

Sermon to the Saints which are at Topeka, Kansas -- Sunday, March 1, 2015.

Good afternoon, beloved friends. Continuing on from the initial work I presented to you on the 12th chapter of the Apocalypse last week – and specifically focusing on the view that chapter presents regarding the Church of the Lord Jesus Christ in eschatology – I want to continue today to bring the light of Scripture to bear on that subject. The purpose of doing so is not to merely present some academic analysis, as I know very well that today I am:

“come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” (Hebrews 12:22-24)

These beautiful descriptors of the Church, culled by the Apostle Paul from many of the historic presentations of that same body of believers, the elect according to the foreknowledge of God, that we here today are part of, provide an instructive and helpful framing for my words. This is not academic to this body. We have been accused of being men-followers, even while we have shown by our conversation among those with whom we share this generation that as Christ said to Peter when establishing the first New Testament church:

“for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven.” (Matthew 16:17)

There are many things written ... and that we have read in our homes and in this house ... about the abominable state of darkness that has been laid upon this generation. This was no mistake of chance. This was no slip, by God, in the management of His providence. This was decreed, so that the affairs of the human experience could come to the very fruition that we have come to, and are shortly to come to. So, many of the passages that I bring forth today are found among prophecy that includes strong words regarding how the Lord would have these nations and peoples lie to each other, and pour hatred and darkness upon one the other – and particularly as it relates to God and his promised bringing about the restitution of all things and the deliverance of His Remnant!

“I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:” (Isaiah 46:9-10)

I say this, because if I were to lay forth in this writing ... if I were to read in your ears in this sermon ... all of those parts of each prophetic passage, two unhelpful things would result: First, I would blur your ability to view my primary point of focus. Second, I would lose the time to bring to you these exquisite gleanings and allow you to taste of the joyfulness – albeit fearfulness – of the issue; the outcome! Your happy duty, when you go out of here on this day, is to search out these passages I bring forth. Read them in their context – and the many just like them. Read them in what is often a compression of the timeline – from the rebellion, through centuries and even millennia of increased darkness and distance of separation, to the conclusion about which I have drawn my message and to which I have drawn your attention.

Allow me a brief metaphor, if you will. As a young adult, I learned about the concept of reflexology. While I allow for the opinion that the medical value of the practice is often over-stated, I believe there is some truth to, and value in, the notion that each of the human body's systems has a correlating batch of nerves in the foot. So, if you apply pressure on that certain group of nerve endings, you can generate or stimulate a reaction in that bodily system. Similarly, the Revelation has correlations to the writings of the prophets in every preceding generation. So, while when those prophets were engaged in and with their generations they spoke of events extant to them, they also saw and spoke of the finale to which all these things were – and for this generation “are” directed: The Revelation of Jesus Christ.

With that framework, let us pick up again this consideration of cataclysmic events unfolding at the sounding of the seventh and final trumpet. It is here instructive, I think, to consider another important contextual point. For two reasons, I want to impose upon you good hearts here to undo some thinking (if you have shared my point of reference) with respect to the “sounding of the trumpets”. I have historically viewed this “sounding” as being an event that has a brief and intense life. Trumpet sounds ... and BANG! Stuff happens! However, this is not a proper view of the case. I might be the only one here with this dilemma, but in case I'm not I want to share two instructive considerations to help all of us move in our minds (and more importantly, spirits) to a proper view of the matter. First, let me offer these words of John, just before this seventh trumpet sounds:

“But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.” (Revelation 10:7)

The clear import of his language is that there is a period of time during which this “voice of the seventh angel” (i.e., the angel blowing the seventh trumpet) is heard, that includes some number of days. This is not a brief, excited period – but a significant period that attends to some significant revealing. Another element to consider is the structure of the closing five verses of the 11th, and the majority of this 12th chapter. I noted in my examination of it, the repeated use of the Greek word “*kai*” (Kahee). This variance of the conjunctive word “and” denotes a copulative or cumulative force. That is to say rather than the word “and” – that is used to start every new verse (except one) from Revelation 11:15 (the sounding of the trumpet) through to the 17th verse of chapter 12 and beyond – I say, rather than it denoting a *sequence* of things, it is denoting an *accumulation* of events that interact and accentuate one the other.

What I believe is necessary to conclude from this analysis is that the sounding of the seventh trumpet has an accumulation of cataclysmic dynamics firing off simultaneously -- or in close association. And, considering the plain language contained in the sixth and fourteenth verses, that period certainly extends for at least 1,260 days, and likely past the Millennial reign of Christ, through to the eternal kingdom of the godhead, for:

“The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)

So, let us now plunge into the text

[2] And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

Throughout a pregnancy, an expecting mother has pains and discomforts, which ebb and flow as the seed within her is forming and preparing for that certain moment when it will come forth. So, too, have the generations of the Church experienced ebbs and flows of conflict with these who have no light, and are energized by His Majesty the Devil, as it is written:

"Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience:" (Ephesians 2:2)

... and ...

