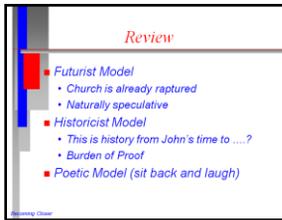


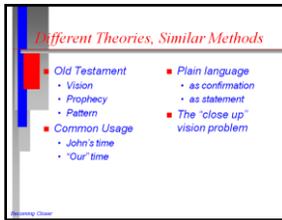
Opening Remark: As much as possible, it is my intention to show each passage as follows:

1. What is the correct interpretation of that passage? What should be taken literally and what should be taken symbolically?
2. Then apply that interpretation to the “time zone” -- futurist or historicist.



At this point it seems to most people that the three views of Revelation totally diverge. Here's why:

- The Futurist model says that the church has already been raptured, as of Chapter 4, verse 1. As a result, anything from this point forward is naturally somewhat speculative. "In my opinion" should be (but often isn't) the watchword of the futurist. Unfortunately, the most popular authors for any opinion are those who are absolutely confident of their opinions. As we stated earlier, one of the attractive features of this theory is the idea that we, the cognoscenti, are in on the secret. No matter; the theory must, of necessity, become somewhat speculative at this point. The essence of the matter should be not, "I am sure I know what that is" but "look around you; doesn't this and such look an awful lot like this portion of Revelation?" And if it does, what should I do about it?
- The Historicist model, on the other hand, says that the history of the church has barely begun. This, I submit, puts the burden of proof on the historicist view for the next few chapters. We shall see that eventually these two views come into coincidence; but now is the great divergence. The historicist says that these next few chapters tell the story of the church, particularly the church inside the old Roman Empire. The question then, is, can this be shown to be reasonable?
- The poetic view laughs at this point. The poetic interpretation is somewhat difficult when looking at a parade of horsemen, trumpets, seals, vials and what have you. It all sounds a little too specific. But we shall see some contribution from this point of view as well. We will not refer to it too often, for its contribution tends to be at a larger level. Not each trumpet has a poetic interpretation; all the trumpets, etc., taken together certainly do.



Surprisingly, the method to be used is very similar. In this section, I will follow the common methods outlined below, and then apply the results by theory. So what's the method?

Old Testament Correspondence

If we plan to use a symbol, it's best if it's confirmed in the Old Testament. In particular,

- It may be confirmed in a vision or dream, as interpreted by the Old Testament. For example, when we see a horn, we can interpret it (via Daniel) as being either a king or a principality of some sort.
- It may be confirmed in prophetic writing. A simple example of this can be found in many of the titles of Christ.
- It may be confirmed in a pattern from the Old Testament. This is particularly true of the Tabernacle, and by extension, the Temple.

Common Usage

A symbol may also be confirmed by common usage. This breaks down into two general (and somewhat overlapping) categories:

- Symbols which would be known in John's time, but not necessarily in our time. For example, a short sword would represent the Roman military or Caesar; a bow might not.
- Symbols which would be known in the time of fulfillment, some of which are commonplace in Western civilization. A good example of this is the use of white to indicate purity. We might (and we probably won't) use the eagle to symbolize the United States.

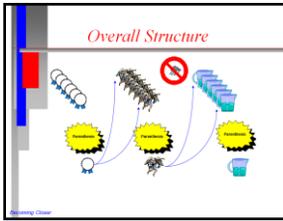
Plain Language

The simple fact is that a great deal of the language is *not* symbolic; it is plain language. Unless there is symbolism inherent in the picture, we should read it that way.

The other use of plain language is confirmation. If we see an event in Revelation confirmed by plain language Scripture elsewhere (e.g., the Rapture) we should hold more tightly to it.

The Close Up Vision Problem

One of the reasons that the futurist theory is naturally "fuzzy" is that, in that view, the Rapture is imminent in our life times. Therefore, as time goes by, the specific identification of various items changes (it is amusing to read *Late Great Planet Earth* in the original and the revised editions). The same applies to the historicist; as we get closer to the present, we get fuzzier pictures. Was that a change of trumpets, or just another dreary palace revolution?



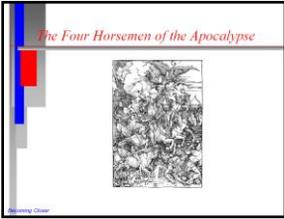
It is usually good to have a road map.

