of the cherubim *sparkled like burnished bronze.*

"It's a characteristic of a body in heaven," said Curious. "It means it's not flesh."

It's time to move on, Curious, and you haven't shown any curiosity about the seven golden lampstands surrounding him and the seven stars in his right hand.

"John was impressed by the white hair because he compares it to white wool and then to snow. There's something like that in one of Daniel's visions ... Here it is in chapter 7: ... *the ancient of days was seated: his raiment was white as snow and the hair of his head like pure wool.*"

The similarity is striking, but the match isn't exact.

"They're different, but there's a family resemblance," said Curious.

It would be unlike Curious to pass over the seven lampstands at his master's feet and the seven stars in his right hand unless he thought there would be an explanation further on in the text—which there is, of course.

17 And when I saw him I fell at his feet as one dead.

Then he laid his right hand on me and said,

“Fear not, for I am the First and the Last and the Living one: I was dead, and behold, I am alive forever; and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”

“How did he know it was the right hand that was laid on him if he was flat on his face?” Curious objected.

Do you have to be curious about everything? Remember, this is *not* physical.

“Oh, I get it! He sees himself in the scene of this vision—not that he actually experiences being in it. That confirms that we're dealing with symbols here.”

You'll miss the main things if you keep wondering about minor things, Curious. What do you make of *the keys of death and of Hades*?

“The main point he's making is that he unlocked death, so he knows how to do it.”

Why does he mention keys, Curious? Isn't that superfluous?

“Now he's offering to unlock the gates for others.”

There's no padlock on the gates of Hades. What do the keys represent?

“He said he would build his church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. So death is the gates of Hades that cannot be forced open because, well, because when you're in there you're dead. He's given to the church the keys to open the gates.”

Yes, and the key for you and me is his own resurrection! Don't forget that.

19 “Write therefore the things which you saw and the things which are and the things which will come to pass hereafter.”

“Sounds like another writing assignment,” said Curious. “The ‘therefore’ must link it to the keys, so this must interpret the keys. Apparently John is going to be writing about the future resurrection of the saints which the keys make possible.”

20 “The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in my right hand and the seven golden lampstands is this: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are seven churches.”

Curious was fascinated by these passages bristling with symbols. The question that forced itself upon him was, “Who made all this up?” Having read John's earlier writings, Curious saw some similarity in the style, but the dense symbolism was new and therefore he judged that newly inspired artistry enabled John to report what he saw.

The golden lampstand was familiar from the tabernacle where it was described in detail; and being carried over to the temples in Zechariah's vision it became clear that each lamp represented one of the seven spirits of God. In the Old Testament, the temple at Jerusalem became the one place God had authorized to represent his presence on earth. But now each church had the complete Spirit, just like the one temple did.

“This means the churches, individually and collectively, replaced the temple in Jerusalem,” said Curious. “So this vision and the writing of it must have taken place later than 70 AD when the Jerusalem temple was put out of business.”

But still Curious was not completely satisfied that he understood the nature of John's vision. His thinking went something like this:

“It could be that what John perceived, however he perceived it, was impossible to put into writing as he was bidden to do, so he translated as well as he could into terms that could be written down.”

I understood what Curious meant. For example, if the double-edged sword was established symbolism, it could be a combination of “in the Spirit” vision and John's effort to write it down in sensible language meaningful to readers familiar with the Scriptures.

2 *“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:*

These things says he who holds the seven stars in his right hand; he who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands:

We know Curious well enough to know what snared his curiosity in the first line: it was addressed to an angel, not directly to the church. Curious understood that “angel” signified “messenger,” but why was it not addressed to the bishop or some leader in the Ephesian church? Certainly the One from whom it was issued knew every name in the congregation; he did not depend on John’s knowledge—and John probably knew.

Then Curious remembered the “test” he had thought of applying to these passages. The angel being used instead of an identifiable name or title was another strike against the literal interpretation, and that was the third strike.

So if this church at Ephesus represented a period of history, he guessed that the angel to oversee that period of time would be charged with making the message available to the whole church. It seemed logical enough, but Curious was not entirely satisfied because if the church represented a period of history, might not the angel represent heaven’s opposition to the “spirit of the age” out of which the church was called? This message to the Ephesian church then would embolden them to take a strong stand against teachers of false doctrines—errors would be deadly to the movement that had as yet no concise charter. Though a doctrinal statement could be derived from the letters that were circulating from the apostles, false teachers could easily promote dishonest doctrines to the Gentiles, at least, who were not familiar with the foundational Scriptures of the Old Testament which had established the character and authority of Yahweh—errors such as leaning toward Greek and away from Hebrew philosophy.

Hence the seven churches *taken together* could cover all types of church culture and practice that would arise—perhaps loosely connected with periods of history but not necessarily in a serial manner. (At least this is what Curious might have been thinking.)

2 “I know your works—your toil and patience—and that you cannot bear evil men. You tried those who call themselves apostles, but are not, and you found them false. You patiently held out for the preeminence of my name and have not grown weary of doing so.

“This must be the model church,” Curious surmised. “Because they hold Jesus dear they diligently and patiently repel and reject the counterfeit gospel involving other names and those promoting such; and what could be more important than that?”

4 “But I have this against you: you have left your first love. Remember the place from which you have fallen; repent and go back to doing what you did at first, or I will come and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you turn around.

“Wow!” uttered Curious for the seventh time (at least) since he began his tour through the Bible. “While they successfully defended the truth, they still fell!”

What were the works of their “first love” that they had abandoned, Curious? Had they stopped defending the truth? Had the false apostles finally succeeded in eroding their love of their Savior? Apparently their light to the world was going out and they needed to reverse the trend or lose their place in history!

“But you have this: you hate the business of the Nicolaitans which I also hate.

Here was a fine puzzle for Curious: a name of someone, apparently, whose practices were hated by Christ. It sounded like this “Nicholas”—or whatever his name was—had started quite a movement, yet it was something different from the false teachers; otherwise it would be out of place here.

A Nicolas was mentioned in the book of Acts, but that man was a reputable disciple of Christ chosen to minister to the needs of people in the early church, a man of “good report, full of the Spirit and of wisdom.”

Revelation

What about the context, Curious?

"That word 'hate' follows 'love' so closely, I wonder if Yes, that hate must be a legitimate exception to the love."

Then it occurred to him that he may not have been curious enough about "you have left your first love." He remembered John quoting Jesus as saying, "*A new commandment I give to you: love one another just as I have loved you.*" Also there was much in John's first letter about this kind of love. Curious turned back and found, *He who says he is in the light yet hates his brother is still in the darkness; he who loves his brother lives in the light, and there is no occasion of stumbling in him.* Moreover, Peter wrote much about this. For example, *Above all things be fervent in your love among yourselves.* (But curious didn't think to check First Peter.)

"Love and hate again," Curious noticed, "but the other was 'yes' on both, and this is 'yes' on love and 'no' on hate. So the Nicolaitans must not have been brothers."

Read it again, Curious.

"Oh, well, it says Jesus hates the *business* of the Nicolaitans, not the Nicolaitans themselves. But I'm sure that would be difficult in practice, whether they were brothers or not. It would be a lot easier to go along with their business, whatever that was."

Are you forgetting the context again, Curious?

"They weren't loving their brethren like they were at first, for some reason. If the Nicolaitans' business in the church was questionable, it would cause dissension, and the love among the brethren would not be as at first, especially if the business of the Nicolaitans was a growing concern. Now what sort of business could it be?"

Curious had become convinced that the Bible answered the questions it raised if he looked in the right place, so with the page being still open in First John, he noticed this: *But when you keep his word, your love of God has truly been perfected.*

His word certainly includes the new commandment to love one another. And what else did he tell them to do that might become difficult to maintain?

Curious tried to think of some words of Jesus that were especially related to that, and he remembered the incident in Matthew and Mark where James and John had decided they were deserving of special honor and power in the kingdom:

The mother of the sons of Zebedee came with her sons and knelt down to ask for something.

"What is it you want?" Jesus asked.

"Say that my two sons will sit on your right and left in your kingdom."

"You do not know what you ask," he replied [to James and John]. "Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?"

"We are able," they declared.

"Indeed, you will drink my cup. But to sit on my right and left hand is not mine to give: it is for whom my Father has prepared it."

The other ten disciples were outraged when they heard this. So Jesus called them to himself and said, "You know how Gentile rulers lord it over their people, the great ones exercising their authority over them. But among you it must not be so. If anyone desires to be great among you, let him be your minister; whoever would be first among you must be your servant, just as the Son of man came not to be ministered to but to minister and give his life, a ransom for many."

"Public servants generally desire to achieve greatness by ministering to their constituents, which means they're serving themselves first," opined Curious. "That's fine as long as they don't craft policies that increase their wealth and reduce our freedom."

Peter, in his first letter, warned leaders against lording it over their charge. Are you accusing them of doing it anyway? If so, I agree. The leadership role naturally tempts one to increase one's influence to excess, and often the laity find comfort in it!

“Church politics likely caused the loss of their first love,” Curious concluded.

Further, he guessed that a translation mistake—if it was a mistake—explained why Nicolaitans appeared as a cryptic name that voided the message.

And that led to another thing to question:

“Were these messages to the churches written in that manner so as to be understood only by certain ones at certain times?”

He was reminded of another verse from Isaiah:

*Bind up this testimony;
it shall be the law among you, my disciples.*

Curious was surprised to find a note to the general reader tacked onto the end of this message to the Ephesian church:

7 *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.*

This made it clear that the Ephesus message was not meant only for one particular group of people at one geographical location and one point in history: it was merely styled in that manner. So the failings of that church were matters to be overcome in a wide context, maybe by everyone. Certainly the reward of sustained life was worth every effort to keep the love of the brethren alive: it was the passport to Paradise!

Curious knew the “tree of life” reference was planted there for curious readers, and he stopped to admire it respectfully without being inclined to dig up its roots.

“There’s that tree of life again!” he said. “It’s been long in hiding since Genesis.”

Is this a reward to be enjoyed by some, or is it simply a metaphor for salvation?

“In the Garden of Eden this tree had something to do with living forever,” Curious recalled. “I’ll assume it has the same meaning here.”

Obviously. But how does that link to “him who overcomes”?

“If Eve had overcome temptation”

That puts a point on the “overcomes,” Curious. I think you’re right.

“So this is about resisting the devil.”

And how do we do that? Might not the devil have the upper hand?

“Where did it say, *Resist the devil and he will flee from you?*”

Eve was misled by a subtle lie. And I doubt that she saw the devil in the serpent. How do we avoid such pitfalls, Curious?

“Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” he whispered.

8 *“And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write:*

The First and Last, he who was dead and lives again, says these things:

I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich) and the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not but are the synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of the things you are about to suffer: behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, that you may be tried, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful even to death, and I will give you the crown of life.

Curious had no trouble identifying their richness in poverty, but he was surprised that Satan had a synagogue until he realized it did not say that: the hearts of these particular Jews were the meeting place where Satan was welcomed, and thus these people were persuaded to discourage the Christian church by instigating the arrest of its members.

The whole message was about being courageous and not being afraid, because the Savior knew all about it (even knowing the duration of the incarceration) and told them it was a trial of their faith for which they would be rewarded if they overcame the temptation to shorten their stay in jail or save their skins by denying him.

Revelation

Curious remembered that James had written a similar thing: *Blessed is the man who endures temptation, for when he has been approved he will receive the crown of life which was promised to them who love him.*

"That throws a different light on temptation," said Curious.

But now he wondered about the ten days. Clearly it was a limit on tribulation, but then it could go either way: release to continue living on earth or release by death to be rewarded in heaven.

"If it meant the end of trial and tribulation in ten days, then why was death mentioned?" said Curious. "That's heavy!"

Their whole outlook on life and death was different from yours, Curious. They counted it an honor to die for Christ who had died for them.

Scenes from contemporary news reports came to his mind where Christians were being imprisoned and murdered for not surrendering their allegiance to Christ. He recalled the words of Jesus: *A slave is not greater than his master, so if they persecuted me, they will persecute you.* And in another place he had read something like, *They will kill you, and you will be hated in every nation when you proclaim my name.*

"If the ten days meant they would be slowly tortured to death, that's a long time by any standard," said Curious.

It was not the ambiguity that bothered Curious, it was the seemingly arbitrary ten days regardless of how they were interpreted.

"But there is a flow," he stated as he thought more about it. "Satanic lies within religion leads to persecution of true believers which leads to martyrdom which leads to the reward of eternal life."

So what about the ten days, Curious? Where does that fit in the flow?

"Ten days simply means the whole thing is limited and will not go on forever."

11 "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be harmed by the second death.

Curious took "not being harmed by the second death" to be another way of saying "will eat of the tree of life" and "receiving the crown of life." But each phrase also revealed something interesting and slightly different. Here it was a confirmation of resurrection, and it suggested that it was during one's resurrection that death could be harmful, which was not exactly like "sinners go to hell."

"Apparently, everyone gets resurrected at some point," he reasoned.

Yes, but have we not seen resurrection spoken of only for the righteous?

"If there's a resurrection to judgment, that could be worse than none!"

12 "And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write:

These things says he who has the sharp two-edged sword:

I know that while you live in a place where Satan is enthroned, you hold fast to my name and have not denied your faith in me—just as in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan has sway.

"Here's a name!" exclaimed Curious. "And no, the sword isn't John's embellishment."

He stopped to think, because Antipas appeared as a name of a faithful witness who had been martyred in Pergamum, making this letter uniquely applicable to that particular place. He would have to realign his opinion about the purpose of these letters.

Consider this, Curious: what if, instead of being lauded for his faith, Antipas had been cited for having endured an unusually cruel torture without flinching?

"But what does it say, really?" Curious asked himself. And he answered his own question: "The commendation is for: 1) not folding when persecution threatens; and 2) being faithful to death. The singular name is like the ten days: it implies a limit."

In other words, there are no particulars about the circumstance cited here.

But Curious' curiosity inevitably attacked the name. It was a curious coincidence that Herod Antipas had been called "that fox" by Jesus. So if "Antipas" has a meaning, he reasoned it must be neutral as far as character is concerned. Curious looked it up and found that "Antipas" means "like father." So a free translation could be, "Like in the days of your fathers when one was faithful to death."

He noticed that Pergamum was apparently unique among these cities for being the place where Satan held sway directly. Curious knew there were temples to pagan deities all over the Roman empire and that Satan lurked behind their gods. So what could this be that was exceptionally satanic? There was something about the name of this place that rang a bell, and "Galen of Pergamon" came to mind. Curious had once studied to become a nurse (but gave it up after being exposed to the dysfunctional hospital where he was being trained), and in the history of medicine he remembered that this Galen of Pergamum was a brilliant pioneer of scientific medical practice.

"If Satan's throne is in the medical establishment, I wouldn't be surprised," said Curious. "But Galen is proof that not all that came from Pergamum was evil."

Had Curious known that Pergamum was renowned in the Roman Empire for its healing arts that bordered on the diabolical, perhaps he would have said more.

14 "But I have a few things against you: you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit fornication."

No doubt this was about fornication, literal and symbolic, in religion. But also it reminded Curious of the apostles' edict designed to settle the question about needing to adopt Jewish religious practices. He had thought it odd that these two things (plus abstaining from blood and the meat of animals strangled, which sounded like health laws) had been set as the minimum moral foundation—and that Paul later discounted the rule about eating things sacrificed to idols. But now, here it appeared again in this dictation! He wondered how John felt about this, for he had written about comprehensive moral and spiritual principles that were expected of followers of Christ.

Curious was too much into the revelations embedded in these texts to let this go as a curious anachronism. The time scale had been greatly expanded by its reference to Balaam, and so he opened his thoughts to the scandalous issues he had been hearing about in churches today, foremost of which was fornication among leaders. But what of the meat sacrificed to idols? He read it again. No, it said "things" sacrificed to idols, not specifically meat. What things might be sacrificed to idols today? Curious had seen idol worship in his travels and the many things that were laid beside images of animals and demihuman statues, but that wasn't Christian practice—or not distinctly Christian. He had been inside Roman Catholic buildings where he saw what worshipers had brought in and laid beside what qualified as idols. But those things were not for eating later.

"What else could it be," he wondered. He pictured the Mass, where the wafer and wine were considered actual body and blood of Jesus. Could it be that their Mass "sacrifice" was so far from the present reality of the glorified Christ that they were essentially sacrificing to the wooden carving of a man on a cross mounted on the wall behind the altar? Could today's priests be Balaks having been taught Balaam-like by Nicolaitans of the Church to cast stumbling blocks in way of God's people for their own administrative profit?

"Actually, that fits quite well if the originators of such teachings are the Balaams here," said Curious.

Now who were these Balaam-like people in the congregation at Pergamum, Curious?

"But in the original setting it must have been influential members who looked down on people who adhered rather strictly to the apostle's teachings on moral lifestyle."

15 *"You have some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans in like manner.*

"Holy" (Curious was about to utter a profanity but caught himself.) "There it is! It's like this Pergamum church models a development of that practice. It's sure to happen: lording over the laity now has no opposition. It all goes together!"

16 *"Repent therefore, or else I will come to you soon and I will make war against them with the sword of my mouth.*

Curious was hot on the trail, and jumped on that one: the sword was the word of God and it warred against established churches that made Scripture inaccessible to the laity. Curious knew enough history to connect this to the ecclesiastical wars that raged in Europe and on the British isles over these issues. As Bibles were being translated and printed in large numbers, the sword of the Word enabled the Protestant upheaval.

17 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone. Upon the stone a new name is written, which no one knows but the one who receives it.*

"This is awesome!" shouted Curious. (He was in the Spirit himself now.) "Manna!—the food from God to feed his hungry people in the desert; it's like in churches where leaders have deserted the Word—still there's hidden food like I seem to be getting now. I've no training in Bible interpretation, but here I am, receiving hidden manna!"

Okay, settle down, Curious. Now what is that white stone?

Curious "guessed"—or maybe he had heard somewhere—that in ancient Rome a white stone was given to someone who had been acquitted in a court of justice.

"It serves as an apt symbol for that," he said. "It represents an assurance of being forgiven of all the sins and foibles in one's life, but it's hidden like the manna and not a literal certificate that anyone else can see."

But what does that have to do with a name?

"New name There were several of those: Abram became Abraham, Sarai became Sarah, Jacob became Israel, Simon became Peter, Saul became Paul. It could be just that."

Sure, but everyone knows those names.

"I never liked my name," said Curious. "I wonder what name Jesus would give me."

Perhaps you're missing the meaning of this, Curious. Your interpretation of the manna didn't equate it to literal food; so why does the name on the stone need to be literal?

"But if the name is known only to me, what good is it? Unfortunately for me I'll have to remain Curious."

As he pondered the puzzle of the new name, he focused on the simple fact that the recipient of the white stone and Christ were the only ones in on the transaction.

"So it must be a secret name that Jesus wants to be called by, and that doesn't make literal sense."

Curious: think about it. How do you feel about being in a crowd of millions standing before Jesus?

"It must mean a direct channel of communication with Jesus, like a private phone number that only I know and that he will answer."

I must say you could be right. Telephone numbers would be meaningless in the first century, and this unique stone is very much like that.

18 *"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write:*

These things says the Son of God whose eyes burn like flames of fire and whose feet glow like burnished bronze:

I know your works: your love and faith and ministry and patience and that your later works are more than at first.

“Finally, here’s a church that’s going in the right direction and has made some progress in those important areas!” said Curious. “If this refers to modern times, it should be interesting.”

Notice the eyes, Curious. He’s illuminating something that will make them tremble.

20 “But I have this against you: you tolerate the woman Jezebel who calls herself a prophetess; she teaches and seduces my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she would not repent of her fornication.

“Uh-oh. Not so good,” Curious muttered. “They do works of love but tolerate sin.”

He had an idea about the meaning of Jezebel in this context, for he was not afraid of metaphors. The charge against her perfectly fit the original Jezebel who, after becoming queen in Northern Israel, promoted Baal worship. Her daughter Athaliah usurped the throne in Jerusalem, killing all but one of her grandchildren, and in doing so nearly ended the Davidic line. Both women were devil worshipers and suffered violent deaths.

Curious had an idea that the evil which worked through Queen Jezebel was a spiritual personage, a demon goddess who infiltrates churches and woos some with her occult lore and practice.

22 “Behold, I cast her and those in bed committing adultery with her into great tribulation—unless they repent of her works.

Curious noticed three startling things being implied here: 1) the number of those involved in this spiritual adultery is significantly large; 2) repentance is held out as a way of escaping guilt; and 3) the ones who are free of this charge can count on escaping “great tribulation.” He felt challenged to identify the adulterers in current Christian movements, though he knew almost nothing about them. All he knew was from the few glimpses of bizarre and sensational mega-churches that made the news: leaders so idolized that scandal had no lasting effect; celebrity musicians drawing audiences where smoke, lights, and rock music made church services resemble hell’s concerts; faith healers using shocking methods foreign to the Scriptures yet with followers eating out of their hands and swallowing their lies. After all that Curious had read in the Bible about the Christian life, he could not get his head around these manifestations of spirituality being of the same kind. “I wonder where all this is going,” he said.

23 “When I terminate her offspring with death all the churches will know that I am he who searches inmost feelings and knows minds and gives to each one of you according to your works.

As so often happened, the Bible answered the questions it raised, but sometimes in doing so it raised another question. What was this selective death? It had to be something that connected with spiritual adultery. That ruled out disease or war or any natural disaster. Even if some Christian dropped dead like Ananias and Sophira did, how would everyone know that the reason was their idolatry and not some other transgression? An answer close at hand was “great tribulation.”

“That must be it,” said Curious. “But this really necessitates him coming and removing the faithful ones before such great tribulation.”

24 “But to you I say—to the rest in Thyatira who have not this teaching and who know not the deep things of Satan, as they are wont to say—I cast upon you no other burden. Nevertheless, that which you have, hold fast till I come.

Curious was somewhat aware of the attraction of occult lore and mystery religion that fascinated people everywhere and probably had been doing so forever. Either what he knew of satanically inspired Christian movements was just the surface of things, or it would be getting much worse and tempting others to get involved.

“But those who have read and understood this are forewarned and will hold to the truth and look for Jesus to come for them before the great tribulation,” Curious said.

26 *“And he who overcomes and he who keeps my works to the end, to him I will give authority over the nations: he will rule them with a rod of iron—as the vessels of the potter are broken to shivers—as I also have received of my Father; and I will give him the morning star.”*

This was like the last piece of a jigsaw puzzle whose shape is apparent but color indistinct until the piece is put down. Curious was reminded of those prophecies promising offices in a future theocracy, and here were the qualifications: faithfulness of the church within the church as long as it remains.

“It doesn’t say what the end is,” said Curious, “but it would have to be the end of the person’s life or the end of the church’s life, whichever comes first.”

Apparently, Curious wasn’t aware that the majority of Christians oppose the idea that the church age will come to an end before the second coming of Christ. How would he know about that misconception since all he knew was what he had read in the Bible?

“Now what is the ‘morning star’?” Curious wondered. He remembered encountering that term in Second Peter:

Like a lamp shining in a dark place, we have the word of prophecy more sure. You do well to take heed until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.

“It makes perfect sense,” said Curious. “Christ’s government will need good communication from the head as well as obedience on the part of the members who are given authority over the nations. It will be like having his light shine in your heart. No email or telephone needed!”

29 *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

3 *“And to the angel of the church in Sardis write:*

These things says he who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars:

I know your works: you have a name that lives on even when you are dead. Watch out! Reestablish what remains of the original things, which have nearly died, for I find none of your own works acceptable before my God. So remember what you received and heard: repent and restore those things.

“Another church in big trouble,” remarked Curious. “Human innovation just doesn’t cut it in Christ’s book. That by itself says volumes. If only anyone would believe it, the world would be a different place!”

“For if you do not watch out, I will be like a thief when I come: you will be unaware of the hour in which I come upon you.

“Thank God he’s coming to straighten things out,” said Curious. “The sooner the better as far as I’m concerned. But why should I be concerned? I’m not a church member. After reading these messages I’m not sure I want to be one!”

It sounded like that church was in danger of being left behind when Christ carries away his bride, and it would be a surprise to them. Curious knew this was well within the kind of operations God performed in extreme cases of disobedience.

4 *“Nevertheless, you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. Anyone who overcomes will similarly be arrayed in white garments; I will under no circumstances blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.*

“Oh. ... That’s the other side of the coin. You either go for it against the current of the times or you’re lost. Obviously the prize of secure salvation is well worth whatever it takes to ‘overcome.’ But I wonder what that means, exactly.”

He searched back in John’s other writings and found where it said, *I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.*

“The word of God does it. I’m glad I’ve persisted in reading the whole Bible.”

Yes, and now where does that put you, Curious?

"It's interesting that Jesus presents the name of the overcomer to both his Father and to the Father's angels. It sounds like a courtroom setting where the worthiness of this person in white garments is being testified to by Christ."

That your salvation is significant beyond your own welfare? Is that what you mean?

"Obviously it's important to the economy of heaven," Curious added.

Because this person resisted and overcame the pressure to conform to that progressive church, he gets special recognition as a servant of proven reliability.

6 *"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

Curious paused and pondered that statement. Though it had already appeared four times in these letters to the churches (and Jesus had often said when on earth, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear."*) Curious suddenly saw this as a divine command on the order of "Let there be light." And that was troubling because it was limited to those receiving an ear to hear.

"And who would they be?" wondered Curious.

He remembered Moses said that Yahweh had not given the children of Israel ears to hear. But to check his memory, he went back and found in Deuteronomy,

Moses, addressing all Israel, said, "You saw everything Yahweh did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to his land, and to his servants—you saw the great trials, the signs, and those great wonders—but Yahweh has not given you a heart to know, eyes to see, and ears to hear to this day."

He also remembered that Isaiah had quoted Yahweh saying something similar:

Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes, lest they see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their heart and turn again and be healed.

And more recently Jesus in the Gospels and Paul in Romans had confirmed Isaiah:

... according as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor: eyes such that they should not see and ears such that they not hear unto this very day.

So the matter of being able to hear or not hear was not something a person could do anything about: it was something God had reserved for himself. But while that sounded like the last word on "free will," Curious realized it left out the reasons God might have for giving someone ears to hear. It was like pointing out that the verdict in a trial was up to the judge without mentioning the witnesses, the attorneys, and the jury. He recalled in the prophets where Yahweh often complained about Israel being "stubborn and rebellious." That, once again, restored his hope. He sighed and moved on.

7 *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:*

He who says these things is holy and true; he has the key of David, and where he opens no one can shut, and where he shuts no one opens.

"This one departs from the pattern," Curious noticed. "The four salutations before this make reference to things from John's initial vision of Christ and what he said. This is a different key, not the key of death and Hades that was mentioned before."

Curious searched back in Isaiah and found the passage seemingly being alluded to:

I will commit your government into his hand, and he will be a father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. The key of the house of David I will lay upon his shoulder; he will open, and none will shut; he will shut, and none will open.

"This is rather amazing," said Curious. "The application fits for one having absolute authority under the king, as Eliakim had under Hezekiah—but not really well because he lost out when Manasseh became king."

Still, the allusion to an outstanding palace administrator remains valid, does it not?

"If this church is mostly Gentile, would they know about Israel's history?"

Revelation

Their “angel” would be acquainted with Isaiah, and he would explain it.

“Balaam and Jezebel were explained, while this analogy comes with an undefined purpose,” Curious complained.

Yes, evils are easily delineated by examples. Goodness has no beginning or end.

“There must be a reason this is given to this particular church,” said Curious. “If it doesn’t address a problem, then they must simply need to be reminded that Christ is of the house of David.”

But notice this, Curious: he said “key of David,” not “key of the house of David.”

“Of course in a simple metaphorical sense the key of David connects him to David independently of that allusion to Isaiah.”

Yes, Jesus of Galilee was of Bethlehem too, being of the lineage of David.

“Gentiles know this. We all know this, of course. But I suspect this particular church represents times near the end when Jesus is close to taking the throne of David.”

Every time is near the end—just as near the end as is the day we die, if not sooner—but aren’t you ignoring the main point, Curious?

“Now let’s see what it is that he will open or shut.”

8 “I know your works (it was I who set before you an open door which no one could shut): you have a little power, for you kept my word and did not deny my name.

“That says they’ve maintained an accurate witness of Jesus by his grace against an enemy of the gospel that tries to shut them up,” declared Curious.

9 “Behold, I give those who are of the synagogue of Satan to you, those who say they are Jews and are not, but lie; behold, I will cause them to come and bow down before your feet and to know that I have loved you.

“That’s interesting,” said Curious, “a little glimpse into his future kingdom.”

Doesn’t this trouble your curiosity? Tell me: will those Jews who were unwittingly hosts to Satan be resurrected?

“I’d hate to think it’s a scene from the final judgment.”

Likely it’s not, because they’re repentant.

“They tried going through a different door that was held open by the devil.”

It doesn’t say that, Curious.

“I take that back. There’s only one door here, and they couldn’t ignore it; they had to come in and acknowledge that Christ had accepted uncircumcised Gentiles.”

10 “Because you have kept the word of my endurance, I also will keep you out of the hour of the trial—that time which is to come upon the whole world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

“That’s a compact phrase with much meaning,” said Curious. “Jesus endured death and will return and take them out before the hour of trial.”

Then what about the rest of it? It should be easy because it’s a parallel.

“Just as he rose from the grave and ascended to heaven and put unbelief on trial, so he promises to raise them up and keep them from the time when unbelief goes on trial in a big way.”

Explain what you mean by “trial in a big way.”

“The whole thing is about believing. When there’s an event that defies natural explanation, and God warned them about it, some who never had enough reason to believe will start to believe that he’s trying to get their attention.”

Do you think “that time which is to come upon the whole world” will not be a natural event?

“To make it work as a trial to instill belief, it will have to match some warning given in advance.”

11 *“I come quickly: hold fast to what you have, that no one take your crown.*

“Just so, he promises to come for this church before the trial,” Curious observed. “It all fits together!”

And what do you make of the crown?

“They already have a crown of victory for holding onto the word that proclaims the endurance of Christ. To keep it they must overcome the arguments of Satan-inspired religionists who would sabotage their belief. That’s all.”

12 *“I will make him who overcomes a pillar in the temple of my God, and he will never leave it; and I will write upon him the name of my God, the name of the city of my God (the new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God), and my own new name.*

Curious remembered the bronze pillars named after Jachin and Boaz at the entrance of Solomon’s temple which later were taken down and carried off to Babylon.

“These pillars will likewise have names, but they’ll be permanent residents of the holy city, never to be carried away,” said Curious as he pondered the metaphor. “It’s like the Jews lost their testimony and their city, but if these Philadelphians keep the word of Christ—no, not just them; it means anyone who overcomes.”

But there were only two, and they weren’t inside the temple, Curious.

“Jachin and Boaz were emblematic, not structural, but I never saw the point in having them there,” Curious admitted. “They did have big fancy crowns, but I wonder Somewhere in one of Paul’s letters the church of the living God is called the pillar and ground of the truth.”

Names were commonly written on temple pillars in John’s day.

“It says ‘I will make him a pillar,’ symbolically, of course: not just a name on a pillar.”

So the overcomer is promised a place as permanent and important as a temple pillar.

“But the promise includes three names like tattoos if taken literally.”

Why would only that part be literal?

“Anyway, it’s an indelible badge in some form: a certification of citizenship and relationship in heaven.”

Break that down for us, Curious.

“Only one third certifies citizenship in the new Jerusalem, which I guess is a celestial city. The rest are marks of ownership—dare I call it slave branding?”

You know bondservant is a good biblical word, Curious.

“The best thing about being a slave is you can’t be let go.”

I agree; that’s a desirable advantage. What about the new name?

“This confirms what that new name on the stone in Pergamum was about,” Curious claimed. “It’s a private line of communication to Jesus Christ in heaven.”

13 *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.*

“The name of ‘my God’ written upon someone I take to indicate a permanent career in the new Jerusalem,” Curious added, “—like a brand or at least a badge that bears the king’s name.”

