



# REVELATION

## WRITER

Though some have questioned the Johannine authorship of Revelation, most Bible students have accepted John, the apostle, as the inspired author. He identifies himself as John in 1:4,9. He was a Jew, the brother of James the apostle (See Mk 10:35). James was the first apostle to be martyred for Jesus (At 12:2). It is believed that John was the last apostle to die. It is believed that John died at an old age in Ephesus at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century (See “Writer” in the intro. to John).

## DATE

There has been a great deal of discussion among Bible students concerning the date when this book was written. Some say it was written in the 60s during the reigns of Nero and Vespasian who were Caesars of Rome. Others affirm the traditional date of A.D. 95 or 96. This latter date is supported by most Bible students of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries. Consider also with this the fact that it is unlikely that the churches discussed in chapters 2 and 3 would have digressed so much in so little time if the book written written in the 60s. Compare Ephesians 1:15, which was written around A.D. 61, with the state of the church in Ephesus as described in Revelation 2:4. Their spiritual state as described in 2:4 does not seem to be their spiritual condition as described in Ephesians 1:15. Compare also the lukewarmness of the church in Laodecea (3:15,16). This city was destroyed by an earthquake during Nero’s reign, but had been rebuilt and was prospering by the time John

wrote (3:17). We must also consider the fact that it was the practice of Domitian to exile religious and political leaders. Tradition says that John was exiled to Patmos around the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. What John says in 1:9 seems to indicate that he was suffering from such an exile at the time he saw the visions.

In view of the content of the book, we would not rule out the early date. Some Bible students have affirmed that John saw the visions before A.D. 70, but recorded them after the consummation of national Israel in A.D. 70. This date is held in conjunction with the view of some students that the beast and false prophet in Revelation refer to Judaism and not the Roman Empire. This is at least one view that should be considered. In the years preceding the consummation of national Israel in the destruction of Jerusalem, there was great turmoil throughout the Roman Empire in reference to the insurrection of the Jews. Even in the church there were those who were questioning the messiahship of Jesus, and thus were being recruited by zealot Jews who were working to inspire all Jews to rebel against the Roman domination and occupation of Palestine (See comments Hb; 1 Jn; 2 Jn).

However, the extent and nature of the persecution that was launched against the church that is portrayed in the book seems to reach far beyond the persecution of the Jews against the early church. The political and economic onslaught that the beast and false prophet launched against the church seems to be much greater than the Jewish persecution that was only regional and was always controlled by the laws of the Roman government. The Jewish persecution of the church was small in comparison to the persecution that was launched against Christians by the Roman Empire.

In chapters 13 and 17 John seems to speak of kings and kingdoms as a chronology in order to identify the date of

writing (See comments of 13 and 17). If reference in the context of these two chapters is to the Caesars of Rome, then the one who was in power at the time of writing was Vespasian who was Caesar from A.D. 69 to A.D. 79. Therefore, it would have been during the early part of his reign that Revelation was written. In view of the turmoil that prevailed throughout the Empire during Rome's destruction of national Israel that was finalized in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, it could be concluded that the letter was written in A.D. 69 or 70.

Regardless of the date of writing, and the persecutors of the church to whom John refers, references to the characters and symbols in the book cannot refer to the end of time. Whether reference was to Jewish persecution or Roman persecution, the textual content of the book does not refer to the end of time. John was writing to those immediate recipients whom were enduring persecution, or headed for persecution in their lifetime.

## THEME

The theme of Revelation is expressed in 17:14. Throughout the revelation, John portrays the victorious Christ over all evil power (1:18; 2:8; 5:9,10; 6:2; 11:15; 12:9-12; 14:1,14; 15:2-4; 19:16; 20:4; 22:3). Christ is pictured as leading the church into victory over Satan and all obstacles that Satan can place in the way of Christian faithfulness (17:14). It is the theme of Jesus throughout the visions to reassure the persecuted saints that they have a greater future than the hostile environment in which they were persecuted. There was a reward for those who endured (2:10). This hope in the reward that was yet to come gave them strength and encouragement to overcome the onslaught of persecution into which they had gone and were going. The message of the book is the victory of the saints over the evils of this world.

