INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to compile, for the reader, quotations from well-known scholars on the premillennial approach to the Book of Revelation. This premillennial approach, we believe, is the only one that does justice to the historical-grammatical basis of interpreting Scripture. However, not all of these scholars take the same position on every issue. For example, some would find a pre-trib rapture at the beginning of chapter 4, while others with equal fervency would deny one; some would find the identification of the 24 elders to be saints, while others maintain they are heavenly creatures. Nevertheless, on the fundamental issue as to who is represented by the 144,000 sealed from the twelve tribes of Israel, all (with very few exceptions) are in agreement that they are Jews, that is, physical descendants of Jacob. And as to that most critical battleground issue—the millennium—all premillenarians contend, in no uncertain terms, that it consists of 1,000 literal years.

Now, although the premillennial view predominates throughout, some pertinent excerpts from scholars of other persuasions will appear from time to time. Also, because premillennial scholars do have different interpretations on issues in the Book of Revelation, the reader will be confronted with conflicting interpretations. And so with the above in mind, I offer this paper with the hope that you, the reader, will engage in a study of the Book of Revelation yourself. Perhaps this paper and the sources cited will give you some foundation on which to build.
To begin, then, it is important to note that one's eschatology must be based first on the Old Testament, and, then, the Epistles of Paul and Peter together with the Olivet Discourse and the parables of Jesus will add many details to it. Theodor Zahn writes,

The Revelation of John consequently takes its place as a part of Christian prophecy, which, as a source of knowledge, edification, and action, was such a powerful and highly esteemed manifestation of the Spirit in the time of the apostles. Revelation is distinguished from the other products of this Christian prophecy merely in the fact that it is a written record of revelation received; whereas the prophets, so far as we know, had up to this time contented themselves with oral utterance. In this, Revelation becomes a continuation of the writing of the O.T. prophets.¹

Merrill Tenney states, "Without a knowledge of the Old Testament one cannot interpret Revelation successfully. The book is a mosaic of allusions, quotations, and images taken from the Jewish Scriptures, and it interprets these in terms of the person of Christ."²

The Book of Revelation is the only book in the New Testament devoted completely to prophecy. Much of its imagery is related to figures and symbols in the Old Testament prophets. Alva McClain writes:

The revelation of the Kingdom and its glorious King in the Apocalypse can only be apprehended in close connection with the Old Testament, especially its prophetic literature, and particularly the Book of Daniel. Although the Apocalypse contains no direct citation from the Old Testament, it is saturated with Old Testament phraseology. In the total of 404 verses, Westcott and Hort list about 265 which contain Old Testament language; and also about 550 references to Old Testament passages. "Nothing is more important for the understanding of our author's mental and literary processes than a close study of his use of Old Testament language" [Frank C. Porter, "Book of Revelation," Dictionary of the Bible]. An exposition which leans heavily upon the Old Testament, and especially its prophetic writing, according to Hengstenberg, "is absolutely indispensable to a proper understanding of the Revelation" [Revelation of St. John]. And James Orr says, "Its precursor in the Old Testament is the Book of Daniel, with the symbolic visions and mystical numbers of which it stands in close affinity" ["Book of Revelation," ISBE]. It may be laid down as a first principle, therefore, that no interpretation of the Revelation can be accepted which breaks with the thought of the Old Testament prophets.³

Therefore, a thorough knowledge of these Old Testament books is necessary to interpret Revelation. To give just one example, Isaiah chapter 24 implies a gap between the two

² Merrill C. Tenney, Interpreting Revelation, pg. 25.
resurrections; Revelation chapter 20 reveals that gap to be 1000 years.

It is not true, as both Amillennialists and Postmillennialists are wont to affirm, that a period of time between the resurrection of the just and of the unjust is affirmed by Scripture in this passage [Rev. 20:1-10] alone. There is at least one Old Testament passage which mentions a long period at the time of the consummation during which certain "high ones that are on high, and the kings of the earth upon the earth" shall "be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days shall they be visited" (Isa. 24:22, 23). No satisfactory explanation of this strange passage was afforded until Revelation 20:1-10 was written, and even then only as the literal Premillennial interpretation was adopted. Dr. Nathaniel West possibly went too far in asserting dogmatically that several other Old Testament passages refer to the Millennium. He asserted this of Ezekiel 38:8; 37:25, 26, 28; Hosea 3:4, 5; Psalm 72:7. Some of these may refer to the Millennium. Only Isaiah 24:22, 23 must refer to it, in my opinion.4

The eschatological position taken in this paper includes several important points. They may seem obvious, but they are necessary in order to distinguish this position from the view of a pretribulational rapture, which we do not hold.

• There is only one Second Coming of Christ, which is and has always been the hope of the church.
• There is only one First Resurrection.
• There is only one Last Trumpet.
• Jesus comes only once "in the clouds," this being at his Second Coming.5

In regard to the amillennial position, it will not be addressed in the sense of offering a suitable interpretation of the Book of Revelation as a whole. It is the premillennial position that will take precedence in this short study, since anything other than a literal interpretation results in endless speculations. Consider just one example--the 144,000 of chapter 14. Who are they? According to Joseph Seiss,

Some answer, they represent the true people of God of all ages--the symbol of the whole body of the sanctified and saved. Others say, they are the choice spirits of the congregation of the glorified, selected and honored above all common Christians because of their preeminent qualities and abstinences on earth. Others tell us, they are the company of those who have remained true in faith under the errors and falsities of the Papacy. And still others say, they are none else than the assembly of the noble spirits who achieved the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and that their harp-notes and new song is "the harmony of