14 *“And to the angel of the church in Laodicea write:*

These things says the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.

“Interesting how these all fit together and look forward,” said Curious. “He must be speaking of the creation of the new Jerusalem.”

Do you mean like it said near the end of Isaiah: *Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create, for I create Jerusalem, a rejoicing, and her people, a joy?*

“I could find in Isaiah about Jerusalem being a new creation of God if I looked for it,” said Curious. “Anyway, this is the affirmation of it.”

Not so fast, Curious. Consider the whole verse.

Revelation

"However, I must say that doesn't quite fit the pattern. It sounds a lot like the alpha and omega only reversed. Now let me see how this last of the seven churches comes out."

15 *"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot; I would prefer that you were either cold or hot. Because you are lukewarm, neither hot nor cold, I will spew you out of my mouth.*

"That's an odd metaphor," muttered Curious. "I get the feeling it's an inside joke." You're close on that one, Curious.

"Apparently he respects Satan more than these folks. He never said Satan made him sick. Conventional wisdom about moderation in all things can get one into serious trouble, like it did Israel with their liberality."

Now reinterpret the previous verse.

"I see now why he emphasized that his observation is faithful and true. No doubt they have a different opinion of themselves."

Also, have the Scriptures not warned them of this over and over?

"This is nothing new, actually. They must be blind."

17 *"Because you say, I am rich and have gotten riches and have need of nothing, not knowing that you are the wretched one—miserable and poor and blind and naked—I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire that you may become rich, and white garments that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness not be exposed, and eye salve to anoint your eyes that you may see.*

"I see his strategy," said Curious. "Rich folks don't want handouts; it's beneath their dignity. So he tells them to buy what is needed."

Do you really think so, Curious? Are they actually rich?

"They don't realize they're miserable—poor, blind, and naked. So how will they ever listen to these words?"

19 *"As many as I love, I reprove and chasten.*

"Thank God," said Curious. "But I wish it didn't have to come to that!"

"Be zealous therefore, and repent.

"Easier said than done, I think. I wouldn't know where to begin."

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 will sup with him, and he with me.*

"This is incredibly gracious," said Curious. "The lukewarm guy can begin without repenting of what he knows not. He can invite Christ Jesus in and share a meal as with a friend. ... No, not quite: he has to hear his voice—or at least the knocking—first, and he may be deaf to that."

21 *"He who overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne, as I also overcame and sat down with my Father in his throne.*

"The greatest reward imaginable!" said Curious. "What a promise to the ones that made him sick! If that doesn't demonstrate the grace of God, nothing can. ... But still there's that overcoming business."

Yes, the overcoming. It could be a rare and exceptional thing.

"This goes well beyond grace. ... Or maybe it doesn't."

What do you say about the thrones, curious one?

"It's making my head explode! This is far beyond being a pillar in the temple. "

But the promise of ruling with Christ is not completely new, either.

"I always pictured this kind of reward as being a secondary level of administration. Now he's sharing with these lukewarm Laodiceans, of all people, the very throne of God!"

Not many of them. Perhaps a couple dozen.

"I wonder what qualifies this particular church to even be considered for this privilege?"

Some will have overcome a great temptation. Tell me: what is that?

"Jesus was tempted to rule the world before dying to save it."

How many from this worldly engaged and spiritually lukewarm church will see this connection?

"This whole thing amazes me. How could a human being become absolutely incorruptible like Jesus and be trusted to share his throne?"

Maybe it's the position that Satan lost.

"Hasn't this world seen enough of scandalous behavior on the part of rulers in high places?"

It does seem like a huge risk, considering the trouble caused by Satan's failure to respect his Creator.

"If such perfection is possible, it will prove to Satan that his disrespect wasn't an inevitable consequence of his freedom."

That's a far-reaching idea, Curious.

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

"Apparently one gets to hear the Spirit *after* being open to Christ," said Curious. "But you have to hear something to even know to open the door to him. It sounds like someone could be deaf to it all and never respond for that reason."

Curious wasn't sure about that. The "*if*" in *if anyone hears* was definitely there, but *and opens the door* could be parallel and not sequential, in which case the person is aware of Christ knocking on their door and is entirely responsible for opening it. Curious didn't stop to ponder this further because this was not the first time the ambiguity of human vs. divine responsibility had appeared in his reading, and he doubted that he would get his head around it this time if he hadn't been able to before.

Curious was eager to move on to the next chapter, but he paused and decided it would be profitable to categorize and summarize main points from the seven letters.

1. Commendations:

for toil and perseverance,

for rejecting evil men (false apostles),

for tireless witnessing for Jesus and holding fast to his name,

for keeping the Word.

2. Condemnations:

for neglecting to love the brethren as at first,

for justifying disobedience as Balaam had,

for Jezebel-like promotion of sexual deviation and occult lore.

3. Commandments:

Do not fear testing; be faithful unto death.

Wake up and remember the foundation you received.

Hold fast to what you have been taught; emphasize the original doctrines.

Be zealous.

4. Conditions:

Positive:

increasing in good deeds,

steadfast love and faith.

Negative:

Nicolaitan leaders extending their power over the laity,

incomplete works,

blindness about true spiritual conditions.

5. Warnings:

Remember from where you have fallen and repent.
Failing to repent, a church will not be counted as a church.
Be aware, or he will come like a thief.

6. Threats:

Unrepentant church members face conflict by the sword of the Word.
Jezebel's disciples can expect sickness, trouble, and death.
Opposing Jews will be forced to bow and admit that Jesus loves his church.
The lukewarm church nauseates Christ.

7. Promises:

He stands at your door and knocks: if you hear and open the door, he comes in.
If your sins are forgiven, you will walk together with Christ in white.
If put to death for your faith, you receive the crown of life.
If you overcome, you receive hidden nourishment and a private line to Christ.
Whoever overcomes and obeys to the end:

- will be recommend by Christ before his father and the angels;
- will be clothed in white garments—cleansed of sin;
- will eat of the tree of everlasting life;
- will never have your name erased from the book of life;
- will not be hurt by the second death;
- will be kept from the hour of testing which is coming to the whole world;
- will sit with Christ on his throne;
- will be given authority over nations;
- will be given light like the morning star;
- will be have a permanent place in the sanctuary of God;
- will personally receive the name of God, the city of God, and Jesus' new name.

"Buy gold refined by fire from Christ and white garments and eye salve," said Curious. "That one stands alone. I don't know where to put it."

At first he had come up with six categories, but he felt it needed to be seven, and he left it at seven even after I complained that there's no difference between Warnings and Threats.

Finally, he went back and surveyed his work.

"Why am I surprised that there are more good things promised than all the condemnations, warnings, and threats put together?"

Yes, but don't go picking out your rewards until you find out what you qualify for.

"Too bad they're not unconditional."

Good observation. Now tell me which ones you think you qualify for.

There's a big emphasis on 'overcoming.' Apparently, not everyone succeeds in overcoming."

Okay, get your head around "overcoming" and explain what it means."

"Being obedient is a big part of it."

Do you know when you've been obedient?

"There were several things listed that they need to overcome. I'm glad I'm not a church member."

Are you saying you don't care about receiving any of those promises?

"Some of the things they're told they have to overcome are not things I'd ever hope to be faced with."

Well, you've nearly overcome one thing at least. You had no interest in the Bible, and now you're well acquainted with almost all of the Word of God. Whether you realize it or not you're ahead of most church members. But if you're not sure yet that you want to obey Christ, it would be foolish to wait until you finish this book!

4 After these things, I looked and saw a door open in heaven, and the first thing I heard was a voice like a trumpet saying, "Come up here, and I will show you the things which must come to pass hereafter."

"Oh, this will be good," said Curious. He had no doubt that this was a very different kind of door because while both doors were metaphors, the door on which Christ knocked was to invite someone into his fellowship while through this door he was admitting John—and presumably John's readers as well—to a vision of the future.

2 Immediately I was in the Spirit, and behold! there was a throne set in heaven, and the appearance of the one sitting on the throne reminded me of jasper stone and carnelian gems; and around the throne I saw a bow like a halo that glowed like an emerald.

"Reminds me of Ezekiel's vision of the throne, except there the bow was colored like a rainbow."

How can we account for that difference, Curious?

"John was familiar with Ezekiel. If he made this up, the colors would be the same."

That's fine, but the color must be significant or it wouldn't be mentioned. Why would the color of the bow around the throne be different now?

"All colors are in the rainbow. I can't think of any reason why colors in heaven should never change. Or maybe John was colorblind—just kidding."

The emerald is green, of course, but valuable garnets can be green too. The priest's breastplate had a garnet for Judah and an emerald for Levi.

"Colors might be saying something at one time and something else at another time."

Are you leaving it to the reader to figure this out? John is under a new dispensation.

"Orange carnelian and red jasper agree with the fire and glowing metal in Ezekiel's version. The color of the figure on the throne is pretty much the same while the bow overhead now celebrates a new office of king and priest. That's the best I can do."

4 Arranged around the throne were twenty-four thrones on which sat twenty-four elders wearing white garments and crowns of gold on their heads. And all the while lightnings and voices and thunders came out of the throne.

The throne is very busy, is it not, Curious?

"If this is the ruler of the universe, I would expect a lot would be going on. Voices and thunders indeed!"

That's the easy part. What do you make of those additional thrones doing nothing?

"The thrones around the central throne must be part of the administration somehow. Princes, the king's cabinet, heads of departments come to mind."

If so, what authority are they demonstrating?

"But they're just sitting there in those white robes."

Remember, he is Lord of hosts. Might these be commanders of hosts of angels?

"Elder can mean representative, not necessarily implying old age. So Maybe they're angels."

On the other hand, there's that promise to the Laodiceans.

"I don't see Christ on his throne in this scene, so these thrones aren't rewards for his followers."

Then could the elders be old-covenant saints?

"Actually, since they're part of heaven's ruling class, I don't see how they could be humans at all. Men ruling over nations was promised, but not ruling in heaven."

So it seems. You may never get your head around this one, Curious.

"Angels, when they appeared on earth, were often taken to be human."

Revelation

Before the throne were seven lamps of fire which are the seven spirits of God. And in front of the throne it was like a sea of glass, like crystal.

"Now here are the seven spirits showing up in lamps," Curious noted.

Does this mean the Holy Spirit is impersonal?

"This has got to be the fountainhead of the Holy Spirit."

I like that. So seven would mean all-encompassing, not segmenting or dividing.

"Any spirit outside of this would not be of God," Curious declared like a scholar.

Okay. What about the shining sea?

"The sea is similar to what Moses and the seventy elders of Israel saw. ... Here it is in Exodus chapter 24: *they saw the God of Israel; and under his feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire as clear as the very heaven.*"

Good find. Now what does it mean?

"John is looking across a sea to the throne which he can't go near because it's holy."

That's true if spatial dimensions mean anything in John's vision.

"These images don't make plain sense, that's clear as crystal," said Curious. "But I would love to get my head around this scene because I see more of it coming."

Four living creatures were around the throne as well. They were full of eyes front and back, round about, and within. The first creature resembled a lion; the second was like an ox; the third creature had a face like a man's face; and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle. Each one of them had six wings. Never resting day and night, they said,

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God,

the Almighty who was and who is and who is to come.

"That's out of this world!" exclaimed Curious. "John has become an Ezekiel. No sane person would imagine that and claim he saw it."

Ezekiel reported seeing four living creatures with frames more like men; however, each had four faces resembling man, lion, ox, and eagle. Each had four wings, not six.

"John wasn't copying Ezekiel, but there is some common ground," Curious observed. "Evidently the impression one gets of heaven's creatures is variable."

After thinking it over, Curious had to allow that since John, like Ezekiel, was describing in earthly terms what had no earthly equivalent, his description served the essential purpose—like a political cartoon which uses objects to represent ideas.

"This is what one would expect," Curious reminded himself, "because the Creator's residence in heaven must be of a different order—high above any of the material stuff we know about."

In other words, although visions of heaven cannot be rendered realistically, meanings can be discerned by interpreting their elements.

"If a scene is meant to be understood by the reader, it won't be too difficult," Curious reasoned. He was thinking of the introduction where it said, *Blessed is he who reads and anyone who hears the words of this prophecy—and who heeds the things written herein—for the time is at hand.* "It didn't sound like the reader was expected to have any special knowledge in order to get the blessing."

Aren't you curious about the absence of wheels, Curious?

"Some things are really obvious," he declared. "Wheels aren't in this scene because these creatures aren't wheeling about, unlike the cherubim Ezekiel reported seeing on two occasions."

That's wild, Curious. Now why are these living creatures not wheeling about?

"Here in heaven they stand beside and guard a throne that's stationary. What Ezekiel saw was whirling wheels transporting a traveling throne."

Okay. Now, the wheels in Ezekiel were full of eyes, and here the creatures are covered with eyes. What do you make of the eyes? Is this obvious to you as well?

“There has to be a reason for so many eyes,” said Curious.

The reason for eyes is seeing. Or are these simply decorative?

“Where did I read something about the eyes of the Lord?”

You may be remembering, *The eyes of Yahweh run to and fro throughout the whole earth*. It appears in Second Chronicles 16. It appears again in Zechariah 4, which you mentioned a bit ago. There it’s in a context where the seven lamps of the temple lamp-stand are associated with both the Spirit and the eyes of Yahweh.

“Frankly their eyes are grotesque,” said Curious, “and that gives me a clue about Ezekiel’s cherubim, as well as these living creatures.”

Go ahead and explain your clue, please.

“The other characteristics of these creatures must tie in here too.”

Yes, if the many eyes symbolize the Lord’s seeing throughout the whole earth—

“If birds and animals are God’s instruments, his eyes indeed are running to and fro.”

It could be a metaphor on that level too, Curious. Now what are the wings about?

“Six wings is also weird. Two wings were standard in the artwork of the tabernacle and temple. Even in Ezekiel’s visions four wings were sufficient.”

Don’t forget the six-winged seraphim in Isaiah 6.

“Isaiah saw creatures called seraphim above the Lord on his throne in the temple. In fact, these might be seraphim because Isaiah’s had six wings too. Here it is at the beginning of chapter 6. ... Now this is interesting: nothing is said about eyes. ... Four of their wings cover their faces and feet and the other two wings are for flying. So no, these royal creatures are quite unlike cherubim. For them, at least, Yahweh is too holy to be looked upon, and he must not seem to be beneath their feet.”

But we’re in Revelation. Does John expect us to guess what the extra wings are for?

“The living creatures here might use four of their wings in the same way. Apparently knowledge of Isaiah is assumed, so I think they’re similar—able to fly or move about.”

9 And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, to him who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him and worship him who lives forever and ever, and they cast their crowns before the throne, saying,

*Worthy are you, our Lord and our God,
to receive the glory and the honor and the power;
for you created all things,
and because of your will they were and were created.*

“These creatures, whatever variety they are, appear to be directing the worship around the throne,” Curious observed. “That’s consistent with Isaiah 6. ... It says there, *One cried out to another, saying, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy, is Yahweh of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.’ And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him who called out, and the house was filled with smoke.*”

But there are many differences.

“The big difference is that Isaiah was being commissioned for his work on earth, while John has been summoned to heaven for a preview of ‘things hereafter.’”

Speaking of John’s being taken up to heaven, you might consider his adventure a “type” of the “snatching up” of the church, which we know as the Rapture.

“It fits nicely,” said Curious, “because Israel was promised resurrection on earth. Paul wrote about Christians being with Christ—and he actually experienced heaven.”

After reading the verse over again, Curious wondered why the elders should speak of God being worthy of *receiving* “the power,” for God is the all-powerful eternal Creator. Might the elders be rulers of angelic realms declaring submission to Yahweh within a context where Satan and other angels had seized power in an unworthy manner?

Revelation

Likewise, might the living creatures be representatives of created orders of beings who are loyal to Yahweh and serving him on earth—while serpents and others served Satan’s purposes? Their archetypes are watchful guardians in the throne room.

“Did I hear someone say throne room?” said Curious. “I don’t like that because, as Solomon said, there’s no building that can contain Yahweh.”

Though Curious had not gotten his head around everything in this scene, I thought his curiosity had been satisfied and we could move on.

“I must slow down,” he told himself. “I’m puzzled about the number. Why twenty-four elders? Why not twelve or some multiple of twelve like thirty-six, which would be the emblematic twelve tripled for strength and reliability—the proverbial three-strand rope that isn’t easily broken. But here we have only twenty-four, for some reason.”

Your guess is as good as mine, Curious, but your curiosity is more than mine.

“Well now, let’s remember Satan in this. Say he got a third of the angels to rebel. These elders could be the representatives of the loyal two-thirds.”

Indeed his curiosity was still raging. He now demanded of himself an explanation of the impossible or extremely unlikely dynamic in the throne scene: the living creatures never resting and their repeatedly impelling the elders to be throwing their crowns at the throne *day and night*. (Is there night in heaven?)

“Who picks up the crowns so they can toss them again?” Curious grumbled.

Apparently he had withheld that question and all the questions related to this unending repetition of sound and sight, hoping that an answer might fall out if he dealt with the easy questions first. But when he attempted to visualize the whole scene as described by John, it turned out to be impossible. (He was not seeing it as a cartoon.)

“I think what John saw was merely window display,” Curious declared at last.

What he had in mind was a display of information such as is found near the entrance of a building of importance to the public. The display would be a simplified and condensed picture perhaps having the artistic qualities of a cartoon, designed to convey at a glance the business of the building—approximately what goes on inside. Because to convey to the visitor the actual complexity of the activity carried on inside (which may stretch over years and decades) would be entirely impractical.

This concept set the stage in Curious’ mind for whatever else John might see. He thought it a better way to think of the essential difference between heaven and earth than his theory about John having to translate what he saw into images that were somewhat human-oriented.

“No doubt John did some of that adaptation too,” he said.

Then what understanding does this animated display leave us with, Curious?

“Actually, the crown-tossing would make a perfectly good political cartoon,” Curious mused. “Why not? One memorable image is way more effective than words.”

If it’s a cartoon, then whether the elders are men or angels should be obvious.

“That’s it!” shouted Curious. “It’s obvious: this is meant to illustrate fulfilling the offer to the Laodicean church members, which was only a few lines back in the text!”

So the elders on the thrones are men from the first century?

“The Laodiceans were advised to buy gold and white garments from Christ. I thought it was an exceptional command, and now here’s the reason and fulfillment.”

I must admit you have a strong “joint-heirs” case there, Curious, except where is Christ? And now you have two competing theories about the twenty-four elders.

That didn’t bother him. He said two theories are better than none.

Let’s leave that alone for now, Curious. Explain your cartoon. Why does it appear to have all the elders repeating the same ritual over and over?

“Repeatedly tossing crowns at the throne and falling down to worship is simply a cartoon portraying never-ending commitment to the king,” Curious declared.

5 *I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals.*

And I saw a strong angel proclaiming in a great voice, "Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals?"

3 *But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look at it. And I wept, and I wept, because no one was found worthy to open the scroll or even look at it.*

Curious wondered why this affected John that way but then realized that if there had been rebellion and war going on in heaven, John would have been sad enough as he witnessed evidence of it. And then to hear that the rebellion had possibly infected even the ranks of elders and angels to such a degree that none of them was worthy—

"Maybe it's not that," said Curious. "John was *afraid* Satan had crippled the workings of heaven," he surmised. "If I were John, it would seem like the end of the world to me, because wouldn't Jesus Christ be worthy? And why isn't he in the picture?"

Good question. And another thing that's odd: how is it that every intelligent being in the world and beyond was able to hear the angel's voice?

"The angel's proclamation was rhetorical, and so was the negative response. But how did John see all seven seals? Oh! I get it now: Daniel was told to seal his vision until the time of the end, which meant it would not be understood until end times. This scroll is the same: the seals mean John will not understand—and the reader will not understand—what is written on the scroll until the end is near."

Nevertheless, can you guess what kind of thing is written on the scroll, Curious?

"What's on the scroll? Well, the future—what someone can expect to transpire. That's what John was promised when he was called up to heaven."

Also perhaps the scroll is a legal document that has been prepared—or is being prepared, depending on your point of view—for Satan's approaching trial and judgment.

5 *Then one of the elders said to me, "Weep not: Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome to open the scroll and the seven seals thereof."*

"Of course I knew that was coming," said Curious. "But where is he? I thought he would be seated at the right hand of the Father. And what did he have to overcome? ... He won the keys of death and Hades, but the sin of the world is yet to be overcome!"

Who wrote the scroll and set the seals?

"That's it!" exclaimed Curious. "Almighty God laid out the plan for determining the future of the world, and the plan is written on that scroll. Now I'm excited! His Son overcame death to raise up a credible witness against Satan's claim that the future belongs to him and his demons. The working out of that will be revealed as the scroll is opened! The scroll gets unsealed and Satan's doom gets sealed. I love it. It would really be dramatic if the sacrificed, yet living, lamb of God breaks the seals!"

6 *I saw in the midst of the throne and the four living creatures and the elders a Lamb standing and yet as though it had been slain. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.*

"Now that's an intriguing cartoon," said Curious. "The Lamb standing and yet bleeding is an obvious figure for Jesus Christ. It's not pretty at all, but it says it all."

Yes, it emphasizes the cost to the majesty of God of his incarnation.

"Apparently, the seven spirits of God will be watching and exerting power to keep the plan on track. That's in addition to Christ's death absorbing penalties of sin that held humanity securely in Satan's camp—the Father, Son, and Spirit all working together in seven points of power!"

I'm curious too: what do you mean by seven points of power?

"Those seven horns mean he's all powerful and there are no vulnerabilities in him. He may appear as a lamb, but he's a lion and the horns tell of his power."

I agree we have to look at it that way because on the surface it's grotesque. The meanings that you said lie behind the elements of the picture have been well established. Tell me more about the seven eyes.

"Seven eyes are actually in that Zechariah passage: *these seven shall rejoice ... these are the eyes of Yahweh which run to and fro through the whole earth.*"

What does that tell you, Curious?

"The seven eyes completely link the Lamb to God the Father as well as to the Spirit. It shows he possesses standing he lacked when he said, *of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, neither the Son, but the Father only.*"

Are we going to find out more about those things which Jesus spoke of?

"If it's in the language of heaven, it's hard to say how much of what's inside the scroll can be communicated to us. It will come out in pictures like everything we've seen so far in this book. If we're near the end times, we may understand some of it."

It stands to reason that the back side of the scroll will be a blessing to anyone reading this, but meanings from inside may be obscure even after the seals are broken.

7 And he came, and he took it out of the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one having a harp and a golden bowl full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.

Curious shook his head as he imagined the elders dropping their harps and spilling their incense as they fell bare-headed before the Lamb. The four living creatures joining them this time capped the comical scene.

"I thought the cherubim or whatever they are—living creatures—would maintain an order of decorum above that," said Curious. "But nothing is too extreme for a cartoon. This reminds me of, *at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of things in heaven*"

Apparently all living creatures are included in that. I can imagine a lion bowing to a lamb, but it's an extremely humorous cartoon that pictures an ox playing a harp.

"Because the harps have appeared suddenly, I suspect they allude to the temple worship. There should be singing too if it's really about that."

Golden bowls were listed among the items David collected for the temple Solomon built. But were they used for incense?

"Ah, something else was needed: prayers. So this must be about future events that take place after some period of time—after enough prayers have gone up. If the prayers are to hasten Satan's judgment, we need more."

So there's no actual incense, only prayers. What about the bowls?

"The bowls of incense are labeled for us: they're not literal bowls; they symbolize prayers that have been accumulating unanswered—like so much unused incense that would fill many containers. Of course this confirms we're dealing with a cartoon."

This isn't the first labeling we've seen. When the text identifies something as being representative of something else, does that make it a cartoon? For example, the seven stars in the right hand of the figure of Christ were identified as angels.

"All of these scenes are cartoons, really. If the scene is so unrealistic that it couldn't appear in a stage play, then not recognizing it as being purely symbolic would lead to an absurd conclusion about how heaven would appear to our senses."

According to that, we haven't seen heaven at all.

"In the first scene of this book, John recorded details using visual terms, but did that figure he saw actually exist there on the island of Patmos?"

No, of course not. But it did reveal something about Jesus Christ.

9 *And they were singing a new song, saying,
Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open the seals,
for you were slain
and with your blood you purchased some for God
of every tribe and tongue
and people and nation
and made them a kingdom and priests to our God;
and they will reign on the earth.*

"It's song of victory!" exclaimed Curious. "And it's more evidence that this scene is about a future that was some way off from John's time—that is unless people all over the world in his day were made part of the kingdom without their knowing it."

So is this not premature?

"The time had come to reveal the scroll because of the momentum of the churches. It was an encouragement to them that many more competent souls would be cleared of unrighteousness and be deployed as servants and rulers on earth."

You're about to know the details of the scroll which others have known since John wrote this and had it delivered to the church. May your curiosity serve you well!

"Yet there's no secret in being forewarned and prepared and excited for the second coming of our Lord—and someday taking part in establishing his kingdom."

So at a certain point he will have purchased every soul he needs to get started.

11 *And I saw and I heard voices around the throne of many angels, plus the living creatures and the elders—more than a hundred million—all saying with a tremendous voice,*

"It would be impossible to picture such a scene unless the throne was on top of a 50-story building," Curious remarked.

But that's not how it's described.

"Either someone told John this happened or he was looking at a cartoon-like image with a number on it."

*Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive the power and riches
and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!*

"I read that somewhere before," said Curious. "It was in Solomon's prayer. ... Well, it's similar, anyway. Here it is: *Yours, O Yahweh, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and on earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Yahweh, and you are exalted as head above all. Both riches and honor come of you, and you rule over all; and in your hand is power and might; and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all. Now therefore, our God, we thank you and praise your glorious name.*"

Paradoxically, Solomon's speech is on a higher plane than the angels' song.

"How Jesus humbles himself in accepting praise to a slain Lamb!"

Infinitely!—since he's not essentially inferior to the Father.

"It was near the end of Matthew where Jesus—after he had been slain—said to some disciples, *All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth.*"

Does it bother you that they refer to him in heaven as the Lamb who was slain?

"The slain Lamb in this book is cartoon stuff and not to be taken out of context."

Yes, it takes what is essentially a spiritual transaction and plugs it into the realm of physical objects. That's the style of this book, like it or not.

"That song belongs here and nowhere else," said Curious, "because it's not really a song any more than Jesus is or ever was really a lamb."

Unfortunately, I have to agree with you.

13 And I heard every created thing in the heaven and on the earth and under the earth— and on the sea, and everything in the sea—saying,

“Hold on,” said Curious. “This makes no sense on any level. Number one, fish don’t speak either Hebrew or Greek, as far as I know. Number two, if they did all talk at once, how did John know what he was hearing? There’s no way to visualize it.”

Obviously, it doesn’t mean quite what it says, Curious.

“If someone were to ask me what it means, I would have to say it’s poetry about an earthshaking event that effects every creature whether they know it or not, and if they could say something about it they would.”

Keep reading. We need to find out what they would say if they could say anything.

*To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be the blessing, honor, glory, and dominion forever and ever.*

And the four living creatures said, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.

“This outrageous scene conveys the kind of worship that was to come—will come someday, I should say, otherwise the world would be a very different place today.”

The cartoon style does get the point across very vividly.

“It could have said, ‘everything in the world will be in tune with God.’”

Does it imply that people will not eat fish and that fish will abstain from eating one another?

“I take it that Jesus set the pattern for what will be done by the way he lived.”

Everyone and every thing seems to be happy about Christ receiving all the power.

“We know Satan still rules the nations because he offered his dominion to Jesus and Jesus answered as if the offer were valid. Obviously, the world isn’t a happy place yet.”

Curious reasoned that since he has seen no mention of Satan’s actual demise in this book, the plan which is about to unfold as the scroll’s seals are loosed will deal with that. But he sees a serious problem.

“So there’s something missing here. If the Lamb receives all the power, as they say, why is Satan acting today as though he’s undefeated and still hopes to win the war?”

Have you forgotten, Curious? You have to go back to the Big Picture.

“Yahweh is being very kind to Satan; that’s what it amounts to,” said Curious.

No, he’s being patient with Satan’s dim view of mankind. Remember Job?

“For example, Job pays a huge price so Yahweh can prove to Satan that his best servants aren’t corruptible. But of course that story is unrealistic.”

As a type it isn’t unrealistic. It foreshadows that human beings are not incapable of becoming steadfast servants, ultimately.

“I understand that Jesus makes multitudes righteous. But will we someday become as reliable as Job? Because that’s the kind of servants Jesus needs to rule the world.”

It’s called sanctification, Curious. It’s a process that will produce servants as trustworthy as Job. It starts here and is finished when our burden of flesh gets transformed.

“Satan still needs to be dealt with no matter how well the kingdom is administered, otherwise, it’s going to be very tough whenever he’s pulling strings.”

But, Curious, think about this: how can God justly condemn Satan without condemning all freedom like what gave Satan his ability to be impressed with himself?

“Isn’t it a mystery? I know I’ve worked through this before. But isn’t it a mystery that Satan wasn’t banished immediately when he began to cause trouble? And that was before the creation of mankind, because he was opposing God in the Garden.”

It’s that issue of justice, Curious. It’s a legal case. All creation was good, precisely as God said it was in the beginning—when properly administered. Therefore, Satan’s argument that the flaw his Maker found in him was an intrinsic feature of freedom will be proven false, and then the devil and his demons *must* receive their just reward.

6 *And I watched when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures say with a voice like thunder, "Come!"*

And behold, a white horse came; and the rider had a bow; and a crown was given to him; and he came forth conquering and to conquer."

What did John see, Curious?

"I'm thinking. ... Is this a view from heaven of an event on earth? No, what can one man with a fancy crown do on a horse? This has to be a cartoon."

Is there no particular campaign being depicted here? (Have you noticed that Curious seems to hear me better lately?)

"It's generic. Without more details it could fit any number of events in history."

This book's purpose is revealing Jesus Christ. Is *he* the rider on the white horse?

"The rider on the white horse isn't Christ because Jesus is the Lamb breaking the seal. ... I'm curious about the bow."

Good. Let's hear your thoughts about the bow.

"The crown is given to the rider, but not the bow. The bow could be his political power, or it could represent a promise, like the rainbow—or both. He didn't earn his crown, so he's a politician, not a warrior. He promises prosperity after gaining control. If the bow is a weapon, the arrows are aimed at dissenters. In fact, he'll need a weapon like that to keep the peace."

So you think this is a propaganda campaign. All right, what does the color of his horse signify?

"There's only one answer to the meaning of the white horse: this rider presents himself as a champion of everything that's just and righteous and good for everybody, but at the same time he trots out on a steed of war to impress his enemies. There are those who don't trust him, of course, and some who don't fear him. He must conquer them first to ensure the stability of his regime."

You seem to base your interpretation of the bow on his crown being unearned. Have you honestly gotten your head around this matter of the crown being given to him?

"It was thus on the scroll. What can I say?"

But there's no need to make a primary issue of it. The horse and the rider, crown and all, are simply ordained by the scroll.

"He must know that the crown is his. If so, he made a bargain with Satan or the principalities and powers in heavenly places."

Did you notice the voice that announced this rider?

"There's nothing as terrifying as a lion's roar. But it's only noise. The lion's thundering growl announced this—or was it the lion's command?"

If the lion-creature commands this event, what part does the Lamb have in it?

"No, the 'Come' was a command to John. It meant 'Come and see' in lion language."

You're too funny, Curious. You *do* realize that the "Come!" and the scroll go together.

"I wouldn't seriously suggest that the lion-faced angel would bring this about."

From whence *did* the command issue to send forth the white horse?

"From heaven's perspective it would look different. The white horse, the rider, and all the details are in timeless writing on the scroll—a symbol for a particular plan of heaven. The living creature's 'Come!' alerts heaven and earth that a revelation is unfolding in time—in language both heaven and earth can understand."

Putting it in plain language, you seem to think this is a formal announcement of one or more events bound to transpire at a time future from where John stands at Patmos.