This is a road map of the next few chapters of Revelation. The pattern - the poetic pattern, if you will, is fairly simple. Three series of “sevens” (not counting the thunders). Each is interrupted after the sixth item with a parenthetical statement, which can be quite long.

I put this up for one reason in particular. Some strange theorists (particularly Preterist) like to make the seven seals the same as the seven trumpets as the seven vials. They are not. They are contained within each other.

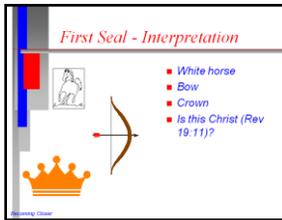
It also points out that the parenthesis, in each case, *may* not be in sequence. Failure to recognize this has driven many commentators to ruin.

With that, we are ready to open the first seal.





I begin a pattern here. As you will see in the next slide, the text in blue is taken by all commentators as being symbolic; the text in green is taken as literal.



The symbolism starts at an easy pace. The horse is a symbol for war -- remember that Christ entered Jerusalem on a donkey, the animal of peace? -- and is always used as such. Job 39:19-23 has such a description, so we have the Biblical symbolism. We also have a local symbolism: in the Roman empire, if a general made a major conquest, the Senate would vote him a triumphal parade. His chariot would then be pulled by snow white horses. So we see that locally the horse was not only conquest, but the white horse was specifically associated with it. This is an easy one -- for the first century. White was the color of celebration. (Think about it: you don't wear white pants to garden in. You save them for "occasions." White togas were party clothes -- still are, in fraternity houses).

The bow, on the other hand, has no clear Biblical symbolism other than military might (see, for example, Hosea 1:5). If there is any symbolism beyond it, it must then be a local symbol.

The crown is *not* a symbol of royalty. The word in the Greek is *stephanous*, the victor's crown. The royal crown is *diademos*. So we have a symbol of victory and conquest.

Is this the Christ? Some commentators (mostly poetic) think so. But the majority of commentators, of all persuasions, think not. The similarity between this description and that of Christ in Revelation 19:11 is such that most futurists hold this to be a counterfeit Christ, generally the Antichrist. In 1937, surveying the world seen from the futurist point of view, Talbot saw this person as Mussolini. Today futurists see the Antichrist. But all persuasions see

- a military conqueror
- somehow associated with a "bow" (not explained by futurists)
- who appears to be "good."

The historicist view requires the facts.



If the Historicist view is correct, good times must *immediately* follow the writing of Revelation. The Historicist view holds that this seal was accomplished under the rule of the “Good Emperors” -- Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Aurelius Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. Trajan was the greatest of these conquerors, conquering both Dacia and Parthia, and much of Arabia down to the Persian Gulf. Their reign ran from roughly AD96 (just after or around the time of John’s Revelation) to AD180. How do they fit the bill?

- They are indeed military conquerors, especially Trajan.
- Their victory did indeed mean good times for the church -- examine the spread of the Gospel!
- They are well reputed for their virtue. Aurelius Antoninus was surnamed Pius for his piety and devotion to religion (pagan, of course); Marcus Aurelius was the most famous Roman philosopher of all time. His works of philosophy in many ways parallel Christian ethics, and are studied to this day.

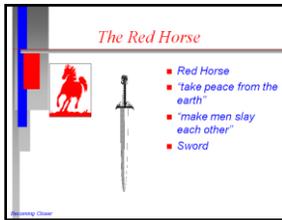
But what about the bow? The explanation is simple -- to the first century or second century Christian. Nerva and his descendants came from Crete. In all the Roman Empire, only the people of Crete prided themselves on the use of the bow. Archers in the Roman army were always recruited (at this time) from Crete. Anyone of this time looking at the bow as symbol would have put it down to Crete.

Unless, of course, you look outside the Roman Empire. Then it would be put to the Parthians (indeed, today we still use the “Parthian shot” as an expression, often misquoted as “parting shot.”). And the Parthians were conquered by Trajan.

The Second Seal

(Rev 6:3-4 NIV) When the Lamb opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature say, "Come!" (4) Then another horse came out, a fiery red one. Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.