5 Alexander Reese, in his book *The Approaching Advent of Christ*, has done an exhaustive study on the pre-trib rapture. He concludes "that the Coming, the Appearing, the Revelation, and the Day of the Lord all occur simultaneously." Each constitutes "the blessed hope" of New Testament believers and is the blessed hope of Christians today. See page 267.
the Reformed Confessions!" I see not how it is possible for any of these interpretations to stand. Without entering upon the many points in which they severally fail to conform to the record, I may say they all do violence to the consecutiveness and self-consistency of this Book, and defy all legitimate dealing with the particulars of the sacred description. We must find a better meaning, or give in that it is impossible to do anything more than guess at what the Lord intended to show us, whilst one guess is just as good and reliable as another. But God's Word is truth; and therefore there must be truth in this presentation—truth which will hold together with the rest of the Book, with the dignity of a divine prophecy so solemnly given, and with the grammatical sense of the words in which the account is presented. Nor do I know why candid and earnest men, but for their arbitrary and stilted theories, should be at a loss for an interpretation answering to the requirements.\(^6\)

It will also be assumed in this study that the revelation given to John is, in its essence, chronological; otherwise it would simply be impossible for any reader, now or then, to adequately prepare for the "things which are to come after." But often, as with the writings of the Old Testament, we are given the final outcome first in a summary statement, and then the details which lead up to it are given directly following. As Cecil Biss\(^7\) states, "Revelation, like other books of prophecy, is composed of a series of visions which present, in different aspects and with varying details, the events of the same, or parts of the same period of history, the rule being that the earlier visions give outlines, the later ones details, of the same events."

As to the structure of Revelation, Zahn writes:

The division of the account into the two unequal parts, 1:10-3:22 and 4:1-22:9, corresponds to the division of the subject matter of all the visions into that which already existed at the time of the revelation, and that which is to come to pass in the future (1:19). The first part is a single vision . . . . According to 4:2, John falls again into a trance, which presupposes that he had returned to consciousness; and the fact that the voice of the angel who shows him what he sees is said to be the same as that which spoke to him in 1:10, enables us to recognize the beginning of another revelation. No feature of the picture which John had before him during the first vision passes over into the new one.\(^8\)

The phrase "in the Spirit" is used repeatedly by John. It does not mean "indwelt by the Spirit" as in the Pauline use of the phrase (cf. Rom. 8:9). John seems to use it to mean the beginning of a new vision. Thus we have the following general outline, according to Tenney: \(^9\)

| Prologue | 1:1-8 | Christ Communicating |

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\(^7\) From appendix G, p. 101, at the end of Samuel P. Tregelles’ book, "The Hope of Christ's Second Coming." These appendices were written by Cecil Yates Biss (who prepared the second edition of the book for printing).


Vision I - 1:9-3:22  Christ in the Church  
Vision II - 4:1-16:21  Christ in the Cosmos  
Vision III - 17:1-21:8  Christ in Conquest  
Vision IV - 21:9-22:5  Christ in Consummation  
Epilogue - 22:6-21  Christ Challenging  


McClain's general outline is somewhat different, as follows:10

Introduction: The Revelation of Future Things and Its Present Blessing (1:1-3)  
I.       The Churches to Which the Revelation Was Addressed (1:4-3:22)  
II.      The Revelation of the Period of Pre-Kingdom Judgments (4:1-18:24)  
III.     The Revelation of the Period of the Messianic Kingdom (19:1-20:15)  
IV.      The Revelation of the Final Universal Kingdom of God (21:1-22:5)  
Conclusion: Exhortations to the Churches in View of the Lord's Coming (22:6-21)

Much of the Book of Revelation deals with the judgments of the Great Tribulation. Concerning this period, we read in Daniel 12:1, "And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered." Quoting now from Arnold Fruchtenbaum,

The uniqueness of the Tribulation's relationship to Israel is especially brought out in Jeremiah 30:4-7. While the Scriptures have many names for the Great Tribulation, in this passage a name is given that directly relates the Tribulation to the Jewish nation: the time of Jacob's trouble. While it is true that all will suffer during that time, Israel will suffer more so. The basic reason for this lies in Israel's relationship to God as God's first born (Exod. 4:22) and, therefore, receives double both in blessing and cursing. The principle that Israel receives double for all her sins is stated in Isaiah 40:1-2 and Jeremiah 16:16-18. This is the reason the Tribulation is uniquely the Time of Jacob's Trouble.11

We read also, in Daniel 12:7: Then I heard the man clothed in linen . . . swear by Him who lives forever that it would be for a time, times, and a half-time; and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people has come to an end, then should all these things cease." Leon Wood has the following comment:

The length of time during which the Antichrist will pursue his anti-Jewish activities, then, will be three and one-half years, the last half of the Tribulation week. When the shattering of the power of the holy people has come to an end: This clause reads, literally, "as completing shattering of hand of people of holiness." . . . "People of holiness" designates the Jews as God's people, chosen to

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10 McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, pg. 445.  
be holy, who will truly achieve this condition in the Millennium. With this element, the angel gave the other part of his answer to the question, the rational part. The force of the answer is to say that the duration of the "end of the wonders" will last as long as it takes for the power of the Jews to be broken. The angel thus revealed the reason for God's permitting the Antichrist to bring his persecution, namely, to break the power of the Jews. As parallel passages indicate, this power and resulting sense of self-sufficiency will need to be broken so that the Jews will be willing to accept Christ as their rightful King. The two parts of the total answer are to say, then, that it will take the Antichrist exactly three and one-half years to bring the Jews to the state of humiliation where this willingness will be evidenced.12