"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." (Ephesians 6:12)

There is a period, however, when that more general discomfort transforms into a increasingly compelling circumstance, bringing upon expectant mother increased anxiety while her body physically prepares for the delivery. Finally, active labor kicks in; bringing with it extreme contractions of pain and travail. Remember the words of Paul relating to this same period of eschatology:

"Because the [creation] itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." (Romans 8:21-23)

This metaphorical "she" we already know to be the Church, as last week's sermon (I trust) responsibly demonstrated. What I would add more, so that we do not fail to properly consider the import of this scene and those that follow shortly, is that the Church here is not only the Gentile church. Recall also, please, that the seven trumpets blow -- in apocalyptic alignment -- within the sequential frame of the seventh seal:

"And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets." (Revelation 8:1-2)

The period of the sixth seal, just preceding the staging of the angels with their trumpets, includes three critically relevant and preparatory events:

1. The disruption of the natural world occurs with such force that the inhabitants of the earth realize that the horrible destruction and death under the second (red horse), third (black horse), and fourth (pale horse) seals were not just an inexplicable increase in the natural progression of the uber-loving and tolerant generation's self-destruction, but in fact ***"the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?"*** (Revelation 6:12-17);
2. The sealing of the 144,000 -- twelve thousand from each of the twelve tribes of Israel -- instantly calling them to grace, and instilling in them a spirit of repentance as prophesied by prophets and apostles (Revelation 7:1-7); and,

3. The "staging" of a great multitude who know very well that an event is at hand for which they have been awaiting, some a short time and some for thousands of years, for while they **are** "before the throne" (present progressive tense), it specifically states:

***"and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."* (Revelation 7:15-17)**

These expressions "**shall**" point forward (future progressive tense), and put a puzzling face on a scene where they are already in heaven -- where they have no doubt been provided for since the time they were removed from the bodies of their humiliation in their generations. What, then, is this group staged for? BANG! The seventh seal opens, and the trumpets begin to sound, speeding the earth to this event for which they wait with most exquisite anticipation.

So, with this additional information, we know that the Church of Revelation 12 includes these 144,000 Israelites who have been sealed ... or called ... and who are later seen with Christ in His earthly throne in the heat of the conflict that ensues, when this same dragon that here menaces the travailing church has given his power to the Beast and the False Prophet:

***"And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads."* (Revelation 14:1)**

Knowing then who this woman is fully, and having a pretty clear sense of what this travailing is -- though not yet perfectly or fully set forth in this sermon -- I want to add from our text passage some additional views of this scene. Camera angles, you might say, so that when we fully understand who these players are and what is the point of dispute we will have absolutely no surprise regarding the identity of the metaphorical "man child". We will also, I anticipate, the better capture the scene which follows the birth and removal of that child, as it pertains to the woman's care and treatment.

***[3] And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.* (Revelation 12:3-4)**

... and ...

***[5] And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.* (Revelation 12:7-9)**

... and ...

[7] ¶ Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child. (Revelation 12:12-13)

[8] And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ." (Revelation 12:14-17)

What is the dispute? Much of the scene-setting in this vision of John's has to do with furious and relentless hostilities that involve heavenly and earthly forces -- the most apparently powerless of them all being this woman. This dispute occurs in three distinct "phases" or "contexts":

1. Pre-birth conflict, representing the hostilities between "the gates of hell" and "the woman ... and her seed", which was started and sworn to in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:15);
2. Heavenly, and at least primarily forensic, conflict in heaven that has been raging from day when His Majesty the Devil rebelled against this Mystery of the Gospel; and
3. Post-birth conflict, representing the hostilities between Satan and the "remnant of her seed" that will bring forward the Antichrist, the False Prophet, and the march of earthly kings to the battle of Armageddon, see a delay of a thousand years, and culminate in the final putting down of Satan, death and hell for an eternity.

You could discuss the question with nearly any human who inhabits this earth, and you would get some vague notion from that person about the conflict between "good" and "evil". Every culture has, as an indelible part of their idolatry, a pseudo-religious structure that includes "good guys" and "bad guys". From the pantheon of the Greco-Roman empires, to the druid legends, to the faux-Christian "saints" who are worshipped as something more than men and presumed to have powers to influence matters in the great conflict. But among them all, nobody does any satisfying job of describing what the conflict is!

