

## The Cultic Calendar for the Introductory Sanctuary Scenes of Revelation

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The book of Revelation is an evenly measured work from the literary standpoint. Four series of seven sections or septets divide up the body of the work. The seven churches, the seven seals, the seven trumpets, and the seven bowls or plagues are readily recognizable. Another section, chapters 12-14, occurs between the last two of these septets, and the balance of the book is divided into two or three more sections. Thus the book of Revelation divides into seven or eight major prophetic narratives. For a considerable length of time I followed Kenneth Strand in dividing the book into eight major sections. Strand spelled out his eight-fold outline for Revelation in a number of places. His study of "The Eight Basic Visions in the Book of Revelation"<sup>1</sup> is an example of that basic program, which he has also published in several other places.

The idea that there are seven basic lines of prophecy in the book has been advanced previously. Strand cited three studies to this effect in his presentation. These include E. Lohmeyer's *Die Offenbarung des Johannes* (Tuebingen, 1926), J. W. Bowman's *The Drama of the Book of Revelation* (Philadelphia, 1955), also reflected in the *International Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:64ff., and T. S. Kepler's *The Book of Revelation* (New York, 1957). While each of these authors worked out the subsections of these lines of prophecy in different ways, they all maintained that there are seven major sections to the book as a whole. Part of the rationale for this approach is that it is evident that Revelation makes repeated use of the number seven and seven-fold schemes, even though they are not numbered, so it seems natural that there would be seven sections on the larger scale. Supplementary to that idea is the series of separate introductions to these major lines, and since seven of these appear more clearly, that should also divide the book into seven major sections between the prologue and epilogue. These intro-

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<sup>1</sup> *AUSS* 25 (1987): 107-121.

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ductory scenes have been especially well isolated by Strand in the work cited above. In that work he labels them as “Victorious-Introduction Scenes.”

That title is reasonable enough, but in discussions of this matter with Strand while he was still alive I suggested to him that he could refer to them as introductory Sanctuary scenes, since all of them are set in the heavenly sanctuary, in contrast to the earth, where the details of the lines of prophecy in the book are worked out. Strand seems to have made some accommodation to that idea, in that he stated as a part of his work, “In some cases the temple in heaven is mentioned explicitly, as in the introductory scenes to visions IV and V; and in other cases, the allusion to temple furniture gives evidence of a temple setting, even though the word ‘temple’ does not occur, as in the scenes for visions I, II, and III. The only introductory scenes that do not have so obvious a clue to temple imagery are those for visions VI and VIII (o cit., p.118, n. 12).” Since a reduction in the number of basic sanctuary scenes has been suggested here, introductory scene VI has been discarded, but scene VIII has been retained, thus reducing the numbers of the last two scenes from VII and VIII to VI and VII for the basic seven visions and their introductions.

These introductory sanctuary scenes, it should be emphasized, are not unrelated to the lines of prophecy which follow them. They speak to each other in such a way that what is shown as occurring in the heavenly sanctuary relates directly to the nature of the prophecy that follows the opening scene. More of the details of this connection are spelled out in the following study.

The other major aspect of this study is to fit these opening sanctuary scenes into a chronological progression, a progression based in the religious calendar of the ancient Israelites, as spelled out especially in Lev 23 and Num 28-29. The basic idea underlying this part of the study comes from a journal article by M. D. Goulder, “The Apocalypse as an Annual Cycle of Prophecies.”<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to Jon Paulien of the SDA Theological Seminary for calling my attention to this work and his own elaboration of it in “Seals and Trumpets: Some Current Discussions,” in *Symposium on Revelation - Book I*.<sup>3</sup> Paulien in turn has developed some of this idea from a study by Richard Davidson, “Sanctuary Typology,” in the same volume (121-125). While I am indebted to Paulien and Davidson for the basic idea underlying this part of this study, the working out of the details of that scheme presented here is my own responsibility and may differ in a number of respects from the way others have worked out this system in the antecedent literature.

These then are the two basic principles upon which this study rests: that each major line of prophecy in the book of Revelation is introduced by a sanctuary scene set in heaven, and the succession of those scenes follows the order of the festivals in the religious calendar of ancient Israel. In the working out of the

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<sup>2</sup> *New Testament Studies* (1981): 355-356.

<sup>3</sup> Ed. F. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 190-192.

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details that come from these two principles, they are treated separately. First the sanctuary scenes are surveyed, and then, in the section that follows that, they are integrated into the Israelite cultic calendar.

**The Introductory Sanctuary Scenes**

**No. 1—Revelation 1:12–20**

After the prologue 1:1-10, John describes how he turned to see Jesus. The sight must have been most welcome, since he had not seen Jesus personally for approximately sixty years. He now sees Jesus not as the lowly itinerant preacher travelling the dusty roads of Galilee, but as a priest in resplendent robes from which radiated the glory of God. There are two antecedents for this vision: Dan 10:5-6 coupled with Dan 12:6-7 and Ezek 1:26-28. These two Old Testament visions of God correlate in terms of their descriptions with that of Jesus in Rev 1, indicating that Jesus is divine and is the figure behind these preceding visions.

In the case of Rev 1 Jesus is shown especially in his function as a priest. This is made clear by His location and His actions. John saw Jesus standing in front of the seven lampstands. The model for these lampstands was taken from the description of the lampstands in the tabernacle in the wilderness and in Solomon's temple. In the tabernacle constructed under the direction of Moses, there was one lampstand with seven branches (Exod 25:31-39), known as the Menorah. In Solomon's temple the configuration was different. In the holy place in Jerusalem, which was twice the size of the holy place of the tabernacle, there were ten individual lamps, five on each side of the holy place (I Kgs 7:49). They were all made of gold, and that gold was probably paid out as tribute to various conquerors, so that in the second temple they appear to have reverted back to the original form of but one lampstand with seven branches, like the original in the tabernacle. This we know from the Arch of Titus in Rome, where the Menorah is shown as tribute brought back from the conquest of Jerusalem in 70 A. D.

The picture of this piece of furniture from the holy place in Rev 1 partakes of both the nature of the Menorah in the wilderness, in that there are seven lampstands, and the nature of the lampstands in Solomon's temple, in that there are individual stands, not combined into one. This distance and spacing is necessary here for showing that each of the individual stands represents one of the seven churches of Asia Minor.

To anticipate the second section of this study, the function carried out here may be noted in terms of the Old Testament sanctuary. The lamps which rested atop the lampstands were tended by priests twice a day. In the morning a priest went into the holy place and trimmed the wicks and filled the lamps. Then in the evening a priest went in and lit the lamps for the night (Lev 24:1-5). Because they did this every day of the year, morning and evening, it is called the "daily" or "continual" ministry (Hebrew, *tamid*).

The continual care of the lamps by the priest in the Old Testament tabernacle represents Christ's continual care for the churches, especially the seven

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churches of Asia Minor mentioned in the text, and by extension, all the churches in the world. The churches have not been abandoned now that Christ is in heaven since His ascension. His continual care is still exercised on behalf of the churches. After this come the letters to each of the seven churches, which spell out the way care is exercised on their behalf. Thus, there is a direct connection between the introductory sanctuary vision and the messages to the seven churches that follow.

**No. 2 A—Revelation 4:1–11**

Following the messages Jesus gives to John for the seven churches, John is taken up to heaven in vision (4:1-2). There, in this case, he sees the great heavenly throne room. The throne of God is shown to him first, and God the Father, the Ancient of Days (Dan 7:9) is shown to him sitting on the throne (v. 3). Around the throne are the twenty-four elders seated on thrones. They wear white robes and are crowned with golden crowns of victory (*stephanoi*). Since the word for elders (*presbuteroi*) is used in the New Testament for human elders of the church and is not used for angels, these elders should be taken as human beings, not angels. The angels before the throne are represented by the four living creatures (vs. 6-7). The question arises as to where these human beings have come from to be assembled around the throne in heaven in John's time. Since the immortality of the soul is not a biblical doctrine, they should have come from some resurrection. Just such a special resurrection is mentioned in connection with the death of Christ on the cross (Matt 27:51-52). It is likely, therefore, that these elders around the throne came out of that special resurrection. Their function here is discussed further in the section on the cultic calendar.