In the New Testament St. Paul writes to Timothy, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come" (2 Tim. 3:1). Our Lord himself warns his disciples that in the last days "there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be" (Matt. 24:21). John records here in Revelation, "It was granted to him [the beast from the sea] to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation" (13:7). Also in 12:12 John records, "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." These words in Revelation are all addressed to God's people, Christian and Jew; they are not words of warning to unbelievers, although unbelievers are necessarily encompassed in the judgments to come. Therefore, it will be worthwhile to remember that the period of time known as the Great Tribulation is a period of time in which Satan's wrath against the seed of the woman is unleashed in all its fullness. In particular "it is the Devil's wrath against the saints for their rejection of Antichrist, and adherence to Christ."13

Our Lord Himself made reference to the cause and motive of the Great Tribulation. After speaking of the signs of the End-time, He says: "And you shall be hated of all men for my Name's sake" . . . Yes, the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the devotion of Christians to it, are what bring on the last great trial; and we know that this has been the cause of tribulation all down the centuries . . . To be sure, there will be desolating judgments upon the Jews for their acceptance of Antichrist, but they are distinct from the wrath of Antichrist against the saints.14

We are part of that seed and therefore must expect persecution. Let us give praise to God who honors us by reckoning us worthy to suffer for Christ. And not only does he honor us, he also sustains us with His grace to suffer courageously and with a willing heart. Let us close with these words of William Milligan:

Thus we are taught what to expect in the book of Revelation. It will record the

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conflict of Christ and His people with the evil that is in the world, and their victory over it. It will tell of struggle with sin and Satan, but of sin vanquished and Satan bruised beneath their feet. It will be the story of the Church as she journeys through the wilderness to the land of promise, encountering many foes, but more than conqueror through Him that loved her, and often raising to heaven her song of praise, "Sing unto the Lord, for He hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider He hath cast into the sea."15

Thankfully, Satan’s wrath does not continue indefinitely. For the sake of the elect the time is shortened,16 and the wrath of the Lamb of God is quickly executed on Satan and those who refuse to repent. Then Christ shall come in all his glory to receive the kingdom promised to him by the Father.

One last word. This is a short study and not meant to answer every question nor address every issue. My main purpose in writing this was to gather together insights from renowned theologians, past and present, for your study. Naturally, I have included observations of my own, and ask that you take them as such—simply observations. Perhaps you would like to consider some of the books I have footnoted. They are all well written and would prove valuable additions to your own library.

"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written in it; for the time is near" (1:3).

Chapter 1 of the Book of Revelation begins with the words, "The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John." This revelation is not merely a communicated message. Rather, it is the "coming, appearing, manifestation, uncovering, presentation" of Jesus Christ in person. Turning to Seiss, we read,

There is every reason for the conclusion that the great theme and subject of this Book is the Coming of Christ, the Apocalypse of Himself, His own personal manifestation and unveiling in the scenes and administrations of the great Day of the Lord. When men speak of "the death of Jesus Christ," their language inevitably conveys the idea that it is Christ who experiences the death affirmed; and so when the Holy Ghost speaks of "The Apocalypse of Jesus Christ," by the same necessity of language the only admissible idea is that it is Christ who experiences or undergoes the Apocalypse affirmed . . . . A tremendous Revelation is therefore brought before men in this Book. And if anyone would fully profit by it, let him bear with him this one vital and all-conditioning thought, that he is here dealing with Christ's own infallible foreshowings of the style, manner, and succession of events in which the Apocalypse awarded to Him by the Father is to take place. He who fails in this misses the kernel of the Book, and must fail of the blessing of those who read, hear, and observe the things which are written in it.  

Henry Frost agrees:

The first and chief purpose of the Book of the Revelation is to reveal Jesus Christ, particularly as the One who was, who is and who is to come. This is stated in the divinely given title (1:1), in the two declarations made by John and Christ (1:4, 8) and in the explanation concerning prophecy given to John (19:10). To miss, in studying the book, this chief purpose, however much one may gain otherwise, is to lose that which is essential; not to miss it, is to make the great discovery and to secure the supreme blessing (1:1-3; 22:6-9).

Holding the position that the church will go through the tribulation (more on this in chapter 4), it would seem likely that we should find the following groups in the Book of Revelation: (1) present-day saints (why else would there be a special blessing for reading it?), (2) dead saints (who are awaiting the redemption of their bodies), (3) elect Jews (since Paul tells us of a believing remnant), (4) unbelieving Jews (with whom Antichrist fosters peace), and (5)

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unbelieving Gentiles (since the earth, naturally, is still populated).

Verse 7 states, "Behold, He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him." Quoting Samuel Tregelles, "No supposition that the Church is found in resurrection glory prior to such a coming can be admitted as capable of reconciliation with this opening expectation."  

Our Lord, in His discourse on the Mount of Olives, in speaking of what should be "immediately after the tribulation of those days," specifies the darkening of the sun and moon, etc.: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven, and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). This, then, was the expectation of the Church declared by the Lord Himself before He suffered, of which the apostles were again reminded when He had been taken up from them into heaven. When our Lord stood before the High Priest, and when he said to Him "I adjure thee, by the living God, that You tell us whether You are the Christ the Son of God, Jesus said to him, You have said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 26:64). Who is there that cannot see how plain is the reference to the manifestation of the glory of Christ?  