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It gets easier. Once again, the horse is the military symbol. It has changed color, however, and that implies a change of circumstance. The rider is not crowned with victory.

The phrase "take peace from the earth" must be interpreted (as always) from the church's point of view. If in the historicist, it means the Roman Empire. Today, it would be western civilization.

The phrase "make men slay each other" implies a civil war, or a class war. The word "slay" could also be translated "butcher."

The large sword is clearly a Roman weapon; it is the symbol of the Roman army.

Red has a number of possible meanings. One certainly is bloodshed. Another (for the futurist) is *communist*. This would be an example of a symbol incomprehensible to John, but clear to those in whose time it would be fulfilled. Thus, it would be a local symbol.

Hal Lindsay (and others) describe this as the start of The Great Tribulation, the second half of Daniel's 70th week. The argument is that the first half has apparent peace. Thus, all the rest of the historical portion of Revelation must take three and a half years, by that theory.

Lindsay puts all this together and concludes that the rider of the red horse is none other than Russia, invading Israel. This ties in nicely with the Gog and Magog sections -- but the identification has been weakened somewhat by the fall of communism in Russia. His identification of this rider predates that event.

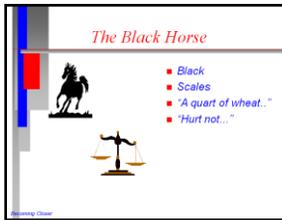
The Historicist view fits very nicely here. After Marcus Aurelius came his son, Commodus. He ruled for three years in wisdom -- then someone tried to assassinate him. He turned into a despot. When he was killed ten years later (AD 192) his death touched off a period of intense civil war. There were 34 emperors in this period; two died natural deaths. There were also 19 pretenders to the throne, all dying violently.

What cause all this? Emperors were elected, assassinated, deposed and manipulated by the Army, most often by the Praetorian Guard in Rome itself. The army might be symbolized by a sword, the Roman weapon. The phrase "large sword" is interesting, however. The main Roman weapon was the short sword. One man, however, received a large sword as the symbol of his office when he took the oath of office. That man was the head of the Praetorian Guard.

The Third Seal

(Rev 6:5-6 NIV) When the Lamb opened the third seal, I heard the third living creature say, "Come!" I looked, and there before me was a black horse! Its rider was holding a pair of scales in his hand. (6) Then I heard what sounded like a voice among the four living creatures, saying, "A quart of wheat for a day's wages, and three quarts of barley for a day's wages, and do not damage the oil and the wine!"

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The interpretation now moves swiftly. Again, the horse is war -- but this time the weapon is -- "scales!" What does it mean?

Black (unmentioned by the futurists, but not incompatible with their vision) is the color of *mourning*.

Scales might mean to us justice. But in this context I think another meaning much more likely. We read in Ezekiel 4:16 (and other places) that in times of great scarcity bread was weighed out on the scales. These scales are a symbol of great scarcity; hence the traditional identification of this horseman with famine.

Another identification would have occurred to the Romans -- taxation. The scales were the symbol of the tax collector -- for money was weighed to determine its genuineness.

There is an interesting contrast between the "quarts" passage and the next. The day's wage (literally, a denarius) would buy a quart of wheat -- just enough to feed one person on the normal diet. If the man had a family, then he could get three quarts -- of barley. That's just enough to prevent starvation.

But- the oil and wine are unharmed. This is generally taken (by all) to mean that luxury goods are still available; the distinction between rich and poor increases. In hard times, there is always money to be made in caviar.

How does this fit the historicist vision? Pretty well -- though the dates aren't quite so exact. This is as you would expect, as civil war would give rise to famine (in any view). The reign of Diocletian (starting AD 284) was noted for

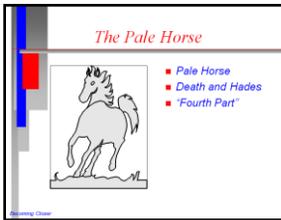
- General hopelessness (see mourning)
- Huge increases in taxes
- Famine in the face of luxury.

One story will suffice. A ship sailed into Rome's harbor from Alexandria. Crowds gathered to buy wheat, for Egypt was Rome's granary. A riot ensued when they found the cargo was not wheat -- but sand! Not just any sand, but a particular color of sand ordered by the Emperor Diocletian for the particular purpose of spreading it on the floors of the arenas for gladiatorial combat.