The presence of the Holy Spirit is represented in this scene by the feature before the throne, the "seven torches of fire which are the seven spirits of God" (v. 5). The number seven represents completeness in this connection. This has a connection with 5:6 that is discussed further below.

The four living creatures are cherubim angels around the throne. This identification is made from Ezek 1 and 10. In Ezek 1:15-21 the four living creatures attend the throne of God wherever it goes. In Ezek 10:1-15 the same beings are referred to as cherubim, and their various characteristics are described in verse 14. These are the same four cherubim found in Rev 4.

Thus far, John has been shown God upon His throne and the Holy Spirit, the twenty-four elders, and the four cherubim around the throne. Then the elders and the cherubim begin to sing. Two of their songs are recorded here. The first is recorded in 4:8, the *trisagion* that is modeled after the holy, holy, holy of Isa 6:3. After celebrating the holiness of God, they also sing to His creatorship,

"Worthy art thou, our Lord and God,  
to receive glory and honor and power;  
For thou didst create all things,  
and by thy will they existed and were created."

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John was shown a scene of worship in heaven. He was shown those who participated in the worship, and he heard how God was celebrated in song there.

In particular he heard the song that praised God as Creator. Representatives of the angels and the human race, both created by God, sing to that Creatorship before His throne in this scene of worship. A fair share of the theology in this narrative focuses upon this song and the song sung in the climax to the worship scene.

**No. 2 B—Revelation 5:1–14**

The scene depicted here is a continuation of that described in Rev 4.

In another sense it stands as separate, so it is subdivided here. That subdivision becomes more important when the cultic calendar is considered in the second half of this study. This second scene set in the heavenly throne room begins by focusing upon a scroll in the right hand of Him who sits upon the throne. The scroll is sealed with seven seals. John is anxious to know what is in the scroll, but no one is found who is worthy to open the seals and unroll the scroll. Finally, one who is worthy is found.

He carries glorious titles—the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Root of David—but when John looks to see who this great and mighty being is he sees, instead, a little lamb (5:6). The lamb looks as if it has been freshly slain, probably due to a fresh scar upon its neck. The figure, of course, represents Christ, who, by His death, has obtained redemption for us.

He alone has the right to open the seals on the scroll because He has purchased redemption for the human race by His death. That redemption is then celebrated in song as the same cherubim and the elders bow down before Him and sing about the redemption He has obtained by His blood:

“Worthy art thou to take the scroll and open its seals, for thou wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God.”

In the Greek this song begins the same way as does the song sung to God the Father in 4:11, “Worthy art thou,” and the reason for the worship of both the Father and the Son is introduced with the same word, “For. . . (Greek *hoti*). In this scene of worship set in heaven, therefore, the Creatorship of the Father and the redemptive work of the Son are both celebrated in songs of praise, and much of the theology of both of these narratives comes from the aspects of the work of God that is celebrated in these songs.

The song of praise to the Lamb for His redemption is then extended to the whole of the angelic host (v. 11) and finally to the whole of creation (v. 13).

From the theology of the songs in these two narratives, therefore, it can be said that Rev 4 celebrates the Creatorship of the Father and Rev 5 celebrates the redemption obtained by the Son, represented here as the Lamb. These paired

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songs take on further meaning when another sanctuary scene toward the end of the book is examined below, Rev 19:1-10.

The connection between this sanctuary scene and the prophecy of the seals which follows is obvious, because each of the scenes in that following sequence of prophecy comes to light as the Lamb opens the seals, one by one.

While this is not a study of the historical fulfillments of the prophecies of the seals, that of the seventh seal deserves mention here. When the seventh and last seal is opened, the scroll can then be unrolled. That occurs in Rev 8:1. The statement there about this action is very brief, but it has led to considerable discussion about what is contained in the scroll. Three main theories have been advanced: 1) on the model of Greco-Roman wills it has been taken as title to the earth which Christ has obtained by winning back the human race and the world by His death on the cross; 2) Others take it simply as representing the opening of the scroll of the rest of the prophecies in the book of Revelation; 3) On the basis of the use of the phraseology later in the book, the scroll is taken as the Lamb's Book of Life. The third theory seems to carry with it the most direct link to the language of the book of Revelation. In this view, the scroll contains the names and perhaps the actions of all the saints of all ages who will be saved in the heavenly kingdom by the purchase of the blood of the Lamb.

The exact nature of the scroll is, however, a side issue here, and thus the study continues on to the next sanctuary scene.

#### **No. 3—Revelation 8:2-5**

The seven churches are mentioned in their introductory sanctuary vision (1:20). The seven seals are mentioned in their introductory sanctuary vision (5:1-4, 8). Now the seven trumpets are referred to here in their introductory sanctuary vision. First of all, the seven angels who receive the seven trumpets are located as standing "before God," which must be in heaven. More specific are the location and the actions of the eighth angel, who comes on the scene of action after them. This angel is located at the golden altar before the throne, and with his golden censer he burns incense on that altar. The incense he burns there goes up before God with the prayers of the saints. This makes them all the more acceptable to God, who answers those prayers.

The site of this action is the altar of incense, which in the earthly tabernacle was located just in front of the curtain that separated the holy place from the most holy place (Exod 30:1-8). The same article of furniture was found in the same location in Solomon's temple (1 Kgs 6:20b-22). In the New Testament, Hebrews 9:4 refers to the same feature in connection with the most holy place. Some have criticized this reference as inaccurate but the text requires a more careful reading.

It refers to the most holy place as "having" the altar of incense, it does not say that the altar of incense was "in" the most holy place. Although it was not topographically located in the most holy place, the function of the altar belonged

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to it. The smoke from the incense that was burned on the altar wafted over the veil, going into the presence of God, just as is described here in Rev 8:4. The language of Heb 9:4 has been inferred directly from 1 Kgs 6:22, which indicates that the golden altar “belonged to the inner sanctuary,” i. e., the most holy place.

From all these earthly connections it is clear that the golden altar of incense in Rev 8:3-5 should be thought of as functioning in the holy place of the heavenly sanctuary. The work carried on there in the earthly sanctuary was also considered as part of the “daily, continual” ministry (Exod 30:7-8). When the priest went in to tend to the lamps morning and evening he was also to burn incense on the altar at the same time. Thus the scene of Jesus among the lampstands and this view of the angel ministering at the altar of incense both belong to that daily or continual type of ministry which went on every day of the religious calendar year.

There is another aspect of this angel’s work at that altar. He is to take some of the fire from the altar and cast it down onto the earth. Obviously this part of the action of the angel was symbolic, as physical fire cast down from heaven would go out or burn up long before it ever reached earth. What this means is that judgments by fire are to occur upon the earth, and these judgments come by way of the actions described in the trumpets. Connected with this is the fact that the first three trumpet judgments include fire in their description. The first trumpet mentions fire mixed with hail and blood (8:7).

The second trumpet focuses upon a great burning mountain that is cast into the sea (8:8). The third trumpet describes a great star falling from heaven upon the earth, and it is blazing or burning like a torch when it does so (8:10). Thus the trumpet judgments minister the judgments by fire that come from the altar.

The ministry of the angel at the altar is twofold. For the saints there is incense burned for them so that its smoke may go up with their prayers. For the wicked there are judgments by fire sent down upon the earth. Unfortunately, these judgments do not result in the wicked turning to God, for the conclusion after the sixth trumpet indicates that the rest of mankind did not repent of their idolatries, immorality, or murders (9:20-21).

**No. 4—Revelation 11:19**

Given the nature of the sanctuary scene in this verse, it looks very much as if it belongs with what follows it more than with what precedes it. Rev 11:15-18 describes the activity under the seventh and final trumpet. That should bring that series to an end. It should be remembered that the chapter and verse divisions in the Bible were not located in the text by the original author, but were placed in manuscripts during the Middle Ages. In most cases the divisions placed at that time appear to be quite accurate and very useful. Occasionally, however, some mistakes have been made.

This appears to be one of those cases. It provides the introductory sanctuary scene for Rev 12-14, and its depiction connects it more with the shift toward end

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time events that occurs in these chapters than with the more historical succession of the seven trumpets.