## PURPOSE

The general scope of Revelation is that God brings down judgment on those who would persecute His people, even though He has used pagan nations to discipline His people. Through the proxy of the Assyrian Empire God brought judgment on the northern kingdom of Israel in 722/21 B.C. However, Isaiah said that God would bring judgment on the Assyrian Empire. Through the proxy of the Babylonian Empire God brought judgment on the southern kingdom of Israel in 586 B.C. God brought judgment on the Babylonians, and subsequently, brought the Babylonian Empire to a close. Through the proxy of the Roman Empire God brought judgment on national Israel who had rejected Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God. God eventually brought down the Roman Empire with the fall of Rome in 476 B.C. The recipients of the book of Revelation were living in a time when God was bringing national Israel to a close, which close happened in A.D. 70 with the fall of Jerusalem. Though God was using the Roman Empire to bring national Israel to a close, he wanted to reassure his readers that as God had brought judgment upon the Assyrians and Babylonians, He would also bring judgment upon the Roman Empire.

John knew the persecution that the church endured in its early beginnings. It was a persecution led by a Jewish leadership who saw the early growth of Christianity as a threat against Judaism wherever it went. However, John saw a greater persecution that was coming in the near future. It would be the persecution of Imperial Rome in her efforts to crush those who would not submit to the tyranny of the Caesars who presumed themselves to be deity. Those Caesars who presumed to be deity imposed their self-deification on the populous of the Empire. Therefore, John sees 175 years of persecution that would begin in the near future, but would eventually come to an end when God would

eventually bring judgment upon the Roman Empire. John's purpose for writing, therefore, was to encourage the disciples in order that they endure the onslaught of Rome's persecution until God brought down judgment on the Empire (15:2; 17:14). John's final encouragement was in the fact that God would bring the whole world to a conclusion.

## **WRITING STYLE**

This inspired letter of the New Testament is apocalyptic in style and presentation of its message. Apocalyptic literature was written by the Jews in times of suffering and persecution. The message of the writer was composed in apocalyptic writing in order to conceal the real message from the enemies of the truth. At the same time, the message of the literature was revealed to the faithful recipients. The general purpose of apocalyptic literature was to encourage the recipients to believe that they would be victorious over their enemies because God was working on their behalf.

The message of apocalyptic literature is presented in a figurative manner with the use of many metaphors (See comments 1:1). Students should be cautious not to literalize the metaphors lest they miss the message of the writer. The writers of apocalyptic literature often used cryptic symbols. These are figures of speech that are often very graphic and terrifying. John uses many cryptic symbols in this document in order to either produce shock or emphasis concerning the message he is conveying.

Because Revelation was written in figurative language, our approach to the interpretation of the book must be different than our interpretation of non-apocalyptic literature. Our approach to non-apocalyptic literature is to first understand the text in a literal manner unless there are contextual reasons to understand the text in a figurative manner. However, in apocalyptic literature the reverse is true.

We must first understand the text in a figurative manner unless there is contextual justification to understand the text in a literal manner. Many interpreters of Revelation misunderstand the message of John because they fail to follow this simple method of biblical hermeneutics when studying this particular book. John knew this. Therefore, he introduces the book with three notes of caution to those who would take the message of the visions out of their historical context or twist them to fit preconceived ideas.

1. He first alerts all readers concerning his style of writing in the very first verse of the book. The message of the book was “*sent and signified*” to the churches (1:1). The message of the revelation, therefore, is set forth and signified in figurative language.
2. John then takes the precaution of identifying the time when the judgments of the book would take place. They would shortly come to pass (1:1; 22:6). The fulfillments of the judgments would take place in the time of the first recipients of the letter.
3. Finally, John warns those who would add to or subtract from the message he writes (22:18,19).

It would be the tendency of those who came later in history to seek to apply the message of Revelation directly to their own circumstances. In a spiritual sense, the message of Revelation certainly applies to the church at any time in history. However, the actual events of the letter were written with direct application to the first readers of the message. All readers after the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians are secondary recipients of the message. Therefore, we can apply the message of the letter to ourselves only in the sense that the message offers encouragement to the church by seeing how God has worked to deliver His saints. All truth in the message applies to the church in any age. However,

the historical content of the book refers to the early Christians who endured these sufferings.

By the time John wrote this letter to the seven churches of Asia, all truth had already been delivered to the church through the apostles (Jn 14:26; 16:13; Jd 3). Therefore, there is no more revelation of fundamental truth in this letter that is not found in other epistles of the New Testament.