The Fourth Seal

(Rev 6:7-8 NIV) When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, "Come!" [8] I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.

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Except for the date, there is virtually unanimous agreement on the interpretation. The Pale Horse -- the Greek is *chloros*, from which we get chlorine, as in bleach -- symbolizes the deathly pale, white with terror. The word for death, *thanatos*, is also the word for pestilence, making the translation somewhat difficult. (Remember the poem *Thanatopsis*?)

There is some slight suggestion that the "fourth part" might be a geographic partition, but this suggestion is not now current. Futurists have no doubt (Lindsey quoting a book entitled *Famine 1975*) that famine and plague (germ warfare) are quite capable of such destruction.

But did such an event ever happen. Indeed yes, and at the time of the fourth seal. Gibbon records of this period that there were 5,000 deaths per day in Rome; half of Alexandria died. An epidemic of bubonic plague ran throughout the Roman Empire, approximately 300 AD.



Is it just a coincidence that the living creature resembling the lion, the kingly beast, introduces the conquering rider on the white horse?

Or that the living creature resembling the ox, the animal of sacrifice, introduces the rider on the red horse of blood?

Or that the living creature resembling man, who brought spiritual death into the world, introduces the black horse of death and mourning?

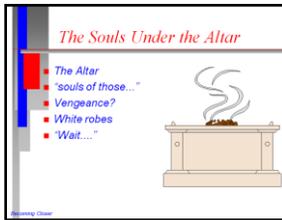
Or that the living creature resembling an eagle, the swiftest of the four, introduces the pale horse of pestilence?

This is a work of art of the highest order.

The Fifth Seal

(Rev 6:9-11 NIV) When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. (10) They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" (11) Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

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The altar seen here is taken, of course, from the Tabernacle -- the earthly type of heavenly things. We need to review how this altar was used:

- The Jew was taught that the blood of an animal was its life; and therefore they could not eat the blood -- only the meat of a sacrifice (Leviticus 17:11-14).
- The blood was to be poured out *at the base of the altar*. (Leviticus 4:7) -- in other words, the "life" in the symbolic sense flowed under the altar!
- The altar is not in heaven -- it is in the world. Remember that the Holy of Holies is the type of Heaven; the outer court contains the altar.
- Christians accept the idea that martyrdom is a form of being poured out as a sacrifice, an offering, to the Lord (Philippians 2:17)

Therefore, virtually all interpreters hold that these are the souls of those who have been martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ. The distinction comes in theology. The historicist holds that these have already been martyred (more below); the futurist that these are yet to be. There is a divergence of opinion here in the futurists:

- Some hold these *must* be Jews (based on Romans 11:25, and the dispensationalist theory that grace is no longer available).
- More recent teachers hold that these are simply those who profess faith after the Rapture. The testing point, by these writers, is whether or not they will accept the mark of the beast. Chuck Smith goes so far as to state that all those in that time will see an angel flying about in heaven, warning one and all not to take the mark of the beast (based on Revelation 14:9-11).

A very serious issue is that of vengeance. The cry here is for vengeance, and we are taught not to seek it. Why, then, this cry?

- The cry is very similar to that in Psalm 79:5-10. In dispensationalist theory, it is therefore justified. Grace is ended; judgment is now the only dispensation left.
- You can look upon it as a cry for holy justice, as the only ones left on earth now (in the futurist theory, at least) are non-believers. Recall the extermination of the peoples in the land of Israel.

The division between these two views does not fit along lines of theory of interpretation.

The white robes, of course, signify purity, but as noted during the first seal, may also symbolize victory.

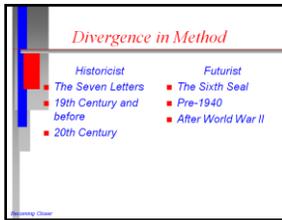
Note that even in death patience is required. The historicist adds that martyrs are yet to come; these martyrs are to papal Rome, not pagan Rome.