When John spoke of Jesus coming again in the clouds, we have every reason to believe that he meant exactly that--Jesus would be coming again only once more in that manner. Until that time, he is seated at the right hand of the Father: "But to which of the angels has He ever said: 'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'?" (Ps. 110:1; Heb. 1:13).

Tenney calls verse seven of Revelation the motto or keynote:

This verse makes the return of Christ the theme of Revelation and asserts its universality because it shall be witnessed by all men without regard to time or space. "Every eye" transcends geographical limitations; "they that pierced him" carries back in time to the day of crucifixion; "all the tribes of the earth" means that no race or people is excluded. The one great universal event that will focus all places, times, races, and expectation is the return of the Lord . . .

The intention of Revelation is to concentrate in its visions the heart of the prophetic teaching of the Old Testament and to bring it to its climax in Christ.  

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19 Samuel P. Tregelles, _The Hope of Christ's Second Coming_, pg. 69.
20 Ibid., pp. 15-16.
21 Tenney, _Interpreting Revelation_, pg. 48.
Before delving into the messages to the seven churches, let us focus briefly once again on Christ's second coming. In chapter 1 verse 7 we read of Christ coming in the clouds, and here in 2:25 this same coming is again mentioned: "But hold fast what you have till I come. And he who overcomes and keeps My works until the end, to him I will give power over the nations."

Revelation 1:7 must be admitted by all as Christ's second advent in glory (it is based on Dan. 7:13-14 and Zech. 12:10). Contextually, Revelation 2:25 must be the same "coming," and it is addressed, in the first place, to John's contemporary "churches." It is not some "secret" coming as espoused by those who promote a pre-trib rapture. To force such a view into either text does not seem worthy of honest scholarship in my opinion. Context matters.

Going back now to verse 1, we read: "To the angel of the church of Ephesus write . . ." The first question that comes to mind is whether John is writing to an angelic being or simply to another human.

First, let us observe that John is told to write to the angel of the church in Ephesus. The address is no longer to "the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus." Nor is it to the saints with the bishops and deacons, as the word was to the Philippian church. . . The angels spoken of in these epistles were men, and must not be confounded with the class of spiritual beings called angels. The apostle John is employed by the Lord to send a message to them, and it would be contrary to all the ways of God to use man as a messenger to angels in the ordinary meaning of the word. Angels often acted between God and man, but not men between Him and angels.

But, further, there is no sufficient ground to affirm that the angel here addressed, though a man, is in such an official place necessarily as a bishop or elder. He might have such a charge, or he might not. "The angel" always gives the thought of representation.22

Walvoord essentially agrees, stating, "These messengers were probably the pastors of these churches or prophets through whom the message was to be delivered to the congregation."23

It would seem apparent from these seven letters that the believers in John's day were to prepare to "overcome" until the end, that end being Christ's second coming. But at the time John is writing, the church is not living according to God's commandments. In such a state, how can they possibly overcome? Thus they are being warned as to what will happen should they not repent. Although John addresses his letters, apparently, to seven historical churches

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of his own day, it will suffice to say that there is much in them not only to warn but encourage every church up to the present day. According to Milligan,

We have good ground for believing that, besides these seven churches of Asia, there were other churches in existence in the same district at the time when the Apostle wrote. . . Yet St. John addressed himself not to [just] seven, but to "the seven churches which are in Asia," as if there were not more churches in the province. More, however, there certainly were; and he cannot therefore have intended to address them all. He makes a selection, without saying that he does so; and it is a natural supposition that his selection is designed to represent the universal Church.24

Frost's comments concerning these seven churches are as follows:

As an indication that the seven churches of the apostolic time did not altogether fulfill the prophecies of the letters addressed to them, and hence, that other churches of a future time--and this time immediately preceding Christ's coming--must do this, the following facts are to be noted: First, there is no historical evidence that there was in the past a church at Thyatira, Tertullianus (160-230 A.D.) and Epiphanius (310-403 A.D.) affirming that there was none; which, if it is true, means that this particular church must yet be established in order that the prophecy spoken of it may be brought to pass. Second, there is no proof either in the Scripture or in the patristic writings to the effect that all of the prophecies concerning the six remaining churches were fulfilled, that is, literally and in detail; which implies that the experiences prophesied in the letters to those churches are to have another and more exact fulfillment in the days to come. And third, it is manifest that certain divine warnings given in the letters to the churches, which were to be made effective if certain spiritual conditions were to remain, were never, in spite of the continuance of these conditions, brought to pass; which undoubtedly indicates that the warnings were given to the apostolic churches in a representative manner, that is, to them as representing other churches like them which should have existence at a later time, and in such conditions as would make possible the bringing to pass of every warning which had been uttered.25

Frost also suggests a three-fold approach to the seven churches:

These letters are to be regarded as presenting three different views; first, the

24 Milligan, The Book of Revelation, pg. 28.
25 Frost, Matthew Twenty-Four and the Revelation, pp. 156-157. Note: no modern scholar questions the existence of a church at Thyatira in ca. A.D. 95 (see, e.g., International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, vol. 4, p. 846; Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 4, pp. 638-39; and Philip Schaff, History of the Christian Church, vol. I, pp. 453-54). Also, Lydia was from Thyatira, a Gentile attracted to Judaism but who became a Christian under Paul's ministry in Acts 16:11-15. Although it is not known when the church was founded in Thyatira, one theory suggests that it might have occurred during the two year period in Acts 19:10, which states that "all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord."
historic, the seven portraying actually, seven Asiatic churches which had existence in apostolic times, and thus representatively, the whole church of the apostolic period; second, the prophetic, the seven portraying the church as it will be found in the seven-year period of the Antichrist, in Asia and elsewhere; and third, the progressive, the seven portraying the course of the church in both of the above periods, from the beginning to the end, the first letter representing the commencement of the church in those periods and the last one its conclusion.