God does not reveal fundamental truth through apocalyptic language. The reason for this is obvious. If He did reveal fundamental truth through language that was subject to the interpretation of men, then we could never come to an agreement on what was fundamental for salvation. Therefore, interpreters who go to this book as their primary source for establishing doctrinal beliefs should be cautioned concerning this point in their deductions from the book. The biblical interpreter must understand that God never revealed that which was essential to believe in order to be saved in a manner that was difficult to understand. Though fundamental teachings can be embedded in figurative language, the teachings themselves must be clearly revealed in other texts. In fact, understanding figurative language depends on the revelation of fundamental teachings that are clearly revealed in other books of the Bible. When we come to a book of apocalyptic symbols as Revelation, our understanding of the book must be based on our understanding of clearly interpreted concepts from other inspired books.

### **Introduction (1:1-20)**

**Outline:** (1) The revelation of Jesus (1:1-3), (3) Greetings to the seven churches (1:4-8), (4) Vision of the Son (1:9-20)

## **Chapter 1 THE REVELATION OF JESUS**

Chapters 1-3 picture the glorified Jesus who reigns

among the churches of Asia. He is there as King of kings and Lord of lords in order to remind the church that He is still head over all things for the sake of the church (See comments Ep 1:20-22; 1 Pt 3:22). One of the specific themes of the entire letter is that the readers understand the omnipotence of Jesus. If the persecuted readers understand that all things are under the control of the King of kings, then they can rest assured that those who belong to the Lamb will also be victorious (See Rm 8:31-37).

**1:1,2 *Revelation:*** The Greek word (*apokalupsis*) means “an unveiling” (1 Co 2:10; Ep 1:17). The visions of the church’s immediate future are going to be unveiled to John in order that the churches be comforted in times of persecution. ***Things that must shortly come to pass:*** This statement of John is made at the beginning of the revelation and at the end (22:6). The nature of the book of Revelation necessitates such a reminder for those who would take John’s visions out of their historical context. In view of 4:1, John was stating that the historical events of the book that were relevant to his immediate readers would happen soon. The final coming of Jesus is mentioned several times in the visions in order to portray the final victory of the Lamb over Satan. However, John does not reveal specific events that would occur immediately before the final coming. He does not in order that zealous speculators not propose some specific date as to when Jesus will come again. John simply uses the final coming and final judgment of wickedness as the ultimate encouragement for the persecuted saints. He does this in order to remind the saints that in the final conclusion of all things, they will dwell in eternity with the victorious Lamb. The word “shortly” is used in the text here to modify the verb “come,” and thus, define when the events of the vision would come to pass. They would come about speedily or quickly (See 22:6). This same Greek word (*en takei*) is also used in other pas-

sages of the New Testament with this meaning (See Lk 18:18; At 12:7; 22:18; 25:4; Rm 16:20). The events would not take place over two thousand years later in a century that was not relevant to the first readers.

**Sent and signified:** The message of the revelation is revealed through different figures of speech. John thus forewarns the interpreter to be cautious about interpreting this book. It is not to be interpreted as other inspired literature simply because it comes to us with great metaphors and cryptic symbols. Therefore, we must understand the message of the book figuratively unless there is reason to interpret it literally.

**Who testified:** John wants us to know that he was being a faithful witness to the things that were revealed to him through visions (See 1 Co 1:6).

**1:3 Blessed is he who reads:** Those who read and understand will be blessed in the sense that they will be spiritually prepared to endure the trials of persecution (1:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). **The words of this prophecy:** See 19:10; 22:7,10,18,19. It is inspired prophecy because John talks of things that were about to happen. This could be possible only if the hand of God was at work in order to reveal such to John. **The time is at hand:** John again cautions us that what he was discussing in the revelation was about to happen in the lives of his immediate readers. He was not talking about something that would take place centuries later (22:10). He was revealing things that would be fulfilled in the near future of those to whom he wrote. Except for the final coming of Jesus that is used as the ultimate encouragement for the persecuted church, the historical events of the book, therefore, refer to John's immediate readers. As secondary recipients of the book, we gain encouragement by understanding that we also can survive persecutions similar to those that the immediate readers of the Revelation survived. However, when the revelations mention the judgment of the wicked, we must

assume that such judgment happened as defined by Hebrews 9:27. After death, one faces judgment. When the rich man of Luke 16 died, he lifted up his eyes and immediately found himself in torments. He did not have to wait until the end of all things in order to discover that he had received final judgment and a sentence to condemnation (Lk 16:22,23). Therefore, when the visions of Revelation portray the judgment of the persecutors of the saints, we must not assume that reference is to the final judgment that will come at the end of all things. When God rained down judgment on the wicked rulers of Rome, their judgment was immediate and final.