"The fanfare that took place before the scroll was opened tells me John will be taken on a journey through time so he can witness this, whenever and wherever it happens."

That remains to be seen, Curious. Don't infer too much. This is only the first seal of several. Taken together they may serve a different purpose.

3 *And when he opened the second seal, the second living creature said, "Come!"*

And a red horse came forth, and it was assigned to the rider to take peace from the earth and that they should slay one another; and he was given a great sword.

"No truth was in the whiteness of that first horse. It was a deception," Curious said.

Do you mean the rider himself was a deceiver? The crown he wore from the beginning was guaranteed, you know—or at least he must have thought so.

"Now comes this red horse to destroy the peace, clearly ordained by a power behind the scene. Whatever comfort people had is deliberately taken away, which exposes the boast of the white rider."

Since the release of the red horse was predetermined on the scroll, some kind of violence was bound break out. Is that why the white horse was a deception?

"I mean, dynasties don't always end by war. Sometimes they disintegrate or collapse of their own weight. Sometimes they last hundreds of years."

In other words, there was a basis for hope, but conditions were unfavorable for lasting peace.

"It depends on the conditions. Yes, incompetence and corruption of the rider on the white horse might well have defeated his promise."

Crime above fosters death and destruction below. It happens all the time.

"When there's corruption, everyone suffers, and it can lead to war," said Curious.

It says this rider was assigned to take peace from the earth. But I agree: the phrase, *that they should slay one another*, suggests war—even civil war. It fits anarchy too.

"That has an awful sound. Civil wars are the worst," said Curious.

There's still a mystery here. Apply your curiosity to the great sword, please.

"The sword is a metaphor, of course. It could be many things, depending on the period of history."

What would it be in today's world?

"It could be social media."

No, seriously.

"It's an interesting question. I'm going to assume this is about crime and anarchy, so the 'great sword' could be something high-tech or something home-made—probably not large-scale armaments unless it's a full-scale civil war."

Don't miss the clue that's given about that.

"High-tech fits best because it says the sword was given to them, and that doesn't sound like home-made. But what it could be, I don't know. Maybe something yet in the future we know nothing about."

Let's stick with what we know. What else could people be using to kill one another?

"It could be illegal drugs."

People selling drugs? That doesn't sound like a sword—a miniature rapier, maybe, if you're thinking injections.

"Drugs are wielded by doctors too. Even reputable drugs cause deaths."

Are you suggesting that "kill one another" could mean a medical emergency like a vaccine failure?

"I believe we've seen this. The white horse might be recent."

Assuming the red horse is drug dispensers and the rider is drug makers. Then who was the white-horse rider?

"The man in the white house if his crown was guaranteed before he got there."

Heaven forbid. Now we haven't looked for a clue in the voice that announced this.

"The second living creature announced this. That one had the face of an ox."

Did you know that 2021 was a year of the ox in Chinese lore?

6 *And when he opened the third seal, the third living creature said, "Come!"*

And behold, a black horse came; and the rider had a balance in his hand. And I heard what sounded like a voice in the midst of 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 harm the oil and the wine.*

"Sounds like a managed economy," said Curious. "War brings on rationing, but rations don't include the finer things which are reserved for the elite—is the way it looks to me. But the previous seal didn't seem to indicate a full-scale war."

Any number of things could cause shortages and price inflation.

"I wonder why this would be on the scroll in the first place and why it's significant enough to have its own seal."

That's a very good question, Curious. We need to find out.

"It must owe its importance to being in a special sequence of events."

If these three events don't commonly go together, it would mitigate against multiple applications in history.

"If the red horse signifies war and this horse signifies economic hardship, still there's nothing special about that. So I don't see why this sort of thing needs to have a place in the revelation of Jesus Christ—if the red horse is about ordinary war."

What does this black horse signify?

"The black horse could be a clue. ... I don't recall a black horse in the Old-Testament Prophets."

There's a chariot with black horses in Zechariah.

"Wait, isn't there something about chariots and horses of different colors?"

That would be a nice coincidence if it helps us out here in Revelation 6. But does it?

"Here it is. It's in Zechariah chapter 6:

*With the first chariot were red horses,
with the second chariot black horses,
with the third chariot white horses,
and with the fourth chariot dappled horses—all of them mighty."*

Is that all it says?

"There's more, but not much. They're interpreted as spirits. But none of it applies here. Strangely, the white and black chariots team up and go northward on a mission."

That would be orchestrating the judgment of Babylon.

"Wouldn't it be almost incredible if the judgment of Babylon is addressed next?"

Well, it would be.

"Everyone has heard of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, but never in connection with Babylon as far as I know."

So, where is this going, logically?

"What follows this logically is an increased death rate."

Don't forget the voice on this one, Curious.

"Oh, the voice. Yes, the third creature had the face of a man."

Whose voice tells about the prices?

"John said it sounded like a voice in the midst of the living creatures. The only one of them that would be interested in prices would be the man-creature."

Okay. Are you satisfied that you've gotten your head around this black horseman?

"Why didn't I think of this before: if the white horse ushered in a bright, hopeful outlook, this black horse doesn't just represent the opposite, it *brings* the opposite."

In other words, your white deceiver was motivated to bring down the economy.

"And the red horse was sent by the white deceiver to accomplish that."

7 *When he opened the fourth seal, the fourth living creature said, "Come!"*

And I looked and behold, a pale horse, and the name of he that sat upon him was Death, and Hades followed with him. And there was given to them authority over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, famine, and disease, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

"This horseman and his gruesome sidekick are simply personifications," Curious observed.

And the others weren't?

"The white deceiver could have been too; it could go either way, but there's definitely room for a real person on the white. The red rider was given a sword, which makes it sound like the actions of people at a literal level."

The black horse represents food shortage or famine. Is that not personification?

"The rider on the black horse holds up his symbolic scale and delivers a curious little speech, all of which convey the idea of food shortage. But I like to think of him as being the puppet of the white rider; in no way was he detached from that deceiver."

Does this fourth horse excite your curiosity at all, Curious?

"My first impression is that this one simply pales after the others. And it's announced by the squeaky croak of the eagle-creature, which is a far cry from the lion's roar. But the interesting thing here is the one-fourth factor. How did that come from famine?"

The pale horse brings deadly disease. It takes a plague to kill so many, which might be the result of war and famine.

"This has happened and may happen again, but the cause of so many deaths is a medical emergency in one way or another. Don't ask me about the wild beasts getting their share. That seems unrealistic."

The wild beasts would symbolize something, of course.

"Now don't mock me!"

Well, aren't you curious?

"Yes, of course I'm curious. How about this: Wild animals are protected and allowed to inhabit civilized areas, right? How are they going to protect themselves from lions, bears, and wolves after guns are confiscated?"

All right. That might be acceptable, but it sounds far-off. What's coming with the next seal? The four living creatures have had their turns calling out the events.

"I'm getting another idea about those four creatures. They represent four phases of civilization: the lion is conquest (exploration, expansion, and empire building); the ox is blood sacrifice (religion and war); the man represents commerce (industry and economy); and the eagle is death (famine, feuds, and plagues) and contraction."

Since nothing new was revealed by these four seals, your idea at least ties them to the mysterious living creatures, and the four horsemen become illustrations of these four cords undergirding human history. But they might also be prophetic.

"Prophecies earlier in this Book, like in Matthew 24, sound much like what these four seals have revealed, so the seals weren't about delaying these revelations."

As Daniel was told, the interpretation is sealed. But this scroll has two sides.

"From heaven's timeless perspective the seals mark different kinds of activity. In terrestrial time they could overlap as they play out. The chapters in a book, though bound in the order in which they were written, sometimes overlap as the story plays out."

I see. So the seals mark chapters which may overlap in what is real time to us.

"So far the seals seem to have indicated events that are sequential. Apparently they don't overlap, but the remaining seals might. I'm curious if these four seals are different from the rest because we've run out of creatures to announce them."

I think you're right. I see you're looking at the next verse where the opening of the fifth seal is not so announced, and what it reveals is entirely different.

9 And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held; and they cried with a great voice, saying, "How long, O Master, the holy and true, will you not judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Each one was given a white robe, and they were told that they must rest for a little while until their fellow servants and brethren finish their course—those who would be killed just as they were.

"Isn't this ongoing?" Curious asked the page. "Martyrs are being made now, aren't they? And haven't there been martyrs for thousands of years?"

Yes, but isn't it curious that they're pictured as being under the altar?

"Where's this altar? It needs a temple—more evidence for a temple in heaven."

The mercy seat in the tabernacle—and in the temple—modeled the throne of God.

"So that altar must be across the crystal sea."

Remember, God gave Moses the pattern for the tabernacle.

"Cartoons don't have to depict true spacial dimensions. In fact, they seldom do."

Curiously, this altar has space under it.

"A multitude sojourning under an altar is a perfectly fine cartoon."

Okay, but what is the meaning of it?

"It means they're Hebrews who identify with the sacrificial system."

They must be late arrivals in John's day, not from over a period of thousands of years. Something caused them to claim the Lamb Jesus Christ as their Savior. Otherwise they would be waiting in Hades.

"Didn't Paul tell us 'When he ascended on high he led captivity captive'? I would say these folks are 'on high' and still captive."

Okay, it has to be something as significant as that for it to be on the scroll.

"Looking at it that way, they could be martyred countrymen he met in Sheol whom he evangelized and took with him to heaven."

As you often remind us, there would not necessarily be the same time scale there.

"He might have stretched those two or three days into a longer time to round up the spirits of martyrs as far back as Abel and introduce himself to them."

Having come without any sanctification or baptism in the Spirit of Christ they would need to be given their robes of righteousness.

"Ghosts are invisible without robes, of course," quipped Curious.

Shouldn't they be grateful and not complaining?

"That's why they're kept under the altar," said Curious. "They haven't forgiven their enemies yet."

That's not what it says, Curious.

"What it says doesn't make sense. To be held under there for thousands of years is a virtual purgatory for the long-timers."

Therefore—

"Yes, therefore it must be a cartoon. It's about the waiting for Judgment Day."

Then how does the cartoon label the souls under the altar?

"What they say is in a speech bubble:

*How long, O Master, the holy and true,
will you not judge and avenge our blood
on those who dwell on the earth?*

The caption reads,

*How many more will be slain for the word of God
and for the testimony which they held
before the Great Day of Wrath comes?"*

12 And I looked when he opened the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake, and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the full moon became as blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as a fig tree casts her unripe figs when shaken by a great wind—the sky disappeared like a scroll being rolled up. Mountains and islands were moved out of their places,

“Whoa,” said Curious. “It’s a storm of asteroids like has never happened in recorded history while a tremendous quake breaks up the land and volcanoes erupt. This is what Jesus told the disciples would happen before his return—and after the tribulation!”

and the kings of the earth, the princes, the chief captains, the rich, and the strong, and every bondman and freeman, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains. And they say to the mountains and to 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 it?”

“Now this is interesting indeed,” said Curious. “They know that what they’re going through was predicted in this Book. That explains why they’re all in bunkers. Apparently the bunkers are keeping them alive, but when they understand that what’s happening is neither natural nor a man-made catastrophe they can’t handle it.”

So they knew about this scene in Revelation, and the warning elsewhere but thought it was merely representing some war or natural disaster. Is that what you mean?

“They’re forced to face the supernatural.”

How do they know the difference now?

“Because, well, the stars fell, for one thing.”

Do you take that literally?

“None of this is a literal description of what will happen. Rather, it’s another cartoon. The view from heaven sees the mechanism behind things playing out in real (that is earth’s) time, but that’s not the same thing as the event.”

I think what you mean is that plans in the spiritual domain for what transpires on earth are in a spiritual-domain language that cannot be well understood by us.

“I mean when you peek behind the curtain of time, if you see anything, you see what appear to be symbols which represent time-ordered reality. As it’s written somewhere, *They were and were created.*”

Okay. The scroll has two sides. How do you think it will play out in earthly time?

“Nobody knows exactly until it happens, but the impacts on the minds of men are being revealed to John and to us. If there’s more, it’s still sealed.”

And the results are?

“They’re scared. Such unlikely events in the sky cause panic.”

What stars are falling? A meteor shower could be spectacular, but not punishing.

“The worst thing that could happen would be for all the thousands of communication satellites to come showering down.”

I see what you mean. All the astronomical observation screens would go blank.

“The sky would literally disappear like a scroll being rolled up.”

So the cartoon concentrates these several events in one picture.

“The whole of the years-long Day of Wrath is depicted in advance here. Otherwise, if this all happened at once, what would Yahweh do for an encore?”

This is next to last of the seven seals.

“Given that what this seal revealed is so horrendous, I would guess that it’s the last seal to be broken and the seventh remains intact. But a series in heaven would never end at six, so the seventh seal will reveal more and greater wonders.”

Turn the page. Here comes another seven for you, Curious.

“Chapter seven. ... Another seven, but I doubt that has any significance.”

7 *After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that no wind should blow on the earth or on the sea or upon any tree. And I saw another angel ascend from the east having the seal of the living God. And he cried with a great voice to the four angels to whom it was given to harm the earth and the sea, saying, "Harm not the earth nor the sea nor the trees until we have sealed the bondservants of our God on their foreheads."*

"This doesn't fit with what came before it," objected Curious. "That was a dramatic scene with the sky being rolled up and all. Now we're back to pre-harm nature."

Indeed, we're forced to consider this a departure from the time sequence of the foregoing six seals.

"If it's a retrogression, there has to be a reason for it."

Say we've just had an apocalyptic sketch. Now comes more detail.

"A summary of things to come from a psychological perspective, was it? That strikes me as a great interpretation."

Okay, what is this present scene about, Curious? Is it realistic at all?

"Now this speaks of a uniform weather condition over the whole earth, which is very unearthly, actually. It would cut the output of windmills to nothing, showing those who neglected their oil as being fools."

Do I hear an echo of a parable of Jesus in what you just said, Curious?

"The four winds aren't simply winds, obviously. They represent harm, like it says. I take it the tribulation is being delayed while the elect are gathered from the four winds."

What do you say about the angel rising from the east?

"It would signify a new day, like a sunrise, for servants who likely have been experiencing persecution."

Of course. But who are these favored servants of Yahweh? Remember, Ezekiel told of forehead-marking in Jerusalem to protect those innocent of idolatry.

"When the Rapture of those in Christ takes place, it leaves behind, among others, faithful Jews who have been serving Yahweh exclusively."

I see. And that unexpected event moves them to embrace the apostles' teaching.

"And so they're sealed by the Holy Spirit at this point."

Are you implying that the seals are not literal marks on their foreheads?

"The seals could be allegorical because the term was used Here's an example in Ephesians: *having also believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise*. And it does call it the seal of the living God, so it's not a stretch to interpret this as the Spirit of the living God."

Okay, this would be forestalling the winds of judgment for the sake of Jews belatedly turning to receive their Messiah. But why limit the time that this scene takes place to a single event following the Rapture?

"Since judgment has been forestalled for two thousand years, I can't say for sure that the Rapture will trigger this event," Curious admitted.

Jews turning to Christ is a growing trend, and it began in the 19th century.

"But if they're being sealed against tribulation, the trouble signified by the winds would have to be within their lifetime."

That's good, Curious. Yes, if this scene comes before the Rapture, what's the point?

"So this fits between the Rapture and whenever the tribulations start, like I thought at first."

And are you still thinking they're Jews?

"If they are in fact Jews, I wonder how many will be converted and sealed—thousands I would guess for it to be included in this book."

4 *And I heard the number of them that were sealed: 144,000 of the children of Israel: twelve thousand from each of the tribes Judah, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Manasseh, Simeon, Levi, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin.*

"Did someone mention detail?" said Curious. "Where will they come from, I wonder."

You were right, Curious. And here is another puzzle: why is Joseph standing in for his son Ephraim, and why is Judah listed first?

"This isn't one of the traditional list of tribes. It's a new ordering for a new day."

Note that Levi is included, and Dan is missing altogether. (No doubt, Curious will notice that too.)

"Couldn't the Danites muster enough worthies to make the 12,000 quota?" Curious wondered.

These uniform numbers must be symbolic, Curious. Dan apparently got left out for a reason, and then the Manasseh half-tribe had to be included to maintain the emblematic twelve.

"Are there Jews of pure tribal heritage these days?" Curious asked himself. "I know God would know, but why are there exactly twelve thousand from each tribe, large or small? That number has to be a formality."

If the numbers don't add up to reality, then what's the true bottom line here?

"Paul said all Israel will be saved. I think this is pointing to that!" Curious declared.

So the forehead marks indicate salvation? And the angel rising from the east with authority over the tribulation program would usher in a new day for them?

"Their tradition expected Messiah to come from the east, so that fits too," observed Curious.

Thus we've discovered not every living Israelite is going to experience God's wrath.

"This parallels the church of Jesus Christ being evacuated before the great tribulation," Curious pointed out.

Yes, apparently the sealing takes place rather quickly. Exactly when does it happen?

"It happens soon after the Rapture of the church."

Thus continuing the presence of the indwelling Holy Spirit—a reasonable conclusion.

"Otherwise the demons would be in total control for some time."

Does it make sense that the sealed might get *literal* marks on their foreheads?

"The forehead sealing by an angel is perfectly suited to a cartoon. Imagine how the sketch would show demons in the background observing it and having a fit."

We need to make it clear that there's nothing said here about demons, Curious.

"I know there's no mention of demons, but that's how I understand the failure of rulers on this earth—yearning for power yet being controlled by demons."

What about Gentiles during this period? Is there any special grace for them?

"God is not willing that any should perish, and at this time there must be lukewarm and nominal believers left behind who have realized their need of the Holy Spirit."

What choice do they have at this point?

"Many will come out for Jesus at great risk of being martyred, which they would never have done before the Rapture. This would be the majority of church members."

9 *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number out of every nation—of tribes and peoples and tongues—standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white with palm branches in their hands; and they cried with a great voice,*

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

And all the angels standing around the throne and the elders and the four living creatures fell before the throne on their faces and worshiped God:

"Amen. Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen."

"I'm curious about this!" said Curious. "Two different ways of escaping the wrath of God are being compared and contrasted here."

Why don't you list their similarities and differences?

"One: The first group is from almost every tribe of Israel while the second group is from all other tribes and nations.

"Two: The first group is strictly enumerated. The second group is unstructured and unbounded.

"Three: In the first group they're called slaves, chosen for being obedient to the Law. The second group claim salvation by waving palm branches, and their white robes are gifts aside from the Law that mean their sins are covered.

"Four: In the first group they're united and divided by their lineage. In the second group they're divided by their origins and united by their contemporary declaration of faith.

"Five: The first group is kept on earth and protected by special sealing. The second group is kept safe by being in heaven.

"Six: The first group has a special purpose on earth. The second group has been relieved of earthly duty.

"Seven: Everything seems to halt while the first group is saved. No special dispensation is given for the salvation of the second group."

Anything else, Curious?

"The numbers we see over and over: the threes, the sevens, the twelves, the powers of ten—they signify something in heaven."

You're onto something there. Say it out loud to see if it makes sense.

"In the design, which is like an algorithm, the actual numbers aren't determined until it plays out. But the variables that hold the numbers have significant names."

Israel is twelve. Do you think seven might represent the church?

"Seven is a common symbol that represents the whole of something, and it may spawn another seven and so on. Ten and its powers are symbolic magnitudes."

Why has the sixth seal revealed multiple scenes? Is six significant in some way?

"It only seems that the scroll has been set aside before being completely revealed, because the sixth section has three prominent sub-sections. Six is incomplete."

Curious was anxious to move on, but then he noticed a discrepancy.

"It says they came from everywhere, but there's no mention of them being victims of anything. Could they have died earlier, before the four horses were released?"

He was remembering that some of the altar martyrs came from an earlier dispensation, so this segment of the scroll seemed to imply no time sequence.

"The martyrs under the altar were complaining about injustice and were petitioning for retribution. Now we're introduced to this great multitude who came with white garments, and they're not complaining at all: they're waving palms and praising God and the Lamb for their salvation."

So you think this demonstrates inclusion—the martyrs under the altar seeing no further than the Old Testament while this multitude is informed by the New Testament?

"I need to know who they are and how they got there," said Curious.

13 One of the elders asked me, "These that are arrayed in white—who are they, and how did they get here?"

"My lord, you know," I replied.

"Just like me, John needed an answer," said Curious. "The elder understood and knew John would be afraid to ask. Chalk one up for the human-elder theory!"

Dialog like that is not an uncommon feature of the apocalyptic style, Curious.

"Also, it verifies that John is in a receptive, not a creative mood."

Right—in case anyone reading this thinks John dreamed it up on his own.

*“They came out of the great tribulation,
and they washed their robes
and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.
Therefore, they are privileged to stand before the throne of God
and to serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will dwell with them.
No more will they hunger and thirst,
and the heat of the sun will not smite them,
for the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd
and guide them to fountains of waters of life;
and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

“This highly lyrical answer goes far beyond the question,” Curious complained. Apparently it’s a summary of the benefits to be enjoyed in heaven.

“At least now I know, and it’s what I was starting to suspect: they came out of the great tribulation.”

Are they all martyrs?

“They’ve all died, obviously. I don’t think they would be classified as martyrs if they died in the disasters we saw in chapter six.”

If they missed the Rapture, how is it that now they’re saved as well as anyone?

“These are among the ones that weren’t ready for the Rapture and had to get serious about washing their robes in the blood of the Lamb. They belatedly committed to serve Christ and set themselves up for persecution and martyrdom—in addition to the tribulation dangers. Now in heaven they’re greatly blessed, but having come in so late, after the last trumpet, they have much to learn.”

If that’s who these are, where are the saved of the whole church age?—floating on clouds and strumming harps?

“There’s more to heaven. Somewhere the bride is preparing for the wedding. But those martyrs stuck under the altar—it’s amazing that they’re in heaven at all.”

Okay, let’s leave them alone. They have their own story.

“However, I’m still curious about the 144,000. I wonder if they evangelize this multitude that’s saved out to the great tribulation.”

If so, who teaches the 144,000 to evangelize?

“Somehow these select ones out of Israel are enabled to preach Christ.”

That would be quite a miracle worthy of mention, don’t you think?

“It’s just that the two scenes are adjacent I’m wondering if they’re connected.”

Do you mean connected behind the scenes, somehow? Go back and look carefully for a connection.

“Well, it says, *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude*. That’s a break separating the two episodes, so I don’t see any connection other than the seven contrast parallels I noted, whatever that’s worth.”

Before you move on, aren’t you curious about day and night in heaven?

“I’m not sure what to make of the day and night—also those other references that sound like life here on earth.”

I can tell you Curious liked this passage because it affirms the complexity of God by showing him being majestically seated on the throne and also going forth in the person depicted as the wounded Lamb and personally drying their tears. But Curious in his meticulous manner had a problem with the multitude. How could they stand before his throne and also serve him in his temple? And how did that fit with him dwelling with them? He saw only one solution: part of this scene looks forward to them being with Christ in their resurrection life when the kingdom of God becomes established on this

earth. *Then* God will dwell with them. *Then* they will need the Lamb's shepherding. *Then* they will drink the water of life and turn to him for resolution of sorrow and grief.

Now tell us again, Curious, where in heaven do you think the Raptured bride will be?

"I figure the Raptured are in a course of training somewhere. They're modern people being entirely sanctified once and for all and preparing to deal with the great complexities to come with Christ's kingdom on the earth."

Then those dead in Christ who are resurrected just before the Rapture—aren't they in resurrected flesh? Where are their resurrected bodies during the tribulation period?

"Who have I missed? Where are those resurrected from the grave at the Rapture?"

Yes, where are they at this point in the tribulation?

"I'm sure none of the resurrected will be dwelling on earth ahead of the return of Christ and his kingdom."

So it seems they must be in spiritual bodies just like the Raptured folks, which makes it seem they haven't actually been resurrected yet.

"I don't have a problem with that, you know. They'll be deployed to an appropriate time and place to begin their resurrection careers," said Curious.

Yes, you did cover that before. Now here's the seventh seal. You knew it was coming.

"This seventh seal will be the last seal," Curious said vacantly. "Seven means that what it reveals will be everything that's left to be revealed to us."

8 *And when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven—about the space of half an hour.*

"The half-hour inactivity is interesting: like in the seventh day of Creation—and also the seventh day of the week—there's rest and reflection."

Certainly, but more than half an hour!

"Seven is more than a style feature of this book: it represents a building block of heaven's administration, like a fundamental axiom upon which other things rest."

Curious ignored my comment because he was preoccupied with expanding his concept of seven. He might have inquired about the "about," but he never did.

2 *And I saw the seven angels that stand before God, and they were given seven trumpets.*

"That's the first mention of them," said Curious. "Unless they're the same as the seven angels of the seven churches, but I thought we'd moved beyond that scene."

Perhaps John saw them earlier but didn't say so at the time.

"No, this is a new cartoon. I think there must be much, much more to heaven's palace than appeared in John's vision. Would the structures involved in the administration of the universe be any less complex than state governments on earth require?"

Well, that's another thing to consider, Curious.

"Your cartoon will focus on one or two points; more would be confusing."

Even *more* confusing, do you mean? Are you ready for the trumpets?

"This reminds me of the seven priests with seven trumpets marching around Jericho. But being ram's horns, those instruments were quite earthy. However, they did call down the forces of heaven to flatten the walls of the city."

You said the trumpets "called down the forces of heaven," almost as if the trumpet were a voice.

"Come to think of it, we have a clear example in, *I heard a voice like a trumpet saying, 'Come up here.'* So 'trumpet' and 'voice' could be interchangeable."

Keep that in mind, Curious.

"And that was a type of the last trumpet before the tribulation period."

So the "last trumpet" that calls forth the Rapture is the shout of Christ.

"Great miracles always come about by the voice of God," Curious asserted.

3 And another angel having a golden censer came and stood over the altar; and much incense was given to him to add to the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel's hand.

Again, Curious remembered the folks under the altar (which he assumed was the altar of sacrifice, not this altar of incense) who were clamoring—or praying—for revenge.

"So their prayers get added to," he said. "I wonder why. Shall we call it grace?"

His thought was that the additional incense purified and corrected their complaints.

"Anyway, it took a lot to make the prayers acceptable, apparently, because 'another' angel was assigned to the job."

That's a weak argument, Curious. But go on.

"Now let me see what form the answer takes."

5 Then the angel filled the censer with the fire of the altar and cast it upon the earth; and there came thunders and voices and lightnings and an earthquake.

"I hope that satisfies them," Curious said.

Why do you think the prayers that were on the altar of incense issued entirely from those martyrs waiting under the altar of sacrifice? Note that the text says "prayers of all the saints."

"Did I say that? Who else would pray for an earthquake but those safely in heaven. Jesus told his disciples to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, so who else in heaven would pray unloving prayers?"

If I remember right, we decided the cartoon was about pleading for the coming of the Lord. Everyone knows judgment is involved and begins even before he appears.

"It doesn't make sense that those who don't believe the Rapture doctrine would pray for disasters to come."

Those martyrs under the altar did have a specific request if we take their scene to be strictly literal. So if that's what this episode is about, it's not a message that a storm and an earthquake would clearly convey.

"The voices were necessary, otherwise people on earth wouldn't know that the storms and quakes were about their mistreatment of Jews."

Then what do you suppose the voices said, Curious?

"What did the voices say? They said, 'To see what this means, read Revelation 8:5.'"

6 The seven angels with the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

"Now they're back on track," said Curious. "If this follows the pattern, the first four trumpets go together in a sequence."

7 The first sounded, and hail and fire mingled with blood were cast upon the earth; and a third of the earth was burned, including a third of the trees and all green grass.

8 The second angel sounded, and, as it were, a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea, and a third part of the sea became blood, a third part of the sea creatures died, and a third part of the ships were destroyed.

10 The third angel sounded, and there fell from heaven a great star, burning as a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and the sources of the waters. The star is called Wormwood, and a third of the waters became bitter. Many men died of the bitter waters.

12 And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten and the third part of the moon and the third part of the stars, that the third part of them should be darkened and the day should not shine for the third part of it and the night in like manner.

Curious was reminded of Moses lifting his rod toward heaven and Yahweh sending thunder and lightening mingled with hail that smashed plants and broke trees.

"But this time it's the fire doing the damage," he murmured.

What shall we make of the blood, Curious?

"I'm looking up something in Joel. Here it is: *I will show wonders in the heavens and on earth: blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun will turn dark and the moon will turn to blood before the great and terrible day of Yahweh.*"

Remember the preview back in chapter 6 which had the full moon becoming not blood, but "as blood." Therefore, "blood" in these passages need not mean actual blood. What do you think John actually saw, Curious?

"First of all, what made an appearance to John was a man-like angelic figure with a straight golden trumpet like you see on Christmas cards—certainly not a ram's horn."

So then are you saying the trumpet wasn't actually the angel's voice?

"If the trumpet is a metaphor for the angel calling down the hail and fire, it would be like God speaking something into existence."

According to that, no naturalistic cause is needed to explain these events.

"But how John saw the hail and fire and blood—and the damage to a third part of the land and sea—I can't imagine—unless it was laid out in a series of cartoons."

Are we talking about a third of the entire globe? Or will it be local, like the plagues were in Egypt.

"How widespread this is depends on what the purpose is."

Yes, and what is the purpose?

"As usual, God is trying to get the attention of his people, at least."

As you say, this is symbolic writing, not meant to be understood in any wise literally.

"All of this could be symbolic language. But then I have to ask, 'what about the plagues in Egypt?' Did they not really happen as described?"

Good point, Curious.

"If not, was the crossing of the Red Sea fictional? The citizens of Jericho believed it. The psalm writers certainly believed it. Stephen mentioned it. Paul mentioned it as if it was a real event."

Curious convinced himself that there was no reason not to believe that John foresaw the essence of an event that will occur in real time.

"But as the blood in the Nile could have been another kind of redness in the water, so it could be in this case," he added.

Please give us an example of what you have in mind.

"A severe red algae bloom would poison the water," Curious suggested. "This reminds me of another plague in Egypt when Aaron struck the river with his rod and all the waters turned to blood. The fish died, the river became foul, and the Egyptians couldn't drink the water."

That brings us to the wormwood. Is there a precedent for that? The herb is toxic but also is used in medicine and in the drink called absinthe.

"I have a suspicion about that scene where wormwood poisons the drinking water. It might be a cartoon about something entirely different yet also the same."

Go ahead. What do you have in mind?

"This pretty well overlays those schemes designed to pacify or reduce population by dropping substances in water supplies."

Wormwood is mentioned in the Old Testament, you may remember. For example, in Deuteronomy: *Beware lest there be among you man, woman, family, or tribe whose heart turns away this day from Yahweh our God to serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root that bears gall and wormwood.* So according to that, this wormwood would be a metaphorical consequence of serving other gods.

Revelation

“We look to government and science before looking to God,” said Curious.

The Egyptians worshiped many gods. Is that what wormwood will be sent to punish?

“The main issue in Egypt was that they mistreated the children of Israel,” said Curious. “But I don’t see how these plagues would select antisemites.”

Neither do you think it’s about an ecological disaster sponsored by humans, right?

“I would guess this is a picture of water pollution by man; but no, the source of the poisoned water is clearly from out of this world, like the plagues in Egypt were.”

If you’re looking for symbols in these trumpet events, the mountain stands out.

“Sometimes ‘mountain’ was used in the metaphorical sense of a ruling power. ... Here’s a case in Jeremiah: *Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, says Yahweh, you who destroy all the earth, and I will stretch out my hand upon you and roll you down from the rocks and make you a burnt mountain.*”

Could this be a prophecy of some prominent city burning to the ground?

“Since it doesn’t say that the mountain was cast down from heaven, a floating megaseaport sunk in a nuclear explosion could match this pretty well.”

Does the context there in Jeremiah 51 tell us what that mountain represents?

“In that case it referred to Babylon.”

Could that be the key to the meaning of this “great mountain burning with fire”? Could it mean that Babylon’s destruction will have horrific side effects on the oceans?