However, in regard to the view that the seven churches represent successive eras in the life of the church, McClain offers the following:

In the seven churches we have both every kind of church and also every kind of member, which not only existed on earth in John's generation but also will exist throughout all ecclesiastical history. In other words, we have in the seven selected local churches a composite picture of all local churches on earth at any particular time. . . .

Since to the Church, from the day of its birth on Pentecost, the coming of the Lord is always imminent, obviously there could be no chronological chart of ecclesiastical history given in advance. This one fact stands opposed to any interpretation which finds in the seven churches of the Apocalypse any rigid prophetical system of successive church eras sufficiently well defined to read in advance of the history. All such schemes applied to the present age raise an eschatological dilemma from which there is no escape except by erasing the sign, "Till He come," under which the churches must live in every moment of their existence upon earth. The logic of the matter is quite simple: If in the seven churches there was prophetically revealed the entire history of the Church in seven successive eras, and if these eras could be identified with certainty in advance of the history, then it is obvious that the coming of the Lord could not occur at any point short of the seventh era. On the other hand, if the eras could not thus be identified, then there was no such revelation.

Before looking at the churches individually, I would like to point out an interesting view of Milligan. He believes that the seven churches should be divided into two separate groups, the first composed of the first three churches (Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos), and the last composed of the remaining four (Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea). He writes,

There are two aspects of the Church which may be said to pervade the whole Apocalypse: first, as she is in herself, in her own true nature; and secondly, as she is engaged in, and affected by, a struggle with the world. The distinction between the two may be traced in the grouping of which we speak. The first three epistles lead us to the thought of the Church in the former, the remaining four to the thought of her in the latter, aspect. In the the first three she is the

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26 Ibid., pg. 141.
27 McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, pp. 446-447, 449.
pure bride of Christ; in the last four she has yielded to the influences of the world, and the faithful remnant within her is separated from her professing but unfaithful members.

In none of the three cases [the first group] is the church perfect, but in none is she really faithless to her trust. She is in danger; she needs to be perfected by suffering; by suffering she is perfected: but she knows that he who will be the friend of the world is the enemy of God, and the enemies of God are her enemies.

When we turn to the second group of the seven epistles, we at once breathe a different atmosphere; and the contrast is rendered more striking by the fact that in the first of the four we have the very sins spoken of which have already twice crossed our path in the epistles to Ephesus and to Pergamum. . . . In all these four churches, in short, we have an entirely different relation between the Church and the world from that set before us in the first three. There is not simply danger of decay within, and the need of trial with the benefit resulting from it. There is actual conflict with the world; sometimes, it may be, a victory over it, at other times a yielding to its influences and an adoption of its spirit. In the first three churches all, or all with few exceptions, are on the side of Christ; in the last four the "remnant" alone is true to Him.

All the promises of the second group of epistles are clearly distinguished in tone and spirit from those of the first group. They presuppose a fiercer struggle, a hotter conflict; and they are therefore full of a more glorious reward.

Such seems to be the relation to one another of the two groups into which the seven epistles naturally divide themselves. In the first group the Church has stood firm against the world. She is full of toil and endurance; in her poverty she is rich; and the troubles of the future she does not fear. She holds fast the name of Christ, and openly confesses Him. Seeds of evil are indeed within her, which will too soon develop themselves; but she has the Divine life within her in as much perfection as can be expected amidst the infirmities of our present state. She walks with God and hears His voice in her earthly paradise. In the second group the evil seed sown by the enemy has sprung up. The Church tolerates the sins that are around her, makes her league with the world, and yields to its influence. She rallies indeed at times to her new and higher life, but she finally submits to the world and is satisfied with its goods. There are many faithful ones, it is true, in her midst. As in the Jewish Church there was a "remnant according to the election of grace," so in her there are those who listen to the Saviour's voice and follow Him. Yet they are the smaller portion of her members, and they shall eventually come forth out of her.

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Kelly writes in a similar vein:

There is an important change of arrangement that occurs in this chapter, beginning with the epistle to Thyatira. In the first three churches the warning word ("He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith to the churches") comes before the promise; but all the four concluding churches have the promise before the call to hear. These at least will be found to be the representatives of states of the church which go down to the end.

Now there must be a reason for such a change—a sufficient reason why the Holy Ghost should uniformly adopt one arrangement in the three earlier epistles, and as uniformly depart from this and adopt another arrangement in the four last. . . .

In the first three churches, then, the call to hear is addressed formally to the whole assembly concerned; but in the last four the change of situation appears to mark greater reserve. It seems to be intimated by this, that none is expected to hear but he who overcomes. Therefore this class is thenceforth, in a manner, singled out from the rest. Evil has now set in over the professing body; so that the promise is not, and could no longer be, held out in the old indiscriminate way. From this distinction we gather a remnant begins to be more and more clearly indicated.