## GREETINGS TO THE SEVEN CHURCHES

**1:4 Seven churches:** John wrote not only to these seven churches but to all the churches of his time. These seven representative churches were facing problems that are often faced by all churches of all history. In the historical context of John's writing, he envisioned a great persecution that was coming in the near future through the hand of Imperial Rome. All the seven churches of Asia would suffer as a result of the persecution that was initiated and carried out by the government of Rome. Therefore, John wrote in order to encourage these churches. **From Him who is and who was and who is to come:** Reference here is to the Father and His eternal existence. As a manifestation of the inseparable Godhead of all things, Jesus is the same today, yesterday and tomorrow (See Mk 6:50; 13:6; 14:62; Jn 6:35; 8:12; 10:7; 11:25; 14:6). **Seven spirits:** Seven is the number of completeness or perfection. The totality of the Holy Spirit and His work in reference to this world is represented. He works among men and has direct access to the throne of God (3:1; 4:5; 5:6).

**1:5 The firstborn from the dead:** Jesus was the first to be resurrected from the dead never to die again (Ps 89:27;

1 Co 15:20; Cl 1:15,18). His resurrection never to die again signaled to all who are in Him that they also will be raised never to die again (See comments 1 Co 15:20-22). ***The ruler of the kings of the earth:*** Jesus is not simply the King and head of the church. His kingdom and reign extend far beyond the submitted hearts of the obedient. He is the King over all things because He has been given authority over all (See Mt 28:18; Ep 1:22; 1 Tm 6:15; 1 Pt 3:22). He is now ruling from heaven. Therefore, John is not talking about a rule that would come in the future. He is revealing the present rule that Jesus now exercises over all the kings and lords of the earth. It is necessary to understand this point because the theme of Revelation stands on the fact that Jesus is the omnipotent King who has all things under His control (See Hb 1:3). Those to whom John writes must understand that the world is not out of control. It is under the control of Jesus who is working things together for the good of the saints. ***Washed us from our sins:*** This could be translated that He “loosed” us from our sins by His blood (Ep 1:7). Through the grace of God, we are no longer in the bondage of our sins.

**1:6 *Made us to be a kingdom:*** Christians are a kingdom in the sense of being kings who reign with Jesus (Rm 5:17; compare Ex 19:6; Cl 1:13; 1 Pt 2:9). They are a kingdom of priests who have submitted to the King of kings, Jesus Christ. Their existence as subjects of the King of kings, therefore, necessitates the fact that Jesus is now reigning as King (Compare comments Mt 16:18,19). ***Priests:*** Christians are a holy priesthood. Because they have given themselves to the service of God, they are priests of God who proclaim the praises of God to the world (1 Pt 2:9).

**1:7 *He is coming with the clouds:*** This is Old Testament judgment language that refers to the coming of the Lord in judgment. Only the context can tell us whether reference is to the coming of the Lord in time or at the end

of time (See Mt 24:30; Mk 13:24; 14:62; At 1:9-11; Ph 2:10,11). In the historical context of the visions of John, reference would refer to the Lord's coming in time in judgment upon the forces that are persecuting the Christians. In this case, the force that was persecuting the church was the Roman State. If John wrote before A.D. 70, however, then we could assume that the persecuting force against the church would be national Israel. But this persecuting force would after A.D. 70 be replaced by the persecution of Rome that would continue persecution until the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century.

**1:8 *The Alpha and the Omega:*** These are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet. This could possibly refer to the complete dominion of the Son of God over all things because He is the creator of all things (Cl 1:16,18; see Is 41:4; Rv 21:6; 22:13). ***Who is ... was ... is to come:*** Only God has eternality, that is, only God exists for all eternity. Therefore, John in this revelation affirms that the Son is eternal because He comes from God who is eternal (Jn 1:1,2,14). The statement here is John's declaration of the deity of the Son (4:8; 11:17). He is the Almighty (Is 9:6) because He is one with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

## VISION OF THE SON

**1:9 *In the tribulation:*** John is a fellow recipient of the persecutions (See comments At 14:22). He is thus a part of the kingdom that suffers violence from those who have given themselves over to follow Satan (Mt 11:12). He is a participant of the results of the longsuffering of Jesus. ***Patmos:*** This small island is located about one hundred kilometers southwest of Ephesus. It was the island to which John was exiled by Caesar Domitian (See 6:9; 20:4). Some Bible students affirm that John went to Patmos voluntarily, and then was given this vision by God while he was on the island. Some students have also suggested that

John was taken to the island in a trance, and while in a trance, these visions were revealed to him.