The text refers to a time when the temple of God was opened in such a way that the Ark of the Covenant was seen. As an article of furniture in the tabernacle and temple on earth, the Ark of the Covenant was well known. In both it was located in the most holy place. In the instructions about building the tabernacle and the objects to be placed in it, it was the very first object about which instructions were given (Exod 25:10-22, 26:33-34). The same Ark of the Covenant was placed in the most holy place of Solomon's temple because the original was still in existence (1 Kgs 6:19). It rested there for another four centuries, until Nebuchadnezzar sacked Jerusalem (2 Kgs:25:8-17). The fate of the Ark at that time is not described in the Bible. Extra-biblical sources, including 2 Maccabees, suggest the Ark was hidden while Nebuchadnezzar's army was approaching. It has never been found, and it was not present in the second temple. No substitute for it was ever made.

In Rev 11:19 the text is dealing with the great heavenly original, not the earthly copy. In the case of the earthly sanctuary it was opened in this way only one day in the year, on the Day of Atonement, *yom hakippurim*, or more simply Yom Kippur. In this case it was when the temple was opened in this way that it was seen. Thus it refers to the commencement of the antitypical Day of Atonement rather than its conclusion.

Since the Day of Atonement occurred toward the end of the festivals of the cultic year, it is to be expected that the antitypical Day of Atonement should occur toward the end of the era. Thus, there is to be a time of judgment at the end of the age. That is the point made by the three prophetic narratives which follow this introductory sanctuary scene. Rev 12 gives the broad sweep of the Christian era, and specifically refers to the end time only in verse 17. Rev 13 divides in half, with the first half, dedicated to the sea beast, having been fulfilled through history. The second half of the chapter, which describes the actions of the land beast, is as yet unfulfilled, and its events lie in the future—they are eschatological in character. Rev 14 is completely eschatological in character, and the rest of the prophecies of the book of Revelation carry on through the future.

Thus there is a gradient that occurs here in this central prophecy of the book, and the shift takes place from history to eschatology. This demarcates the fulcrum of the book, in which the history of the era found in the churches, seals, and trumpets gives way to the more thoroughly eschatological character of the last half of the book.

Since these prophecies turn at this point to a more eschatological viewpoint, it is appropriate that the introductory sanctuary scene associated with these prophecies focuses upon the end of the cultic year. The daily ministry is in view in Rev 1 and Rev 8, whereas now the annual ministry is in view.



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**No. 5—Revelation 15:5–8**

The setting of this scene is specifically identified as “the temple of the tent of the testimony in heaven.” The phrase about the tent of the testimony is taken from the Old Testament, where the tent was the tabernacle or sanctuary tent and the testimony was the ten commandments written on stone and held in the Ark of the Covenant in the most holy place of that sanctuary. The Ark of the Covenant is also called the Ark of the Testimony (Exod 25:22), and Moses was given instruction that this Testimony was to be placed in the Ark under the Mercy Seat (Exod 25:21). In this way the temple in heaven is shown to be thematically connected with the wilderness shrine, and the witness given there through the ten commandments still speaks from heaven, even down to the time when ministry in the heavenly sanctuary closes.

The close of that ministry is what is depicted here. The angels who signify that end are clothed in a very similar manner to the way Christ is depicted in the introductory sanctuary scene. The phrase about their having golden girdles around their breasts is essentially the same in Greek as that which describes Christ’s golden girdle in Rev 1:13, except that here there are plurals, whereas in Rev 1 it is singular. The verb for being “clothed” with a robe is the same, but Christ’s robe is described more simply with one Greek word for a “long robe.” Here the angels are described as being clothed with “pure bright linen.” Thus there is a great similarity in terms of the dress of the priest who opened the daily ministry in the book of Revelation and the dress of the angels with which it closes.

They come out of the temple with their bowls with the plagues which were given to them by one of the four cherubim who stand before the throne of God. After they have departed on their mission of pouring out the plagues on earth, the glory of God flares up in such a way that no one can enter the temple until the mission of the plague angels is completed. This is another way of saying that all redemptive ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is now concluded. Probation for the human race has closed, and now it remains only to pour out these judgments before Christ comes a second time.

This flaring up of the glory of God is described on two other occasions in the Bible. The first time occurred with the dedication of the tabernacle in the wilderness (Exod 40:34-35). On that occasion the manifestation of the glory of God in the tabernacle was so intense that even Moses could not enter it. The same thing occurred at the dedication of the temple by Solomon. On that occasion, “when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord” (I Kgs 8:10-11).

Thus there are three recorded instances upon which the glory of the Lord was manifested in this powerful way, when ministry commenced in the tabernacle in the wilderness, when ministry commenced in the temple in Jerusalem, and when ministry concludes in the temple in heaven. The same dramatic event oc-

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currs here for the conclusion of redemptive ministry as when it began in those earthly shrines.

Since the introductory sanctuary scene here has been delimited in Rev 15:5-8, some note should be taken of what precedes it. Once again, the chapter division is in the wrong place. Rev 15:1-4 belongs with the visions and messages of Rev 14. It is a concluding scene to that sequence. It relates most directly to Rev 14:1-5.<sup>4</sup> There Christ and the 144,000 are seen on the heavenly mount Zion singing a new song, but the contents of that song are not disclosed. When one comes to Rev 15:1-4 the reader finds that this new song is the song of Moses and the Lamb, and the words of the song are given (15:3-4). The sequence begins with a revelation of the results of what the messages of the three angels will accomplish. Then the text of the three angels' messages are given. Following that, the second coming of Christ is depicted, and He reaps the harvest of the earth. That harvest results in the scene of the redeemed depicted in Rev 15:1-4. Thus the entire sequence of Rev 14 runs from 14:1 to 15:4.

The sanctuary scene of Rev 15:5-8 begins the next sequence, and it deals with the seven bowl plagues. Those plagues are specifically connected with that sanctuary scene, as their place of origin is given there.

The sequence of what follows this introductory sanctuary scene should be noted, as this is where lies the difference between the seven or eight vision outlines of the book. According to the outline presented here, the entire sequence of the plagues begins with this introductory sanctuary scene and runs through to the end of chapter 18. The outline of this section is as follows:

1. The introductory sanctuary scene—Rev 15
2. The description of the plagues—Rev 16
3. The reason for the plagues—Rev 17
4. The response to the plagues—Rev 18

The first two elements in this outline are reasonably clear. The reason given for the plagues in Rev 17 is that the impure woman is drunk with the blood of the saints. Thus she deserves the judgments described in the plagues. The response to the plagues comes especially in Rev 18, where seven songs of lament and mourning are sung over the woman who has been judged with these plagues. These songs come from the kings (v. 9), from the merchants (v. 11), and from the seamen (v. 17), who all sing songs of lament because they have done business with the woman, but now their time of commerce is over. These human songs of lament are enclosed by a song from an angel at the beginning of the narrative and another song by an angel at the end of the narrative (vs. 1-3

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<sup>4</sup> See William H. Shea & Ed Christian, "The Chiastic Structure of Rev 12:1-15:4: The Great Controversy Vision," *AUSS*, 38:2 (Autumn 2000), which reveals that the many verbal, synonymous, and thematic parallels between the first part of Rev 14 and Rev 15:1-4 tie them closely together as mirror halves of an elegant chiasm.

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and 21-24). Both of their songs have to do with how just and deserved are the judgments that fall upon the woman.

For these reasons it is not necessary to divide off a separate sanctuary scene in Rev 16:17-20 to introduce a new line of prophecy in Rev 17 and 18. This section connected with the seventh plague does, however, bring up an interesting connection through the sanctuary scenes that have been covered from Rev 4 up to this point. In each of them there is reference to phenomena that accompany their respective judgments. These are listed in a sequence, and in each case the sequence gets longer and more severe. The texts involved are:

- Sanctuary Scene 2—4:5, lightning, voices, and peals of thunder
- Sanctuary Scene 3—8:5, thunder, voices, lightning, and an earthquake
- Sanctuary Scene 4—11:19b, lightning, voices, thunder, an earthquake, and hail
- Sanctuary Scene 5—16:17-21, lightning, voices, thunder, a great earthquake (described), and heavy hail (described)

Each of these lists signals a judgment to come. The judgment with the seals is mild. The judgment with the trumpets is severe. The judgment with Rev 12-14 is still more severe, and the judgment with the plagues is most severe of all. The description of this list is given at the end of the plague sequence, and it forms an inclusio with the sanctuary scene of 15:5-8, it does not divide off another line of prophecy. There are two more sanctuary scenes to follow, but they do not include this list. The sequence is fully completed with the close of probation and the judgments issued from that sanctuary scene. The following two sanctuary scenes lie outside of a time when redemption is still possible, and hence those types of judgments are no longer issued.