Something analogous to this appears elsewhere. Thus in the seven parables of Matt. xiii. the last three were unquestionably marked off from their predecessors, and were addressed to a higher degree of spirituality. . . . This is strikingly true of these Apocalyptic epistles, the last four of which sever the overcomer from the unfaithful surrounding mass. In short the formation of a faithful remnant, who were at first, I suppose, only morally separate from the mass which bore the Lord's name . . . becomes increasingly distinct. 29

THE CHURCH AT EPHESUS

Those in Ephesus who overcome are promised that God will give them "to eat of the tree of life which is in the midst of the paradise of God." John Walvoord thinks this refers merely to ordinary—but genuine—Christians who have overcome the unbelief and sin of the world. 30 This, however, seems a rather tame explanation in view of the nature of the revelation given to John. In Revelation we have recorded great trials that must be overcome, and for those who persevere, they are to partake of the tree of life in the New Jerusalem.

We read of the Nicolaitans’ appearance first at the church in Ephesus, then in the church of Pergamos. Who were they? According to Zahn,

29 Kelly, Lectures, pp. 45-47.
A comparison of Rev. 2:2 and 2:6 leaves no doubt that emissaries of this party had come to Ephesus some time before, and, after being turned away by the bishop of that place, had moved on to Pergamum and Thyatira, where they met with better success. The fact that they represented themselves to be apostles, and were declared to be false apostles, makes them itinerant teachers who roamed about, like the followers of Peter in Corinth, but does not necessitate the assumption that, like these, they originated in Palestine and taught a doctrine more or less Judaistic . . . . But the tradition that Nicolas, the proselyte of Antioch (Acts 6:5), later went astray as a libertine deserves to be believed . . . . If then this Nicolas himself, like Philip his former companion in office, emigrated to the province of Asia, or if adherents of his came to that place—which is more likely—it is quite conceivable that the representatives of this doctrine, because of its outward connection with the primitive Church, introduced themselves as apostles of a true gospel.  

THE CHURCH AT SMYRNA

Here there is no word of reproach; the church has been faithful in the midst of her suffering. And even so, there is no indication that her sufferings are drawing to an end.

How often does it happen in the Christian's experience that one burden is laid upon another, and that one wave succeeds another, till he seems left desolate and alone upon the earth. Yet even then he has no assurance that his sufferings are at a close. The consolation afforded to him is, not that there shall be a short campaign, but only that, whether long or short, he shall be more than conqueror through Him that loved him.  

THE CHURCH AT PERGAMOS

To those in Pergamos who overcome, Christ says, "I will give some of the hidden manna to eat." Zahn writes,

The angel in that place is subject to a special temptation to deny Jesus and belief in Him, because he lives where Satan's throne is . . . it is not something external, like a prominent building or work of art, which is meant, but an institution or custom there prevalent in which the Christians recognized a striking embodiment and activity of the dominion of Satan. This is the cause of the martyrdom of Antipas, and of the continued danger in which the confessors of Christ are placed. It cannot well be doubted that the author means the cult of Æsculapius, the God of healing, in Pergamum, which flourished there as nowhere else . . . . How easily it might have happened that in daily life, or at the celebration of the feast of Æsculapius, Christians in Pergamum came into conflict with the heathen population, and that a Christian who openly expressed his abhorrence of this cult

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might have been killed by fanatical worshippers of the divinity!\textsuperscript{33}

Those in Pergamos who overcome are promised "a white stone, and on the stone a new name written which no one knows except him who receives it" (2:17). Gleason Archer remarks that this stone is a symbol of acquittal in a court trial.\textsuperscript{34}

**THE CHURCH AT THYATIRA**

"Nevertheless I have (a few things)\textsuperscript{35} against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols." Zahn states that this Jezebel is definitely the wife of the pastor, and from the manner in which Christ describes himself in verse 23 ("I am He who searches the minds and hearts"), Jezebel knew how to conceal her actions even from her own husband.\textsuperscript{36} Milligan takes the opposite view, that "Jezebel" is clearly a symbolical name. He also states, "For the first time in these epistles we meet with those who are spoken of as 'the rest,' the remnant, who are to be carefully distinguished from the great body of the Church's professing members."\textsuperscript{37}

We note in particular the Lord's closing words to this church: "But hold fast what you have till I come." Overcoming believers will continue until the coming of Christ at "the end," when He will give them "power over the nations."

**THE CHURCH AT SARDIS**

The angel of the church of Sardis was warned, "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent. Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know what hour I will come upon you." It depended on the overseer's attitude whether Christ's Coming would have the character of blessing or judgment. The same will be true of us.

The one who is watchful pays close attention to the signs, and in his case the Lord's coming will not be unexpected. However, the Lord's day will come as a thief in the night to the man who does not watch. The signs will be signs only to those who are watchful; those who sleep will not see them and will therefore be surprised when the day comes.\textsuperscript{38}

**THE CHURCH AT PHILADELPHIA**

All those in the seven churches are told that they are to "overcome." Even those in

\textsuperscript{34} Gleason Archer, unpublished class notes.
\textsuperscript{35} "A few things" is omitted in the best manuscripts.
\textsuperscript{37} Milligan, *The Book of Revelation*, pp. 54, 55.
\textsuperscript{38} Olaf Moe, *The Apostle Paul, His Life and His Work*, pg. 312.
Philadelphia who have perseverance and will be "kept from the hour of trial" are still told to overcome something. There is nothing in this letter to make any Christian think that he will be raptured from the earth in order to be spared the trials and suffering of the Tribulation period. The preferred meaning of \( \varepsilon \kappa \) is "through," to be delivered "out of," not to exempt from (see John 17:15, Heb. 5:7, Gal. 1:4).\(^{39}\)