Why does this dragon of verses 3-4 stand "**before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born**"? Why does he want the child devoured? Is it the same dispute about which verses 7-9 describe "**Michael and his angels**" fighting with "**the dragon; ... and his angels**"? Finally, what goal is it for the accomplishment of which Satan knows he "**hath but a short time**"? For two reasons (at least) I bring this question to the discussion. First, if it occupies the armies of two mighty leaders within the species that is without dispute the most glorious of God's creations, it should probably occupy our interest. Second, if we understand what they're fighting over, we might the better understand who this man-child is, and the issue of the conflict as it pertains to this metaphoric woman.

Since it is of an important -- yet secondary -- relevance to the discussion we focus on today the form in which this dragon is presented vis-a-vis the Church, I will simply tell you that the "**seven heads and ten horns, and**

seven crowns upon his heads." present the enemy of the church in the primary earthly operation of civil government. Any examination of the places -- within the prophecy of Daniel or that here of John the Seer -- that discuss this same monster will reveal that simple fact, and it is without a doubt a time of great international shaking with kingdoms and nations in violent upheavals. Consider the discussions in Daniel 7, Revelation 12, 13, and 17 for your further edification on the point.

My friends, we get a glimpse of the purpose of this conflict by considering the other places where this same prince -- Michael the archangel -- has been identified to be fighting with his nemesis from time in memorial. Four places -- in addition to this scene in Revelation -- you see this mighty angel named in Scripture; three times in Daniel's prophecies and once in Jude:

"But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia. Now I am come to make thee understand what shall befall thy people in the latter days: for yet the vision is for many days." (Daniel 10:13-14)

... and ...

"But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince." (Daniel 10:21)

... and ...

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." (Daniel 12:1-4)

... and finally ...

"Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee." (Jude 1:9)

The dispute referenced in each of these passages is the same dispute. Since the godhead -- Father, Son, and Holy Spirit -- agreed to and initiated the Covenant of Grace, this rebel has been denying the prerogative of God to give to Christ those whom He chose [no wonder that it's "God loves everyone!" that the deceived are sent to screech at us]. He has denied the efficacy of Christ's blood to redeem that number -- less or more not a single one! He has denied the ability of the Holy Ghost to call, comfort, and guide this little group of blessed ones through this waste, howling wilderness to their rest. The weak seed of lesser creation -- the vast collection of whom he has deceived into denying the very existence and the power of this trinity -- is not worthy to take this

kingdom with Christ. This kingdom, Satan believes, is his! He offered it to the incarnate Christ if He would serve him. (Luke 4:5-7) But a covenant was entered into, and it is a sure covenant with sure guarantee:

"Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast, and which entereth into that within the veil;" (Hebrews 6:17-19)

And what is this hope -- the fulfillment of which is the essence of this Mystery of the Gospel -- except that we have our bodies redeemed, whether it be resurrected from a grave or translated from vile to glorified? What evidence can Satan have that God is impotent, Christ's blood of none effect, and the Spirit worthy of despite (Hebrews 10:29), except that the dead rise not? The dispute is about the body of Moses -- and those who stand spiritually in his place -- whether it will rise again and be joined with him as one of those among the ***"great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations and kindreds, and people, and tongues"*** who are staged for this great event!

Now, having framed what the dispute is -- leaning upon the word of prophecy, to which we are instructed we should ***"take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place,"*** as we run up to this signal event -- look at these words of prophecy from Isaiah, in discussing this same eschatological event:

"Like as a woman with child, that draweth near the time of her delivery, is in pain, and crieth out in her pangs; so have we been in thy sight, O LORD. We have been with child, we have been in pain, we have as it were brought forth wind; we have not wrought any deliverance in the earth; neither have the inhabitants of the world fallen. Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead." (Isaiah 26:17-19)

Those who are presented in Revelation 7:9, 14-17, having been delivered in their assigned generations, and having each been comforted as Lazarus in the bosom of Abraham, are awaiting their new bodies. Indeed, the great cloud of witnesses of Hebrews 12:1 are not mere spectators! They have a stake in the outcome of the Gentile Church reaching that day that Christ testified of:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end [I submit, of the Gentile Church] come." (Matthew 24:14)

That note I plugged in there is because it is ***after*** this statement of Christ that he says:

"Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day: For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened. Then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is Christ, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were

possible, they shall deceive the very elect. Behold, I have told you before. Wherefore if they shall say unto you, Behold, he is in the desert; go not forth: behold, he is in the secret chambers; believe it not. For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For wheresoever the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 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. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."
(Matthew 24:16-31)

These words are intimating that there are those who are still under conflict in the earth, so the literal end of all clearly has not come. Rather, there has been an end short of that, and that end is related to the concluding the preaching of *"this gospel of the kingdom"*, which is no more to be preached since those who are God's elect have all been revealed (i.e., *"the mystery of God should be finished"*) and it is only now the question of whether Satan will have the ability to pluck a single one of them out of Christ's hand (John 10:28).