“I’m afraid I haven’t been consistent,” said Curious. “If these scenes are in heaven, then they cannot be quite literal.”

Could you explain what you mean, please?

“It’s like the inside of a computer program. What you see there is the source of everything that the program manifests. But you would not be able to see what it produces in the real world by looking at it’s source code even though the code is the well from which all the possibilities flow.”

That’s a bit too technical, Curious. Try explaining what you mean again.

“In other words, in heaven you find the plans for what happens on earth. But since our time doesn’t exist there, the plans are not timelines. When rendered in time the plans produce events on earth, but the plans themselves ... I suppose if you saw them in heaven they would strike you as being symbolic and not necessarily tied to time and place at all. The same plan could even manifest in different times and places.”

Is that why it seems there are patterns in history?

“For example, the same plan that was used to produce the plagues in Egypt could be used on a larger scale and there would be some common features in the results.”

But I thought you liked the idea of the trumpets being like the voice of God speaking things into existence.

“The trumpet would be like the command to bring the plan into action while providing certain parameters that suit the plan to the occasion—the command given in perfect faith, of course.”

The four scenarios have one thing in common: do you think it’s a literal “one third”?

“‘One third’ isn’t literal unless you refer to the name of a variable in the plan. It follows Ezekiel and suggests a significant portion but less than half,” Curious said.

The fourth trumpet scene doesn’t give any measure of the damage to the earth. It will be devastating if it goes on very long.

“The same variable can factor several things.”

So what purpose do these puzzles serve in this revelation of Christ?

“To me, whenever the prophet looks into heaven, this weirdness is evidence that the Bible is true, because the impression it makes on our sensibilities is not what I would expect. It’s not at all like those out-of-the-body visions that people report.”

Is that all? There’s no meaning we can discern?

“If you look at computer code and you’re not a programmer, it looks like an assemblage of symbols, which might be poetry in some code language, and in fact it is just that. If the programmer has included comments, those may have meaning to anyone, but the comments are not essential to the program. If one understands the programming language and the application and the principles of the program’s architecture, one may be able, with time and effort, to begin to understand how it does what it does—but you never actually see what it does by looking at the code. The processor—that’s real time—turns the timeless domain of symbols into meaningful output that we observe. What we’re getting in these trumpet scenes is the comments.”

Then is there no way for us to know what the fourth trumpet scene will look like?

“No way can that fourth scene be literal without some major modification of the code that underpins the universe,” said Curious. “In a computer simulation of the night sky, like in a planetarium, such a thing would be possible by changing a few parameters—but for the whole universe? ... Well, if man can do it in a simulation, why should the Creator be unable to do it in *his* simulation?”

Just change a factor from unity to two-thirds, eh? But what would be the purpose?

“Why it will be done I can’t imagine unless it’s to show scientists there’s a God.”

Then maybe someone will draw their attention to this passage in this book.

“If anyone living at that time in the future has a Bible, potentially they could follow right along, properly interpreting the ‘comments,’ and know what’s coming next.”

But will they interpret it properly if they don’t know it’s not the program output?

“However, the actual events in time will not look quite the same as the picture one is likely to form by reading the text, which is more like a cartoon”

How does one recognize a real event that has been prophesied in a cartoon?

“The first step is to admit it’s a cartoon. But I’m not sure about these four trumpet scenarios, whether or not they’re regular cartoons. It may qualify as a cartoon if there’s a simple message supported by the complexity of the scene.”

Then are these trumpet scenes cartoons?—or not?

“What they do is they get people’s attention and cause them to search Scripture. So if this is a cartoon, it could represent something else that achieves the same end. In theory, anyone who has a Bible or has read Revelation carefully will not be too surprised by what happens when it doesn’t exactly match the surface level of Scripture.”

Will the Bible suddenly be in great demand?

“I imagine all Bible references will have been purged from digital devices by then. Any surviving printed copies will be vary rare and worth billions on the black market!”

13 And I saw and heard an eagle flying in mid heaven, saying in a great voice,

*Woe, woe, woe, for these dwelling on earth,
because of the remaining trumpet voices
of the three angels yet to sound.*

“I’ve heard the cries eagles make,” Curious said. “Their voices were anything but great. Pathetic squeaks is what I heard.”

The main thing is this, Curious: this eagle *talks*.

“I wonder what language it will squeak—or speak if that’s what it’s doing. No, this has to be something seen only in heaven, like an emblazoned chapter title or a creative comment in the program.”

You don’t think the three woes will be shouted out, just like that, to get people’s attention?

“So the three woes correspond to the three remaining trumpets—or angel voices—because the decoration on a chapter title page of a great book is always designed to correspond to the content.”

9 *The fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven that had fallen to the earth, and there was given to him the key to the pit of the abyss. And he opened the pit of the abyss, and there went up a smoke out of the pit like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.*

What will you call this plan, Curious?

"We have here a specified means, at least," said Curious. "In the wormwood case, little was given to explain why something looking like a comet should poison water sources. However, I don't know what to do with this star—a thing which turns out to be a person who receives a key and by means of the key opens—what?"

Where have you seen that word before, Curious?

"I recall Paul used that word Abyss when quoting something from the Old Testament. He implied it's the place of the dead. So that would be another name for the grave."

But this is the "pit" of the abyss.

"It seems 'pit' and 'abyss' together mean 'portal to the place of the dead.'"

So can we expect death to come of this?

"I suspect that that smoke is toxic, and people will get sick, somehow."

But the abyss means death, you said.

"Could be fear of death, which is toxic like in a pandemic. People are afraid to breathe the air, and fear darkens their imagination like a black cloud."

What about the key? And who in heaven hands him the key?

"Something happens that triggers fear like a key opening a door. The key unlocks something that misuses and perverts nature. Satan no doubt has his hand in this."

Was the cartoon just that clear to you, Curious?

"Maybe I'm being influenced by recent history. But why not? It doesn't make a similar event in the future less probable."

It is true that political cartoons are meaningless if you don't know their context.

"The darkening of the sun in this one makes me wonder if smoke was the cause of sunlight being cut by a third in the fourth trumpet's scene."

So there may be an overlap of what was revealed by the fourth and fifth trumpets. Now about that star fallen from heaven: what do you make of him?

"In this case the word 'heaven' in 'fallen from heaven' could not mean outer space because the star is a living being, not a personification. There's no reason for a personification here. It's obvious that this is some kind of fallen angel, if not Satan himself."

What convinces you that this is Satan's plan and not God's wrath?

"Satan wouldn't be idle at a time like this," said Curious.

3 *And out of the smoke came forth locusts upon the earth; and power was given them as the scorpions of the earth have power. And they were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree, but only such men as do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And it was given them that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man.*

Curious put the Book down, folded his arms, and groaned, "What a batch of contradictions! Smoke turning out insects? Characteristics given them that belong to another kind? Insects given orders what to do and not to do? And they're instructed not to eat foliage which is their food and energy source—and they're obedient to that? Instructed to not kill—as if they could! Bugs smart enough to respect a mark on the forehead?"

Maybe the contradictions are deliberate, Curious.

"It sounds like a disease to me, and calling it locusts is a smokescreen."

Do you mean the true meaning was deliberately obscured?

"The bottom line is the same: whether by disease or these exotic creatures, the plague lasts five months."

Notice that the greenery means there is less merit in the idea that this scene overlaps an earlier trumpet scene.

"All the grass gets burned up after the first trumpet, so there must be a lapse of time before this scene transpires because it mentions green things including grass."

6 *And in those days men will seek death
and will in no wise find it;
they will desire to die,
but death will flee from them.*

Notice the nice parallelism in that verse, Curious. It could be a quotation.

"This is absurd on its face. I'll take it as a clue about interpreting John's hyperbole."

7 *And the locusts resembled horses prepared for war,
and on their heads it looked like victor's crowns of gold;
and their faces were as men's faces,
and they had hair like the hair of women,
and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.*

"This is too much," grumbled Curious. "Even for a mythical beast this is crazy, and hyperbolic style can't account for it. But it is rather poetic. Maybe that's a clue."

9 *And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron;
and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots,
of many horses rushing to war.*

"If this is poetic fancy or a cartoon, what's the point?" Curious asked the open page.

10 *And they have stinging tails like scorpions,
and their power to hurt men five months is in their tails.*

"It's just too weird," Curious complained. "It's one thing to make up fanciful verse with images to remain in the imagination, but quite another to attach it to real physical pain. I mean, it's done in fairy stories, but this is the Bible!"

11 *Over them as king is the angel of the Abyss;
his name in Hebrew is Abaddon,
and in the Greek language he has the name Apollyon.*

Curious remembered that Sheol and Abaddon seemed to be synonymous when he encountered them in the book of Job and also in a Proverb.

"Again these are billed as agents of death, but where's the destruction?" Curious grumbled. "This is a contradiction on so many levels!"

The same could be said about the four living creatures around the throne.

"I must admit, those creatures around the throne were outrageous too."

I thought you liked the weirdness. You tied it to the inside view of computer code.

"If this is an inside view of the program for a plan to bring on a five-month bout of sickness to all but a selected few, the code has bugs in it," Curious said with a grin at his own cleverness.

Yes, of course. But maybe these are symbols with meanings if one understands the code.

"I might try to understand it from that point of view, but what bugs me is the noise of their wings sounding like chariot wheels—and how did John hear that?"

Maybe John got carried away and made up that part. Is that possible?

"The self-limiting pain is the only believable part. I wonder if the key to the interpretation of the rest of it is the contradictions: it's not meant to be anything real."

So when this five-month nonfatal plague transpires sometime in the future, no one will recognize it as the result of the fifth trumpet. Is that the idea?

“Come to think of it, prophecy has this huge problem: if its fulfillment is easily recognizable, and the prophesied event is painful, defenses could frustrate the fulfillment.”

How could anyone stop something like smoke from a volcanic eruption, Curious?

“If everyone recognizes these events when they occur, and it’s like reading history as it unfolds, wouldn’t they turn to God and plead for mercy?”

Have you learned nothing about human nature from reading your Bible?

12 The first Woe is past; behold, two Woes are yet to come.

13 And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the horns of the golden altar which is before God: someone saying to the sixth angel with the trumpet,

“Loose the four angels that are bound at the great river Euphrates.”

And the four angels were loosed

*that had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year,
that they should kill the third part of men.*

“Now comes the death!” exclaimed Curious. “But what is the connection? Oh, I get it: the day and the hour was variable, not exactly following the five months of pain, and the sixth angel couldn’t call for it until told to go ahead. So they knew that death was coming but kept it secret. Is that the incense altar? Whose prayer is behind this?”

Curious, wake up! An angel looses other angels? Angels bound at the river? Angels doing the killing? Be more curious!

“I’m reminded of the death angel that killed all the firstborn in Egypt. Who knows, maybe that one was bound to the Nile. That might have been a disease too, but I never thought of it that way. No, in Egypt it was precisely targeted and thorough. This one sounds like a disease, though, since it kills something like another third of the remaining population. But why four river angels are involved I can’t imagine.”

16 And I was told the number of horsemen in the armies was 200,000,000.

“Was this implied? Curious asked. “It’s an army of fifty million commanded by each of the four angels, I presume, and fanning out to the four corners of the earth, I suppose. But this is totally unrealistic, of course. It leaves Ezekiel’s horses in the dust.”

17 And here is how I saw the horses and the riders in the vision:

They had breastplates of fire and sapphire and brimstone, and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions, and out of their mouths proceeded fire and smoke and brimstone.

By these three plagues the third part of men were killed (by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone) which proceeded out of their mouths. For the power of the horses is in their mouth—and in their tails, for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they hurt.

“I would like to know what John thought of this,” said Curious. “Two hundred million horses of any kind would be unimaginable, let alone flame-throwing monstrosities such as these.”

Is it really unimaginable to you?

“Here we go again with the one-third factor. That’s a plausible death toll from a plague. It’s interesting that the five-month locust pain also involved a third of the planet.”

Explain this factor once more, Curious. When the first four trumpets sounded, the damage was always in terms of a third: grass, trees, seas, ships, rivers, etc.

“There’s some significance in that one-third factor. I would regard it as nominal or a term meaning ‘partial’ or ‘severe but not fatal.’ On the other hand, these may all be miraculous, and if the damage factor is consistently one-third, it would cause people to realize this is not natural—that God is trying to get their attention.”

That would be the desired outcome.

“Horses with riders wearing breastplates would indicate they were going to war. But it’s unaccountably strange that no opposition to these armies is mentioned. Apparently, they go around killing people with lion’s breath and serpent bites—entirely unopposed. Amazing.”

Will it come as a surprise?

“The timing is preordained and precise—but kept secret. If it follows immediately after the locust plague, then that’s preordained too.”

So if this event anchors the whole program, we need to find out what it is, Curious.

“The four angels are charged with the killing as if the warriors are insignificant.”

Could they be robot horses in such numbers that the opposition is ineffective?

“The problem with robots—if that’s what these invaders are—is robots don’t reproduce or grow themselves like horses and riders do. To build four armies of fifty million robots each would be a major undertaking in the real world. In video-game software it can be done easily: you make one and let it replicate any number of times.”

Do you mean John could somehow be seeing a computer game in heaven?

“The package would feature a picture of the exotic horse-warrior and boast of its ability to replicate the unworldly monster as many as 200,000,000 times.”

You’re not being serious, Curious.

“But seriously, that enormous number could be an upper limit.”

This has to pertain to the real world, Curious.

“That’s it!” he exclaimed. “Everyone is living in a metaverse which is no different from a video game.”

Do you mean everyone is equipped for virtual reality at some time in the future?

“Look where the world is headed. Anything is possible in the metaverse.”

Let’s remember that John and all his readers were expected to get something out of this. Here’s an idea that will get you back on track: maybe they’re demons—like dragons—and the four angels, demons really, are their commanders.

“If they’re demons, they could be unearthly like that, but these have geography and they’re equipped to manifest in the material world: to burn and sting fatally.”

Could these invaders have come from another planet?

“People fear an extraterrestrial invasion, but these don’t look that part either. Besides, they come from the Euphrates River, not outer space.”

Okay, then if you think they’re symbolic of a pandemic, would you consider that they represent disease germs? Some of those microbes are pretty fancy, you know.

“Any microbiologist would laugh if I proposed that these war horses literally depict some novel microbe, and two hundred million wouldn’t be enough. So that’s out.”

Then do they characterize disease some other way?

“If I were to make up an image of an invader to scare someone, I couldn’t do any better than those horses. I’d rather meet a fire-breathing dragon, but I’d die of fear either way.”

Nice hyperbole, Curious. You said you’d die of fear if you encountered one. Maybe they represent fear.

“The breath of that horse’s mouth is interesting. Horse mouths aren’t frightening, but lion mouths are. And you don’t even have to see a lion to be frightened to death by the roar that comes out of it.”

Maybe the uncomfortable “roar” of some disease is characterized to have the power to kill.

“Pandemics are driven by fear and exaggeration.”

True, but fear isn’t enough. You need to fully interpret those horses, Curious.

“If the locusts could take on outrageous appearances, these might likewise be some form of insect or rodent, in which case two hundred million might be reasonable.”

Revelation

Another plague of insects? How would they kill with fire?

"The fire and smoke and brimstone could be a way of describing their bites and stings."

If they're visible, how would a third of the populace have no way to escape?

"Fear and panic might kill more than their actual bites and stings. A third of the people believe the lie and so the infection becomes deadly."

Even though Curious did not feel that he had gotten his head around this frightful image, he read on, hoping to find more about it.

20 And the rest of mankind, who were not killed with these plagues ...

"It really does sound more like a disease plague than a war," said Curious.

All right, then what does the Euphrates River have to do with a disease?

"The Prophets referred to the Euphrates as the source of invaders, especially from Babylon, so maybe this disease invasion will originate there in some great city. Timing is everything, apparently, so it could be released from some lab deliberately."

You make it sound like a political war.

"Like a war fought with disinformation and bio-weapons. There were no bows and arrows or swords in the hands of those riders."

I only said that to see what you would say. As you noted, where is the opposition?

"Of course the opposition is helpless—clueless as to what's happening to them, because almost everyone wants to believe in the goodness of medical services."

So are the riders doctors?

"But I wouldn't go so far as to say the riders are medical professionals."

Commercials? Advertising even today speaks fear to promote patented medicine.

"Others are more directly involved, I think, like those with an agenda to reduce population surreptitiously. It's like a religion to them. It's their prayer."

Maybe we've gone too far afield here, Curious. This had to mean something to the apostle John and his readers, after all. Maybe not exactly the same thing it means today, but the essence cannot be entirely different.

"That's all I can make of it. It's either about disease and fear and medicine that actually destroys health, or it's utterly nonsensical."

It wouldn't take much beyond severe air pollution for a disease to become a pandemic, and fear might do it.

"I'm afraid the whole beast needs to be accounted for."

So, if the lion here represents fear, how and when does the tail come into play?

"The hurtful tail maybe represents a failure of medicine to deliver a remedy," he said.

Okay, now is there symbolism that John would have understood in the number?

"However, that 200 million must be significant, so if my theory doesn't explain that, then it's worthless."

Curious seemed to be depressed after this realization. He thought he had exhausted all the possibilities but one, and now he realized his theory did not fit what the Bible actually said. Any suggestions?

"That's an awful lot of horses, however you look at it," Curious mumbled. "If they're mythological or imaginary, why does there have to be a limit—or any number given at all? Obviously it's a magnitude referring to something in the material world."

I was afraid myself at that point because it looked like Curious was going to close the Bible and not finish reading it all the way through. So I offered a suggestion: if each horse fulfills a prescription, could it be the number of casualties?

Remember this is future, not today, Curious—was the hint I whispered.

"In fact, if these horrific beasts represent fear and the consequences of it, why would there need to be more than one? One could represent that as well as many. ... Unless, well, one for each person so traumatized. But 200 million isn't enough to account for a

third of the world's population today, and in John's day the entire population of the world was probably close to that number! 200 million deaths implies a world population of 600 million when this happens, which is seven percent of today's population."

How many died in the disasters prior to this?

"A fourth of the world died with that pale horse. Then say a third of the ships at sea; and presumably buildings on land were burned up with the first two trumpets. Three-fourths times two-thirds takes out half of the world's population. But the world's population today is still too many to fit that theory—seven times the 1,200 million."

Don't forget the fresh water was poisoned by the third trumpet.

"I doubt that corrupting the fresh-water sources could take out eighty-five percent, so the number is still way off. Say twenty percent died from bad water; that leaves about twenty percent of the world population going into this."

And don't forget the fourth trumpet.

"I suppose the cutting back of the sunlight will cause deaths too, but the effect of that wouldn't be immediate unless everything freezes overnight, and there was no indication of that."

Again, remember this is future, Curious—maybe the near future, but still everything will be a little different.

"If the world depends on solar energy, the dimming of the sun could have an immediate effect. It could disrupt the economy and cause starvation within a few months."

If a third of the world is devastated by that, you're up to two and a quarter billion before this happens.

"But still, it's less than 30 percent of today's population."

Don't forget the Rapture, Curious.

"Oh, the ones that get caught up to meet Christ in the air won't be on earth! Maybe a third of the world disappears. That leaves more than four billion unaccounted for."

There's more to come in the Great Tribulation. But quite possibly our theory about the 200,000,000 horses is wrong, and they don't represent deaths.

"It comes out about right if the world population reduces by 50 percent before the Rapture takes place—and there's long been a globalist force pushing in that direction."

You need to think more about that, Curious. Now, go back and explain the locusts.

"It's interesting that these locusts have things in common with the horses. In fact, the locusts are shaped like horses, and both types have harmful tails. While the locust-horses don't have riders, they have faces like men and breastplates like the riders have breastplates. So they're closely related. I think the locusts must have made some people susceptible to the disease."

I thought the smoke pollution does that.

"Well, the smoke, yes, but the locusts are the pests that talk about it and promote a vaccination that hurts for five months: both male and female commentators that have taken over the channels of news, as indicated by their victory crowns, and the lion teeth mean they verbally tear up any contrary opinions."

You still need to explain the noise of their wings being like chariot wheels.

"Oh, yes, the noise. I suppose they send helicopters up to report on the volcano with some of these reporters in them, and you get the noise in the background."

So those are the locusts according to you. I'm not sure we can publish this, Curious.

"It was their opportunity to capture the attention of everyone, and they will appear like locusts out of the smoke. Then after the plague winds down I suppose they celebrate."

So the horse-locust has characteristics that *represent* other things, but the sound is still sound. Have you been consistent with your metaphors? Does the cartoon emit sound?

Revelation

"That helicopter theory is a stretch, though. It calls on locust's wings to be horizontally rotating devices, and the number of locusts exceeds the number of helicopters there are or ever will be."

Curious had become discouraged again over this, but not for long.

"Paying due respect to the numbers, the horse-human-scorpion-locusts represent outrageous fabrications, and their wings represent the airwaves or cable signals by which the propaganda travels. That theory accommodates the numbers better."

You still haven't accounted for the sound of chariot wheels, Curious.

"I guess they talk about war in one way or another. So by various media go the rumblings of chariot wheels, as it were—figuratively speaking, of course."

Do you remember the locusts Joel wrote about?

"That poet Joel—I thought he was as much a poet as prophet. Joel was in the middle of a locust plague. ... Okay, here it is. Here's what he said about the sound the locusts made: *With noise like chariots they leap to the tops of mountains; with sound like fire devouring stubble they show their strength in battle.* But Joel's locusts were real—devouring the crops as real locusts do. These locusts that John describes are something else."

True, but if Joel described them by poetic metaphors, why not view this in that tradition? Was it mere coincidence that both used the chariot-wheel simile?

"But I don't want to get this backwards. Joel wrote about real locusts using military metaphors. Here we have something using locust metaphors. Hmm. ... There was a more pertinent locust in Proverbs. ... Here it is: *The locusts have no king, yet they all go forth by bands.* Isn't that a perfect description of the news media?"

That's clever of you, Curious. I assume you mean the frequency bands used in communications. But remember, these locusts have a king.

"The proverb even uses the word *bands*, like communication channels."

Well, the word is *divisions*, so it could mean that, but the context refers to military divisions. What about the power given them *as the scorpions of the earth have power*?

"I like the air-wave interpretation," said Curious. "It affects people right down where they live and has the power to cause pain, and people would avoid listening to them if the sting were up front and not in the after effects. It's always one calamity after another that the broadcasters swarm to. Unlike literal locusts, they're always concerned about harm to the trees. Apparently, the smoke is the hot topic for five months until the pandemic breaks out. Oh yes, I believe the media do serve Abaddon."

Now, are you saying there's a connection between the locusts and the horses?

"That five months from the fifth trumpet is peculiar. I suspect it's not symbolic because it's, well, it's five, as real as your five fingers. It's literally the length of time the talking faces on the horse-locusts keep buzzing about the smoke because it's cut short by the hour of the release of the contagion that had been planned."

How are those with the marks of God on their foreheads not hit by the scorpion tails?

"Of course, not everyone feels the pain for five months. Some won't be taken in by the panic because they trust God and refuse the jab. Those who do buy the propaganda are sure they're going to die and look for death, but the smoke isn't capable of that."

20 did not repent of the works of their hands: that they should not worship demons and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone, and wood—which cannot see, hear, nor walk; and they did not repent of their murders, their sorceries, their fornication, nor of their thefts.

"They're clueless that all this was predicted in a book that has evidently been banned, so they blindly follow the script."

Do you think they will care what this ancient book says to them, Curious?

"Not that they would care about it then if they don't read it now. I should know."

10 *And I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as the sun and his feet as pillars of fire.*

"The most complete description of an angel so far," said Curious.

It does say "angel," so he's a messenger, and the fact that he's qualified as being strong may apply to the message he delivers and not necessarily to his person.

"Or rather I should say it's a description of a unique angel."

I beg to differ with you, Curious. The angel who shouted out "*who is worthy to open the scroll?*" was also described as a strong angel.

"We saw a strong angel earlier, but this one is stronger. He's 'another' strong angel, but his face and feet make him comparable to Christ—in terms of the image, I mean."

Curious had latched onto this, and whether these details are significant or not, he was not going to let it go.

"There's a bow about the throne of God, and here's a rainbow upon this angel's head. Now, the cloud as a covering is indicative of God too. So I get the impression that we're supposed to connect this angel directly with Yahweh."

But John saw this angel. Is it likely that he was seeing Yahweh himself descending from heaven?

"If this wasn't Yahweh exactly, then John was looking at an angel sent by God to stand for him on earth."

I agree if you mean this is an angel sent on a special mission.

"With features like that image of Christ as he appeared to John on Patmos, there's no doubt that he's sent to accomplish mighty things all over the world."

We'll see if this is an epiphany or if he's simply a messenger.

2 *And he had in his hand a little book that was open, and he set his right foot upon the sea and his left upon the land; and he cried with a great voice, as a lion roars; and when he cried, the seven thunders uttered their voices.*

"Unlike the book with the seals, this one is open," Curious noted. "So if it's about an event, the event will be easily recognized. If this is an angel, he spans land and sea like he owns the creation. Furthermore, his lion's voice sounds like the voice of God because he's answered by thunders."

Still, why would Yahweh be coming down out of heaven and not sending an angel?

"That would be one giant of an angel, standing on a seashore with one flaming foot on the wet sand and the other sizzling each time a wave comes in."

Suppose this is another one of those heavenly cartoons depicting a plan of some kind. What might that be?

"As an interpretation, I would say this represents the dominion of heaven over some portion of the earth—some empire that spans lands and seas. The little book is the story of this, and it's not a long history."

Isn't that an anomaly, considering what has transpired so far in this revelation?

"This picture is so detailed it leads me to believe it prophesies a new kingdom."

It might be in our past. Remember, two thousand years of John's future is our past.

"It was said that the sun never sets on the British empire; and the lion is its symbol."

You might have something there, Curious, because the British Empire Christianized the world in spite of its faults and failures—and sponsored the new nation Israel.

"I don't see how that could be, however, because it would date this point in the stream of events which clearly have not all occurred yet."

So are you saying that would mean that the seals and most of the trumpets were fulfilled prior to the rise of the British Empire?

"The first five seals might refer to local events that happened somewhere, I suppose. But I like my interpretation of the fifth and sixth trumpets."

Revelation

And your interpretation requires today's technology, at least. But that ruins your British Empire theory, doesn't it?

"Well, we definitely have a break here in chapter 10, so why couldn't this strong angel have come down from heaven at an earlier time."

In other words, it was more important to have the orderly sequence of the seals and trumpets. Where would you insert chapter 10 if you were to arrange it in chronological order?

"The four horsemen and the martyrs could apply somewhere on earth in almost any century, so it's reasonable that the end times began with the British Empire."

Okay, why not? It was all future when John received it.

"If this writing of John's is about revealing Jesus Christ, the Christianization that took place in the colonies was an example of that. But there has been much bitterness which continues and may continue until Christ comes back."

Hold onto that thought, Curious. Now, what about the seven thunders?

"I have no idea what those seven thunders mean."

4 When the seven thunders spoke I was about to write, but then I heard a voice from heaven saying,

*Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered,
and do not write them down.*

That's very interesting. Can you make anything of it, Curious?

"John is given to hear something but told not reveal it in his Revelation. On the surface that's a contradiction! So it must be significant."

Indeed. Why would he be told what he must not tell?

"It's weird—I mean extra weird. Have we had inanimate entities speaking before?"

I don't think so, unless you count the trumpets or the voice from the four horns of the altar of incense or the voices from the throne of God when John first got there.

"Okay, I'll have to take a stab at it. John thought he heard words in the thunderous rumblings, but it was his imagination; so he was gently told not to write. They were symbols of something. Wars I Guess."

5 And the angel I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven and swore,

*By him who lives for ever and ever,
who created the heavens and the things therein,
and the earth and the things therein,
and the sea and the things therein,
I declare there will be no more delay!*

"Okay, it's obvious this is a created being," Curious admitted.

What would you call him?

"Apparently, John wasn't overly awed by his appearance. Perhaps he has seen other angels like him and hasn't put it down in his writing. But the declaration this angel makes is on behalf of the Creator."

So is he a messenger or more than a messenger?

"Come to think of it, he's the archangel," said Curious. "Wasn't it the voice of the archangel that will announce the Rapture?"

Yes, and you might be right about this, Curious. This might be a glorious appearance of Michael, because he's making this important announcement: "no more delay!"

"Now this means the British Empire was part of a plan that had been delayed."

Important truths of the Scriptures had been long delayed from wide dissemination prior to the British Empire. And you may not know, Curious, how influential the King James Bible was when it came out in 1611.

7 Thus in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, as he is about to sound, the mystery of God will be finished, according to the good tidings which he declared to his servants the prophets.

"That shows there was no mystery revealed in those thunders," Curious declared.

Don't be too sure about that. Isn't there still a secret in the timing of the day and the hour that no man knows?

"But I suppose it could be the secret of the 'day and the hour.' In fact, I think that's it: once these events start rolling like thunder, their timing will no longer be much of a secret."

So are you allowing that the good tiding of the Rapture was revealed here to be sometime after the bitter end of the British empire?

"We have to wait for a voice like thunder to finish the mystery, and no one knows what it will say," Curious declared confidently.

*8 And the voice which I heard from heaven spoke again to me saying,
"Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel
that stands on the sea and on the land."*

*So I went to the angel, saying to him that he should give me the little book.
And he said to me,*

*"Take it, and eat it;
it will make your belly bitter,
but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey."*

*I took the little book out of the angel's hand and ate it up. In my mouth it
was sweet as honey, and when I had eaten it my belly became bitter.*

John has suddenly become bold. Have you noticed, Curious?

"Jesus called John a son of thunder, so his behavior now is not too surprising."
Do you think John actually ate a book?

"This has to be a symbolic scene", said Curious, "as it was in Ezekiel. If John can converse with a face as bright as the sun, and take and eat a book, that surely proves it's symbolic of a plan. What fascinates me is that this plan involves John!"

Tell me what the honey means if you're so sure of that, Curious.

"Well, I have an idea about the honey, but it means I was wrong about the book being the story of the British Empire. The angel spanning land and sea symbolizes that, and the book is something that *came out* of the British Empire, like the documents that constitute the USA, which are very promising of a land of milk and honey, but bitterness comes out of it."

Curious, you've outdone yourself on that one. But no, the book is John's instructions.

*11 Then it was said to me,
"You must prophesy again about many peoples
and nations and tongues and kings."*

You could be right too, because now it turns the focus to many nations.

"This sounds more straightforward," said Curious. "I'll welcome anything if it's a break from outlandish symbols."

Straightforward? Then tell us who said this to John?

"It's curious that John has become involved. But he isn't doing anything that could affect the plan. His participation only serves to illuminate it for him—and us too, of course. So who it was that said this to him doesn't really matter."

Aren't you assuming without basis that John would have known this if not told?

"Jesus' disciples heard him say they would be brought before kings and governors for his name's sake."

No, it's telling John there will much more to write. (I doubt that Curious heard me.)

11 *And there was given me a reed like a measuring rod, and I was told,
Rise, and measure the temple of God
and the altar and those worshiping in it.
But leave out the court which is outside the temple;
do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations.
For forty-two months they will tread the holy city under foot.*

“What temple is this?” said Curious. “The measuring rod means it’s a future thing, like in Zechariah when the angel measured Jerusalem to predict a time of peace and prosperity.”

Ezekiel is famous for his extensive and detailed measuring of a grand temple, you know. He understood it was planned for the future.

“Also Ezekiel measured a future temple of grand design.”

We need not confuse that with this, however.

“But here the size is limited! Jerusalem is divided at this time—that’s clear. Apparently the temple itself and the sacrificial altar is in business for Yahweh, but not the ground around it or the rest of the city. That’s interesting.”

What has happened to Jerusalem?

“Where did I see it? In Luke, I think. ... Yes, here it is in chapter 21. Jesus speaking: *Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled.*”

Jerusalem has indeed been trodden down. Even now the city is owned by Gentiles. Is there significance in the forty-two months?

“Measuring the temple, John thereby measured the duration of Jerusalem’s remaining tribulation. That’s three-point-five years—half the week of years.”