Essentially, \( \varepsilon \kappa \), a preposition of motion concerning thought or physical direction, means \textit{out from within}. \( \varepsilon \kappa \) does not denote a stationary position outside its object, as some have mistakenly supposed in thinking that the \( \varepsilon \kappa \) of Revelation 3:10 refers to a position \textit{already} taken outside the earthly sphere of tribulation. Other prepositions--\( \varepsilon \kappa \tau \omicron \omicron \varsigma \), \( \varepsilon \xi \omicron \omega \theta \epsilon \nu \), \( \alpha \nu \nu \epsilon \nu \) and \( \chi \omega \rho \iota \varsigma \)-- would have properly denoted a place apart from the hour of testing. The basic idea of emergence from within is illustrated by usages in other verses of similar expression. The large host of tributional saints will be "the ones who come out of the great tribulation" (Rev. 7:14). "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation" (2 Pet. 2:9 AV). The primary sense of emergence in \( \varepsilon \kappa \) would therefore seem to thwart a pretribational interpretation of the verse, for emergence from within could only mean that the Church had been within the hour of testing.\(^{40}\)

Tenney notes that "The Greek phrase, \textit{tereo ek}, is used elsewhere only in John 17:15, and means to preserve from the attack of evil rather than to remove from it by physical separation."\(^{41}\)

The church at Philadelphia was suffering while they awaited Christ's coming in power and great glory. They are admonished to continue doing so, for in that they have shown patience ("because you have kept the word of my patience"), Christ, therefore, will keep them during the greater tribulation that is to come upon the whole world ("I will also keep you"). This coming shall be sudden, that is, occur quickly once it finally comes.

\textbf{THE CHURCH AT LAODICEA}

We have all come to know the church at Laodicea as "the lukewarm church"--one neither hot nor cold. In his commentary, \textit{Revelation}, Alan Johnson comments as follows:

There is good reason why we should not try to take both of these words as if Christ meant I wish you were either spiritually cold (i.e., unsaved or hostile) or spiritually hot (i.e., alive and fervent). In the first place, it is inconceivable that

\(^{39}\) In Heb. 5:7, speaking of Christ, we read: "Who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from (\( \varepsilon \kappa \)) death, and was heard because of His godly fear." "Here is a case where we know that the Lord suffered and passed through death, and yet was saved out of it. Anything more decisive than this passage could not be wished for." See Alexander Reese, \textit{The Approaching Advent of Christ}, pp. 204-205.\(^{40}\)

\(^{40}\) Robert H. Gundry, \textit{The Church and the Tribulation}, pg. 55.\(^{41}\)

\(^{41}\) Tenney, \textit{Interpreting Revelation}, pg. 65.
Christ would wish that people were spiritually cold, or unsaved and hostile. Furthermore, the application of "hot" and "cold" to spiritual temperature, though familiar to us, would have been completely foreign to first-century Christians. The two adjectives in "neither hot nor cold" should be understood together as equivalent to "lukewarmness" (v. 16). That is to say, they were useless to Christ because they were complacent, self-satisfied, and indifferent to the real issues of faith in him and of discipleship.\(^{42}\)

He goes on to say that lukewarmness is the condition of those who do not really know Christ as Savior and Lord, and that "Origen likewise understood the passage to refer not to lapsed Christians but to the unregenerate."\(^{43}\)

Nevertheless, the church in Laodicea is counseled "to buy from me gold refined in the fire . . . white garments that you may be clothed . . . eye salve that you may see." The next verse reads, "As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent." We read in 1 Peter 1:7 "that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ." And Job states, "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold" (Job 23:10). Perhaps those in the church of Laodicea are truly saved but are being admonished because of their earthly comfort and ease. They are so lukewarm due to the lack of any trials that even Satan is not concerned about them. Could it be that Christ is telling them that they should be praying for those tests that prove faithfulness (buying gold and wearing white garments)?

The only cure for poverty-stricken disciples was to purchase from Christ gold which is refined in the agonies of the shared passion. For their nakedness . . . the only recourse was to buy such clothes as the naked Christ had worn on the cross. The blindness of self-deception could be cured only by understanding the correlation between Christ's love and his discipline. These three purchases constitute a substantial definition of the kind of zeal and repentance which was the burden of all John's prophecies. The thrust of these commands moves in the direction of rigorous warning. They are tantamount to saying "Open your eyes" and "Carry your cross." This letter argues against the widespread assertion of many interpreters to the effect that John's chief concern was to provide consolation to a persecuted church. Nearer the mark would be the opposite assertion; that John, like Jesus, was concerned to bring not peace but a sword.\(^{44}\)

In any event, trials will be coming; and they will come as chastisement for those who do not have an attitude which pleases God. However, "if they hear his voice," he will come in and "sup with them," that is, be their strength.\(^{45}\) We have here in the church at Laodicea both the lukewarm and those who shall overcome.

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\(^{42}\) Alan Johnson, *Revelation*, pg. 457.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid., pg. 458.  
\(^{45}\) Rev. 3:20.
Revelation 3:20 is a verse with which we are all familiar. Many take it as an invitation to lost sinners. One such scholar is Richard Trench, who offers the following analysis:

We have in these gracious words the long-suffering of Christ as He waits for the conversion of sinners (1 Pet. 3:20); and not alone the long-suffering which waits, but the love which seeks to bring that conversion about, which knocks. . . .