Did such a persecution come about? Remember in Revelation 2:10 that the church of Smyrna was told to expect persecution for "10 days" (meaning, of course, ten years). Most historicists of the 19th century agreed with the idea that the seven churches were the seven ages of the church. This has been dropped, due to the increasing invective on both sides -- but perhaps common ground should be sought again. Such a ten year persecution did occur, and exactly once in the Roman Empire: AD 303-313. Starting with Diocletian, Christianity was outlawed and hunted. In this period the Christians took to the catacombs. History records that 700,000 Egyptian Christians alone were slaughtered in this time. Diocletian swore to "erase the name Christian from the earth."

Note the date, AD 313. Of itself, not important, it sets the starting point for the sixth seal -- and the great divergence in interpretation.



And where would you say is the split between symbolic and literal in this one?



There is a sudden -- and seemingly unexpected -- divergence in method at this point. Up until now, both viewpoints use the same method of interpretation, with a different starting point. Using books in print only, one would now conclude that the futurists have taken a right turn -- but why?

Go back for a moment to the Seven Letters. If you read the historicists of today, those are nothing but letters to the churches -- not prophecy. But this was not always their view. In the 19th century (and before, the idea is a very old one) the Seven Letters = Seven Ages idea was widely accepted by historicists. What changed?

I think the answer is a combination of two things. First, the futurists have used the close comparison (especially after dropping the idea that the Reformation churches are the dead ones of Sardis) between Revelation 2-3 (seven letters) and history to argue very strongly for their theory. This argument has been, as we have noted, very acid at times. I suspect the historicists have reacted to two things:

- the strength of the argument, and
- the venom of the arguers,

by changing their stand and denying the interpretation. It's an effort (and perhaps not a very honorable one) to defend their position.

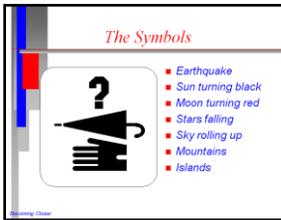
It would be pleasant to say that the futurists, being kind and charitable people, full of the Spirit, would never do such a thing. My feeble brain, however, suspects otherwise. For exactly the same two reasons, strength of argument and venom of arguers, they have turned from the symbolic to argue that the sixth seal has only one possible interpretation -- the exact literal one. For the sixth seal provides some of the best evidence for the historicist theory.

Second, the advent of nuclear weapons, and the general increase in the horror of weaponry as a whole, permit the imagination to see a literal interpretation as something other than science fiction.

In light of that, therefore, we must begin by examining the basis for use of symbolic terms in the sixth seal. As always, we must do so from

- The Old Testament, either in vision, prophecy or plain statement, and
- common usage of the time, closely tied to specific facts.

The truth is that the symbolic interpretation of the Sixth Seal was in common thought by the futurists -- up until about 1970.



Let's take the first one on this slide, the earthquake. The key to understanding it is to understand "earth." We often hear "let the whole earth ..." in the Scripture. We don't mean the dust of the ground; we mean the people of the earth.

So what's an earthquake? A "shaking" of the people, an upheaval of some sort. Talbot, a futurist writing in 1937, puts it this way:

"In the Olivet discourse, Jesus told His disciples that there would be 'earthquakes in divers places.' And, no doubt, there will be physical earthquakes in increasing numbers as the end time draws near. But the "great earthquake" which comes at the opening of the sixth seal, that earthquake, after which the sun will become "black as sackcloth of hair" and the moon "as blood," will not be a physical earthquake. It will doubtless be a great moral, spiritual and political upheaval that even now we can hear rumbling in the distance."

Note two things:

- Talbot, a futurist, takes earthquake in the symbolic sense.
- And like any good futurist, he is sure he can see signs of its coming in his own time.

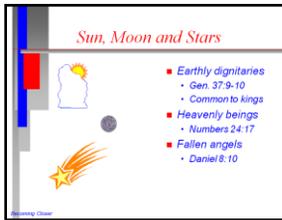
Further confirmation, should you need it, can be found in these verses:

(Hag 2:6-7 NIV) "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. {7} I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty.

(Dan 7:17 NIV) 'The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth.

Note particularly that in the last verse the earth is clearly symbolic.

One thing is particularly striking about all these symbols: their ordinariness. Until 1970 or so, no one thought otherwise, as far as I can tell.