**No. 6—Revelation 19:1-10**

The angels who join the songs of lament at the beginning and end of Rev 18 come down from heaven to earth to join the kings, merchants, and seamen who sing those songs here on earth. Thus the focus of those laments is here on earth. In Rev 19:1-10 there is a shift back to heaven for the next introductory sanctuary scene. The location in heaven is demonstrated by the presence of the twenty-four elders and the four cherubim before the throne of God (v. 4). Thus there is here a return to the scene of Rev 4-5. Not only is the same scene revisited, but the essence of the worship recorded there is carried out here, also, in the songs of praise that are sung to the Father and Son. The location of this singing is said to be in heaven (v. 1), and it is said to be sung there by a “great multitude” (vs. 1 and 6).

The first song sung in this introductory sanctuary scene is sung to the Father, as is the case in Rev 4, but in this case it celebrates His justice in judgment: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for his judgments are true and just;” (vs. 1b-2a). In particular His justice has been made

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manifest in His judgments upon the impure woman that are described in Rev 15-18. Thus the song sung to God the Father celebrates Him as Judge.

The song sung to the Son, referred to here as the Lamb, as in Rev 5 (and elsewhere after that chapter), celebrates His marriage: “Hallelujah! For the Lord God Almighty reigns, Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready; It was granted to her to be clothed with fine linen, bright and pure—for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints” (vs. 6b-8). The title Lord God Almighty that is used here also appears in Rev 4:8 in one of the first of the songs of the elders and cherubim. This song to the Son is sung to Him as he prepares to depart from heaven at the second coming (19:11-16).

Thus the songs sung to the Father and Son in this introductory sanctuary scene from the end of the age celebrate the Father as the Judge and the Son as the Bridegroom. This can be compared with the songs sung at the beginning of the age, as recorded in Rev 4-5.

<b>Beginning of the Age</b>	<b>End of the Age</b>
4:11 Creator God	Father Judge 19:1-2
5:9 Redeemer Christ	Lamb Bridegroom 19:7-8

The prophecies following this introductory sanctuary scene extend the line of salvation history on through the second coming to the beginning, the middle, and the end of the millennium, culminating in the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev 20:11-15. The final line of prophecy in the book is divided off at the end of Rev 20, and it begins with Rev 21:1, which brings up the final introductory sanctuary scene.

**No. 7—Revelation 21:1–8**

At first glance it appears as if all of Rev 21:1 to 22:4 deals with the same subject, the new earth and the New Jerusalem. In a sense it does, but there is actually a sharp division in this section. The division is marked off by the beginning of the vision, which is repeated twice. Rev 21:2 states that “I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.” The same statement is repeated in 21:10. One of the angels with the seven bowls takes John to a great high mountain and shows him “the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God.” This means John saw the vision of the New Jerusalem twice. Each vision, of course, contains different descriptive elements with different associations.

It is interesting to see that the Bible begins with two interrelated narratives about creation and ends with two interrelated narratives about recreation. One may reasonably say, however, that the first of these two visions does not clearly identify the heavenly sanctuary like the previous introductory sanctuary scenes. In fact, Rev 21:22 says that there is no temple in the city. It is not needed anymore. The plan of salvation administered from the heavenly sanctuary is over; it

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has accomplished all it could accomplish. Now God can dwell directly and personally among His redeemed people.

While there is no temple in the city because it is no longer needed, there is a sense in which the whole city serves as a temple. This is manifested, for example, in the various stones that are used for the foundation of the wall of the city (21:18-20).

These resemble the twelve stones placed upon the breastplate of the priest who ministered in the Old Testament sanctuary (Exod 28:15-21). In the Old Testament system, only the temple and its immediately surrounding area was holy, in the midst of an unholy camp or city. In the new earth, the entire city will be holy, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zech 14:20-21. Thus, the city itself will be the sanctuary, in a sense, and for that reason it is called the "holy city." This connection, however, is a general one. The question is, then, is there anything in the first of these two visions that connects it more directly with the heavenly sanctuary than the other. Following the pattern we have seen throughout the book, it should be the first of these two visions that should be more directly connected. Upon closer inspection, there is such a connection. While the vision begins with the new heaven and new earth and is followed by the view of the New Jerusalem descending to earth, this first vision then reverts back to heaven.

When this vision reverts back to heaven, John then hears "a loud voice from the throne" (21:3). This is followed up by the second statement that "he who sat upon the throne said," (21:5). This is different from the second vision in which John is told about the city by the angel who accompanies him, the angel who takes him to the great high mountain. That angel speaks to him about the city (21:15 and 22:1). Thus there is a distinct difference between these two visions about the source from which the information about the city comes. In the first vision that voice speaks to him directly from the throne, which, at that point in time, is still in heaven. In the second vision the angel interpreter accompanies John through his vision about the city and tells him about it.

This means that while the second vision is more earth centered, the first vision still issues from the throne of God in heaven, in the heavenly sanctuary, from which the conclusion to the plan of salvation is shown to his servant John. There is a more direct connection with the heavenly sanctuary in the first vision than in the second. That makes it another introductory sanctuary scene. This is the initial vision introducing the second and final vision about the New Jerusalem.

The first vision also has more direct connections with the Old Testament sanctuary in terms of the message that it gives. The main message here is given in verse three, supplemented by what follows. The message of verse three is that, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them."

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The word used here for dwelling is *skene*, and the verb used for his “dwelling” with them is derived from this root. In the Old Testament, and in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament in particular (chapter 9), the word *skene* is used for, among other things, the tent of the sanctuary in which the presence of God dwelt with his people. This was in fulfillment of Exod 25:8, “Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst.” This Old Testament instruction has now met its final fulfillment, not in a sanctuary that men built for God, but in a sanctuary---a city---that God built for them.

The second bicolon of this verse also has direct Old Testament connections. It presents the ultimate fulfillment of the most direct statement about what the Old Covenant was. Lev 26:12 gives the essence of the Old Covenant, “I will be their God and they shall be my people.” Initially, this Old Testament relation failed because of the failure of the people. The question can then be raised, did the promise fail completely? The answer here is no; instead, it finds its ultimate fulfillment in the New Jerusalem in the new earth. All this is announced from the throne of God in the heavenly sanctuary. The location of these statements has connections there, and the content of the statements has connections with instructions and promises related to the Old Testament sanctuary. Even the vocabulary used relates to that Old Testament tent. This first vision about the new heaven and the new earth and its New Jerusalem thus has more direct connections with both the earthly and the heavenly sanctuary than does the second vision following it. Thus the first vision of Rev 21:1-8 serves as the sanctuary scene which introduces the second vision, the prophecy of Rev 21:9-22:4 which follows it. Obviously, however, there is a direct connection and relationship between the two, just as there has been with the preceding sanctuary scenes and the prophecies they introduced.

#### **The Cultic Calendar**

Now that the seven introductory sanctuary scenes of Revelation have been isolated and described, they may be set into the scheme of the ancient Israelite religious calendar. The festivals of this calendar are identified in particular in Lev 23, and the list of the additional sacrifices that accompanied those festivals is outlined in Num 28-29. The function of this second section of this study is to see how well the events in the course of that calendar can be fitted to these sanctuary scenes. The theory presented here, and by others previously, is that the fit is quite compatible, perhaps even more complementary than has previously been suspected. In order to demonstrate this, the list of sanctuary scenes given above is reviewed again, now with an eye towards the particular connection of each scene with specific events in the religious calendar.

#### **No. I—Revelation 1:12–20: The Daily or Continual Ministry**

This has already been discussed in connection with the description of the lampstands before which Christ, as priest, ministers. The specific textual con-

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nection with the Old Testament daily ministry is made by the repeated use of the word for “daily, continual” in the Levitical instructions about tending the lamps (Lev twenty-four:1-4).