(As you can see, Curious felt this was something he could get his head around.)

“The animal sacrifices will be started up again and right in the face of the nations, and the animal-rights activists from every nation will be marching to Zion!”

Are you sure this isn’t a view of Herod’s temple that John was so familiar with?

“That measuring rod is the key,” said Curious. “Like the measuring of Ezekiel’s temple, it signifies something new. But here the dimensions aren’t given, so there’s nothing remarkable about its size. Obviously, this isn’t Ezekiel’s massive temple.”

Besides that, Ezekiel has the nations in a new arrangement relative to the temple.

“It sounds like all the rest of Jerusalem is opposed to it. If they had a temple, this could happen soon!”

Note that it doesn’t say John actually proceeded to measure it.

3 *And I will assign my two witnesses, and they will prophesy 1,260 days,
clothed in sackcloth.*

“It says, ‘I will assign my two witnesses.’ Apparently this is God speaking to John now,” said Curious.

In other words, John is prophesying as he was told he must do.

“They’re dressed like Old Testament prophets mourning for their country. They’ve been assigned to this important duty, so they must be high-ranking servants of God.”

Then they’ve been resurrected. Resurrected bodies have extra-human powers and characteristics, so we can expect that.

“I think the temple must be an authentic reproduction because it set the stage for these ancient-looking prophets.”

I’m surprised you’re missing the significance of this scene, Curious. Don’t you realize how different this is from anything we’ve encountered so far in the Apocalypse?

“It’s like a page out of the Old Testament.”

Two men appear out of nowhere. John may be seeing the future from a vantage point in heaven, but this is presented as terrestrial *reality*.

“And it’s not apocalyptic language—like it doesn’t belong in this book! We know what prophets do, that they stand for the Lord; we know what days are. So there’s no interpreting to be done here.”

Two things you might consider, Curious: why doesn’t the text say who they are and where they have come from? And is 1,260 days realistic, or does it point to something else?

“Even if they appear out of nowhere and go around witnessing for the Lord until the nations stop walking all over the holy city, this is strictly an earthly scene.”

The first of its kind in this book.

“That’s a long time to be preaching. Apparently it’s every day, not once a week.”

Notice that it’s the same as the forty-two months that the nations will tread the holy city under foot.

4 These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands, standing before the Lord of the earth.

“This refers back to Zechariah!” Curious exclaimed. “Zechariah asked his guide, *What are the two olive branches beside the two golden spouts that pipe the golden oil out?* And he was told, *These are the two anointed ones who stand by the Lord of the whole earth.*”

Remind me: who did you decide the two anointed ones must be, Curious?

“They were the priest and the king—or the governor in that case: Joshua the high priest and Zerubbabel the appointed governor. But it also appeared that the two were indistinguishable from one another there by the lampstand.”

So it was the offices of priest and king that were symbolized, which could be filled at different times by different people.

“Ultimately those offices will be filled by one person; at least that’s what I thought when I was looking at Zechariah.”

Here it says they’re both prophets.

“Anyway, they’re sons of Israel. I’m thinking Moses and Elijah because those two appeared on the mountain with Jesus when John was there.”

So wouldn’t John identify them if they are Moses and Elijah?

“This is a long way from the mountain of transfiguration.”

John may have assumed you would know without him naming them.

5 And if anyone tries to hurt them, fire proceeds out of their mouth and devours their enemies; and anyone who tries to hurt them is necessarily destroyed in this manner.

“Whoa! Moses is a great orator now,” exclaimed Curious.

Are you abandoning our mundane interpretation so soon? Are you sure this isn’t literal? Remember the fire Elijah called down. This fire from the mouth isn’t like the sword where the human-like figure was clearly symbolic.

“I’m connecting this with the terrifying fire out of the mouths of those lion-headed horses. There’s a precedent in Jeremiah where the fire isn’t literal. Jeremiah’s words were said to be like fire and the people like wood devoured by the fire.”

Good point. If the terms are similar, the interpretation might be much the same.

“I wonder if ‘fiery orator’ comes from here,” said Curious. “But if all they do is talk, I doubt that it’s having much of an impact—especially if it’s only Hebrew. The memorable prophets always did something besides talk.”

6 These have the power to shut off the waters of heaven, that it not rain during the days of their prophecy; and they also have power over the waters below, to turn them into blood and to smite the land with every plague as often as they desire.

“Now there’s lion’s teeth in that!” said Curious. “I should have known.”

Revelation

How would you make this comfortable—less miraculous than it seems?

"I admit, when it's brought down to earth like this, it's hard not to take it literally. If they aren't in fact incarnations of Elijah and Moses, they follow in their footsteps."

What is the geographical context here, Curious? Moses was in Egypt when he and Aaron brought down plagues and turned waters to blood.

"So these prophets are in Israel where the temple sacrifices have been re-instituted, and the opposition would be like Pharaoh opposing Moses wanting to lead Israel out to worship his God. So in that sense they would be like Moses and Aaron in Egypt."

As you know, Egyptians worshiped many gods in Moses' day. Religious liberty in Israel has led to something like that but in factions fighting one another.

"Obviously these characters aren't politically correct, but being out in the streets, they can't very well be censored."

Do you mean there will be opposition to the temple rituals at this time?

"No doubt they're near the temple where they confront continual protests by those who oppose Yahweh and the laws of Moses."

Not to mention Daniel's "little horn" who wants to change the feasts and the law.

"In that amount of time they could visit many places in Israel and even go into surrounding countries witnessing by their presence to the reliability of the Scriptures."

Do you think so? They're associated with temple lampstands, and they appear when John is told to measure the temple.

"Apparently they're connected with the temple; otherwise they wouldn't be referred to as olive trees. But if they're to be witnesses, they'll have to go into the court of the gentiles at least."

Don't you think they'll be able to hold an audience regardless of where they're located?

"After they exercise their Moses and Elijah supernatural powers, will there be any Scripture doubters left?"

No, not within their firing range, but they'll still have enemies.

7 And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss disputes with them and overcomes them and kills them.

"I thought these resurrected bodies were invincible!" complained Curious.

Note that this happens after they've completed their assignment.

"It reminds me of the death of Jesus that was allowed to take place after he had completed his mission on earth."

Okay, now where's your curiosity? Who or what is this "beast"?

"That 'beast' reminds me of what Daniel was told about the fourth beast."

Right. Here it is: *He will speak words against the Most High and will wear out the saints of the Most High, and he will attempt to change the times and the law; and they will be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time.*

"So it looks like the beast takes over at this point," said Curious. "Now the Great Tribulation with a capital 'G' and a capital 'T' begins, I would say."

Again, who or what is the beast?

"We saw Abaddon, the angel of the abyss, and now this beast comes from the abyss."

You concluded before that the abyss equates somehow with death.

"The abyss is more than a synonym for death. It would be a dark place connected with death; a sort of negative of heaven (which is connected with life)."

So the beast, coming from the abyss, must oppose the kingdom of heaven.

8 And their dead bodies lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.

"This is confusing," said Curious. "I thought this was all focused on Jerusalem, so why would John need to say it was the 'great city'?"

Think about it, Curious. If John saw Jerusalem even today, compared to the city he knew, wouldn't he be impressed?

"Modern-day Jerusalem would be astounding to John!"

What would someone from the first century think of the buildings in a modern city?

"John would have no feelings of affection for Jerusalem of the future if that's what he saw, and apparently it *is* what he saw and in some depth too."

Speaking of shocking, what about these ancient sackcloth-clad prophets (who had no doubt made themselves known around the world) being left dead in the street.

"I know why they're left lying the street," said Curious. "They appeared miraculously, and now some are saying, 'If they're authentic, they'll disappear miraculously.'"

In that case, the beast's servants would see that they're removed, would they not?

"The beast, of course, knows he can't touch this prophecy."

9 And the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations look upon their dead bodies three and a half days and do not let their dead bodies be laid in a tomb. And they that dwell on the earth rejoice over them and make merry, even sending gifts to one another because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.

"I was wrong," said Curious. "The reason they're left in the street is because there's money in it. It sounds like everyone on earth has gone in for the devil. It's like Christmas only the one who has arrived is Satan's puppet, not God's Anointed."

Will they be unable to avoid fulfilling this prophecy?

"I don't see how this could happen if there's knowledge of these Scriptures."

Remember what was said in the book of Daniel: *The wicked will not understand.*

10 Then after the three and a half days the breath of life from God went into them, and they stood up on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven calling to them, "Come up here!" And they went up into a cloud in the sky in the sight of their enemies.

"There's a resurrection and 'catching up' in plain sight," said Curious.

Not quite. No one sees the Rapture take place. It happens in the twinkling of an eye.

"Or come to think of it, it's like Jesus' ascension witnessed by those nearby."

Yes, and notice here again we have a voice speaking from heaven.

"That 'great voice' must be like the voice of creation," said Curious. "It doesn't say anyone else hears the command that causes them to rise."

Is it a command they must obey?

"I don't think they have wings."

Then what is the purpose of the voice?

"The great voice powers their ascension. As for the city, this solves the problem of the corpses."

I see. Now everyone can forget about them and go back to ignoring heaven.

13 And in that hour there was a great earthquake, causing a tenth part of the city to fall. Seven thousand named people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were frightened and gave glory to the God of heaven.

"This purges the city of influencers—evidently unbelievers," Curious remarked.

The survivors are a lot like Lot: righteous but in the wrong place.

"So, mystically it's Egypt and Sodom; now I get it."

Aren't you curious about the tenth?—why not the typical third?

"This is realistic, not nominal. The righteous flee the city within an hour of witnessing the ascension because they suspect that the earthquake is imminent."

How will it be that all the unrighteous get to be in the particular buildings that fall?

"That's not a great number of people. The unrighteous gather together in one ballroom to celebrate the death of the witnesses. Reminds me of Samson's last revenge."

Revelation

14 *The second woe is past; behold, the third woe comes quickly.*

The seventh angel sounded, and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said,

*The kingdom of the world is now of our Lord
and of his Christ, and he will reign forever and ever.*

16 *And the twenty-four elders who sit before God on their thrones fell upon their faces and worshiped God, saying,*

*We give you thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty,
who are and who were,
because you have taken your great power,
and now you reign.*

"It's all over now," said Curious, "—the end of the plagues, that is."

Read it again, Curious.

"It says another woe is on the way, however."

What's new?

"But those in heaven are celebrating the end."

*The nations were angry,
and your wrath came! ...*

"Oh, no! Does this mean the real wrath hasn't begun yet?"

Why do the nations rage and the peoples meditate a vain thing, Curious?

"No doubt there are those who will be angry with God about the damage done to the 'environment' during these years."

You will appreciate the scope of this verse when you read the rest of it.

*to reward your servants the prophets,
as well as the saints
and those who revere your name—the small and the great—
and to destroy those
who destroy the earth.*

"I see the whole tribulation period here—and beyond," said Curious. "It starts back at the reward of the Rapture and finally puts down the satanically raging tyrants and anarchists."

John would have the larger view from the vantage point of heaven.

"The time has come for the Lord God Almighty to exert his power. He will call for an accounting that rids the earth of corruption and puts the saints in power under the King! Let there be a celebration!" Curious shouted.

19 *And the temple of God that is in heaven was opened,
and seen in his temple was the ark of his covenant;
and there followed lightnings, voices, thunders,
and an earthquake and great hail.*

Take your time with this one, Curious.

"This is exciting," said Curious. "Now we might be told what went on behind the scenes."

Look at it carefully. What does it mean that the temple of God was opened?

"This must be a significant revelation," said Curious.

Not so much a revelation! These are established terms.

"Again, it's like the Old Testament is being fulfilled."

In other words, the covenant with Israel is being fulfilled.

"And fulfilled dramatically and noisily," Curious added.

But not apart from the New Testament, you can be sure.

"I would like to see it in context with Christ," said Curious.

12 *And a great sign was seen in heaven:*

*a woman arrayed with the sun, and the moon under her feet,
and upon her head a crown of twelve stars;
and she was with child, and she cried out,
travailing in birth and in pain to be delivered.*

"As signs in heaven go, this is the clearest picture ever," said Curious.

Then let's hear your interpretation.

"With a crown of twelve stars, obviously the woman is Israel."

Then what do the sun and moon contribute to the cartoon?

"She's privileged to have God Most High as her husband. With the counsel of Yahweh she knows she tramples pagan gods under her feet. Her child, of course, is Messiah."

Yes, and it is a long, painful road she travels.

3 *And there was seen another sign in heaven:*

*behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns
and with seven crowns upon his heads.
And his tail drew down the third part of the stars of heaven
and cast them to the earth.*

"Now there's Satan with seven proxies—he's appropriated every power on earth."

This is "another sign," not time-wise sequential. Cast down a third of what, Curious?

"Nothing fits better here than those falling stars in chapter 6. They were satellites!"

*And the dragon stood before the woman that was about to be delivered, that
when she be delivered he may devour her child.*

"Standing ready to offer him all the kingdoms of the world if he will disassociate himself from the temple and use his power to provide physical bread to the nations," said Curious, remembering how Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness.

5 *And she was delivered of a son, a man child, who is to rule all the nations
with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to his throne.*

"As promised, this book is indeed a revelation of Jesus Christ," Curious remarked.

But it's not the whole gospel of Jesus, Curious. In this verse it's the bare framework.

6 *And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared
by God, that there they may nourish her a thousand two hundred and three-
score days.*

What is this, Curious? In sequence here it would be the escapees when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem. But as far as I know it doesn't fit that or any event in the past.

"This previews the future tribulation period. Israel has to be a nation in the land in order to flee from it."

It's confirmation that Israel is always in heaven's plan even when she seems absent.

7 *There was war in heaven: Michael and his angels warred against the
dragon who fought with his angels.*

"Michael Where did I hear his name recently? Anyway, he would be the archangel Jude mentioned and also 'your chief prince' Daniel was told about," said Curious.

Get to the point. What is this war about?

"Satan and his angels are being deterred from unseating Israel entirely."

8 *They did not prevail; they lost their place in heaven: the great dragon was
cast down, the old serpent called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole
world, was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him.*

Did Satan suddenly lose his standing in heaven? What do you say, Curious?

"The decisive thing was when Israel's child was caught up to God and to his throne."

But that doesn't end the war.

"Satan lost the battle and his influence in heaven. No doubt he's angry!"

10 And I heard a great voice in heaven, saying, "Now comes the salvation, and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ, for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, who accuses them before our God day and night. And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them. But woe for the earth and for the sea because the devil has gone down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has but a short time."

"So the blood of the Lamb in one's testimony is the foremost defense against Satan's accusations," said Curious. "The devil isn't happy about this."

Yes, because the death of Christ is what he promoted; and now it's being used against him. It's mankind's the long-awaited hope of attainable righteousness.

"Good for those in heaven. But the game isn't quite over for Satan," said Curious.

Don't we know it? Tell us this, Curious: who is the heavenly narrator in this scene? John has heard "great voices" before—from Christ, angels, and even an eagle.

"The voice sounds akin to the human 'brethren.' But this is a major announcement!" He does speak with great authority.

"He speaks of 'our God.' That leaves only angels."

Are you sure heaven is so rudimentary? Shouldn't you be more curious?

"Unless someone like Moses is there."

Good. Now do I have to prompt you again? Is there day and night in heaven?

"I'm starting to wonder if this is anywhere near literal."

He speaks to heavens yet sees them like the atmosphere above earth and sea, as if the birds that "dwell" in them will be better off than fish and animals.

"But these heaven dwellers must be the saints that are no longer being accused."

So are you saying it's literal now?

"The message is clear: this victory of Jesus is the turning point of the ages."

What did he win?

"His victory was confirmed by the transformation of his followers."

Satan can no longer accuse them in heaven, but why does that matter so much?

"Satan is losing his argument! He accused all mankind of being irreparable sinners forever—like himself. Now there are legally righteous people living on earth. He must stop them from becoming sanctified lest they be used to testify against his petition."

13 And when the dragon saw that he was cast down to the earth, he persecuted the woman that brought forth the man child.

"That makes sense. It's out of satanic spite that the Jews have been persecuted."

By whom, Curious? Who has persecuted Jews ever since they sacrificed Jesus?

"This pins it on Satan regardless of who he uses as his instruments."

Okay, but I thought you identified the woman as being the nation.

"I admit it's complex. Many Jews are indifferent or opposed to Israel as a nation."

I was just testing you. There's more, but the descendants of Israel are Israel too.

14 And there were given to the woman the two wings of the great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time from the face of the serpent.

Here's more detail and another puzzle for you, Curious. Is this the same picture?

"What could that be but an airlift to get people out of a war zone?"

It's unlikely that Israel will have friends with lots of airliners to transport them at that time.

"Unless they land by parachute, the place will have to be near an airport, and that isn't typical of wilderness areas."

Also with plenty of hotel rooms and restaurants, you might add.

“This doesn’t make a lot of sense. Or maybe ‘wilderness’ refers to the area southeast of Israel that is specifically called ‘the wilderness’ in this book.”

They could live in tents like they did during their wilderness experience after escaping from Egypt. Every year they spend time in makeshift “booths” commemorating their escape from slavery.

“That reminds me—I think its back in Deuteronomy. ... Here it is:”

*As an eagle that stirs up her nest,
that flutters over her young,
he spread abroad his wings and took them;
he bore them on his pinions.*

That poetic passage celebrates the *miracle* of their flight out of Egypt.

“So maybe the *two wings of the great eagle* is a poetic metaphor.”

That’s fine, but a metaphor for what?

“In Zechariah I remember it was predicted that an escape route would open up through the mountain east of Jerusalem.”

A nice parallel, Curious—opening the mountain for them to pass is like the Red Sea being opened for them to escape.

“But that would be later, and this shows up closer to the beginning of the tribulation period. So the Zechariah passage must refer to some that were left behind after the airlift or whatever. Or else they came in later, of course.”

Keep reading, Curious, and see if there’s another clue.

15 And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a river after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the stream. And the earth helped the woman: the earth opened her mouth and swallowed up the river which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

“Obviously this isn’t literal water because if Satan is a dragon, dragons spit fire, not water,” quipped Curious.

Notice “mouth” vs. “mouth.”

“The water is a torrent of words from Satan’s proxies that become increasingly irrelevant and ignored by people living in that area.”

Who are his proxies that become irrelevant?

“Islam loses its influence in the future. That explains the temple being there.”

That’s a very interesting theory, Curious.

“I’m reevaluating the eagle wings: they must be metaphors too. There’s no literal airlift, but it’s a miracle just the same. If the water is words then the wings are wealth.”

I never heard that before.

17 And the dragon waxed wroth with the woman, and went away to make war with the rest of her seed that keep the commandments of God and hold the testimony of Jesus; and he stood upon the sand of the sea.

“So Satan leaves Israel alone and attacks Jewish Christians in every nation.”

Why do you say Jews? Why isn’t this simply about Christians?

“They prove their devotion in ways that would be criticized by the Christian church if it were still on earth.”

That would bring this episode up to modern times.

“Chapter twelve encapsulates the history of Israel. That’s fitting,” said Curious.

13 *And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads names of blasphemy.*

This is a new chapter with a new starting point, Curious.

“That one’s easy. It’s an empire forged of several nations with their military commanders being loyal to Satan—the dragon that John saw standing on the seashore now conjuring up a beastly regime in his own image.”

Revelation

Are you taking the ten and seven as symbolic numbers? Remember, the beast had ten horns in Daniel's dream, and three of them were eliminated.

"The beast Daniel saw had multiple horns, but they were kings upon one head. The horns on this beast are loosely connected to the heads. So the horns would be the powers really in control while the seven heads would represent leaders of several nations—however many that may be—which join and answer to the satanic system of the beast."

All right. Daniel doesn't have exclusive right to such images.

2 And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were as of a bear and his mouth as the mouth of a lion; and the dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.

"Adopting methods of previous empires, it moves quickly, trampling on human rights in a reign of terror. Those in seats of power are Satan worshipers—like what Satan tempted Jesus to be. It could be a cartoon of the Roman Empire—simplified of course."

I cannot disagree with you, Curious. That would be a flashback, but not for John.

3 One of his heads appeared to have been struck unto death; but then his death-stroke was healed, and the whole earth wondered about the beast.

"This could be a heart attack or stroke or dagger and then a resuscitation. Maybe a fake resurrection. But I rather think this refers to what looks like the end of the empire after several murders and suicides in the leadership."

That happened in Rome in AD 68-69. But this is just one of the heads, Curious.

"Because it happened so fast it was like just one of the heads."

I'm shaking my head, but keep reading.

4 And they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who compares to the beast? Who can contend with him?"

"No one is able to oppose the beast successfully, so lacking true knowledge of the God of heaven, they serve the government unquestioningly and worship the government's god," said Curious. "It's a regime installed by Satan, plain and simple."

Is there a gap here? Have we zoomed to the future now?

"This doesn't look quite like ancient Rome, actually. It's a beastly totalitarian regime enabled by modern technology. It's like the old Roman beast in a technocratic age."

But there's no other indication of a gap of nearly two thousand years or perhaps more in these verses. How do you account for that?

"The prophets do this all the time. You think they're dealing with a contemporary issue then you find they've projected it into the future."

Yes, Curious, we know that well by now. Look for something to synchronize this with events previously revealed in what John has told us.

5 And there was given to him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and there was given to him authority to continue forty and two months.

That's an interesting phrase: "given to him a mouth." Could this be a cyborg?

"Now the multi-headed beast has a single mouth!—like the lockstep news media."

Indeed. But I wonder how you would explain this to John and Daniel?

"Three and a half years are guaranteed to this regime. It has no need to worry about re-elections, and there's no attempt to hide its purpose now."

So if this is a revival of ancient Rome, it has come back transformed.

"It's too short a time for serial heads. So it must be a cabal of contemporaries."

Then what is this big mouth, exactly? It sounds like it talks incessantly and is heard everywhere. Is it one of the heads? Is it Daniel's little horn?

"If this is the official oracle of a modern version of the beast, it could be a robotic thing. Sure, that's it: an AI chatter-bot schooled in devil-pleasing rhetoric."

6 And he opened his mouth for blasphemies against God, to blaspheme his name and his dwelling place, including the residents of heaven.

"It sounds like the debut of the bot on social media, pushing this propaganda out on everyone's phone."

Why would it waste words criticizing residents of heaven, Curious?

"This is simply a continuation of what Satan did in heaven: accusing the saints."

Remind me. What good does that do—from his point of view?

"It's an attempt to make himself look reasonable, because his trial is coming up."

7 And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them: and there was given to him authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation.

Satan already owns the kingdoms of the world, so what does this mean, Curious?

"The dragon gives the beast unified authority, and the beast has military means."

Are the saints eliminated from the world at this point?

"But it doesn't say that all the saints will be killed. Job's case is similar."

Or at least not immediately. Remember the two witnesses.

8 And all earth dwellers whose names are not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that has been slain—they will worship him.

"Only the surviving saints refuse to worship the regime and Satan's mouthpiece."

How did these saints miss the Rapture?

"It becomes clearer every time this comes up. They didn't know at that point that they were destined to be saints, and neither did anyone else: the Rapture woke them up. They were left behind to keep everything from going to hell. I mean, Satan would like to see the whole experiment discontinued if he can't stay ahead of unlikely saints popping up, oozing Holy-Spirit power and choosing to be imprisoned or die rather than worship his beast."

When you indulge in invention like this, Curious, you're a bit out of character.

"The saints can't win this war, but those who imprison and kill the saints won't win in the end; and the saints know that, of course, but they will have to be patient."

9 If anyone has an ear, let him hear:

*If anyone is for captivity,
into captivity he goes.*

*If anyone will kill with the sword,
with the sword he must be killed.*

Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

You must have been reading ahead, Curious.

"That's interesting," said Curious. "Apparently some of the beast's party will live in captivity after Christ returns."

I smelled your curiosity cooking something up.

"They would be a great resource for cleaning up the earth's mess after the rebellion is put down."

11 And I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spoke as a dragon. And he exercised all the authority of the first beast in his sight. And he makes those who dwell on earth worship the first beast (whose death-stroke was healed).

John saw the first beast coming out of the sea. This one comes up out of the earth.

"Antichrist!—from the pit—mimicking the authority of the lamb while speaking like the devil and supporting this revived Imperial Rome and its trans-human emperor."

What will the death-stroke be this time?

"The death-stroke will be the 'sign of the beast' in those days", said Curious.

Revelation

Yes, and a useful sign for everyone since it identifies the beast. But what is it?

"It doesn't say what it is, but according to the pattern, the whole earth will wonder about it, and anyone knowing this book will not be deceived by something that looks like the beast in other respects. And that's a blessing!"

So if you suspect you're in the tribulation period and the beastly regime doesn't incur some death-stroke on the part of one of its members such that everyone wonders, you know it's not the time yet.

"I have to keep telling myself, the Rapture comes first," said Curious.

Would you say the beast isn't getting the worship he needs?

"This antichrist persuades many more to bow to the beastly regime."

So is this antichrist himself not being worshiped?

"But he doesn't appear to be the focus of worship; Satan reserves that for himself."

13 And he does great signs, even making fire come down out of heaven upon the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by means of the signs given him to perform in the sight of the beast—

"Jesus and his apostles used sign miracles as prophecy-matching credentials, but not like this," said Curious. "Rather, this is the Elijah type."

Surely the two witnesses are remembered, but this one is a false prophet.

"So now Christ's faithful few must remind them of the two witnesses of Christ and point out the folly of putting this ahead of that."

commanding those who dwell on earth to make an image of the beast who had the stroke of the sword and lived.

"Okay, here we go: I should have waited for the Bible to answer my question. It was a fatal wound to a head, and I guess it's now artificially alive. Its idol is a talking AI-god."

15 And it was given to him to give breath to it, to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as should not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

"Here we have the tyranny of the regime of artificial intelligence. Next we'll find out how the beastly bot eliminates its opposition," said Curious.

16 And he causes all, the small and the great, the rich and the poor, the free and the bond, be given a mark on their right hand or upon their forehead. No one will be able to buy or to sell save those who have the mark which is the name of the beast or the number of his name.

"The famous mark-of-the-beast, a new badge of the synagogue of Satan," quipped Curious.

18 Here is wisdom: he who has understanding, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

This is for someone who has understanding, Curious.

"It strikes me as a trinity of not reaching the completeness of seven. It could apply to any deluded clown claiming to be God because six is the number of man, not God."

Well, I agree with that, but some say a gematria treatment of "Nero Caesar" comes to 666.

"Since it's called a calculation, I think it's the beast, the antichrist lamb, and the image of the beast: all are part of the same. It implies a formula of types of men. One type is not the essence of it; it's the formula that matters."

The details of this beast would not fit Nero Claudius Caesar who was a populist and committed suicide in AD 68 after which Jerusalem was destroyed. Interestingly, for the gematria of Neron Caesar to equal 666 it must start with only those parts of his name using faulty Hebrew transliteration. I wonder if that's significant of a beast to come!

"John may have figured this fits Nero. But so what? Prophecy is pattern."

14 *And I saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on Mount Zion and with him 144,000 having his name and the name of his Father written on their foreheads.*

“Now there’s our true Lamb deploying his select disciples to guard the site of his capital,” said Curious rather facetiously.

I notice you didn’t say Jerusalem.

“It says Mount Zion, so it’s not about the city, exactly.”

What do you make of the Lamb in this scene? Is it something like a ghostly image, or is it a statue surrounded by the guard, similar to the arrangement of the tribes camped around the tabernacle?

“But I’m not able to picture this yet.”

Is it the same 144,000 we saw in chapter seven? It doesn’t mention tribes of Israel.

“I’m convinced that the number 144,000 signifies all Israel, and here’s the whole house of Israel being converted to serve Jesus Christ.”

Yes, it is obvious. But why Mount Zion?

“Mount Zion is the location of the City of David, so this picture associates David with Jesus, and the whole of Israel with them both.”

Do you think this is merely a picture?

“I’m thinking this may not be an actual event; it’s just a cartoon.”

Why does it show up here?

“If Jerusalem is to be the capital of the world, this might be a statement asserting claim to that location—as well as the rest of the land that was assigned to the tribes.”

Even Dan? (Let’s see if Curious remembers.)

“However, Dan lost his territory, apparently.”

Not so. Ezekiel shows Dan’s future territory at the extreme north. Remember that?

“But Samson won’t let that happen, I’m sure. He’ll carry Dan’s flag alone if necessary.”

Yes, we know you like Samson. Keep reading; this will all be explained.

2 *And I heard a voice from heaven, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of a great thunder—*

“Now which is it, John?” grumbled Curious.

Why not both, Curious? But the important question is, “Whose voice is this?”

and the voice I heard was like harpers harping with their harps.

“I get it: like harpers making the harps sound like many waters and also singing. The two sounds are mixed, like a deep thundering voice over rushing water.”

If 144,000 all sang together it would be an amazing sound.

3 *And they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no man could learn the song save the 144,000 who had been purchased out of the earth.*

So this is something new even to heaven. What do you make of it, Curious?

“If they’re not literally in heaven, they have the attention of everyone in heaven. If they *are* in heaven, it must be a different 144,000, unless it’s the same ones having been translated to heaven.”

Is their song understood by anyone at all?

“I take it ‘no man could learn the song save the 144,000’ refers to their uniqueness. They’re unique among humans, in a new class that doesn’t fit anywhere in the schemes of religion.”

If you think that who and what they are is so easily accounted for, look out!

4 *These are they who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are they who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men, the first fruits to God and to the Lamb.*

Revelation

Don't be discouraged; first fruits tells us something, Curious.

"'First fruits' tells me they're among the earliest disciples of Christ in Israel. So they cannot be the same as the 144,000 in chapter seven."

And in their mouth was found no lie. They are without blemish.

"They're *extremely* unusual. Adam's sin hasn't touched them," said Curious.

I disagree. It says they were purchased. Now they descend from the second Adam.

"I think that's the way God *must* see those married to Christ."

The devil would have to agree with that, which I'm sure makes him shudder to think that they might truly be incorruptible.

"Yes, this is a picture, a timeless picture reaching back to the earliest days of the Christian era."

Then are these 144,000 purely symbolic, or is there such an army that will have a role to play in the end times?

"These could appear on earth by resurrection and assert Jesus Christ's ownership of Jerusalem—if not all of the promised land. But when it will happen I can't guess."

6 And I saw another angel flying in mid heaven, having eternal good tidings to proclaim to those who dwell on earth and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people.

"Ho! John saw an angel flying in the sky. This would be the source of all the winged angel art."

But you're not going to allow that it's realistic art, are you? It's a cartoon, right?

"The message goes out everywhere in every language. How else could this be pictured in John's day?"

Indeed, modern communication would be indescribable and incomprehensible. Do you suppose the 144,000 have something to do with getting the good word out?

"This could represent the worldwide evangelizing that has been going out over the airwaves since the early days of radio until the day the beast shuts it all down."

7 And he says with a great voice, "Fear God and give him glory, for the hour of his judgment has come; and worship him who made the heaven and the earth, the sea and fountains of waters."

"I take that back," said Curious, "because the very hour of judgment is at hand when this is preached."

There's no need to take it back, brother. They've always preached that judgment is at hand. And so it is for everyone as a practical matter. It's a timeless message.

"They worship anything and everything but the One who made them," said Curious.

Why is that practice so prevalent?

"Because when there's no respect for God, giving him glory seems irrational."

But is failing to fear God not irrational in the first place?

"If we're unaware of God's love for us, the pain of being what we are leads to irrational choices. That's my theory, anyway."

You've packed a lot into that sentence, Curious. Now complete your thought.

"The search for release from discomfort always leads to idolatry of one kind or another."

8 And another, a second angel, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great that has caused all the nations to drink the wine of the wrath due to her fornication."

Yes, all of our intoxicating spiritual and worldly pursuits are illicit relationships.

"Babylon the great. ... This is the legacy of Nimrod's ambition which the prophets predicted would be utterly destroyed. Isaiah said it first: *Fallen, fallen is Babylon.*"

But Isaiah and Jeremiah spoke in very literal terms about the fall of Babylon.