**1:10 *In the Spirit:*** John was in a visionary state while receiving the visions. In such a state, God communicated to him the visions of this book (See Ez 3:12-14; 8:3; 11:24; 37:1; Mt 22:43; At 22:17; 2 Co 12:2-4). **Lord's Day:** This is the only time in the New Testament that this phrase is used. According to the writings of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century church writers, the term referred to the first day of the week, or Sunday (At 20:7; 1 Co 16:2). All ancient church writings use this term to refer to Sunday. **As ... a trumpet:** The use of “as” alerts us to the fact that John is using a simile. Because this is a book that is communicated to us in figurative language, interpreters should note the number of times a simile is used throughout the revelation in order to bring the readers into contact with something that is greater than earthly things. In this context, a literal trumpet is not indicated. The simile (a form of a metaphor) refers to a loud voice that sounded as (“like”) a trumpet. Many interpreters develop wrong conclusions in their interpretation of the book of Revelation by failing to identify the great metaphorical style of writing that John uses to convey his message of hope. Beginning in the first chapter, we are alerted to the fact that this is a masterpiece of literature that metaphorically communicates to the saints one of the most powerful messages of deliverance by Jesus who now has all things under control. We must not, therefore, become so involved in the metaphors themselves that we miss the signified message of the metaphors.

**1:11 *To the seven churches:*** The problems of these churches were representative of the churches that were in Asia Minor at this time. The problems of these churches are also typical of many churches throughout history. Therefore, though the message is directed specifically to these churches, a spiritual message goes out to all churches of all

history until Jesus comes at the end of time. We must also keep in mind that the warnings Jesus gives to these churches, He would also give to churches today who suffer from the same problems. Though Jesus came with judgment in time on these churches in the 1<sup>st</sup> century, He will certainly come in judgment at the end of time on those who harbor the sin these churches allowed.

**1:12,13 Seven golden lampstands:** The disciples are the light and hope to the communities in which they live. Through their obedient lives of faith, they radiate the light of the Son of God (Mt 5:16; see Ex 25:37; Zc 4:2). **One like the Son of Man:** As the Messiah of Israel (14:14), Jesus is pictured as a judge who is always among His people (Mt 18:20; 28:20; compare 2 Co 6:16; Cl 1:17; Hb 1:3).

**1:14-16** See Dn 7:9. **Eyes were like a flame of fire:** As the Son of God, Jesus is omniscient (See Dn 10:6). His knowledge penetrates all things and nothing is hidden from Him. He knows the spiritual state of the church at any time in history in every city. **Feet like fine brass:** His feet have been purified in fire in order to carry out the judgment He is about to render to the churches, as well as to the persecutors of the saints (See Dn 10:6). **Many waters:** See 14:2; 19:6. “Waters” is a symbol for people. Jesus has authority over all peoples of the earth (Ez 1:24; 43:2; Dn 10:6; see Dn 7:13,14; Mt 28:18; 1 Pt 3:22). **Seven stars:** He has control of the communication to the churches (vs 20). **Sharp two-edged sword:** Jesus is the One who executes justice and judgment through the authority of His word (See Jn 12:48; Ep 6:17; Hb 4:12). He is pictured here ready for judgment of the sin among the disciples, as well as to pronounce judgment on those who are afflicting the saints.

**1:17,18 Fell at His feet:** Worship is spontaneous from the hearts of those who realize the power and authority of God. What John saw struck reverential fear in his heart. What we read should do the same. True worship comes

from within one's heart when one recognizes the presence of God. One should not confuse emotional excitement that is stimulated from man-produced environments or occasions with one's emotional response from within his heart when he responds to who God is and what He is doing in our lives. ***Do not fear:*** The worship that was produced in John's heart came as a result of his fear of the presence of Jesus (See comments 2 Co 5:16). Though the awesome existence of Jesus as Lord of all things should strike fear in our hearts, Jesus wants to reassure us that because we are His we can have confidence because of the grace of God.