The daily ministry is not mentioned in the calendar of Lev 23, but it is the very first section of the instructions about the sacrifices in Num 28:1-8.

**No. 2A—Revelation 4:1–11: Passover**

The Passover sacrifice is not mentioned directly in this narrative. Nevertheless, there are elements present in this narrative which connect it here. First of all, there is the presence of the twenty-four elders. In the discussion of this sanctuary scene above, they were identified as human beings. Here now we can ask the question about their function in the heavenly temple. Some of that function derives from their number, twenty-four.

Why twenty-four? Why not one, or two or seventy (cf. Exod 24:1, 9)? The most direct connection available has to do with the number of priestly courses that served in the temple.

There were twenty-four of those priestly courses. Each one served one week in the first half of the year and one week in the second half of the year. Then, along with all other adult males of Israel, all twenty-four courses attended three of the festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. That made up their service for the levitical year.

Particular attention has been paid to the chronology of the order of these courses because of the reference to Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, as belonging to the priestly course of Abijah (Luke 1:5). If one could figure out when he ministered in the temple, one could determine the approximate time of John’s conception and birth. Then, since John was related to Jesus, if one could determine John’s birth date, Jesus’ birth date could also be determined, since John was six months older than Jesus (Luke 1:26). These calculations are complicated, however, because it is uncertain whether Zechariah was serving in his spring course or his fall term. In the most recent discussion of this matter J. Finegan points to Zechariah’s priestly course in the temple from Nov 10 through 17 as the time when the forthcoming birth of John was announced to him.<sup>5</sup>

Our purpose here is not to determine the birth date of either John or Jesus. Our purpose is to illustrate the function of the priestly courses through the calendar of the religious year. In the case of Rev 4, however, it is not one priestly course that is on duty, but all twenty-four. This happened only three times in the year, at the festivals of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. Since this is the first festival worship scene to which we come in the book of Revelation, this should be Passover. It occurs first in the list of Lev 23 and first after the daily and the Sabbath in Num 28. It is interesting to note that these twenty-four repre-

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<sup>5</sup> *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 130-134, 275-278.

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representatives of the priestly courses also show up later in the scenes from Pentecost and Tabernacles discussed below.

This worship scene with the representatives of the twenty-four priestly courses serving in the temple is thus identified best with the first major festival of the religious calendar. It is a Passover worship scene.

There is another element that is not here that argues for the same connection.

It is an argument from silence, but a glaring silence. Jesus is not in this scene. He does not come into it until the associated narrative of Rev 5, but that has another connection, as is discussed immediately following this discussion. Jesus is present in Rev 1. He is present all the way through all of the messages to the seven churches in Rev 2-3. He is present in Rev 5. But He is not here in Rev 4. Is there a reason why He would not normally be here? Jesus was the ultimate antitypical fulfillment of the Passover lamb. That is the way he shows up in Rev 5, as the Passover lamb whose wound had healed. But he is not present in Rev 4, which serves as a Passover scene. Is there a reason why the lamb would not be present during this service? Yes, there is. That was the time of His sacrifice. He was not in the temple because he was out in the courtyard, on the cross, being sacrificed. When he next appears, he shows the wounds of that sacrifice. Thus the presence of the representatives of the twenty-four priestly courses are shown ministering in the temple in this Passover-style service, and the Lamb is not shown there because this is the time of His sacrifice. Thus this first introductory sanctuary scene shown as occurring in the heavenly throne room is best identified with the first major festival of the ancient Israelite calendar, Passover

**No. 2B—Revelation 5:1–14: Pentecost or the Feast of Weeks**

While in one sense Rev 4 and 5 are connected, in another sense they are separate narratives. The twenty-four elders are still here, or perhaps it would be better to say they reappear here (5:8, 11). The next major festival in the Israelite religious calendar was Pentecost, referred to as the Feast of Weeks because it was measured off by the seven weeks following Passover. There is a major element in this narrative that points to it as a Pentecost type of festival, and that has to do with the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is present in the scene of Rev 4, “before the throne burn the seven torches of fire which are the seven spirits of God” (v. 5). The Holy Spirit serves a different function, however, in Rev 5. There it is mentioned, but it is mentioned as having been sent out into the world. The Lamb is shown standing there, “with seven horns and seven eyes which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth” (v. 6).

The presence of the Holy Spirit is manifest in heaven in a special way in the scene of Rev 4, the Passover scene. Now, with this new scene of Rev 5, the Holy Spirit has been sent from heaven into all the earth. When did this happen? The New Testament describes that event as occurring on Pentecost (Acts 2).



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There the Holy Spirit is depicted as tongues of fire descending upon the heads of the apostles as they preach on that day. In Rev 4, before they are sent out, they are described as seven torches of fire. When they are sent out they are described as seven horns, representing power, and seven eyes, representing knowledge. Seven is the number of completeness, and thus here, when the Lamb has sent the Spirit out into the world it represents the omnipotence and the omniscience of God that is active in the world. The time when it goes to work in that specific way is most directly on the day of Pentecost. Now, in this scene, the wounded but healed Passover Lamb that was not present in the Passover scene has sent His power and knowledge into the world through the Holy Spirit.

That is the earthly manifestation of this heavenly pentecostal festival, but there is another corresponding function of heaven: the inauguration of Jesus as King. That is the scene that is shown here. He is first identified by His earthly messianic titles, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah and the Root of David. The Messiah King was to come from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10), and more specifically he was to come from Bethlehem, David's own town (Mic 5:2). Thus Jesus is known here not by His heavenly divine titles, but by His earthly royal messianic titles, for here now He is inaugurated as King upon His return to heaven from the time he spent on earth between Passover and Pentecost. The same royal function of the Lamb is shown by the ever-expanding choir singing his praises in this heavenly scene.

The pentecostal function of this heavenly sanctuary scene is twofold. On the earthly side it represents the sending out of the Holy Spirit into the world. On the heavenly side it represents the inauguration of Jesus as King upon His return from His victory in the world.

#### **No. 3—Rev 8:2–5: The Seven New Moon Festivals**

The action in this introductory sanctuary scene takes place at the golden altar of incense in the holy place. It is, therefore, part of the daily service of the priestly function. Associated with it are the seven angels who blow their seven trumpets successively, and each of the prophetic scenes unfolds as they do so. The new moon of the seventh month, the 1st of Tishri, was the festival of trumpets *par excellence*. But the other new moons in the cultic calendar also had this signal associated with them, though in a lesser way. The festival calendar of Lev 23 mentions only the new moon festival of the seventh month (Lev 23:23-25). In the cultic calendar of Num 28-29, however, the new moon festivals of all of the months are referred to (Num 28:11-15).<sup>6</sup> In both Old and New Testament times the month was lunar, in that the first day of the month was announced when the first crescent of the moon was observed. In both Old Testament and New Tes-

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<sup>6</sup> Today we give little thought to the new moon festivals, yet Isa 66:22–23 indicates that the new moon festivals and the seventh-day Sabbath will still be celebrated in the new earth, as all the redeemed come to the New Jerusalem to bow before God.

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tament times this was done by physical observation, it was not determined by astronomical calculation.<sup>7</sup>

A lunar month is 29.5 days and a fraction in terms of astronomical calculations. In practical terms this meant a month had either twenty-nine or thirty days, depending on when the crescent of the new moon was observed. Since this determination was observational in nature, it had to be signaled throughout the land once the determination had been made in Jerusalem. There was also the problem of signaling when the extra months were to be added. About every three years or so an intercalated thirteenth month was added to keep the lunar year even with the solar year. This too needed to be signaled, not only in Judea, but also in the diaspora throughout the Roman empire. Messengers were sent out to accomplish this. The seven trumpets of Rev 8-11 provide a fitting symbol for this kind of signal.

This does not mean each trumpet should be taken as signaling a period of thirty days or thirty years. It is simply that the figure of the signal, drawn from the idea of signaling the beginning of each month, was used for this prophetic series of symbols. It should also be noted that there are seven of them, not twelve for all twelve months. These seven monthly signals take one, in the cultic calendar, from 1 Nisan, to 1 Tishri, from the new moon of the first month to the new moon of the seventh month. The new moon of that seventh month is also, of course, the Festival of Trumpets. It announces the fall festivals to follow.