"I say legacy because Babylon on the Euphrates is merely a curiosity today."

Remember this is not necessarily about today.

“So this has already been fulfilled.”

If so, then why is Babylon’s influence still so strong as revealed here?

“This could mean Rome. When Peter mentioned the assembly in Babylon I wondered about that—if Rome was being referred to as Babylon because of its many religions.”

It says Babylon the great led the nations into religious idolatry. But Rome was not the leader; Rome adopted the gods of the nations.

“Rome was strongly influenced by Greek culture, however. So to fit this in here we *could* say Babylon on the Euphrates will rise again.”

That’s something to watch for, everyone.

“It would take some time—many years for a city to grow and become as influential as this Babylon must be.”

On the other hand, this could refer to the fall of the Roman Church which has throughout the centuries substituted its own idolatry or combined its own idolatry with that of the nations.

9 And a third angel followed them, saying with a great voice, “If any man worships the beast and his image and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand, he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God which is prepared unmixed in the cup of his anger—

“What’s the distinction here?” Curious wondered. “Are there two cups of wrath?”

In both is the penalty for worshiping false gods. It’s a metaphor, Curious.

“Did Babylon produce the beast, or is the beast of Satan and predated Babel?”

and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb—

Do you find this as odd, Curious? I do. It doesn’t fit either death or eternal punishment because it takes place in the presence of Jesus and holy angels.

“This reminds me of the fire and brimstone coming out of the mouths of those horses from ... Babylon on the Euphrates? Could this be fear and a painful physical reaction to the mark?”

That’s a wild idea, Curious, but I must admit there’s reason behind it.

“Fear, vaccine administration, and visible identification have been linked already.”

and the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever; and they have no rest day and night—they that worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.

“This is uncomfortably close to home,” said Curious.

If you’re referring to the pain inflicted by fear and injury on those who trusted the medical head of the beast, then what is meant by the “smoke of their torment”?

“They’re praying fervently now and forever!”

12 Here is the patience of the saints, those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

“Yes! The reward for patiently keeping one’s temple clean as commanded in Scripture and refusing the witches brews!”

Remember what James wrote: patience leads to completion. But wait, there’s more.

13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying, write: “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from henceforth.” Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, for their works follow with them.

“Some will starve or die in isolation, waiting for the Lord. That’s patience!”

Heaven wanted to be sure John included that promise.

“Everyone needs to remember 14:13,” echoed Curious.

But will they appreciate its meaning?

“Because blessings depend on one’s labors.”

Revelation

14 And I saw, and behold, a white cloud and sitting on the cloud one like a son of man, having on his head a golden crown and in his hand a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the temple crying with a great voice to him who sat on the cloud: "Send forth your sickle and reap; the hour to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." And he who sat on the cloud cast his sickle upon the earth, and the earth was reaped.

"I've been expecting a scene something like this where people sit on clouds," said Curious.

It's disappointing, isn't it?

"They're supposed to be strumming harps, not swinging sickles."

That's what happens when you ignore things you don't understand.

"I would put the emphasis on 'harvest,' not on the cloud."

Harvest is generally a good thing. And the reaper?

"The one reaping the harvest is a first-class enigma."

Could he be one of the twenty-four elders?

"John would have identified him as one of the elders if he knew that to be the case. Curiously, he describes him as 'like a son of man.'"

So are you concluding that this person has a unique responsibility?

"This man has a special interest in the harvest. I'm also wondering about the cloud, which is like the last place where Jesus was seen on earth."

Try casting this as a political cartoon, Curious.

"I see a man wearing a golden victor's crown and sitting on a white cloud. Below him stretches the earth. I don't know if John saw the earth as a globe. He never says so. But that's how I picture it, even though it puts the cloud above the atmosphere, which is fine for a cartoon. The man on the cloud holds a sickle in his hand, evidently waiting for a signal. Off in the distance is an image of the temple in heaven. The second frame has the angel flying out of the temple and announcing that the time for the harvest has come. The third frame has the sickle being flung to earth. The fourth frame shows a few bare patches where the sickle found grain to harvest, but not too many."

Why isn't the harvested grain and its disposition shown anywhere?

"This being a cartoon, it need only make one point, so it excludes irrelevant details."

Does it make the point that the day and the hour was not known to the reaper?

"It could be assumed that the reaper knows that the time is near, since he's sitting on that cloud."

So if the reader assumes the harvest consists of souls of men, he's left wondering and uncertain about whether the harvest is of wheat or tares. Is that right?

"I'm remembering the parable Jesus told about the harvest of the tares coming before the wheat. The tares were burned and the wheat was gathered into barns."

According to that, the reaper would be an angel.

"It doesn't fit this scene at all."

Why should it? Why not leave it in the context of verse 13?

"Here comes another sickle. Maybe it will help."

17 And another angel came out from the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, he that has power over fire, and he called with a great voice to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, "Send forth your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." And the angel cast his sickle to the earth and gathered the vintage of the earth and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and there came out blood from the winepress, even to the bridles of the horses, as far as a thousand and six hundred stadia.

That's equivalent to about 190 miles, Curious.

"There's no doubt about this harvest," declared Curious.

It's doubtful that you've gotten your head around it so soon.

"If the man on the cloud who did the other harvest is involved, he's nowhere to be seen here in this one. Instead, an angel is the executioner."

Okay, let's have the cartoon.

"In the first frame, the sickle is being delivered from the temple where the altar is plainly shown with flames of sacrifice upon it. The second frame looks down on a map of Israel with grapevines superimposed on it, and clusters of grapes are being cut from vines by angels and thrown into a long vat that starts at Jerusalem and extends south and north over the entire length of the land. On the vat is written, 'The Wrath of God.' The third and final frame shows horses and riders entering the long vat from the north. They're spattered with blood-red juice from trampling the grapes of the land."

What makes you think this is about Israel? It says, "vine of the earth."

"I should think everyone knows the grapevine associates with Israel as a symbol."

So the reader of the cartoon can't miss the fact that the grapes represent Israel undergoing kinetic wrath, and the reason is apparent from the foregoing—their stubborn indifference to the plagues and their acceptance of the mark of the beast.

"But now I have a problem reconciling this one with the parable of the tares and the wheat as well. Where are the tares? Jesus said the tares would be eliminated first."

Listen up. He was referring to a different occasion.

"Another discrepancy, if these are the tares, is the tares are cast into a fire somewhere while these grapes get slaughtered—like in a war. And the location is specified."

How could this be a war? There's no battle line.

"They have made God their enemy."

All right. Now what do we do with this scene, Curious?

"It's hard to tell where this scene fits in, if it fits in at all. I think there's more structure in these chapters than it seemed at first: it's not a simple sequence. The first six seals were a sort of overview of the tribulation period—like a movie trailer. Then there was a brief pause. Then the six trumpets supplied more detail. Then the seventh trumpet made an announcement that the end has come. Now it's like we've been in an intermission with various scenes that may not be synchronous at all—a picture of Israel going back beyond the birth of Jesus, a war in heaven, casting down of Satan, reincarnation of the beast, 144,000 blameless disciples, announcement of the fall of Babylon."

So is there any sense in which the wheat-and-ares parable fits in here?

"My guess is that Jesus' parable was a much larger picture which includes the time when he will have come back to conquer and rule the world: to make way for the kingdom, the sons of the evil one are removed and the sons of the kingdom are preserved."

Good guess. The tares are disposed of in fire while these are grapes and are "harvested" in a manner which is reminiscent of prophetic passages in the Old Testament.

"If everyone on earth, good and evil, were to get harvested at the same time, there would be nobody left when Jesus returns. These harvests are put together here because they're harvests, not because they're consecutive."

We've seen martyrs and multitudes from out of the tribulation in heaven already. So what kind of harvest might be pictured here that hasn't been mentioned yet?

"It's *before* the tribulation; it's the Rapture. And the one like a son of man is Jesus."

How does that square with Paul's description?

"Meeting Jesus in the clouds is a cartoon too. It has to be. Or call it a euphemism. The physical body is for earth, not heaven. We shall be changed. What happens to the bodies? Unmade. Clouds of dust. In the twinkling of an eye it will be painless."

Naturally, I agree. That's why their disposition isn't shown. Only the cloud is shown.

15 *And I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having seven plagues, the last, for in them the wrath of God is finished.*

"There's another signpost," said Curious, "but I'm not sure about the sequence."

How do you picture them holding plagues, by the way?

"John said it was great and marvelous, but there's no clue about what these plagues looked like."

Maybe they held placards.

"It says they actually had the plagues, like they held them in their hands."

If you had to make a cartoon with so little information given, how would you draw the plagues?

"'Bowls of wrath' comes to mind. I heard that phrase somewhere. Bowls would work well in a cartoon: the plagues are poured out from bowls."

Curious paused because he was puzzled beyond words, which as you know rarely happens.

"I don't see how there can be another round of plagues," he finally said. "I thought the harvest with the 190-mile winepress completed the outpouring of wrath."

Remember, since we left the trumpets there have been signs and scenes where sequence was not maintained.

"This round of seven plagues might dovetail into the seventh trumpet—like the trumpets came out of the last of the seven seals."

Now look at the next verse. We're in for another interruption.

"I doubt that John knew how these all fit together. Or maybe they don't fit sequentially on any terrestrial timeline. That should not surprise us if these are heaven's plans and not a documentary of the future."

2 *And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who come off victorious from the beast and from his image and from the number of his name are standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying,*

*Great and marvelous are your works, O Lord God Almighty;
righteous and true are your ways, O King of the ages.*

*Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name?
for you only are holy;*

*for all the nations will come and worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been made manifest.*

"These include martyrs who preferred death by starvation to worshiping the image of the beast and taking his sign," said Curious. "I wouldn't call this a harvest. Come to think of it, those who refuse the mark and are prepared to survive will miss out!"

They must have been well versed in the whole Bible in order to enjoy that song. They missed the Rapture and failed to prepare, but they got the most important thing right.

"They must be enjoying this immensely to have their perception of God be validated—I would say a hundredfold."

Notice how they declare God's righteousness.

"It's obvious here, and now looking back I see that their cheerfully praising God in spite of earth's troubles is an answer to Satan."

And certainly an answer to anyone's criticizing God for his administrations on earth.

"If anyone had reason to complain, these folks would be among the first."

Yes, and like a Jobian reward they're restored with fame and a bonus.

"Harps of God! I think we'll have to wait to find out what a harp of God is."

Okay. What about that sea of glass, Curious? Can we guess what its purpose is now?

"The sea of glass is the stage provided for their performance, and like all such platforms there are lighting arrangements."

5 And after these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened, and there came out from the temple the seven angels that had the seven plagues, clothed in bright linen and girded about their breasts with golden girdles. And one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives for ever and ever.

“These seven angels had nothing in their hands when they were introduced above. Now we see there’s a religious ceremony involved. No wonder that no detail was given about these plagues in that verse.”

Well, actually it said “having” the plagues, which now we see means having the duty to dispense the plagues.

“Obviously that verse was merely an introduction.”

Before going on to the next verse, what do you make of the temple connection here, O curious one?

“This wrath is connected with the temple, so it must be pointed at unfaithful Israel—reminds me of Ezekiel’s rants from Babylon about the wrath coming down on Judah.”

Doesn’t that mean the scope of this is limited geographically?

“Whether or not the bowls hold wrath for other nations remains to be seen. But the trumpets appeared to predict widespread impacts.”

Why did John emphasize the noble appearance of these angels?

“The appearance of these angels is impressive, and it must be significant.”

Are you sleepy? Break it down for us. What do the white robes signify?

“The robes are bright. It doesn’t say white. They could be the seven colors of the rainbow.”

I doubt that anyone would agree with you, Curious.

“But to assume that would mean finding the significance of each color as it applies to the particular bowl.”

Assume they’re white, then. Nothing is brighter than all the colors together.

“White signifies purity and holiness. The implication here is that the wrath they are serving in no way makes them less holy and pure—again in defense of the Great Tribulation’s justice.”

Yes, John is careful to remind us that no effort of justification is needed for the actions of the One who inhabits eternity.

“The gold signifies royalty.”

Do you mean that, Curious?

“Certainly there are ranks of angels. They don’t all look alike.”

8 And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no one was able to enter into the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels are finished.

Tell us how these plagues are associated with gold, Curious. Gold implies holiness.

“Wrath is the essential word there, and it manifests as plagues administered by holy angels of the tabernacle of testimony—the holy laws that were seldom kept in Israel!”

But notice that the bowls were handed out by one of the four cherubim.

“And the medium of wrath comes from one of those strange living creatures. It would be the one like a man. But how he manages seven bowls with four hands I don’t know.”

That’s our curious one: no detail is too small to be a legitimate target of the outpouring of his curiosity.

“Smoke about the tabernacle always denoted the presence of Yahweh. He’s taking full responsibility for this.”

Why is the temple closed at this time?

“They don’t have a prayer—no mercy now—the mercy seat is hidden.”

16 *And I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God."*

"The command is from the temple of Israel's God. Clearly this is his wrath being poured out on Israel. Obviously this comes before the grape harvest."

2 *And the first went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a noisome and grievous sore upon the men who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.*

Will the beast somehow explain that the mark wasn't the cause of the sores?

"It turns out that the mark wasn't as harmless as, no doubt, it was advertised—reminds me of you-know-what."

3 *And the second poured out his bowl into the sea; and it became blood as of a dead man; and all living things in the sea died.*

"This is curious," said Curious. "The second trumpet called out a similar bloody event, but only a third of the sea creatures died in that one."

If the trumpet was the announcement, how do you account for the discrepancy?

"The sea here must refer to the Sea of Galilee. If the plague is worldwide, there will be differences in different parts of the earth, so a one-third average is reasonable."

How could human blood be poured out in such quantity?

"It doesn't say blood was poured into the sea. It says the bowl was poured out and the sea became blood as of a dead man, which I take to mean 'the sea became like dead man's blood.' Again, it could be red algae, depleting the oxygen."

Okay, but if the second trumpet was about the same event but reporting its effects worldwide, how does algae sink ships?

"Tsunamis from that mountain-of-a-thing falling into the sea could destroy ships in port," said Curious. "It didn't say they sank."

Then explain how the first trumpet announced the sores.

"The first trumpet was about fire. If the first bowl had rained down fire, interpreters would be blaming the dying sea-life on man-made warming, not the wrath of God."

4 *And the third poured out his bowl into the rivers and the fountains of the waters, and there came blood. And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are you, who are and were, O Holy One, in making this judgment; for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink: they are worthy of it."*

"The third trumpet called for a star named Wormwood that poisons a third of rivers and headwaters and causes unspecified deaths. This one targets exactly the same waters, but now with blood."

Is any reconciling possible?

"The two together make an equation," said Curious. "Blood equals poisoning and death."

Do you mean this is the key to the meaning of blood in all these plagues?

"John is dealing in symbols. Death is symbolized as blood. Blood means death."

Then is wormwood interchangeable as a symbol?

"Wormwood adds something about the source. Here we have a statement about the reason for it: saints and prophets This seems to be specifically about Israel."

You said, concerning the trumpets, that anyone "who reads Revelation carefully will not be too surprised by what happens when it doesn't exactly match the revelation." And you gave a reason for that which gets into your theory about how plans in heaven work out in terrestrial time.

"I thank God and John for including the trumpets. If only the bowls had been given, they would seem rather arbitrary," said Curious.

7 *And I heard the altar saying,*

“Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are your judgments.”

“The martyrs under the altar become vocal about this one,” said Curious, “just as one would expect. This is the retribution they were calling for.”

8 *And the fourth poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to scorch men with fire. And being scorched with great heat, they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues; and they refused to give him glory.*

“These four bowls definitely cover the same period of time as did the first four trumpets,” said Curious.

This one exposes the symbolism in “poured out,” does it not?

“Obviously ‘poured out’ is a compact way of saying these complex events are direct manifestations of the wrath of God. But the metaphor sounds silly when applied to the sun.”

Has Yahweh made himself known to them now, or are they cursing mindlessly?

“Science can’t handle such improbabilities, so atheism is under fire.”

What do you mean by that?

“This looks like a major CME, which is so rare that to have it occur on this schedule is uncanny.”

Then if they acknowledge such precision in the Bible, what keeps them from embracing all its truth and repenting?

“I’m no psychologist, but they’re angry at Yahweh for messing with the sun and pulling the rug out from under their theories.”

10 *And the fifth poured out his bowl upon the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was darkened; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they repented not of their deeds.*

It says his kingdom was darkened. That could include a wide area.

“Isn’t this merciful?” said Curious. “They complained about the heat; now they get a cooling spell.”

Is there any correspondence with the fifth trumpet?

“Actually, the fourth trumpet announced the darkening of the sun, moon, and stars.”

Has the fifth trumpet nothing to offer?

“The fifth trumpet was about pain from those scorpion-like tails on the locusts which was so intense they wanted to die. This fifth bowl doesn’t mention the cause of the darkness, but the fifth trumpet describes darkness from smoke out of the pit of the abyss.”

Does that absolve us of having to explain the exotic locusts, since there is no mention of them here?

“This reveals the locusts as being connected with the regime of the beast, which is what I thought they were.”

Can we assume then that the pain from this fifth-bowl darkness lasts five months?

“That curious five-month duration is suspect because it was the fifth trumpet and now the fifth bowl. However, it doesn’t apply here.”

We have yet to discover how pervasive the numerology is in this book.

“The numbers aren’t mystical if they’re symbols from the heavenly realm.”

Let’s have some curiosity about this!

“Five is halfway between three and seven. It’s a variable that depends on other things and doesn’t represent anything outstanding on its own.”

All right. I’ve never heard that before, but I’ll take your word for it until a better explanation comes along.

12 And the sixth poured out his bowl upon the great river, the Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way might be made ready for the kings that are from the sun-rising.

"Now this is interesting indeed when seen in light of the sixth trumpet," said Curious. Here we have a partial fulfillment of the trumpet's prediction."

But two hundred million kings?

"The horse-riders wore crowns, as I remember."

Are you abandoning your interpretation that makes them symbolic of the response to some disease pandemic issuing from that area?

"Both must be true. The psychological invasion comes first. Fear multiplies the magnitude of the threat."

We know these "pouring out" events are metaphors for almost any assault. But it seems especially incongruous here. How could something poured out cause water to disappear?

"Perhaps it destroys a dam."

I was baiting you, Curious, to see if you were listening. Don't you think Yahweh can dry up a river directly? He dried up a swath across the Red Sea and also across the Jordan River.

"It doesn't say how much will dry up. A swath across the river is all that would be required if it remains long enough."

In John's day this would have seemed necessary.

"This might be a convenience even for modern armies, but not a necessity. However, let's say the CME disabled all the electronics and rendered all the military equipment useless. But the prince of Rosh is prepared for that too and has a backup cavalry of a million horses when all the contributions of the nations in his coalition are added up. Then the demonic fear mongers multiply their number by two hundred."

That's far fetched, Curious. Maybe the river is only symbolic of all the obstacles preventing armies from being transported through that region from the east.

"Not only the Euphrates but the whole of Iraq might be the 'river' to be dried up."

By the way, you seem to have changed your mind and you now think Ezekiel prophesied this invasion of Israel.

"Ezekiel's predictions about Rosh, or Russia, invading Israel have to be fulfilled sometime. He got advised of two different scenarios. This is not the one where the object was economic expansion over a prosperous yet defenseless Israel. Here the motive must be different because earthquakes have devastated the area."

13 And I saw out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet three unclean spirits, as it were frogs, for they are spirits of demons, working signs, which go forth to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together to the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.

"There it is! The Day of the Lord we read about so often in the Prophets," exclaimed Curious.

This reveals that it's demonically inspired—Satan's doing.

"Yahweh was very clear that he had his hooks in Gog when he told Ezekiel to expect this massive movement of troops."

Doesn't Satan know Gog and his armies can't survive, let alone win this war?

"Satan is wroth. He's reckless about spreading his rebellion. I imagine he'll sacrifice a thousand to silence one voice of truth. Why? Because he's desperate. All he can think about is upsetting Yahweh's intention to harvest obedient slaves."

Curious, we should go back and reread Psalm 2 right now.

"Where is that psalm that mentions this type of thing? ... Here it is:"

*Why do the nations rage,
and the peoples meditate a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against Yahweh,
and against his anointed, saying,
“Let us break their bonds asunder
and cast away their cords from us.”
He who sits in the heavens will laugh:
the Lord will have them in derision.
Then he will speak to them in his wrath
and vex them in his sore displeasure:
“Yet I have set my king
upon my holy hill of Zion.”
“I will tell of the decree:
Yahweh said to me,
‘You are my son;
this day I have begotten you.
Ask of me,
and I will give you
the nations for your inheritance,
and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession.
You shall break them with a rod of iron;
you shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.’”
Now therefore be wise, O you kings;
be instructed, you judges of the earth.
Serve Yahweh with fear
and rejoice with trembling.
Kiss the son, lest he be angry
and you perish in the way,
for his wrath will soon be kindled.
Blessed are all they who take refuge in him.*

“They’re insane to war against God Almighty,” Curious said.

15 (Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he who watches and keeps his garments, lest he walks naked and they see his shame.)

“A word to the wise who read this long before it happens,” said Curious. “How long in this day and hour will it be before it happens, I wonder.”

Remember Jesus’ parable of the virgins and their lamps.

“After waiting thousands of years it’s no wonder if some run out of oil.”

Who has waited thousands of years?

“Well, nobody lives that long.”

So keep your shirt on.

“I get the point that one needs to be continuously faithful to Christ and not the world, but what’s the use of watching for something that will be a surprise?”

Think hard, Curious.

“Oh, I get it. There’s a blessing in that kind of devotion.”

What kind is “that” kind?

“I can’t think of anything else that requires that kind of faith.”

Faith in what?

Revelation

"I mean faith in the Scriptures. ... That is, what is said about this."

What is said?

"The Rapture, specifically. So, logically, there's a blessing in watching for that like the five wise virgins who brought enough oil to keep their lights burning."

Then, specifically, what is there to watch for?

"It's a paradox, though, really, because the thief takes care not to be seen as he approaches the booty he's going to steal away."

What thief would announce his coming with seven trumpets and bowls of wrath?

"This confirms that the Rapture happens before it becomes obvious that the end-time program is unfolding—unfolding like when Satan pulls off this invasion of Israel."

16 And they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon.

"That sounds like the valley of Megiddo where King Josiah met Egypt's army."

Good guess. How did it come out for Israel?

"It was a bad decision on the part of Josiah, and Jerusalem was doomed after that."

*17 And the seventh poured out his bowl upon the air,
and a great voice came forth out of the temple,
from the throne, saying, "It is done!"
And there were lightnings and voices and thunders;
and there was a great earthquake
such as never had been since there were men on the earth,
so great an earthquake, so mighty.
And the great city was divided into three parts,
and the cities of the nations fell,
and Babylon the great was remembered in the sight of God,
to give to her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.*

"Here's the finale," said Curious, "a massive earthquake triggered by lightning."

Cities fall, but one is singled out as being the primary target—or is it two?

"A tenth part of Jerusalem had already fallen, and now it's further remodeled. Babylon and other cities are destroyed."

Yes, if Babylon is Jerusalem's demonic counterpart, it must also be a literal city.

*20 And every island vanished,
and the mountains could no longer be found.*

Mountains and islands disappearing? Do you buy that, Curious?

"This could refer to structures within Babylon, since that's the immediate context."

*21 And great hailstones, about the weight of a talent,
came down out of heaven upon men.*

"This comes with the lightning and thunder and earthquake, and like the rest it's supernatural, at least according to natural events in the past."

Curious looked up talent and found it equals three thousand shekels, the shekel weighing about eleven grams.

"Seventy-five-pounds! The largest hailstones on record are two pounds."

Then are these literally ice balls, Curious?

"They must be real because the weight is specific. But I wonder how John knew."

Then we should expect the reaction among men to be reasonably literal.

*and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail;
for the plague thereof is exceeding great.*

"Apparently it's recognized as an act of God quite literally."

All the effects of this seventh bowl's pouring-out seem to be literal.

17 *And one of the seven angels that had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come hither; I will show you the judgment of the great harlot that sits upon many waters, with whom the kings of the earth committed fornication, and they that dwell in the earth were made drunken with the wine of her fornication."*

"So Babylon's role among nations is ended," said Curious. Here's how Jeremiah described her: *Babylon has been a golden cup in Yahweh's hand that made all the earth drunken. The nations have drunk of her wine; therefore the nations are mad.*"

3 *And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-colored beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns.*

"Here's the beast again, like the red dragon but here called a beast. These beasts are all a manifestation of Satan and his demons," said Curious.

4 *And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication ...*

"So this is the caricature of Babylon from heaven's point of view," said Curious. "She can't walk on her own feet."

5 *and upon her forehead a name was written:*

MYSTERY BABYLON THE GREAT
MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND
ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH

And I saw that the woman was drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus.

And when I saw her, I wondered with a great wonder.

"Okay, there's the full cartoon," said Curious.

What do you make of the "saints"? Are they the same as the "martyrs of Jesus," or is that a reference to the Old Testament saints and prophets who were martyred in Jerusalem?

"If John wonders, how can I not wonder? But I'm thinking of Zechariah where that evil woman in the basket was flown from Jerusalem to the land of Shinar."

In what sense is she a mystery, Curious?

"The mystery religions are here revealed for what they are," Curious declared, "unholy doctrines devised and supported by Satan from Babel to the present."

So is this woman on the beast an abstract of pagan religion, or may she represent unholy religion in some particular form at a particular time in history?

"But like Babylon of old, she may gather great influence somewhere in particular."

7 *And the angel said to me, "Why did you wonder? I will interpret for you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her which has the seven heads and the ten horns.*

"Oh, good! John gets an interpretation."

This shows that "symbol" could replace the word "mystery."

"It's extremely important that this Babylon symbol not be misinterpreted," Curious wisely observed.

8 *"The beast that you saw was and is not and is about to come up out of the abyss and to go into perdition.*

"Am I expected to identify this beast? Isn't this another mystery?"

Is there anything about this brief history that's familiar?

"It's a resurrection not to life but to destruction!"

Though it was dead, it comes back from the grave.

"It's like a negative of Christ's resurrection—essentially antichrist."

Revelation

“And they that dwell on the earth will wonder, those whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast, how that he was, and is not, and shall come.

You don't have to be among those who wonder, Curious, since you're reading this.

“They're curious, at least, but to no avail. ... That's awful! They're doomed to never understand hell!”

By the way, when will it happen? Is this on the timeline?

“This seems to tie back to that indefinite span of time where we had the signs.”

So the Roman Empire would be the beast that was and was not after it fell.

9 *“Here is the understanding of wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits; and they are seven kings ...*

But these mountains are kings, not hills. They would not be the seven hills of Rome.

“This seems contrary to the Roman-empire theory,” said Curious.

Because this woman's influence is international—she sits on many waters—so must be the beast she rides.

the five have fallen, the one is, the other is not yet come; and when he comes, he must continue a little while.

“The five fallen empires would be Egyptian, Assyrian, Babylonian, Media-Persian, and Greek. The one existing in John's day would be the Roman empire, and the one yet to come would be the Ottoman empire.”

Yes, all of them dependent on the beast.

“And the beast that was and is not is himself also an eighth and is of the seven; and he goes into perdition.

The beast finally comes back and manifests directly as the eighth empire.

“This eighth king must be Antichrist.”

“And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority as kings, with the beast, for one hour. These have one mind, and they give their power and authority to the beast.

“What I see in this is elites acting like kings colluding in a new world order supported by Satan.”

14 *“These will war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and they who are with him, called and chosen and faithful.”*

Note that the world rulers instigate this war against Christ.

“This is holy drama!” said Curious. “The wounded Lamb is King of kings!”

15 *And he says to me, “The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*

“Her corrupting influence is everywhere,” said Curious.

Isn't it more than influence?

“Actually this cartoon is simple and direct: the harlot depends on people everywhere for her sustenance.”

Remember: biblical “harlot” indicates false religion and idolatry, and this woman gathers all that into one system.

“It appears that the woman may have more direct support of the world's people than the beast does.”

The beast, of course, will let that go only so far.

16 *“And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh, and will burn her utterly with fire.*

“Ironically she gets sacrificed. This makes it clear that she's not just an idolatrous system; she's also embodied in something that can be dismantled and destroyed.”

17 “For God put in their hearts to do his plan and to come to their own mind, giving their kingdom to the beast until the words of God be accomplished.

This is how God will finally destroy false religion.

“She is a mystery! She’s supported by the devil and the people, yet she stood against the world being turned over to the beast.”

Is she two-faced, Curious?

“She’s for herself. She thinks she holds the greater power.”

Then she would be a political entity of some other kind.

“What comes to mind is the Roman Catholic Church widening her influence.”

18 “And the woman whom you saw is the great city which reigns over the kings of the earth.”

“Yes, she has become politically powerful, and here is her headquarters.”

Would that be Rome?

“In John’s day would his readers see contemporary Rome here? I’m not sure they would, because she becomes the enemy of the empire.”

18 After these things I saw another angel coming down out of heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory. And he cried with a mighty voice, saying, “Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great which has become a habitation of demons and a haunt of every unclean spirit and a haunt of every unclean and hateful beast.”

“This sounds like Isaiah and Jeremiah,” said Curious. “And to them it was the city of Babylon in the Euphrates river.”

Note that this is another angel, and one of great authority—like Isaiah and Jeremiah were great authorities as prophets. We can expect him to carry out their tradition and illuminate this prophecy with detail.

“I don’t think Rome ever became that, not literally at least,” Curious noted.

3 For by the wine of the fury of her fornication all the nations are fallen; and the kings of the earth committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth waxed rich by the power of her wantonness.

She built up her power by making idolatry the foul fuel of economies everywhere.

“There’s money for the few in false religion,” said Curious.

It would be fitting if Babylon on the Euphrates becomes her headquarters.

4 And I heard another voice from heaven saying, “Come out of her, my people, that you have no participation with her sins and that you receive none of her plagues, for her sins have piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.”

Many Jews moved out of Rome due to persecution well before John was exiled to Patmos. Christians were increasingly discriminated against too, as we saw in the letters at the beginning of this book.

“What plagues are these?” Curious wondered. “It seems fitting that the plagues already mentioned would be referenced here.”

*6 Render to her according as she rendered,
and give double to her according to her works:
in the cup which she mingled, mingle to her double.
However much she glorified herself and waxed wanton,
so much give her of torment and mourning,
for she says in her heart, I sit as a queen
and am no widow and shall in no way see mourning.*

The tumultuous political history of first-century Rome doesn’t fit here.

“Could this be the Roman church centuries later?”

Nothing like this has happened to the Roman church as yet, at least.

*8 Therefore in one day her plagues will come:
death and mourning and famine;
and she will be utterly burned with fire,
for strong is the Lord God who judged her.*

That rules out the Roman Catholic Church as an interpretation.

"Is this a literal day?" Curious wondered. "If so it must be future."

And if not?

"That word 'utterly' makes me wonder."

But a smoldering ruin would be proper, even necessary, in a cartoon, would it not?

*9 And the kings of the earth, who committed fornication and lived wantonly
with her, will weep and wail over her when they look upon the smoke of her
burning, standing far off for the fear of her torment, saying,
Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city!
for in one hour your judgment is come.*

"Jeremiah's 'Suddenly' has now become one hour," Curious noted.

Isaiah cites Sodom and Gomorrah.

"This must be a supernatural event," said Curious.

Why could it not be apocalyptic hyperbole?

"Weeping and wailing' may be exaggerated, but 'looking on the smoke of her burning' must mean what it says. How does one gaze at a symbol?"

Rome did burn, you know. Two thirds of the city was destroyed in nine days.

Curious was already looking it up.

"The two parts of the Great Fire of Rome totaled nine days, not one hour," he said.

And that was in AD 64, most likely before this book was written.

"John is making it clear that this is not that," Curious declared.