***He who lives ... was dead ... alive forevermore:*** Jesus was crucified, but resurrected to live and never die again (1 Co 15:1-4,20-22). What He experienced has given Him the right to have authority ("keys") over the hadean existence of the dead and physical death itself (3:7; 9:1; 20:1; see Jn 5:26-29). ***Hades:*** This is the abode of the spirits of the dead that is unseen by those of this world. It is the unseen existence of Christians who have gone to be with the Lord (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23; see comments Lk 16:19-31; Rv 20:14).

***1:19,20 Write:*** John is to write those things that he has just seen. He is to write concerning that which now existed among the churches. And finally, he is to write what is going to be revealed to him concerning the future judgment of the Son upon those who are persecuting the church.

***The angels of the seven churches:*** This would be a metaphorical statement that would refer to the spiritual representation of the churches before the throne of God. Reference would not be to a specific angel of each church. The lampstands (vs 12) are metaphorical in their representation of the disciples on earth in their influence among the communities of the seven cities. Throughout the following pronouncements, the interpreter must keep in mind that the Christians were meeting throughout the cities in the homes of the members. The church of each city was the fellow-

ship of all the Christians that resided in the cities. One should not make the mistake of defining the church of these cities as single-assemblies of disciples in each city. In the context of the message to the church in each city, therefore, the address was to all the disciples who lived in each particular city, regardless of where each Christian assembled with one of the many assemblies within each city.

### **Christ and the Seven Churches**

**(2:1 – 3:22)**

**Outline:** (1) To the church in Ephesus (2:1-7), (2) To the church in Smyrna (2:8-11), (3) To the church in Pergamos (2:12-17), (4) To the church in Thyatira (2:18-29), (5) To the church in Sardis (3:1-6), (6) To the church in Philadelphia (3:7-13), (7) To the church in Laodicea (3:14-22)

When considering the following addresses to the seven churches, there are some common things that we must notice concerning how God views the church. (1) The church in a particular city is addressed as one church in that city. Though there were certainly more than one assembly of the saints in the city meeting in houses on the Lord's Day, the church in each city was one church (See At 14:23; Ti 1:5). (2) Each of the seven churches is addressed individually. They are not addressed as a hierarchy of churches that have control over one another. Nor are they addressed in order to supervise the affairs of other churches in other cities. (3) Though there is sin and false teaching among the churches, the churches were not encouraged to withdraw from one another. Neither was a delegation of preachers or elders advised to go from one city to another to sort out the problems of the church in other cities. (4) Though there was grave sin among the disciples in some of the cities, Jesus still refers to them as the church. Though they are warned concerning His coming judgment upon them, He at this time was giving only a warning that they repent. (5) There are no instructions for members to withdraw from

one another, though this would occur if repentance did not come forth. (6) Some churches unfortunately took on the carnal characteristics of the culture in which each church dwelt. Jesus thus judges them because of their adoption of sinful behavior or beliefs that were prevalent in the cultures in which the disciples lived. (7) The spiritual nature of these seven churches is typical of the nature of many churches throughout history from the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The nature of the sin that is seen in these churches has been a threat to the faithfulness of churches from the 1<sup>st</sup> century to this day. (8) Jesus exhorts the disciples in the cities that they must remember and return to how they were when they were first converted. There is a call for restoration of attitudes and behavior throughout the message that Jesus delivers to the Christians in each of these cities.

## Chapter 2 TO THE CHURCH IN EPHESUS

**2:1,2 Angel:** See 1:12,13,20. **Ephesus:** If the letter of Revelation were written around A.D. 96, and the church of Ephesus established in the early fifties, then the Ephesus church was about forty years old at the time these visions occurred (See At 18:19 – 20:38; 1 Tm 1:3). The letter was thus directed to a second generation of Christians. The city of Ephesus was a port city of Asia with great wealth. The temple of Diana was located here (See “Historical Background” in intro. to Ep). **I know:** The omniscience of Jesus allows Him to know all that transpires with His body, the church, on earth (1:4; Hb 4:13). Jesus knew that the disciples in this city were faithful in works and labor. Their performance of deeds was known, as well as their faithfulness to the truth. **You cannot bear those who are evil:** They did not allow immoral or unethical men to be recognized among them, and thus remain in fellowship with the members. **Tested those who say they are apostles:** Some

in the 1<sup>st</sup> century had evidently claimed to be church-sent apostles. They claimed to be commissioned by the church to other areas to represent the church. However, they were found to be teaching that which was false (See 1 Co 12:10; 2 Co 11:13; 12:12; 1 Jn 4:1).