Sun, moon and stars: even today we speak of a celebrity as a “star.” So from the common point of view, we can see the symbolic interpretation already. But there are other evidences:

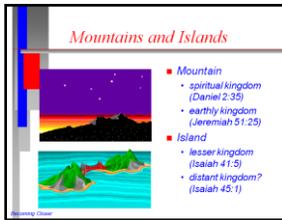
Sun and moon and stars are all proclaimed to be symbolic in Joseph’s dream:

(Gen 37:9-10 NIV) Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." {10} When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

(Interestingly, Chuck Smith, J. Vernon McGee and Hal Lindsey all cite this passage in connection with Revelation 12:1 -- as clear proof of the symbolic nature of the passage, in that instance signifying the Jews). A consistent passage with this is in Revelation 12:4, which Smith interprets to mean that a third of the angelic beings came down with Satan.

So we can see sun, moon and stars as either earthly dignitaries or heavenly beings, either righteous or fallen with Satan. We saw this in Revelation 1, where the stars were the angels of the churches. In Numbers 24:17, Christ is referred to as a “star.” A somewhat darker reference to heavenly beings is in Ezekiel 32:1-7, where the stars being “snuffed out” refers to the conquest of Egypt by Nebuchadnezzar.

So then, what are sun, moon and stars? They are either earthly dignitaries, or heavenly ones, either righteous or evil.



The real giveaway here is the title of the emperor: Your Eminence. The verses are instructive:

(Dan 2:35 NIV) Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

(referring, of course, to the Kingdom of God, the church)

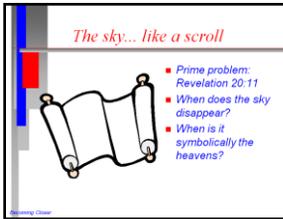
(Jer 51:25 NIV) "I am against you, O destroying mountain, you who destroy the whole earth," declares the LORD. "I will stretch out my hand against you, roll you off the cliffs, and make you a burned-out mountain.

(the specific instance is to prophesy against Babylon)

For islands, the references are a bit more obscure:

(Isa 41:5-6 NIV) The islands have seen it and fear; the ends of the earth tremble. They approach and come forward; {6} each helps the other and says to his brother, "Be strong!"

The point, however, is this: islands are mountains stuck in the sea. The metaphor is clear: again, nations or kingdoms are meant by this.



One last symbol. Putting all the above together, the interpretation naturally lends itself to seeing the sky as the place where the sun, moon and stars are found. More to the point, in the sense of angels or fallen angels, the religious system of the day. This would certainly correspond to the astrological thinking and worship of heavenly bodies of the day in the historicist view (and given the resurgence of astrology today, not a bad metaphor today either). The scriptural basis for this is, however, weak to nonexistent. It seems nothing more than a common metaphor of the 4th century -- if you accept the historicist account. And to that account we must now repair.

The chief difficulty with making the sky literal in this passage is in Revelation 20:11. The sky disappears at that point too -- now how do we do this twice?



The question is: is there ever in human history such a great upheaval in religion, politics and life as to justify such a passage. There is.

In 313 AD Constantine issued the Decree of Milan, declaring an end to the Diocletian persecution and that his mother's faith, Christianity, should be the official religion of the empire.

IN 321 AD he decreed that Sunday should be a day of worship; no labor to be done. (Christians had observed it long before that -- despite what the Seventh Day Adventists say).

In 325 AD he abolished gladiatorial combat -- which had existed as sport in the empire for over a thousand years. This was a major demand of the Christians. It was the equivalent of Clinton issuing a total ban on abortions today.

Also in 325 AD, in the town of Nicea, he called the first general council of the church since the destruction of Jerusalem. This council denounced Arianism (and thus upheld the Trinity). In so doing, he also gave the excuse to the Jehovah's Witnesses to misinterpret and later reinstate Arianism as their doctrine.

In AD 331 he abolished all pagan religions, and ordered that all temples be converted to churches or razed to the ground.

He totally reorganized the empire into four prefectures -- an organization unknown and not thought of until then.

Finally -- he moved the capital city from Rome to Constantinople (then Byzantium, now Istanbul).

There you see it: total upheaval in religion and politics. No wonder the existing princes and kings cried to the "mountains" (the government of the day) for protection! (Note that there is no angelic equivalent to this cry; there is no shout of victory at this point from heaven. The reply to these must be: "you ain't seen nothing -- yet.")