*11 And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, for no man buys
their merchandise any more: merchandise of gold and silver and precious
stone and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet; and all citron
wood and every vessel of ivory and every vessel made of most precious wood
and of bronze and iron and marble; and cinnamon and spice and incense and
ointment and frankincense and wine and oil and fine flour and wheat and cat-
tle and sheep; and of horses and chariots and slaves; and souls of men.*

What is most significant about that list, Curious?

"Obviously those items refer to commerce in John's day."

So would it make this apply to first-century Rome?

"But how else could commerce be detailed?"

What stands out the most?

"What's outstanding about this list is that it's a list. 'Merchandise' would be sufficient. There's never been so much apparently unnecessary detail in this book, unless it was the listing of the tribes of the 144,000."

Could you make a cartoon of this?

"One thing I'll say: this is not meant to be symbolic."

That's true, though if the particular items are taken as examples from categories, then they're symbolic to that extent.

"This has to literally be about the commerce of a particular city."

*14 And the fruits which your soul lusted after are gone from you, and all
things that were dainty and sumptuous are dead and gone from you and shall
be found no more at all.*

"So the destruction is complete and permanent," Curious observed.

As Isaiah and Jeremiah predicted it would be.

"Those prophets weren't kidding."

*15 The merchants of these things, who were made rich by her, will stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning, saying,
Woe, woe, the great city,
she that was arrayed in fine linen and purple and scarlet,
and decked with gold and precious stone and pearl!
for in one hour so great riches is made desolate.*

This is a repeated chorus. It must be doubly important.

"This would make a cartoon representing the collapse of a financial system," said Curious.

You might have something there. This woman must represent a city that is or will be a financial center.

*And every shipmaster and everyone who sails anywhere, mariners and all who gain their living by sea, stood far off and cried out as they looked upon the smoke of her burning, saying, "What is like the great city?" And they cast dust on their heads and cried, weeping and mourning, saying,
Woe, woe, the great city
wherein all that had shipping at sea were made rich
by reason of her costliness!
for in one hour she is made desolate.*

"Now it looks like a major international shipping port," said Curious.

By what measure? What does "her costliness" mean?

"Or it could be a world-renowned market for expensive items."

How would that translate to shipping profits in modern times?

"Another thought struck me: if the cost of shipping is high because of the location and the city is willing to pay more, the shipper's profit could be greater."

*21 And a strong angel took up a stone as it were a great millstone and cast it into the sea, saying,
Thus with a mighty fall will Babylon, the great city,
be cast down, and will be found no more at all.*

"That means clean gone from the earth if it means anything," said Curious.

Not that the angel is doing it, of course.

*22 And the voice of harpers, minstrels, flute-players, and trumpeters
will be heard no more at all in you;
and no craftsman, of whatever craft,
will be found any more at all in you;
and the voice of a mill
will be heard no more at all in you;
and the light of a lamp
will shine no more at all in you;
and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride
will be heard no more at all in you,*

"The finer things of life are to be taken with it."

The point is, heaven doesn't spare the bad for the sake of the good.

*for your merchants were the princes of the earth;
for with your sorcery were all the nations deceived.*

"We're talking about an international city. I assume all nations means all nations."

*24 And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all that have been slain upon the earth.*

"Now this sounds like the city goes back to the beginning of civilization."

If so, Babylon in Mesopotamia is the only candidate left standing.

"But it must be modern too. 'Come out of her, my people,' sounds like the Rapture."

19 *After these things I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,*

*“Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for true and righteous are his judgments;
for he has judged the great harlot,
she who corrupted the earth with her fornication,
and he has avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.”*

“She has no friends in heaven in her final hour,” observed Curious.

Are you implying that she once did?

“I wouldn’t say she ever did, but some who shared her bed may have seen her in different light at one time.”

Those who were called to come out of her heard and obeyed.

3 *And a second time they say,*

“Hallelujah!”

And her smoke goes up forever and ever.

There’s one to get your head around, Curious.

“We’ve seen this ‘forever’ smoke before. I think it symbolized torment, not physical products of combustion.”

Your memory is better than mine.

4 *And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne, saying,*

“Amen;

Hallelujah!”

5 *And a voice came forth from the throne, saying,*

*“Give praise to our God, all you his servants,
you who fear him, the small and the great.”*

6 *And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders saying,*

“Hallelujah,

for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.”

“This evidently is a turning point in heaven’s view,” said Curious.

7 *“Let us rejoice and be exceedingly glad,*

*and let us give the glory to him,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his wife has made herself ready.”*

“The demise of the evil woman was prerequisite to the marriage of the Lamb.”

Yes, but why?

“The Rapture was the last call for the Bride, and some needed to see that the end of Babylon was at hand before they would respond to the call.”

Or to put it the other way, those who missed the Rapture are not of the Bride.

8 *And it was given to her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

“I like that,” said Curious. “Because I don’t know if I will have any righteous acts to show on my own.”

9 *And he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are they who are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’”*

“Who are these?” asked Curious. “Some select guests, I know, but who?”

Try eliminating whoever would not be called.

“Anyone who doesn’t care about Christ wouldn’t care to be there.”

Remember the tribulation martyrs.

“If this takes place on earth, it could be the resurrected martyrs.”

And he said to me, "These are true words of God."

10 And I fell down before his feet to worship him. And he said to me, "See you do it not: I am a fellow-servant with you and with your brethren that hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God, for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

Why did John momentarily think the angel was Jesus?

"I sense there's something profound in that, but I don't quite get it," said Curious.

How was the angel able to speak the true words of God?

"Testifying the truth about Jesus doesn't make one God."

Then how do we know it's truth? Saying the words doesn't make it a true testimony.

"But I see from this that it takes a certain spirit for it to be genuine, and that would definitely be the Spirit of God," said Curious.

Which people manifest to various degrees, so would it not be with angels?

"The loyal angels must glow with the Spirit more at some times than at others."

What do you mean by "glow"?

"They exhibit great power sometimes, according to all that has been recorded."

I can hear you saying their abilities have no measure by earthly standards.

"If John was confused, I don't see how I could avoid being mistaken."

There's another equation for you, Curious. Don't overlook it!

"Prophecy has a spirit? Well, yes, prophecy might be malicious and deceiving, or it might be mistaken and empty. But if it's faithful and true, it's like what Jesus said."

11 And I saw the heaven opened: and behold, a white horse and he who sat upon it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war.

"Now *there's* a testimony of Jesus in the spirit of prophecy," said Curious. "Like he dictated to John for the Laodicean church: he's the faithful and true Witness!"

(Is Curious serious? I'm not sure.)

"This must be the moment of the second coming revealed in the spirit of all the Old-Testament prophecies."

Curious is out of control. He's trying to make more of "spirit of prophecy."

"I'm just excited. This is a dramatic cartoon!"

Fine. Let's get the rest of it.

12 And his eyes are a flame of fire, and upon his head are many diadems, and he has a name written which no one knows but himself ...

"One head wearing many crowns is a fine picture compared to that of the many-headed beast," said Curious.

Is this a cartoon or not, Curious?

"But how that unknowable name was portrayed to John, I have no idea."

Consider that it's outside our world of visualizations.

"The eyes being flames is easy to visualize but hard to interpret."

Isn't it consistent with John's initial vision?

"His eyes illuminate, but 'flames of fire' sounds like judgment."

Remember the lamps.

"That's it! He sees by his Spirit, not by natural light. Spirit penetrates everything."

What is the essence of his name being unknown?

"I'm thinking of Yahweh's reply to Moses. It wasn't a name, really."

One's name implies a context within which the name differentiates you from others.

"It makes sense that if the infinite God has a name, it's only known to himself."

Yes, that makes sense in words, but it breaks your cartoon.

"What if all these fancy images were never intended to be images at all."

What then?

Revelation

"They might be mnemonics: silly things working to help you remember something."
You have to know the thing first: chances are the mnemonic won't help you get there.

13 and arrayed in a garment sprinkled with blood, and his name is called The Word of God.

"This reminds me of the opening of John's gospel where Christ is the eternal Word, one with God."

What does the sprinkled blood remind you of?

"Christ coming down out of heaven with a blood-stained garment would be a reminder that he bears the penalty of our sins eternally."

That's nice, Curious, but read on.

14 And the armies which are in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and pure.

"Here come the angelic armies of heaven, but the horses are novel."

Did he not say he will come quickly?

"He comes quickly; of course we were told that. The horses are the reminder."

And the white?

"There are no dark spirits embedded among them."

In other words, this is a direct act of God, unlike in other judgments.

"In reality, Jesus Christ and his angels will not need horses any more than Moses and Elijah did. He will subdue his enemies with a word."

15 And out of his mouth proceeds a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations;

"The sword is the Word of God, of course. This smiting of the nations has been predicted in the Word and here it comes to pass. I'm reminded of a psalm. ... Here it is: in Psalm 110 it says,

*The Lord at your right hand
will strike through kings in the day of his wrath.*

You're assuming that the smiting refers to the initial battle. Check Zechariah 14 for exact words.

"That verse near the end of Zechariah opened up a window into the time of the kingdom on earth:

... there will be the plague by which Yahweh will smite the nations that do not go up to keep the feast of tabernacles.

"But that has to do with ruling them after the initial battle."

So it does.

*and he will rule them with a rod of iron;
and he treads the winepress of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.*

"Of course that reminds me of Isaiah 63:3:

*I have trodden the winepress alone;
and of the peoples there was no man with me:
yes, I trod them in my anger,
and trampled them in my wrath;
and their lifeblood is sprinkled on my garments,
and I have stained all my raiment."*

There's your correct interpretation of the sprinkled blood. What you said was true and nice, but it wasn't the reason for the mnemonic.

"All right. Does anything in this book stand on its own?"

Is this the same winepress we saw in chapter 14?

"The winepress symbol isn't limited to Israel, as the passage from Isaiah shows."

Then what does it refer to here?

"Obviously here it refers to the smiting of the nations at his appearing."

16 *And he has on his garment and on his thigh a name written,*

KING OF KINGS

AND LORD OF LORDS

"In case there would be any doubt who this is," said Curious. "I know there's a verse somewhere."

First Timothy. Chapter 6.

"Yes, here it is: ... *until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ which in its proper time he who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, will bring about—who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen nor can see, to whom be honor and power eternal. Amen.*"

Has John made an error here?

"This cannot be the same person," said Curious.

That's true: according to Paul this King of kings is invisible—at least to us on earth.

"But John knows about that. Where does he say"

First John 1:18.

"Yes, here it is: *No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him.*"

What does this have to do with the garment?

"So John isn't saying here that Jesus is identically King of kings, but he carries the name of his Father like a badge."

That's debatable. What about the thigh?

"And the declaration being on his thigh suggests it's his very nature too."

I know you want to say they're "joined at the hip," but you don't need to say it.

17 *And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven,*

*Come, be gathered together to the great supper of God,
that you may eat the flesh of kings,*

the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men,

the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them,

and the flesh of all men,

both free and bond, small and great.

19 *And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against him who sat upon the horse and against his army.*

20 *And the beast was taken and with him the false prophet who worked the signs in his sight by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image: the two of them were cast alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.*

21 *And the rest were killed with the sword which came forth out of the mouth of him who sat upon the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.*

While several things in those five verses provoked his curiosity, Curious was unable to pause his reading while the battle went on.

"The birds rank higher than human rebels in God's judgment—at this time at least," Curious said at last. "I'm reminded of Jesus' saying, 'there the vultures will gather.'"

Note that the angel's invitation to the birds to clean up the battlefield is given before the battle begins.

"In this case the invaders are from heaven. The outcome is foregone, of course."

How could the opponents of God believe they had a chance to win this?

"They thought Satan's beast had become equal to Christ."

Surely the devil knew—he knows what is written here.

"And Satan seems to think he can break Scripture if he has enough time."

Revelation

This was planned in advance by the kings of their earth. It says they were gathered together. Where on earth would that be?

"If they capture Jerusalem—the city of God—Babylon will have won."

Do the horses play any part in this?

"As for the horses, they need be no more literal than the horses John saw when the Lamb undid the first four seals."

So this will happen quickly is what I think you mean.

"I mean this is inevitable."

The kings of the earth have already carved up Jerusalem.

"This could refer in part to what has already happened. Those birds, though. I don't know about the birds."

Isn't it surprising what the angel who stands in the sun says?

"They get their own supper—not just any supper: the great supper of God. I can't help but contrast this against the marriage supper of the Lamb."

They are, in a strange way, opposites.

"Christ's church merges into eternal life; Satan's church into death."

We have seen that birds sometimes symbolize evil.

"Before the battle even begins, the beast is sent to try out a lake of fire. Either that hasn't happened yet or he's escaped."

Is the beast then a person like the false prophet?

"The beast at this time will be run by artificial intelligence. So the beast is essentially a computer network."

If the beast isn't a spirit, then why is it not simply destroyed?

"Artificial intelligence doesn't reside in flesh and blood; it's purely information and therefore lives as long it can infest information networks."

Then you will have to explain the lake of fire.

"What is this lake of fire? It strikes me as being unreal."

The incompatibility there must be significant.

"I get it: there's a balance such that the fire goes on without consuming. Thus they remain alive."

So it's a metaphor?

"It's an illustration of the fact that timeless spirit cannot simply be disposed of in time."

That's one opportunity spirit lacks.

"The lake of fire would have to be self-contained with no escape, fundamentally enclosed like within a quantum barrier."

Then how is it entered?

"I notice that they're thrown, not escorted, into it—thrown with enough force to penetrate the solid barrier."

So if the whole person goes, body and spirit both, then what sustains the body?

"There would be no time there, so the body is not consumed, and neither can the spirit escape the barrier."

Do you mean the lake of fire can be seen?

"For that purpose it would be located below in some hot recess of the earth."

Why is it not put out of sight?

"History is important. If forgotten, it will be repeated."

Now how does this apply to the beast if he's information?

"His computers are fried by a solar pulse, leaving the wizard behind the curtain."

Then finally the kingdoms of the world are rapidly put down as promised in the Word of God.

"A lot of bones will be left after the birds have finished their supper. That's all."

20 *And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven having the key of the abyss and a long chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, the old serpent, which is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years and cast him into the abyss and shut and sealed it over him—that he deceive the nations no more until the thousand years be finished. After this he must be loosed for a little time.*

“This will be my favorite trio of verses!” said Curious. “Finally Satan is taken out—for a long while at least. But why the devil must he be let loose again?”

It’s that legal matter of which you’re aware, Curious.

“It’s like he’s in jail, waiting for his day in court.”

Not only is it like that, that’s precisely what it is.

“If anyone thinks Satan’s mighty spirit rivals God, they need to see these verses!”

They’ll say this is not the ultimate prince of darkness, only his shadow or his puppet.

“It couldn’t be more clear: it’s the devil; it’s Satan; it’s the same old serpent that was in the Garden and the red dragon that tried to devour the Son of God and sink Israel.”

Or they’ll say it’s merely theatrical and he’ll be stronger and wiser when he’s loosed.

“Satan’s followers today need to read this and know how easy it is for a regular angel to singlehandedly lay hold of their god.”

Tell me, Curious, since you like to scrutinize things carefully, why does John say Satan was bound for a thousand years before he was cast into the abyss? Is that an intentional mixing of metaphors?

“The binding is what constrains him, and since he’s a spirit, the time element has to be imposed by a physical means.”

Are you saying the abyss, which we know is a name for the grave or the realm of the dead, is a physical place?

“This is a perfect cartoon,” said Curious eagerly.

Then how does it picture the abyss?

“The angel descends to earth where Satan has been roaming in the form of a dragon and tells him he’s under arrest. Next frame: he’s seen throwing a loop of the chain around the dragon’s left rear foot and pulling it tight. Next frame: the angel drags the serpent to the opening of the abyss where the lid lays beside it ready to receive the devil who has now shrunk to the size of a Gila monster. The angel picks up the poor devil, lowers him into pit, and begins feeding down the long chain. Then he hooks the end of the chain to the underside of the lid and replaces it. Final frame: the angel is seen locking the lid with the key to seal it.”

Are you saying the key and the chain are simply props for the drama?

“How can a spirit be bound? Now we know!”

Seriously, Curious, we do want to know.

“I’m not going to torture my head over this. John is telling us how it will be done as well as it can be told. But one thing about it does bother me a little: I know Satan is no match for God and his mighty angels, but this incarceration seemed too easy. Something else is going on behind the scenes.”

I see what you mean. Why does Satan not call on his demons and put up a fight?

“Satan doesn’t resist because his jail time isn’t infinite and he knows he’ll have a good chance to win his case in court. Furthermore, if things go badly during his absence, it cannot be blamed on him, and he’ll add that to his defense.”

Someone will ask, if you don’t, why demons aren’t mentioned? Could it be that this scene took place long ago and lesser evil spirits are the ones still raising hell today?

“When you think about the demons not being mentioned you realize that this scene is focused and not revealing everything. Demons and their idols are deceivers of nations, and if there is an end to that, then demon activity has been curtailed for some reason.”

4 And I saw thrones and those who sat upon them, and judgment was given to them; and I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who did not worship the beast nor his image and did not receive the mark on their forehead nor on their hand; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.

Here's a screening for resurrection duty at the beginning of the Millennium. Who are we missing, Curious?

"Those fifth-seal martyrs are first in line for positions of honor in the resurrection," Curious noted. "And they're joined by those who died resisting the beast. But something is missing here."

The resurrection will include more than this, certainly.

"Paul gave us to understand there will be a resurrection before these dire conditions, and the promise to be joint-heirs with Christ was never limited to martyrs."

You missed the surprising part of this verse, Curious.

"Actually, I see now that the verse isn't trying to cover the whole resurrection issue. It focuses on the ones who miss the Rapture yet demonstrate their dedication in the end. Oh yes, and those ancient martyrs under the altar."

Their number would have increased throughout the centuries.

"Being pictured under the altar is significant. There may be more of that kind added every year, but what about the tribulation martyrs who showed up in heaven with white robes and palm branches? Will they not participate in the Millennium?"

While this verse omits certain elements of the resurrection issue, it also adds something, and you're still not getting it, Curious.

"Curiosity doesn't bring everything into focus automatically. Somehow I missed the judgment."

Why is this judgment needed?

"This is the gateway to the resurrection for these folks. ... That's it! They weren't included in the original resurrection promise. This is an exception!"

What makes them exceptional? The two groups don't seem to go together at all.

"I wondered about the altar-dwellers—their showing up without robes and their loud complaint."

We know how you feel about them. Now what do they have in common with the others in this scene?

"The others might be proud of having refused the mark. I know I would be."

This special judgment will examine each one, of course. But there's something very unusual about it.

"Are these judges the same as those elders on the twenty-four thrones? No other thrones have been mentioned—other than the throne of God."

These wouldn't be Laodiceans, would they?

"Laodiceans? That's ridiculous."

Why has this judgment been delegated to elders?

"I'm surprised. I thought the judgment seat of Christ would show up here."

Perhaps certain angels are qualified to judge in this particular matter.

"I get it," said Curious. "The thrones of the twenty-four elders were never about ruling in heaven. This is their purpose: judging the worthiness of people to participate in the millennial resurrection. What must be conferred by Christ are gifts of service."

Now explain their number, which was hard to interpret before.

"Twelve to examine saints who lived before the church era and twelve to judge saints from after the church era. The martyrs under the altar could go either way."

Are these elders men or are they angels? Are you still curious about that?

"Only humans understand the hearts of humans," said Curious, "not angels."

5 The rest of the dead did not live until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are they who have part in the first resurrection; the second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him a thousand years.

"This seems to leave the vast majority of the dead in Christ from previous years and centuries in their graves until the thousand years is ended," said Curious.

That can't be. Leave it in the context of the previous verse, Curious.

"It would be a mistake to think that what John saw in that judgment scene included all that's involved in arranging for the millennial kingdom."

I agree, we're getting just enough to satisfy common curiosity.

"If John saw everything there was to see in heaven and recorded every sight, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written."

I believe John would agree with you, Curious.

"'The rest of the dead' includes the clearly unsaved from all the ages, but is there any reason why it couldn't also include borderline cases passed over in this judgment and sent on to the supreme court?"

Falling short at the first resurrection, they might still avoid the second death?

"We can't even say that everyone who is promised resurrection at the time of the Rapture will be resurrected at the time of the Rapture."

You need to clarify that, Curious.

"That is, the Rapture marks the beginning of the arrangements for the long-awaited reign of Christ on earth, and the coincident resurrection closes the door on this dispensation, and when it opens you're in the millennium."

You explained this temporal relocation before. Remind us.

"Both the Rapture and the resurrection involve relocations: you go to a new place. Resurrection must involve time travel too. It was reasoned out during chapter one."

Yet, doctrines of simplicity have been built on this abstract in chapter twenty.

"It made sense to me back in chapter one, but reality is unfathomable, really; you never get your head around it completely."

That's the beauty of fiction.

"That's the Curious test: fiction you can comprehend simply by ignoring its faults."

Say the first resurrection takes place in two phases: one preceding the Rapture, the other here at the start of the Millennium. Do they all appear on earth at once?

"Enough of chaos! When Satan is put away, where do you appear, you ask? No doubt we're deployed in an orderly manner—the second 144,000 was a preview of that."

If we're to receive gifts and rule with Christ, will we also have received training?

"They appeared to be well organized around the Lamb there at Mount Zion."

Speaking of 144,000, what happens to the others who have the seal of protection?

"The sealed Israel must live through the tribulation and on into the millennium, along with multitudes marked by the beast but not on front lines of the rebellion."

What happens to servants of Christ who manage to live through the tribulation?

"They can't get resurrected bodies if they haven't passed through death, and there's no indication of a translation to heaven at this point."

So they remain in natural bodies subject to death and judgment.

"Fortunate are they who die in the tribulation!" said Curious.

Do you really believe that the ones who managed to avoid the mark and remain alive are less fortunate than these who starved to death or were executed?

"Well, it depends on how they live the rest of their lives."

Hold that thought lightly, Curious. You may be surprised.

"That leaves the Rapture-ascended saints in heaven: the glorified bride of Christ."

The advantage they have is due to their up-to-date talents. That may be important.

7 *And when the thousand years are finished, Satan will be loosed out of his prison and will come forth to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to the war, the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.*

"This is interesting," said Curious. "It shows that Satan hasn't lost his nerve and still thinks he controls geopolitics. But we know 'the war' was expected."

Yes, it will be inevitable. Remember, it was said that Satan must be loosed for a *little time*. That's not indicative of a peaceful transition.

"There's no time to train such vast armies, and the art of warfare will have been forgotten. Swords were beaten into plowshares, to put it quaintly."

How else could this take place?

"Nations far from Jerusalem will be ripe for revolt after a thousand years of ironclad theocratic rule. But without planes, tanks, and missiles, Gog's invasion will be little more than a march to surround Jerusalem and demand autonomy."

Peacekeeping will not be easy while pagan populations reject the rule of Christ.

"I'm wondering why the ungodly will be allowed to live in the millennial kingdom while the contest for the rule of the universe is going on."

God loves them all. He can't help himself. Some of them will hear the plan of the world's salvation and be saved themselves. They must be given the opportunity.

"I see it now," declared Curious. "Here's what happened: a compromise was struck with Satan, and it goes like this: Creation may still qualify as being the 'good' which God called it, even under oppressive government, since humanity has none of its original perfection. The only requirement was peace being kept, and out of that God had to demonstrate free-will-defying obedience among his servants for a thousand years."

One thousand years *does* sound like an agreed-upon number.

"A minimum number of perfectly obedient servants would have to be in this agreement as well, and Satan would have demanded that the number be large."

That would explain the indefinite start date of the end times.

"I'm seeing this fall out of Scripture," said Curious. "Does everyone know about it?"
Not at all.

"How will Christians be motivated to learn obedience if they don't understand that their purpose is to make it possible for God to permanently bind Satan?"

That's where you come in, Curious.

"Competence is important too: obedience is easier with success than with failure."

Practice in obedience is even more important. Scripture uses the word slave, but bondservant is the closest most Bible versions come to translating it accurately.

"Perfect obedience is never heard of. It's called slavery," said Curious.

What if the number falls short by one and you could have made the difference. I'm referring to service to Christ in the Millennium, of course.

"It's such a big subject. I know there are commandments, but when and how and to whom they apply isn't always clear."

Since the issue is the liability of free will, obedience might be narrowly defined as obeying instructions which are inconvenient and even contrary to self-preservation.

"If the agreement with Satan is in terms of percentage, God has a problem."

God is not stupid. It would be fixed minimums like 144,000 for Israel and so on.

"No wonder Satan seeks population reduction by every means possible."

History certainly makes more sense in light of that

"Another factor, if you think about it, is transportation and communication."

It's a big world. God might be waiting for technology to make it possible.

"But I suppose a network of miracles would accomplish everything needed."

No, Curious. Miracles are off the table. Think about it.

"This is the second of Gog's marches on Israel," Curious noted.

That's remarkable longevity by a mortal not seen since the Flood.

"Of course, Gog may signify a title, not a man's name."

Or it may be the name of a demon who had dominion over Magog and is back again.

"So John sees the same thing: far-flung nations turning against Jerusalem—an inestimable number of invaders without sophisticated instruments of war."

Given the history of Magog, it makes perfect sense that a "rod of iron" will be needed to maintain peace on earth even with Satan out of the way.

"The often-mentioned iron scepter isn't surprising at all, given that natural people—not resurrected and not holy—will have multiplied again during the thousand years."

Still, aren't you surprised that Satan rallies them to march on the stronghold of God?

"Satan need only point out that he caused the execution of the Son of God once before, and for the next two millennia or so thereafter he instigated wars against the followers of Christ."

Yes, but what is his motive? Surely Satan doesn't believe he can defeat God.

"I can't tell whether he lost his case in court and is motivated by anger, or if he won his argument and is now free to do as he pleases without the threat of doom if he disobeys his Sovereign."

If Satan won his case in court, it means Christ's slaves in the administration failed to exhibit perfect obedience.

"In that case, free will is proven incompatible with the creation God declared was 'very good,' and no free-willed being can be charged with a crime for not being good."

Satan's plan for his own survival is a recipe for utter chaos.

"So far, we have hope," said Curious.

9 And they went up over the breadth of the earth, and encompassed the camp of the saints and the beloved city; and fire came down out of heaven and devoured them.

"Yahweh expressed the miracle differently to Ezekiel. But the outcome is similar."

What do you make of that fire from heaven, Curious?

"This shows that fire can be a metaphor in these visions."

You missed my point. Is there no pity in heaven for the people duped by Satan?

"The stakes are far too high to criticize the use of deadly force."

10 And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where also the beast and the false prophet are; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

"This is my new favorite verse!" declared Curious. "Now comes the seven-year cleanup Ezekiel described in much detail."

Yes, this earth will forever be sacred because God died and won the battle here.

"The thing that makes me bow down to our loving Creator as much as anything is his perfect justice. He waited all these millennia and suffered unimaginable pain to respect the Prime Transgressor's challenge."

You seem to think that God *knew* Satan was wrong about free will.

"I would say it was daring and very risky for him to create Satan in the first place. But I don't know whether God saw it as a risk."

Is it possible that he didn't know?

"Did he know he would have to create this universe and give Satan a free hand in it in order to play out the possibility?"

Yes, once Satan sinned. But did he know that that magnificent creature would turn out the way he did and cause all the harm he did?

"If free will is not necessarily fatal in us, why could it not have gone well for Satan?"

It only works well for creatures in God's image—because God could die for us.

Revelation

11 And I saw a great white throne and he who sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

"I knew there must be more than one heaven," declared Curious.

You can call it that.

"This image portrays sovereignty. Does anyone think he can lay a case before this great throne? There is no Lamb here. There's nothing a human soul can offer in this consuming Presence. No one can look upon his face. This makes me tremble."

John must have been impressed too, but he doesn't say so.

"The judges on the many thrones might have debated borderline cases among themselves. Not so here."

This is truth beyond which there is nothing.

"This judgment will be the last word."

Yes, and the first word. Because he inhabits eternity there is no separation of first and last as we think of it. You taught me that!

12 And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is of life; and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and they were judged, everyone according to their works.

"So these are the dead," said Curious. "That would include all who marched on Jerusalem that were destroyed by fire, all who were ever cremated, all who were drowned, and all who were buried in the ground from all the ages."

Only the first resurrection isn't here; they're the blessed ones.

"I can't begin to imagine how long it will take to make a thorough evaluation of one's worthiness based on records of all of one's days and hours."

You must be assuming that good works and bad works are balanced according to some scale. There is no scale here, only another book.

"What are the options? A return to Hades would be better than going where Satan went."

14 And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

"That eliminates one option. There's no Hades anymore!"

It's either eternal life or eternal fire, Curious.

"I'm needing to get my head around this. I'm understanding that only the book of life makes any difference, and that's only a list of names!"

Where have you seen that book mentioned?

"It was like a force of destiny when the book of life came up before. If you weren't in the book of life you automatically worshiped the beast. I didn't think much about it then because it seemed like a metaphor about one's political alignment. But here if it's a metaphor, I don't know what it could represent because everything is in the other books. This book of life is just names—nothing about family or religion or membership in anything. No titles. Just names, and that's all. Or at least that's all that counts for anything."

Curious, slow down. You have consumed nearly the entire Bible. Don't let it become bitter in your stomach. You must know how one becomes named in the book of life.

"Looking back, I see that it said, *And they that dwell on the earth will wonder, those whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world.* From the foundation of the world! Does that mean before I did anything, good or bad, my future was predetermined?"

It doesn't say that, Curious. It doesn't say or even imply that names cannot be added later. Look at the passage before that—where the book of life is mentioned.

"Here it adds something: ... *earth dwellers whose names are not written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that has been slain.* Book of life of the Lamb that was slain! So it's actually *his* book!"

Yes, and the names in it belong to him. He decides who is in the book of life. Paul knew about it. He described his fellow-workers as ones whose names were in the book of life. So did David: he prayed that certain enemies would be blotted out of the book of life.

"Blotted out of the book of life ... where did I see that? Back in the letters Christ dictated to the churches. ... Here it is: *Nevertheless you have a few names in Sardis who have not defiled their garments, and they will walk with me in white, for they are worthy. Anyone who overcomes will similarly be arrayed in white garments: I will under no circumstances blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels.* According to that it's unlikely that David's prayer got answered."

There's no evidence that anyone ever got blotted out of the Lamb's book of life, and it should be obvious to you by now that Jesus is quite willing to add your name to his book if you but ask him.

"But, ... okay, that's great! ... But, where is justice in your name being a ticket to the lake of fire if you've never asked to be in the Lamb's book? ... or even heard of Jesus Christ?"

Think about it, Curious. This is not difficult for anyone to get their head around. Did you think God was being just by accommodating Satan's sin for a long time and almost forever? No! God is waiting before he applies the law of sin and death until he establishes it before the angels by a demonstration that everyone understands.

"I know the law condemns the sinner. But all have sinned. The standard is unattainable. The standard is the glory of God and we're mere humans. ... Well, I know that Christ is able and willing to take the rap for any amount of sin and dispense his infinite worthiness in exchange. But I'll wager that not a few of those poor souls out there in the four corners of the earth who were duped by Satan to march on Jerusalem ... I'll wager that they would have taken the free gift if they had known about it."

Get serious, Curious. Your weak gut is making a fool of you again. What did you mean when you said the stakes were too high to question the fire?

"I mean, this is a very tremendous conclusion that makes my head hurt."

It isn't your head, Curious; it's your weak stomach. Evil makes you sick, and getting rid of evil makes you sick.

"But, ... why must there be torment—eternal tormenting. Why not forget the sordid past?"

Have you never wondered about history in the Scriptures? Why is it ninety percent about the evil that took place? You understand this is the word of God which must have a purpose.

"Is that the price that must be paid for free will to continue? Must we always be reminded?"

You remember well, Curious, but you don't like it.

"Their worm shall not die. Isaiah's last words too."

It's the price God must pay for sharing his free will. The gift of free will is not free.