Thus, these seven trumpet symbols take one from the spring festivals, utilized in figure in the first half of the book (Passover and Pentecost), to the fall festivals, those of Yom Kippur and Tabernacles or *Sukkot*. In this way one finds the spring festivals in the first half of the book of Revelation and the fall festivals in its second half. The bridge between them are the seven trumpets, the figure for which was drawn from the signaling of the seven months between the Spring New Year and the Fall New Year.

Thus, the sanctuary scene of Rev 8:2-5 not only represents the continuation of the daily ministry, but is also connected more specifically with the seven new moons signaled between those two main focal points in the calendar.

#### **No. 4—Revelation 11:19: The Commencement of the Day of Atonement**

The connection of the view of the Ark of the Covenant with the Day of Atonement is quite obvious and has been discussed above at some length. The point that should be emphasized here is that the reference in this verse is to the opening of the temple: i. e., it refers to the commencement of that work. In the camp of ancient Israel this was a day of judgment, and anyone who did not enter into the spirit of the day was to be cut off from the camp. In like manner, the

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<sup>7</sup> R. T. Beckwith, "Cautionary Notes on the Use of Calendars and Astronomy to Determine the Chronology of the Passion," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos*, ed. J. Vardaman and E. M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 186-188.

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antitypical Day of Atonement is a time of judgment. That work is seen as beginning in this introductory sanctuary scene.

**No. 5—Revelation 15:5–8: The Conclusion of the Day of Atonement**

The sanctuary scene described here as associated with the sending forth of the plague bowls uses language that indicates that all mediatorial work in the heavenly sanctuary has ceased, both from the daily service, as described in Rev 1 and 8, and from the yearly service, described in 11:19. Probation has closed for the human race. More immediately, the work of investigative judgment carried on in the antitypical Day of Atonement has also ceased. That is the more direct connection here, although the daily ministry is also involved.

**No 6—Revelation 19:1–10 - The Commencement of the Feast of Booths**

This scene has been described above as an introductory sanctuary scene, and so it is. The question about it is, however, when and where should it be located in the course of the flow of the prophecies of Revelation? Above, the connection with the heavenly sanctuary has been made, because the voice comes out of heaven and the elders and the cherubim are there in the scene singing along with the “great multitude.” Who belongs to the great multitude and where do they come from? The position adopted here is that they represent the redeemed, not angels, and they are represented as being in heaven at this time.

Two lines of evidence lead to this conclusion. The first is the linguistic association of the phrase, “great multitude.” The Greek word for multitude is *ochlos* in the genitive. It is modified in both instances, verses 1 and 6, with the same adjective, *pollou*, which yields the meaning “great multitude.” The same phrase is also found in Rev 7:9, where the great multitude gathered around the throne clearly are the redeemed. They have been gathered from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue.

They celebrate before the same throne in heaven also encircled by the cherubim and the elders. In addition, the text says of them, “Therefore they are before the throne of God, and serve him day and night within his temple, and he who sits upon the throne will shelter them with his presence” (v. 15). Clearly then, these are the redeemed in heaven, and they celebrate there after having been taken there at the second coming of Christ. Some were translated and some were resurrected, but none of them were immortal souls who went there at death, since the Bible does not know of that kind of a state of immortality. In this case the phrase “great multitude” is spelled *ochlos polus*, which makes this group linguistically equivalent to the great multitude in Rev 19:1 and 6.

The group in Rev 7:9ff is also directly connected with a celebration that is identified through Old Testament connections to the Feast of Tabernacles. The connection comes through the fact that they celebrate before the throne of God “with palm branches in their hands” (v. 9). This is a reflex from Lev 23:40, where the saints who gathered to celebrate the Feast of Booths or *Sukkot* were to

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“take on the first day the fruit of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook.” The purpose of the reference to the palm branches in heaven in Rev 7:9 is to show that this is the antitypical fulfillment of the Feast of Booths. Since that is the case in 7:9, it should also be the case with the great multitude in 19:1, 6.

They also sing with a great voice in both 7:10 and 19:1. In 19:6 that voice is described as the voice of a great multitude without the modifying adjective for voice. There, however, additional clauses are added to tell how mighty that voice is. It is “like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty thunderpeals.” This phrase also has connections elsewhere in Revelation, for in 14:2, which depicts Christ and the 144,000 on the heavenly Mount Zion (Heb 12:22), the voice heard from heaven is “like the sound of many waters, like the sound of loud thunder.” Thus the voices of the multitude heard in 14:3 and 19:6 are essentially the same, and that is another link to the Feast of Tabernacles, for the earthly procedure for that feast was to gather in Jerusalem, living in booths for the week of the celebration.

The scene in Rev 14:1-4 is in turn connected with the scene in Rev 15:1-4, where the song those redeemed sing is now identified and quoted.

The thematic connection is made here with all these scenes of the righteous redeemed in heaven for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. This occurs during the millennium, as described in Rev 20:4-6. There are, however, four antecedent and related scenes, and they have been mentioned above: Rev 7:9-17, 14:1-5, 15:1-4, and 19:1-10. Thus, there is considerable evidence from Revelation that the millennium will be spent in heaven, along with the depiction of the New Jerusalem coming down from there at the end of the Millennium (Rev 21:2, 10). These five Feast of Tabernacle-like passages combine to point out a Sabbatical-like millennial theology.

During the Feast of Tabernacles the Israelites left their homes in the land and went to live in Jerusalem during the eight days of the feast. In like manner these saints leave their home here on earth to live in Jerusalem in heaven during the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles. The land they left behind lies fallow during that period, just as it did during the Sabbatical year.<sup>8</sup>

From linguistic links and thematic connections elsewhere in Revelation, it may be concluded that the introductory sanctuary scene of Rev 19:1-10 gives an anticipatory or proleptic view of the redeemed in heaven when they begin to celebrate the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles there.

**No. 7 A—Revelation 21:1–8: The Conclusion to the Feast of Booths**

The sanctuary introduction has been isolated from the body of the prophecy in Rev 21-22 by the two references by John to his view of the city of God com-

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<sup>8</sup> On this subject see R. M. Johnston, “The Eschatological Sabbath in John’s Apocalypse: A Reconsideration,” *AUSS* 25:1 (Spring 1987): 39-50.

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ing down to earth from heaven. The first of these scenes introduces the sanctuary prophecy and the second introduces the main body of the prophecy. After its view of the city of God coming down out of heaven, he returns to listen to the message of God from His throne in the temple in heaven. That voice tells how God will come to dwell with His people forever and they will be His people, in fulfillment of two texts in the OT, Exod 25:8 and Lev 26:12.

This is the reverse of the scene found in Rev 19:1-10. There John sees the scene in the heavenly sanctuary and listens to the redeemed people singing praises to their God. If that tells of the beginning of the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles, then the reverse should describe its end. That end comes when the people of God come back to earth, and that is what is decreed in Rev 21:1-8. After the introductory view of the city coming down, all of the statements which follow tell about God's relation with His people and who will be in the eternal kingdom (the blessed) and who will not (the cursed). The decree is, therefore, that the people of God return home to earth after their time dwelling where Jerusalem is, in heaven.

There is one new feature here, however, and that is that the city itself accompanies them as they return to earth. In the Old Testament festival the people went up to Jerusalem for the week, they lived in booths there, and then they returned home when the festival was over. Jerusalem stayed where it was. In this case the city accompanies them back to their earthly home so the people and the city will dwell together in the earth made new. All of this occurs at the end of the millennium, according to the order of the text of Revelation.

Supplemented by other passages in Revelation, cited above, this section toward the end of the book gives three views of the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles. The first, the sanctuary introduction of 19:1-10, shows the saints after they have arrived in heaven, celebrating in the temple there. The second scene, Rev 20:4-6, shows them at the work of judgment on thrones with Christ during the millennium. The third scene shows the city coming down to the earth after the millennium and after the antitypical Feast of Tabernacles is over. As the city comes down the voice of God from the throne decrees the eternal welfare of the righteous.