[4] And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days. (Revelation 12:5-6)

The man-child being born here is none other than that prophecy that was articulated by Paul, and is the very thing we everyone -- those who have died in Christ, and those Gentiles who were referenced twice by him as remaining in the earth at this amazing hour -- look to as the final evidence of the power of Christ's propitious blood:

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52)

... and ...

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

The redemption of the bodies of the elect of God from every generation -- those of Adam and Eve through to the last little soul about whom Christ said:

"[Y]ea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service." (John 16:2)

A key event under the sounding of the seventh trumpet is the redemption of this body of believers, and it triggers a transitional bursting forth of praise and thanksgiving:

[6] And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death (Revelation 12:10-11)

The fullness of the Gentiles having come in, the 144,000 Israelites -- sealed by God and ensconced in the earth in fulfillment of the promises given to our spiritual father Abraham -- a transition takes place in the conflict heretofore identified.

"And thou, O tower of the flock, the strong hold of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion; the kingdom shall come to the daughter of Jerusalem. Now why dost thou cry out aloud? is there no king in thee? is thy counsellor perished? for pangs have taken thee as a woman in travail. Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the LORD shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies." (Micah 4:8-10)

... and ...

"Now gather thyself in troops, O daughter of troops: he hath laid siege against us: they shall smite the judge of Israel with a rod upon the cheek. But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting. Therefore will he give them up, until the time that she which travaileth hath brought forth: then the remnant of his brethren shall return unto the children of Israel. And he shall stand and feed in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God; and they shall abide: for now shall he be great unto the ends of the earth." (Micah 5:1-4)

Satan has been denied his quarry -- the ability to prevent the promised resurrection of those who sleep in Christ, and those to whom it was given to "change" from vile to glorious bodies -- and has been closed off from ever again having any access to that place of disputation he was allowed with the "sons of God", where he could continually accuse the elect over their sins and unworthiness of Christ's sacrifice, to wit:

"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan came also among them." (Job 1:6)

All that's left of this Adversary's field of disputation is the earth and her kingdoms and her people. Tightening the noose. The remnant of the seed of the woman -- the little "***church in the wilderness***" becomes the focus of his rage. So severe is the terror of it, they are put safely into a place in the earth and fed supernaturally while the troops of darkness are prepared for the great battle. The process of "***the kingdoms of this world [becoming] the kingdoms of our Lord,***" is one that will issue in much death and horror. This little flock of slaughter is promised a remedy:

***"Come, my people, enter thou into thy chambers, and shut thy doors about thee: hide thyself as it were for a little moment, until the indignation be overpast. For, behold, the LORD cometh out of his place to punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity: the earth also shall disclose her blood, and shall no more cover her slain."* (Isaiah 26:20-21)**

The remnant of elect are said by Christ to take "flight", as previously provided in this sermon:

***"Then let them which be in Judaea flee into the mountains: Let him which is on the housetop not come down to take any thing out of his house: And woe unto them that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days! But pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on the sabbath day:"* (Matthew 24:16-20)**

This is not the first time that this band of Israelites have been supernaturally sustained in the wilderness, as they were also sustained there upon the miraculous exodus from Egypt. The expositors indicate ... and with some sound authority ... that this flight is into the wilderness of Sanai where these 144,000 are sustained by God's miraculous mercies, including that they ***"nourished for a time, and times, and half a time"***. Because this same group is seen in the 14th chapter standing with the Lamb on Mount Sion (as previously quoted in this sermon), I cannot agree with those expositors and I do not believe the specific location is the most important inquiry for this day ... but perhaps another.

This language clearly denotes that the body of this remnant is passive in her maintenance, which is sustained through the same period of time during which this dragon is giving his power to Antichrist and the False Prophet to set up a world kingdom of people who seek that these should be slain, and prevents any from doing commerce with them:

***"And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. ... And [the False Prophet] had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: And that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name."* (Revelation 13:5, 15-17)**

This closes the chapter under consideration, although it moves seamlessly into the remainder of these apocalyptic visions and prophecies that our dear John was given while he was in the Isle of Patmos. Seeing the Church in eschatology is of distinct value to us, since we have many evidences from this blessed Word of God that objectively demonstrate those days are shortly to come. We, of course, can neither "will it" to come, nor declare a day or an hour certain that it will come, for:

***"[Y]e know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."* (Matthew 25:13)**

What we can do, however, is heed the message of the parable that follows hard upon the verse just quoted, where Christ instructs that we should intelligently invest all the talents given us into the preaching of this gospel to all the inhabitants of the earth, and into ministering unto the needs of those whom our God has

chosen to call out as a people for His name. So I close as I opened last week. Read the words -- and/or listen to the sermons -- prepared by our brother Steve last year on the nature and duties of the Church.

Thank you for this opportunity to feed you, and I love you all most dearly.

Amen.