"Would I give up free will in order to forget evil, do you ask? That's barely conceivable because it's not human. No, I see what God is doing. Bring on the reminder of evil when I need it, and let me never need it!"

Yes. Deliver us all from evil.

21 *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away, and the sea is no more.*

“So that was a new heaven,” said Curious. “I thought there must be more than one.” A new visible sky, not a new third heaven, could well be the meaning here, Curious.

“How heaven and earth are both visible at once is hard to imagine. Perhaps it could be done in a cartoon. At least John is making it clear that this is a departure from the familiar.”

Answer why there is no sea, and the rest will fall into place.

“Earth’s vast quantities of water are essential to life, so the absence of oceans is puzzling if this new earth has any claim to be like earth. There would be no clouds.”

Recall Noah and the use that was made of our vast quantities of water.

“This indicates there will never be a need to drown out the population on this new earth,” said Curious.

And no rain and no rainbows.

“For all we know this is in a different universe with different laws of physics.”

Or no physical laws at all.

“Or it’s pure symbolism. Poetry, really.”

Unlike other chapters, this one isn’t introduced with “after these things.”

“The connection to the previous chapter is weak if there is any.”

There are similar words in Isaiah. Do you find a connection there?

“John frequently references the old prophets. Like Here’s one in Isaiah 65: *Behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things will not be remembered nor come to mind.* But it goes on to bring in elements of the old earth. The last verse in that passage reads: *The wolf and the lamb will feed together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox, and dust will be the serpent’s food. They will not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says Yahweh.*”

We all look for new heavens and a new earth just as Peter, referencing Isaiah, wrote: *We look for new heavens and a new earth wherein righteousness dwells.*

“Where’s the city?” Curious grumbled. “I recall Jesus’ promise to the church at Philadelphia: ... *the new Jerusalem which comes down out of heaven from my God.*”

You’re reading ahead, Curious.

2 *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.*

“Now this is definitely looking like different laws of physics,” said Curious. “It’s a pristine version of Jerusalem ready-made—if it’s not simply a metaphor.”

Is this really a ready-made city, or does she have a past? Typically brides aren’t infants; they’re shaped by their past experiences.”

“This is a city, not actually the bride. If it were literally the bride of Christ, I don’t think she would appreciate this caricature.”

Be serious, Curious. It says it’s a bride.

“It says it’s made ready—all decked out—*like* a bride would be. It’s a simile.”

So is “coming down out of heaven” also pure metaphor?

“We know ‘bride’ in this context is metaphorical, so the rest of it may be as well.”

Then you will have to explain why John put “the sea is no more” right up there parallel with “the first heaven and the first earth are passed away.” It’s primary, not a frill.

“Let me get my head around this. Why is the sea important enough to be on top? The sea separates nations. If new Jerusalem draws the nations to itself—which is a metaphor, really, having to do with worshiping Yahweh, the God of Israel—then the sea, which distances nations geographically, disappears in the spirit of the metaphor.”

You make these verses disappear in the spirit of conjecture, Curious.

“It feels lyrical to me.”

3 *And I heard a great voice out of the throne saying,
“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,
and he will dwell with them, and they will be his people:
God himself will be with them, and be their God;
and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes,
and death will be no more;
neither will there be mourning nor crying,
nor pain any more:
the first things are passed away.”*

“Now that puts some meat on it,” said Curious. “The city is actually the new tabernacle, the house of God he now shares with his people—like the Jewish tradition where the bride goes to live with her husband in his father’s house.”

Do you recall any other inkling of this in the Old Testament?

“I thought David was referring to the temple he had designed, and his son Solomon was going to build, when he wrote, ‘I will dwell in the house of Yahweh forever,’ though it didn’t make literal sense. He must have been inspired to see this thing John is describing. So I do believe there’s a promise of real experience wrapped up in this metaphor, whether or not the new earth is a new earth.”

I suppose you’re not curious about who said this.

“This ‘great voice out of the throne’ could only be the voice of Yahweh. Is this still the great white throne, or are we back to the throne by the crystal sea?”

Does it matter? The focus is on New Jerusalem.

“Presumably this continues the vision of the new heaven and earth where there is no sea,” said Curious. “God is there in new Jerusalem. That’s all this is about. It’s a beautiful dream John is having.”

You might want to reconsider that, Curious. Think back. John did not dream this up.

“But there’s that similar passage in Isaiah 65 where Yahweh says,
*Be glad and rejoice forever in that which I create;
for, behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing and her people a joy.
And I will rejoice in Jerusalem and joy in my people;
and no more will the voice of weeping be heard in her
and neither the voice of crying.”*

Yes, I mentioned that earlier. So is John seeing in a vision what Isaiah heard about?

“I must admit, whatever was promised must come to pass in the future. But is John getting a preview of it, or is this similar but really something else?”

Is there any great difference?

“In the Isaiah passage mortals live long lives, but here in John’s vision there will be no more death.”

One is the approximate image of the other.

“It’s coming clear to me now,” said Curious. “There’s to be a city in heaven because people need what they’re familiar with. And during the millennium, Jerusalem on earth will be upgraded substantially—very substantially according to Ezekiel.”

Recall that preview of how it will be in heaven.

“Back when the sixth seal was opened the elder told John a little of what the tribulation saints could expect in heaven: *They are privileged to stand before the throne of God and to serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will dwell with them. No more will they hunger and thirst, and the heat of the sun will not smite them, for the Lamb in the midst of the throne will be their shepherd and guide them to fountains of waters of life; and God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

Will there be tears in heaven? It’s a key question.

“I remember saying, ‘This highly lyrical answer goes far beyond the question.’”

5 *And he who sits on the throne said,
Behold, I make all things new.*

*And he said,
Write, for these words are faithful and true.*

Believe it or not, Curious, there are those who say this has been fulfilled.

"Is this a complete overhaul of the universe like it sounds? After so much destruction it will be needed!"

Take us to the point here, Curious.

"This locks in the interpretation of 'all things new': it means what it says. All things aren't just spiritual things. This contradicts every naturalistic idea I ever heard of."

Everyone with any senses at all, whether in heaven or on earth or under the earth, should know when it happens. There will be no more debate.

"Those who have moved to heaven will know, and those who find themselves in the lake of fire will find that a novelty too," said Curious.

You said that "all things new" means what it says, and you pointed to "all things." Does "renew" qualify for "new"?

"Of course 'completely new' would leave us all in the dark if it means totally unlike the old. But a renewed earth and a brand new heaven modeled after earth would be fine with me; and still it would be faithful and true to the meaning of the words."

That I'm comfortable with.

"I like it much better than that lyrical interpretation of new heaven and earth which I was starting to work up."

Don't react too far, Curious. You still have to deal with a few little details like there being no sea.

"I can see a new heaven with no seas but otherwise being similar to earth with gravity and air and lakes and rivers. But I would want to vacation back down on old earth now and then in order to go sailing on her seas. So I'll have to cling to the metaphorical 'no sea' if it applies to new earth."

Then be sure you know what John was looking at when he said, *I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth are passed away.*

"It's plain to me now that 'passed away' means his view passed from old earth to a new heaven that resembled earth except that it had no sea as far as he could see."

6 *And he said to me,
It is done.
I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the beginning and the end.
I will give to him who is thirsty
of the fountain of the water without cost.
He who overcomes will inherit these things;
and I will be his God, and he will be my son.*

"There's no blessing that depends on future fulfillment," Curious declared.

Haven't you just read that he will be making all things new?

"*It is done.* It's done already. Why? Because he contains all time."

Yet we must find the fountain, or else what's done for us is that we get left out.

"Blessed are they who are thirsty," intoned Curious.

You have a right to say that.

"I was thirsty and looking for answers. This Book has led me to the fountain, and it's been my salvation."

Where the water cost you nothing, yet it's priceless because *he* paid the price.

"Now, I'm keen to obey and overcome. Overcoming is the scary part. I wish John had included a list of what I'm expected to overcome."

*8 But for the fearful and unbelieving
and abominable and murderers and fornicators
and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars,
their part is in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone,
which is the second death.*

“Now I see why ‘fear not’ appears so many times in the Scriptures,” said Curious. In my Authorized Version it appears in 144 verses.

“Because being fearful is actually a sin unto death!” Curious exclaimed. Right next to unbelief.

“I see how the warning makes sense. Such people would be very uncomfortable in the glorious new city.”

I know some who would be scared to death.

“They need to read what I just read.”

Don’t misconstrue that “fearful” word, Curious. What does it mean in this context?

“All things will be made like new—like it was at first when the world was new, before Satan made his mark. The world will be cleansed of all evil.”

Are you classifying fear as a kind of evil?

“I want to know what kind of fear may lead to evil.”

The self-preservation instinct sometimes leads to evil thoughts and actions.

“There’s a remedy: we’re told that perfect love casts out fear.”

Who else would teach that a common natural fear may lead to the most fearful condition imaginable? Now, Curious, listen to me: Sometimes you wrap your head around strange symbols. Tell me what the lake of fire is in real terms? Or, first, tell me why eternal incarceration is necessary, for it must be necessary and not arbitrary if God is good and just. And finally, how does damnation reconcile with God’s love?

“Something tells me I need to get my head around this lake of fire. Its purpose is to isolate elements that can, or do, or would oppose the dominion of God, so it’s like an infinite sentence in a political prison for misuse of free will. It’s not true that free will is liable to ruin paradise only when we elevate ourselves to the level of God. We’re created at that level; he made us in his image. We are gods! We were created with the ability to ruin paradise, and the propensity is not far off. Someone almost certainly will oppose God, as Satan did, if allowed to live long enough. So keeping the equilibrium of freedom and strict loyalty must be a delicate balance. The meek will inherit the earth.

“The first step toward that end is to eliminate clear risks. Yes, that’s inhumane, and it’s exactly what every dictator attempts. It’s a method reserved for God the Creator; no one else has the right to use it. Unlike the first death, the second death is the lake of fire. It’s not the death of the body. Everyone gets a shot at resurrection life, and resurrected bodies transcend physics. The lake of fire looks like a lake on fire; this is not a metaphor shaped to fit the reader’s knowledge of the material world. Brimstone indicates a location in the bowels of the earth where the lake gives off an infernal glow which from some point of inspection on the surface of the earth can be observed. Who can forget the last verse of Isaiah? *And they will go forth and look upon the dead bodies of the men who have transgressed against me, for their worm will not die, neither will their fire be quenched, and they will be an abhorrence to all flesh.* Yes, the horror of their agony will be visible then and is visible today in the mind. So the insulation of hell from earth is perfect in one sense but not in the other: the damned are cut off from participating in life, but their memory is preserved and stands as a warning by revelation today and tomorrow by a glimpse into the luminous pit where worms never die.

“Here are the three acts of love which allow mankind to live in paradise: God’s own tasting of death, his shared tabernacle over us, and the warning of the lake of fire—which, by the way, is one reason he’s not in a hurry to unmake this old earth.”

9 *And there came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls, who were laden with the seven last plagues, and he spoke to me, saying, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb."*

"There's a thousand-year anomaly here," Curious noted.

Yes, curiously it links back to the tribulation period and bowls of wrath.

"Actually, that figures because the marriage of the bride was announced back in chapter nineteen with no followup. Now we get to see who she is, exactly."

10 *And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God. And having the glory of God, her radiance was like a most precious stone, as it were a jasper stone, clear as crystal ...*

"Ha! I was right. The bride is the city—unless that plague-bowl angel was mistaken when he said this."

But we know the bride consists of humans, so the city must be a metaphor.

"Is this a repeat of the same city descending out of heaven, or is it another one?"

That first mention eight verses ago was like an introduction, Curious.

"Sure, now we get the details. There's that jasper stone again like what John noticed the first time he saw the one sitting on the throne, but I don't understand how it could be as clear as crystal."

Remember he said he was "in the Spirit" then too.

"It represents the glory of God, so I give up. I think it's not supposed to be literal."

12 *having a wall great and high, having twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: on the east were three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates.*

The gates in Ezekiel's new Jerusalem were also named after the tribes.

"Now how could a great high wall with twelve gates in it be a metaphor for people?"

It's not that difficult.

"People come through gates; I get that. I'm beginning to see something: these are the people who come through the promises made to Israel."

Yes, there is a great dividing wall between that and other so-called ways to heaven.

"But the bride of Christ has more than promises made to Israel."

14 *And the wall of the city had twelve foundations and on them twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

There you go, Curious.

"There had to be twelve apostles to make this work!"

15 *And he who spoke with me had a golden measuring reed to measure the city and its gates and its wall. The city lies foursquare: the length is as great as the breadth. He proceeded to measure the city with the reed: 12,000 stadia, the length, the breadth, and the height being equal.*

"Now it's looking less like a metaphor again," Curious moaned.

Doesn't that twelve thousand ring a bell?

"Though I have to admit that twelve thousand is one of those symbolic numbers."

We decided it couldn't be literal when it was applied uniformly to each tribe listed in the 144,000 representatives of Israel.

"I wonder how far is a stadion."

Look it up. I told you before, but you didn't hear me.

"Okay. ... It's like the length of the track in a Roman stadium, or about the same as the perimeter in a sports arena."

In First Corinthians, Paul wrote, *Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Even so, run that you may attain.*

“Could there be a connection with a race track? Suppose the thousand means a large yet undefined number. Then the city gates represent the people who attained the prize and became the bride.”

Figure the literal size of the city in miles and see if that makes sense, Curious.

“Now, the dimensions of the city would be roughly two and a half million yards or about 1,400 miles on a side.”

Don’t forget, this thing towers that same high above its base as well.

“Gravity must operate differently in this new earth for there to be both breathable air at the top and livable air pressure at the bottom.”

Perhaps most of the height is like our sky and not meant for living space.

“And angels would have trouble flying in such rarefied air.”

Ha, ha. Why does there have to be any air at all?

“It could be airless, but an airless city would be silent and the sense of smell would be useless. That doesn’t appeal to me.”

How high was that mountain, do you suppose?

“That would indeed be a great high mountain for John to see much of this thing—far higher than the great high mountain where Ezekiel was taken to survey the city.”

And could the angel have literally measured the city while John observed?

“It would take a million placements of a seven-cubit stick to measure just one side.”

It seems quite impractical, yet this is a new thing, so how are we to judge?

“If the angel moves the measuring rod once per second, 3,600 times per hour, it would take him two hundred hours to measure one side at seven miles per hour.”

We might have to get used to things taking longer when time is unlimited.

17 And he measured the wall thereof: 144 cubits according to the measure of a man (also of an angel).

What was the measured thickness of the wall in Ezekiel’s vision?

“Ezekiel measured the wall thickness at six long cubits. So this heavenly city wall is formally twenty-four times the thickness of the wall around the new earthly temple.”

But John is careful to say this is a standard cubit. That’s interesting, isn’t it?

“But actually it’s only slightly more than twenty times Ezekiel’s figure. Those two highly symbolic numbers, seven and twenty-four, seem to collide in the significance of these wall thicknesses.”

Is there a message in that?

“So they are two distinct things in spite of the similarities.”

In other words, we must not try to reconcile the heavenly and the earthly.

“Also, it was interesting that the name of the city was to be ‘Yahweh is There.’”

How is that significant? Jerusalem is always known as the city of God.

“This is like pointing to the city Ezekiel saw, and saying, “This is like that only in a world where the science differs.”

Well, there are mysteries here, and you may have found another one.

18 And the wall was built of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like pure glass.

“Transparent gold? How is gold transparent?”

Think! Get your head around it, Curious.

“A new dimension of course permeates the others.”

Why not simply gold-tinted glass?

“It says gold. Pure gold like pure glass—however that’s possible.”

It’s looking more and more like a massive metaphor.

“There’s metaphor galore, but it’s certainly presented as a physical structure.”

Then both must be true.

“I’m reminded of the angel explaining the two meanings behind the heads of the beast. It wasn’t one or the other: both were true.”

19 The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald; the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chryso-prase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.

"How would John identify all those gems without circumnavigating the base, and that would be a journey of 5,600 miles!"

If they were determined by some rule of order, he wouldn't need to see them all.

"Anyway, it's curious that the twelve apostles are associated with precious stones."

There was an order in which the twelve were called.

"I wonder if each disciple had a gemstone nickname. John might know that."

These particular stones are anisotropic, in case you didn't know. They aren't the most brilliant in ordinary light, but under cross-polarized light they display different patterns.

"None of these stones are prized for being brilliant, and neither were the disciples—until after the cross when they got fired up by the light of the Spirit."

21 And the twelve gates were twelve pearls: each one of the several gates was of one pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

"Those are some pearls!" said Curious. "And in a world where there's no sea, I find it very odd that there would be oysters of any size."

It's the heavenly science, Curious.

"This must be tied to the parable Jesus told about the pearl of great price. I understood the pearl as the church. Christ paid a great price for his bride."

Then why are the names of the tribes of Israel written on the gates?

"If I knew why 144,000 have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb, with both his name and the name of God on their foreheads, then I might be able to explain the pearls," said Curious.

Of course the size of the pearls is as inexplicable to us as the size of the city.

"The prize of righteousness is what comes to mind," said Curious, "which goes beyond my knowledge. Maybe entrance to this city is the pearl Jesus had in mind."

22 And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are the temple thereof.

"As has already been stated, the temple of God is among men," Curious noted.

And are we not the temple of the Holy Spirit?

"There's no doubt here about the Lamb being one with the Godhead!" said Curious.

*23 And the city has no need of the sun,
neither of the moon to shine upon it,
for the glory of God illuminates it,
and the lamp thereof is the Lamb.*

*And the nations will walk in the light thereof,
and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.*

*And the gates will never be shut—
not by day, for there will be no night there;
and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it;*

"Now this definitely is a city," declared Curious, "but not one of this world."

Certainly you notice at least one metaphor.

"It's difficult enough to picture the risen, glorified Christ as a lamb, let alone a lamb lit up like a giant street lamp. Moreover, it doesn't lend itself to the cartoon treatment. All I can do is step back and think of it as lyrical poetry about a city of symbols."

Check Isaiah. He foresaw something like this too.

"This sounds a lot like something from Isaiah. ... Here it is in chapter 60, speaking of future Jerusalem: *The sun will no more be your light by day; neither for brightness will the moon give you light, but Yahweh will be to you an everlasting light, and your God your glory.*"

Curious thought a moment.

"That's not saying there will literally be no sun and moon," he concluded.

There's a precedent as a metaphor: Jesus said the righteous will shine like the sun.

"The presence of God will be palpable, more powerfully so than sun and moon."

The language is similar, but this Jerusalem is the eternal bride.

"And we learn the reason for the walls and the gates: some live outside—whole nations, apparently. Here's another passage from Isaiah 60: *Your gates will also be open continually; they will not be shut, neither day nor night, that men may bring to you the wealth of the nations—and their kings led captive.*"

That's a little different too.

"There's so much similarity, I have to believe this points to that."

The kings of the earth, it says. Are they transported to the new earth too?

"I give up. The thing is a box of mixed metaphors."

You're almost to the end of the Book, Curious. Please don't give up now.

*27 and there will in no wise enter into it anything unclean,
or he that makes an abomination and a lie,
but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.*

"It's all metaphors of salvation."

Hold on, Curious. There's more to come.

22 *And he showed me a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that side was the tree of life, bearing twelve fruits, yielding its fruit every month, and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

"A different fruit every month: so there will be a regular calendar," said Curious.

I thought you decided it was all poetic symbols.

"I'm drawn back to the temple in Ezekiel's vision. ... Here it is in chapter 47: *And by the river bank, on this side and on that side, will grow every tree for food, whose leaf will not wither, neither will their fruit fail: they will bring forth new fruit every month because the waters issue out of the sanctuary; and the fruit will be for food and the leaf for healing.* I understand in that day on earth there will still be people with natural bodies subject to illness. But here, on New Earth, I thought there would be no natural bodies."

I agree. Something is out of place, metaphor or no.

"Could the two be connected somehow?"

Do you mean the new-earth Jerusalem is an ideal town from which the old is derived?

"It would mean the old and new exist simultaneously."

Or was the new created to oversee the old during the millennial age?

"Since earthly Jerusalem will always be a rock-solid city, this one must be too, in its own new way perhaps."

That's a good way to put it, Curious. On the other hand, remember Psalm One.

"Suddenly Psalm One comes to mind:

*He will be like a tree planted by the streams of water,
which brings forth its fruit in its season,
whose leaf does not wither,
and whatever he does will prosper.*"

Revelation

“Is that what this means? Is it a metaphor of the life of the believer living on water from the throne of God? And is the city the church founded on the testimony of the apostles and open to all Israel in the broader sense of the redeemed in Christ?”

Often the best answer is “both,” Curious. Creation is God’s poetry, and multiple meanings like precious gems can be found in it.

“If there will be a new earth and city that’s more or less literally like what is described here, will there be in a new ‘heaven’ of stars and planets as well?”

No one will care, so why should there be?—seeing the splendor of God in his glory!

*3 And the curse will be no more;
and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be therein;
and his servants will serve him,
and they will see his face,
and his name will be on their foreheads.*

“This is so different from what this book opened with,” Curious remarked. “What happened to the four cherubim and the twenty-four elders?”

With the curse gone on earth it’s an entirely new arrangement in heaven too.

“It’s a new picture with Satan put down and locked up. I wonder if those four creatures with all the eyes were royal guards that are no longer needed.”

Well, look at it this way: the throne of God has moved from the third heaven to new Jerusalem, which therefore must be the new third heaven.

*5 And there will be night no more:
they need neither light of lamp nor light of sun,
for the Lord God will give them light;
and they will reign for ever and ever.*

“Now who are they reigning over?” Curious wondered. “It appears that new Jerusalem, as large as it is, administrates over a greater new Earth territory occupied by people who aren’t employed as his immediate servants.”

Might their dominion also include old earth?

“But then there’s old earth to be ruled over during the millennial age at least. Apparently they do both. One could become really confused about this and doubt that it means what it says.”

You speak with authority.

*6 And he said to me, “These words are faithful and true.”
And the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show to his servants the things which must shortly come to pass.*

“This is still the angel connected with one of the bowls of wrath, I presume.”

We must remember these are visions, and John is still on Patmos.

7 “And behold, I come quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.”

“Now here is Jesus Christ breaking in. It must have been confusing to John.”

But did you catch that meaning, Curious? Nothing could be more relevant to the reader at this point.

“Keeping the words of these prophecies I assume that means what it says: keeping the words in mind even if there’s no certain interpretation. That’s hard for a curious guy like me.”

The words are inspired, and that’s our reason to put our hope in them.

8 And I, John, am he who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things. And he said to me, “See that you do not do this: I am a fellow-servant with you and with your brothers who are prophets and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God!”

“Poor John is overwhelmed again by the authority of this angel,” said Curious. And because the words that the angel had him write were a revelation to him. “That God would share this with us is awesome, even if we don’t understand much.”

10 And he said to me, “Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.”

“He’s referring to what Daniel was told. Yet all this has been relevant throughout the centuries,” said Curious. “I need to get my head around that.”

*11 He who is unrighteous, let him do unrighteousness still,
and he who is filthy, let him be made filthy still;
and he who is righteous, let him do righteousness still,
and he who is holy, let him be made holy still.*

Relevant, yes, but most people are indifferent to it.

“That’s like the answer Yahweh gave Isaiah when he asked how long the blindness would last.”

This prophecy won’t transform the world, but God will.

12 “Behold, I come quickly, and my reward is with me, to render to each man according as his work is.”

This is relevant, regardless. And it’s spoken by Christ himself!

“Let me work for your glory, Lord,” Curious prayed.

*13 “I am the Alpha and the Omega,
the first and the last,
the beginning and the end.”*

“This has more meaning than I thought it did at first,” said Curious. “There is no other way; there’s nothing outside of Christ that amounts to anything.”

14 “Blessed are they who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may enter in by the gates into the city.”

Is he taking a huge risk here? They are citizens forever. Do you see what I mean?

“I shudder to think that the sin in the garden could happen all over again.”

Satan will be locked up, and that should help immensely.

“I know that Satan is in the abyss at this time, but how can Christ make sure no latent demon gains entry to his new world?”

15 “Without are the dogs, the sorcerers, the fornicators, the murderers, the idolaters, and everyone who lies about loving.”

“It’s rather shocking to see that slur of a fine animal,” said Curious.

Remember this is first century when dogs had no rights.

“In one of Paul’s letters—was it Philippians? I think so—he applied ‘dogs’ to religionists who were barking up the wrong tree.”

That’s clever, Curious. Jesus referred to a foreigner by that term.

“So the dogs are those who disrespect this Book. I’m afraid my dog would, actually.”

That would apply to the entire list, except perhaps the last one.

“That last type of person reminds me of the Ephesian church members who lost their first manner of love without admitting it.”

Yes, and the warning there was dire too.

16 “I, Jesus, have sent my angel to testify these things to you for the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, the bright, the morning star.”

“So this whole book, not just the initial seven letters, is for all the churches.”

*17 And the Spirit and the bride say, “Come.”
And he who hears, let him say, “Come.”*

“This is what would have driven me mad,” said Curious. “Verse eleven made it seem that evildoers never change. Now here the invitation goes out to everyone.”

New Jerusalem has walls and gates, yet the gates never close.

“But now I accept that things simply are that simply cannot be.”

Look up Chesterton’s poem, “The House of Christmas.” You might enjoy it now if you never did before.

*“And he who is thirsty, let him come:
whoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”*

“From whence comes that thirst? That’s the mystery,” said Curious.
From the foundation of the world, as it was said.

18 *“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book:
If anyone adds to them,
God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;
and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy,
God will take his part away from the tree of life and out of the holy
city as they are written in this book.”*

“That warning is what kept manuscripts true to the original,” said Curious.
It doesn’t say anything about written copies.

“‘Anyone’ would include teachers and preachers. I hope it doesn’t mean making comments like I’ve been doing!”

If it does, that’s not the worst part: we might survive plagues.

“At least I haven’t disregarded anything.”

Let’s hope your curiosity will not keep you out of heaven, Curious.

“I have no doubt that all these beautiful words are inspired by the Spirit of God.”

You needn’t fear. It’s telling us to disregard teachers who don’t know what time it is.
They’re like the man who takes his watch apart and can’t put it together again.

20 *He who testifies these things says,
“Yes, I come quickly.”*

How many times in this book has he said he comes quickly, Curious?

“This is the fourth time I’ve read that he will come quickly. How do we explain that?”

Some of those with time pieces they have mishandled say he has already come.

“If he’s come already, then nobody noticed. That’s the worst thing I can think of.”

Some say it means that when he does come it will happen quickly. Isaiah quotes God saying, “I, Yahweh, will hasten it in its time.”

“Didn’t I just read that God sent his angel to show us things that must *shortly* come to pass? And back in the very first verse I believe it said God revealed to Jesus Christ things to share with his bondservants: things that must *shortly* come to pass.”

Consider this, Curious: suppose it said after two or three thousand years these things will come to pass.

“But I’m thinking now, what if it didn’t say ‘soon’ or ‘shortly.’ What if it gave instead a definite time in the far future? Then for a long time nobody would care much about chapters four through nineteen.”

Would it be better if nothing at all were said about when these things will happen?

“Without the ‘soon’ it would be like Old Testament prophecies which people pretty much ignored,” said Curious. “Come to think of it, ‘soon’ can mean a lot of things.”

Please share your thought, brother.

“For example, how long is ‘soon’ relative to the span of human history?”

Is it not interesting that he also tells us to watch?

“He told the church at Sardis to watch for his coming, and it seemed to be a big deal: it was important that they not be taken by surprise.”

You’re on to something there.

“What that means primarily to everyone is that he *is coming for sure!*”

Amen: come, Lord Jesus.

21 *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with the saints. Amen.*

Epilogue

Curious returned his friend's copy of the Holy Bible, thanking her for lending it to him and for challenging him to read it. He told her he was going to get his own copy. She was surprised that he had looked at every verse in all sixty-six books. She had not read some of the Old-Testament books herself, she confessed. When she asked him how he felt about the Word of God, he said he felt like Ezra: it made him tremble. He said he planned start over at the beginning and read it through again carefully, taking notes this time. He said he wanted to understand the big picture better: he had an idea but wanted to confirm it by careful study. He told her he believes the Bible is about getting rid of evil, which surprised her. She said the Bible is God's love letter and an invitation to join him in heaven. He couldn't argue against that. She told him she understood that Satan gets eliminated at the end of Revelation, but the Bible is about Jesus Christ dying for our sins so we may be accepted into God's holy presence.

Curious decided not to debate her. He understood that her viewpoint was what she had been taught, and it would be foolish for him to insist that there was something even more important than that. So he said no more and left, thinking he would outline his thoughts about the big picture and simply send her the outline.

The Bible is about getting rid of evil, particularly getting rid of Satan.
Why?

1. Satan appears at the beginning - tree of knowledge of good and evil.
2. Satan disposed of at the end - tree of life.

Question: **Why does it have to take so long?**

Possible answers:

1. A war between good and evil is ongoing.
Not: Satan is a created being, not equal to God.
2. Satan's evil works are being used by God.
Not: God is not duplicitous.
3. Satan has a valid argument in his defense that God has not answered.

Satan's argument is an appeal to God's justice. It goes as follows.

1. Satan is not responsible for being created with free will.
2. Free will allows no barrier to self fulfillment and pride.
3. He argues that since his fall was therefore inevitable, punishment is injustice.

Satan demands proof that free will can be free of sin: where is the evidence?

(Jesus Christ is sinless but not evidence because he is not a created being.)

Several problems must be worked through to challenge Satan's argument.

Problem 1: Satan is right. All have sinned.

Solution 1: God's Son pays legal death penalty for human sin (his right as Creator).

Problem 2: As a practical matter sin continues after penalty is paid.

Solution 2: The Holy Spirit institutes the sanctification process.

Problem 3: Human flesh is inherently corrupt: sanctification is never complete.

Solution 3: A new body will be provided in resurrection.

Problem 4: How will anyone be proven sinless?

Solution 4: Testing. 1000 years track records as bondservants.

Satan's suit is tried in the court of angels and proceeds as follows:

Exhibits for the Creator: a multitude of willing slaves with perfect records.

Satan argues that since he was barred from tempting, the millennial test is invalid.

Revelation

The court rejects that argument because there was no tempter when Satan fell. The court rules that even one sinless soul proves free will does not necessitate sin. Satan brings up a second argument: if he is banished, all sinners must go with him. A test is arranged: Satan is loosed and allowed to attract an army of followers. Satan mounts an insurrection in a desperate attempt to win his freedom. Finally, justice is served: Satan is cast out along with residual sinners.
Lesson: invest your talents now to ensure a place of service in Christ's kingdom.

And as they heard him speak these things he added a parable, because he was near Jerusalem and they supposed that the kingdom of God was to appear immediately.

"A certain nobleman went to a far country, to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return. And he called ten servants of his, gave them ten minas, and said to them, "Trade with these till I come."

But his citizens hated him and sent a delegation after him, saying, "We will not have this man reign over us."

And it came to pass, when had come back again, having received the kingdom, that he commanded these servants to whom he had given the money to be called to him, that he might know what they had gained by trading.

And the first came before him, saying, "Lord, your money has made ten minas more." And he said to him, "Well done, good servant. Because you have been found faithful in a very little, you will have authority over ten cities."

And the second came, saying, "Your money, Lord, has made five minas." And he said to him also, "You will be over five cities."

And another came, saying, "Lord, behold your money which I wrapped in a piece of cloth, for I feared you because you are a demanding man: you take up that which you did not lay down and reap that which you did not sow." He said to him, "Out of your own mouth I judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I am an austere man, taking up that which I had not laid down and reaping that which I did not sow. Then why did you not give my money to the bank, that at my coming I should have received it with interest?"

And he said to those that stood by, "Take the money away from him and give it to him that gained the ten minas." And they said to him, "Lord, he has ten minas."

"I tell you, to everyone who has, more will be given; but from him who has not, even that which he has will be taken away from him. But these my enemies that would not that I should reign over them bring here and slay them before me."

Luke 19:12-27

Curious Looks at the Bible

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