**No. 7B—Rev 21:9-22:4: The Great Sabbath of the Festival of Tabernacles**

I have given the body of this prophecy a separate section because it too has connections with the last festival of the cultic calendar. The celebration connected with the Feast of Tabernacles lasted eight days, a day longer than the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The legislation in Lev 23 describing the Feast of Tabernacles speaks several times to the fact that the feast was seven days long (vs. 39, 40, 41, 42). Only once does it speak of the eighth day (v. 39), indicating it was to be a ceremonial Sabbath. The cultic calendar of Num 29 lists separate offerings for each of the eight days for this festival and indicates, as does Lev 23, that the first and eighth days were to be ceremonial Sabbaths (vs. 12-38). It

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also indicates that the Feast of Unleavened Bread was to be only seven days (Num 28:16-25). Its first day and seventh day were to be especially holy days.

Thus, the eighth day of the Feast of Tabernacles was something unique and set apart that was not replicated in any of the other festivals of the entire religious calendar year. That last day of the feast was also called its “great day” and was observed by Jesus during the last Festival of Tabernacles in His earthly ministry in a special way (John 7:2, 37-39). On that day He stood up and gave His great appeal about the Water of Life, “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink” (v. 37).

A major part of the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles involved the use of water. Each morning of the feast the priest led a procession down to the Gihon spring on the east side of Jerusalem, the spring that filled the Pool of Siloam through Hezekiah’s water tunnel. As the priest filled the golden pitcher with water from the spring, the choir accompanying him sang Isa 12:3. Then the procession returned to the altar of burnt offering in the courtyard of the temple. The crowds that accompanied him carried the *lulab*, which consisted of myrtle and willow twigs tied together with strips from palm branches. This was in fulfillment of the instruction in Lev 23:40 and is reflected in antitypical fulfillment in Rev 7:9. When they reached the courtyard, the people walked around the altar singing Ps 118:25 while the priest went up the steps of the altar to pour the water down a silver tube. On the seventh day of the festival the people walked around the altar seven times.<sup>9</sup>

The reflection here was twofold. It looked back to the times when God miraculously provided the people with water in the wilderness, and it looked forward to the rains that began in the fall after the festival, as they were necessary for the production of a good crop. There is also the messianic prophecy of Zech 14, which tells how all the nations will come up to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Booths (vs. 16-19). When those conditions have come there will be a perpetual flowing of waters from Jerusalem, some to the east and some to the west (v. 8).

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stands up in the midst of the people and invites them to drink of the water that He provides, the water of life. It is not so much the water that God provided in the wilderness for your fathers that is important. Nor is it the waters that you have used daily in this festival that are important. What is really important is the water of life that I provide for you.

Light also played a very great part in the celebration of this festival, as it reflected upon the time in the wilderness when God led His people by the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire. The pillar of fire illuminated the camp in the wilderness during the nighttime. This was celebrated in the temple precincts by the use of four great golden bowls placed atop four large golden lampstands. These

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<sup>9</sup> For this description of the ceremonies see R. E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII* [Garden City: Anchor Doubleday, 1982], 327.

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were placed in the court of the women. The lampstands were so tall that the priests had to use ladders to reach their tops, and the bowls placed atop them were so large that the wicks used in them were the worn out garments of the priests. These were probably lighted each evening, but especially on the opening day of the festival (Ibid., 344).

At His final Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus also reflects upon this practice. In John 8, while still in Jerusalem for the Festival, Jesus proclaims, “I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” (v. 12).

Again, Jesus is saying it is not the light God gave your fathers in the wilderness that is so important. Nor is it the light you are supplying to Jerusalem during this festival that is important, either. I am the light of the world, and I fulfill this feature of the festival in an even greater way. The messianic prophecy of Zech 14 also refers to this feature, for when the nations come up to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of Booths (vs. 16-19) they will find the light of perpetual day there (v. 7).

These features of light and water are especially prominent in the body of the prophecy about the New Jerusalem in Rev 21-22. It has already been mentioned above that there will be no temple there (21:22), because the whole city has become the sanctuary where God dwells with His people with no more need of separation between them. All of it is holy, in fulfillment of the prophecy of Zech 14:20-21. The stones of the foundation resemble the stones on the breastplate of the OT priest (21:18-20, cf. Exod 28:17-20). Now there is also stress upon the nations that will come into that city, as they were to come to the festival of booths, according to Zech 14. The nations walk into the city through the gates by the light of the glory of God, and the kings of earth come in with them (21:24). The leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations (22:2).

The same major features of light and water found with the Feast of Tabernacles also show up in the description of the New Jerusalem. “The city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. By its light shall the nations walk; . . .and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there” (21:23-25). “And night shall be no more; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light and they shall reign for ever and ever” (22:5).

Between these two major statements about light is the major statement about water, “Then he showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river” (22:1-2). These two features can now be compared, as they are found through the course of salvation history. First, God supplied light and water in a miraculous way to the fathers in the wilderness. Then Zechariah prophesied about the use of these features in the future feast of booths, when the nations would come to Jerusalem. In Jesus’ time, at His last Feast of Tabernacles, He proclaimed that He Himself was the Water of

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Life, and in association with that He also described Himself as the Light of the World. In the final fulfillment of all things, as described in this passage in Revelation, light and water again show up as vital and miraculous ingredients of life in the New Jerusalem.

The prominence of these features of water and light in the description of the New Jerusalem come together to emphasize the connection of this description with the Feast of Tabernacles in an ongoing way. But it was not the festival proper that finds its fulfillment here, for its beginning, middle, and end have been described in Rev 19:1-10, 20:4-6, and 21:1-8. In other words, the body of the festival is now over by this time, but one thing remains: the eighth day, the great day of the feast, the Great Sabbath of the feast. That is fulfilled antitypically in the New Earth and the New Jerusalem.

#### **Summary**

The results of this correlation of the cultic calendar of ancient Israel with the introductory sanctuary scenes of Revelation can now be summarized by use of the following table:

<b>Revelation Text</b>	<b>Sanctuary Scene</b>	<b>Calendar Correlation</b>	<b>Following Prophecy</b>
1:12-20	Lampstands	Daily	7 Churches
4:1-11	Throne Scene I	Passover	(7 Seals)
5:1-14	Lamb Appears	Pentecost	7 Seals
8:2-5	Incense Altar	New Moons	7 Trumpets
11:19	Ark of the Covenant	Day of Atonement Begins	Rev 12-14
15:5-8	Temple Closed	Day of Atonement Ends	7 Plagues
19:1-10	Throne Scene II	Tabernacles Begins	Rev 19b-20
21:1-8	New Jerusalem I	Tabernacles Ends	Rev 21:9-22:4
21:9-22:4	New Jerusalem II	8 <sup>th</sup> Day / The Great Sabbath	Eternity

#### **Appendix: Effect upon “the Lord’s Day” in Revelation 1:10**

John says he received these visions when he was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day. The Greek phrase used in this case is unusual, *kuriake hemera*. This is the standard form of the noun for Lord, *kurias*, plus an adjectival ending.

It is this adjectival ending that has made this word unusual and occasioned a considerable amount of discussion. This form occurs only one other place in the New Testament, in 1 Cor 11:20, but there it is connected with the Lord’s supper, not the Lord’s day. While other theories have been advocated, the discussion of the occurrence in Rev 1:10 has generally been narrowly based. Sabbatical advocates have pointed to biblical texts such as Isa 58:13 and Mark 2:27-28 to show that the Sabbath was the day above all others that was claimed by the Lord as especially His. Dominical advocates have pointed to the use of this phrase by the church fathers in the late second and third centuries to apply its use to Sunday.



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**Possibilities.** As can be seen from the above survey of the calendar connections of the sanctuary scenes in Revelation, a number of other possibilities could be considered. These include Passover (Rev 4), Pentecost (Rev 5), the Day of Atonement (Rev 11), and some date in the Feast of Tabernacles (Rev 19-21). There is a sense in which each of these festival days could also be claimed as a special day of the Lord. Sabbath, however, lays claim to being a special day of the Lord in a more direct sense, and the use of the cultic calendar in Revelation emphasizes the position of the Sabbath as the head of the calendar.