**2:3,4** The Ephesian Christians had suffered in their labor for the sake of the name of Jesus (See Jn 15:21; At 4:12; 19:5; 1 Co 6:11; Cl 3:17; 1 Pt 4:16; see comments At 14:22). ***Have not become weary:*** They had maintained their work regardless of the persecution they had endured (Gl 6:9; Hb 12:3-5). ***Left your first love:*** Sometime between the commendation of Ephesians 1:15,16 and this judgment, the Ephesian disciples had grown cold by their ritualistic performance of deeds without the inward motivation of a loving heart (See Mt 24:12). They were ceremonially continuing their good works and doctrinal soundness, but their obedience had digressed to a legalistic performance of religiosity that was void of love (See comments Mt 7:21-23; 15:7-9; 24:12; Mk 7:1-9; see intro. to Gl). After several years of existence, these disciples had digressed to cold formalism.

**2:5** ***You have fallen:*** In order to avoid the judgment that was about to be brought upon them, they had to repent. They had to return to their former works that were motivated from a heart of love (Compare 1 Co 15:10; Gl 5:6). ***I will come:*** Reference here is not to Jesus' coming at the end of time. He would come in time with judgment upon this church. ***Remove your lampstand:*** When the influence of the disciples in a city does not enlighten the community concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ, then their lampstand of influence has been removed (See comments Mt 5:13-16). Members will continue to meet in their assemblies long after their lampstand of influence has been removed. Dead churches are identified by the fact that when they are gone no one misses them.

**2:6,7 Nicolaitans:** There is little known of this religious group (See 2:14,15). They may have been associated with Gnosticism that was prevalent in the Asia Minor religious culture. Certain sects of Gnosticism believed that there was no value to the flesh, and thus, the flesh could be given over to immorality without endangering the soul (Compare 2 Pt 2:15; Jd 11). **Let him hear:** In order to stop their digression into legal religion that justified cold formalism, they needed to return to hearing God speak to them through His word (See Mt 12:15; 13:9,42; Jn 6:45; Rm 10:17; see comments Hb 5:11,12). Those churches that digress to the formalities of legal religiosity will cease their diligent study of God's word. They will do so because they feel that all the answers to religious matters are settled, and thus, there is no more need for study. In order for this church to return to God, they had to return to listening to God, not to their emotions or religious traditions, for both misguided emotions and traditions will lead one further away from the word of God. **Tree of life:** This metaphor finds its literal meaning in the actual tree of life that was in the garden of Eden (22:2,14,19; Gn 2:9; 3:22). It is this tree that gives eternal life to all who would eat of it. Those who are in Christ have access to eternal life because they have access to the tree of life (1 Jn 5:11). **Paradise of God:** The eternal life that Adam lost by being driven from the tree of life (Gn 3:22-24) is restored to those who will enjoy the presence of God in eternal heaven (See comments Lk 23:43; 2 Co 12:4). Christians now have access to eternal life through Jesus (Jn 5:24; 1 Jn 5:11). Their life will continue into the new heavens and earth because they have established a covenant relationship with Christ through their obedience to the gospel (2 Pt 3:13).

## TO THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

**2:8 Smyrna:** In A.D. 26 a temple was erected in

Smyrna in honor of Tiberius who was Caesar of Rome. This city eventually became a center of emperor worship that was enforced by the Roman State. Because Christians would not give allegiance to Caesar as lord, they were considered insurrectionists, and thus, they suffered capital punishment of the State.

**2:9 *I know:*** The omniscience of Jesus allows Him to be aware of the spiritual condition of the disciples in every city (See 2:2; Hb 2:18; 4:15). ***Works and tribulation and poverty:*** The Christians in this city suffered both from society and the economy in their efforts to work for Jesus. They were in the midst of a hostile environment that worked against their Christian behavior. Though living in a hostile environment, and in poverty, they continued their faithful work to the glory of God. ***You are rich:*** They were rich with those things that are not of this world. Their treasures were in heaven (Mt 6:20; 2 Co 6:10; 8:2). They were a poverty stricken church that was rich in faith (Mt 6:20; Lk 16:11; see comments 2 Co 8:1-4). ***They are Jews and are not:*** These were Jews by heritage, and thus, should have maintained the faith of their fathers. However, their behavior identified them with the pagan religions of the region (See Rm 2:17,28,29). These were Jews who had been influenced by the mystical religions of their society. They were Jews by physical descent, but not by faith. ***Synagogue of Satan:*** See verses 13,24; 3:9. The synagogue was a religious center of reference for the Jews. These Jews, however, were doing the work of Satan by working against what God would have them do. They were of their father, the devil (Jn 8:44). The reference to the synagogue of Satan would be a reference to persecution that came locally from the Jewish community. Since the persecution by the Jews was only local, we could conclude that the great persecutor of the church that is mentioned in Revelation was greater than local Jewish persecution. It is for this

reason that the persecuting beast of Revelation was probably the Roman Empire.