Christ does not knock only; He also speaks; makes his "voice" to be heard--a more precious benefit still! It is true indeed that we cannot in our interpretation draw any strict line of distinction between Christ's knocking and Christ's speaking. They both represent his dealings of infinite love with souls, for the winning them to receive Him; yet at the same time, considering that in this natural world a knock may be any one's and on any errand, while the voice accompanying it would at once designate who it was that was knocking, and with what intention (Acts 12:13, 14), we have a right, so far as we may venture to distinguish between the two, to see in the voice the more inward appeal, the closer dealing of Christ with the soul, speaking directly by his Spirit to the spirit of the man; in the knocking those more outward gracious dealings, of sorrow and joy, of sickness and health, and the like, which He sends, and sending uses for the bringing of his elect, in one way or another, by smooth paths or by rough, to Himself. The "voice" very often will interpret and make intelligible the purpose of the "knock."

But that "knock" and this "voice" may both remain unheard and unheeded. It is in the power of every man to close his ear to them; therefore the hypothetical form which this gracious promise takes: "if any man hear my voice, and open the door." There is no gratia irresistibilis here. It is the man himself who must open the door. Christ indeed knocks, claims admittance as to his own; so lifts up his voice that it may be heard, in one sense must be heard, by him; but He does not break open the door, or force an entrance by violence. There is a sense in which man is lord of the house of his own heart; it is for him to open, and unless he does so, Christ cannot enter. And, as a necessary complement of this power to open, there belongs also to man the mournful prerogative and privilege of refusing to open: he may keep the door shut, even to the end. He may thus continue to the last blindly at strife with his own blessedness; a miserable conqueror, who conquers to his own everlasting loss and defeat.

At the same time these words of Christ, decisive testimony as they yield against that scheme of irresistible grace which would turn men into mere machines, and take away all moral value from the victories which Christ obtains over the sullenness, the pride, the obstinacy, the rebellion of men, must not be pushed, as some have pushed them, in the other direction, into Pelagian error and excess; as though men could open the door of their heart when they would; as though repentance was not itself a gift of the exalted Saviour (Acts 5:31). They can only
open when Christ knocks; and they would have no desire at all to open unless He knocked, and unless, together with the external knocking of the Word, or of sorrow, or of pain, or whatever other shape it might assume, there went also the inward voice of the Spirit. All which one would affirm is that this is a drawing, not a dragging--a knocking at the door, not a breaking open of the door.\(^{46}\)

However, it would appear doubtful, at least to me, that Jesus here addresses his invitation to lost sinners. "Behold, I stand at the door and knock" is addressed to the Christians in the church at Laodicea. This church is being admonished for their lukewarmness, being warned that they are about to be spewed out. In verse 19 the Lord says that he rebukes and chastens, and in verse 21 he tells what will be rewarded to those who overcome. Verse 20 comes between them. It tells us that Jesus will come to the aid of him who is zealous and repents of his lukewarmness. It hardly seems, in this context, a plea for unbelievers "to open the door" of their heart.\(^{47}\)

Tenney has an interesting comment on the letters to the seven churches which includes this particular verse:

> The letters to the seven churches close the section of Revelation that relates to the immediate present of the author. To what extent they forecast the development of the historic church may be debatable. The probability that they have a meaning for the church of all times is enhanced by one prominent factor: the increasing imminence of the Lord's coming is reflected in His utterances of correction to these churches.

**Ephesus:** "... or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick . . . ." (2:5)

**Smyrna:** (None)

**Pergamum:** "... or else I come to thee quickly . . . ." (2:16)

**Thyatira:** "Hold fast till I come . . . ." (2:25)

**Sardis:** "... I will come as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee." (3:3)

**Philadelphia:** "I come quickly." (3:11)

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46 Richard Chenevix Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia: Revelation II. III*, (1861), pp. 279-282.

47 Even if this is an "invitation" for lost sinners to accept Christ as Savior, Trench's statement that "there is no *gratia irresistibilis* [irresistible grace] here" is a denial of one of the fundamental components of Calvinistic soteriology--the "I," for *irresistible grace*, in the famous TULIP. However, in the final paragraph cited, Trench sounds much like a Calvinist, so there is confusion here. Well known Calvinist, William Hendriksen, clarifies the issue in commenting on Revelation 3:20: "This passage does full justice both to divine, sovereign grace and to human responsibility." He further explains, "When the heart has been opened by the voice of the Lord, this principle of regeneration now becomes active so that, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the regenerated individual opens the door and receives the Christ. This opening of the door is what is generally called *conversion*. Do not confuse regeneration, John 3:3 ff.; Acts 16:14, and conversion. Here, in the expression, 'If any man opens the door,' the reference is to conversion, *to repentance and faith in Christ*, as the context clearly indicates" (emphasis original). The doctrine of irresistible grace affirms that all those elected to salvation in eternity past and then regenerated by the Holy Spirit at some point in their lives will most certainly respond in repentance and faith. See Hendriksen's commentary on Revelation, *More Than Conquerors*, p. 97.
Laodicea: "I stand at the door and knock." (3:20)  

One last word regarding the letters to the churches, and this is from McClain. His insight on Revelation 3:21 is brought out while commenting on the Universal Kingdom.

Following His incarnation and death and resurrection, He was exalted as Man to sit down "on the right hand of the Majesty on high." This was not the throne of David transferred somehow from earth to heaven, as some have mistakenly supposed, but God the Father's own throne in the Universal Kingdom. The distinction is made very clear by our Lord Himself when, speaking to the Church on earth from His throne in the heavens, He promises, "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev. 3:21). These are two thrones, not one. The former is distinctly Messianic; the latter is the throne of God alone upon which "none may sit but God, and the God-Man Jesus Christ."  

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48 Tenney, Interpreting Revelation, pg. 68.
49 McClain, The Greatness of the Kingdom, pg. 34.