**Sabbath.** First, there are those texts above which indicate the Sabbath was a special possession of the Lord. Isaiah 58:13 refers to it as “my holy day.” The same claim is reiterated in the New Testament in Mark 2:27–28, where Jesus says he is “Lord also of the Sabbath day.” These claims can now be reinforced in light of the religious calendars of Lev 23 and Num 28–29. The calendar of Lev 23 starts directly with the Sabbath. After announcing that what follows is a list of the appointed feasts of the Lord (Lev 23:1), the text goes on to refer to the Sabbath in the first position, “Six days shall work be done; but on the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, a holy convocation; you shall do no work; it is a Sabbath to the Lord in all your dwellings” (Lev 23:3). The Sabbath is identified as a special day in three different ways, the third of which indicates it is a Sabbath to the Lord. Then, after this reference to the Sabbath, the main introduction to the festivals is given again (Lev 23:4), and the legislation about the Passover comes immediately after that. One could say the Sabbath is set aside in a particular way by the envelope of this main introduction, which is given twice, before and after the Sabbath.

The same thing can be said for the cultic calendar of Num 28–29, which provides the list of the special sacrifices for the feast days. Numbers 28 follows a more strict calendric approach. It starts with the daily, then goes to the weekly, then to the monthly, and finally to the yearly or annual festivals. In this case the Sabbath comes in second place (Num 28:9–10), after the daily (vs. 1–8). In Revelation, however, the daily is represented by the vision of Jesus before the lampstands. That should put the Sabbath at the end of Rev 1, but instead it precedes it in v. 10. Thus it takes its place here at the head of the sacrificial calendar, too.

In addition to the texts in which the Sabbath is claimed as a special possession of the Lord, therefore, both the major cultic calendars place the Sabbath at the head of the list. It comes first in Lev 23, set apart in a special way, and it comes at the beginning of the calendar, along with the daily, in the calendar of Num 28. One would expect, on this basis, therefore, that the Sabbath would also come at the head of the liturgical calendar that proceeds through the book of Revelation. With the Sabbath identified as the Lord’s Day in Rev 1:10, it does just that. Thus, the Sabbath is the prime candidate for the nomination for that day in that passage.

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**Caesar's Day.** A couple other days from the festival calendar might be considered here. One of those is the Day of Atonement, also viewed in Rev 11:19. The reason this date could be taken into consideration has to do with the use of the word *kuriake* in connection with objects and events possessed by Caesar. This occurs a number of times in the first and second centuries. The problem here is that this word for Caesar's possessions is never used with a day. While there were days celebrated as special days for the deified Caesars, this word for possessions is never used with them.

Nevertheless, there is an interesting calendrical connection with Domitian. Domitian received royal orders on September 13, 81 A.D. He was assassinated on September 18 in 96 A.D. In that particular year, therefore, his death date fell only five days after his accession date. His accession date was known in Latin as his *Dies imperii*, which could readily be translated into Greek as *kuriake hemera*, the Lord's or Emperor's day. The reason this is of interest in connection with the Israelite cultic calendar is that the Day of Atonement fell directly between these two days in 96 A.D. According to the Jewish calendar calculated in *The Book of Calendars*,<sup>10</sup> the first day of Tishri, the fall New Year, fell on Monday, September 5 in that year. This means the tenth day of Tishri, the Day of Atonement, fell on Wednesday, September 14.

In 96 A.D., the year to which the early church pointed for the imprisonment of John, Domitian's *Dies imperii*, or his *kuriake hemera* in Greek, fell on September 13, and the Day of Atonement fell on September 14. There is a connection that is closer still. Roman days were figured from midnight to midnight. Jewish days, like the Sabbath, however, were figured from sunset to sunset. This means the Jewish day of September 14 began at sundown on September 13, which was also Domitian's date of accession. Thus, if John's vision on the *kuriake hemera* was Caesar's accession date, and if that vision came in the evening of that day, it would also have fallen on the Day of Atonement.

This is of interest because the Day of Atonement was a day of judgment in the camp of Ancient Israel. The person who did not enter into the spirit of the day both mentally and physically was to be cut off from the camp. This was the day upon which the final judgment on sin was carried out in the sanctuary with the atonement made by the blood of the Lord's goat (Lev 16). As a day of judgment, one might expect it could, on occasion, be connected with a judgment made against one or more of the Lord's enemies, like Domitian, who imprisoned John for his witness for the Lord.

There is at least one vision in the prophets which was given on the day of Atonement, and that was the final vision of restoration in the book of Ezekiel. It was given on the 10<sup>th</sup> day of Rosh Hashanan, ten days after the fall New Year. That puts this vision of Ezekiel on the Day of Atonement. This was a day of judgment, too, but judgment can cut both ways. In this case it was a judgment on

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<sup>10</sup> Ed. F. Parise (New York: Facts on File, 1982), 15.

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behalf or in favor of the Lord's people, that they would be restored to their land and that the land would be built up again. Thus, if there is a parallel here between Ezekiel and John, Ezekiel's last vision was given on the Day of Atonement, and John's overall vision, the final one of the era, could also have been given on the Day of Atonement, a day of judgment upon the Christian era and the Christian church as a whole.

There is at least one case known when this worked out this way in Old Testament times. It had to do with the fall of Babylon in the time of Nabonidus and Belshazzar. According to the Nabonidus Chronicle, the city of Babylon fell to the army of Cyrus without a battle on Tishri 16 (539 B.C.) This date was favorable for the Persians because the Euphrates River was at its lowest ebb at that time of year, and the river bed provided them with access to the city. It also fell just six days after the Jewish Day of Atonement. This is interesting in view of the way Daniel came to interpret the mysterious handwriting on the wall to Belshazzar. He said, "You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting." He also said God had "numbered the days of your kingdom and brought it to an end." The act of weighing in the balances was, of course, an act of judgment. As a result of that judgment, God had numbered the days of Belshazzar's rule, and on the night that Daniel appeared before Belshazzar, those days had come to an end. That night fell on Tishri 16, as we know from the Nabonidus Chronicle. The kingdom was taken by the Persians that night, and Belshazzar was slain. With the Day of Atonement just six days before this description of the pronouncement of judgment, the pronouncement of that judgment and the number of days left to Belshazzar could easily have been given six days earlier, on the Day of Atonement.

Thus, there are some precedents for a vision on the Day of Atonement and a judgment pronounced upon the Day of Atonement. Since Caesar's accession day or *kuriake hemera* overlapped with the Day of Atonement, the judgment carried out against him by the assassin's hand five days later could be seen as the carrying out of a divine judgment against him, established on the Day of Atonement. Given how Domitian exalted himself to the status of deity and persecuted saints like John, that judgment would have been most appropriate.

**The Spring New Year.** A third possibility is that this date in Rev 1:10 could be connected with the Spring New Year's Day, which is not otherwise mentioned in Revelation (or in the cultic calendars of Lev 23 and Num 28–29). That date does not appear to have been of very great importance in ancient Israel, however, perhaps to avoid the connections with the fertility cult practiced across the ancient Near East in the spring, to bring fertility to the harvest of the crops. It may have been in order to avoid those connections, to which the Israelites were susceptible through Baal worship, that the Spring New Year was not emphasized in ancient Israel. Passover took the place of the Spring New Year celebration, and it was set off from it in the calendar and had other historical connections. Given this lack of emphasis on the Spring New Year in the Old

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Testament and in the practice of ancient Israel, it seems unlikely that it would be emphasized here in Revelation

**Sunday.** As one can see from the description of the sanctuary scenes above and their connections with the dates in the ancient cultic calendar of Israel, Sunday obviously is a very unlikely candidate for the Lord's day in Rev 1:10 because Sunday had no place in that ancient cultic calendar.

**Summary.** In summary, Sabbath remains the most likely connection of this reference to the Lord's day of Rev 1:10, both on the basis of explicit statements about it elsewhere in the Bible and on the basis of its connection with the head of the Israelite cultic calendar. The interpretation that this phrase could be translated as the Lord's Day, referring to Caesar, holds some interesting potential connections with the Day of Atonement in 96 A.D., but this interpretation probably should still occupy only second place in the list of possibilities for the Lord's Day on Rev 1:10. The Spring New Year remains a more remote possibility on the basis of its calendar connections. To the extent to which the calendar connections have been elucidated correctly above, Sunday is ruled out as a possibility, since it had no such calendar connections.

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