**2:10 Cast some of you into prison:** John says that evil men would soon imprison some of the disciples. Nevertheless, when such took place, they should not be afraid because Jesus had all things under control and was working everything together for good (Mt 10:22,28; Rm 8:28).

**You will have tribulation ten days:** The tribulation refers to influences outside the church that would affect the church. They would thus go through a definite period of trials in which they must remain steadfast. **Faithful unto death:** The Greek text indicates that they should remain faithful even if it means physical death (Compare vs 13; 3:11; 12:11; 17:14; Js 1:12). Because the Christian is not of the world, it is a principle of the Christian life that he will suffer the persecution of the world (At 14:22). **Give you the crown of life:** Those who remain faithful, regardless of the onslaught of persecution and trials, will receive the victory crown (Gr. “*stephanos*”) of eternal life at the time of death (3:11; 1 Co 9:25; 2 Tm 4:8; Js 1:12; 1 Pt 5:4).

**2:11 Will not be hurt by the second death:** The first death would be one’s spiritual separation from God by sin (Is 59:1,2; Rm 6:23). The second death is one’s eternal separation from God in the destruction of hell (20:6,14; 21:8; 2 Th 1:7-8). When one is born again, he is born out of his first death in sin. If they remain faithful, they will not suffer the second death of separation from God for eternity.

## TO THE CHURCH IN PERGAMOS

**2:12,13 Pergamos:** This was a city in which the Roman seat of government authority was located in the region. By the time this message was announced to the church, at least three temples had been built in the city that were dedicated to emperor worship. There were also in the city

temples to pagan gods such as Zeus, Athena, Asclepius and Dionysus. The influence of temple religiosity was strong in the Roman Empire in these early years of the church. What would eventually happen in the years to come would be an apostate church that was brought into conformity with the function of pagan religiosity. By the first part of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, much of Christianity would be hijacked by Emperor Constantine in order to bring Christianity into conformity with the temple religion of the Roman Empire.

**Where Satan's throne is:** Of the many temples to pagan gods, the temple of Zeus had a carved altar resembling a throne that was approximately ten meters high. The church in this city resided in a society of both religious and political hostility against the truth. It was a city of religious people who had created gods after their own imagination, and religions that conformed to the desires of the worshippers. **Antipas was My faithful martyr:** Nothing is known of Antipas other than what is stated here. We might assume that he was a very influential member of the church, for when he suffered martyrdom it was a great discouragement to the church. Nevertheless, the church remained strong during these times of persecution. **Satan dwells:** When the work of Satan is carried out by those who have given themselves over to his deception, then it is there that Satan dwells. In this case, the city was filled with the influence of idolatry and Roman emperor worship.

**2:14-16 The teaching of Balaam:** See Nm 23:24,25; 31:16. The doctrine of Balaam is often associated with the beliefs and practices of the Nicolaitans (vs 6). Those who were of this cult participated in immorality in the name of religion (Compare At 15:29; 1 Co 10:20; 2 Pt 2:15; Jd 11). Since Balaam was a religious worker for hire, then we would assume that those who were of the teaching of Balaam were on the payroll of the adherents to idolatrous religions. **Repent:** Since the Christians resided in a culture of religious

immorality, they were affected by it. In this case, the culture was affecting the disciples instead of the disciples affecting the culture. If the members of the church who participated in the practices of Balaam and the Nicolaitans did not repent, they would suffer the judgment of the Lord (22:7,20).

**2:17 The hidden manna:** Manna was the survival food given to Israel in the desert during their wilderness wanderings (See Ex 16:31-34; Hb 9:4). It gave them life. Those who repented in Pergamos would also eat of that which would give them eternal life (Jn 6:33-35,49ff). **Give him a white stone:** In their culture, white stones were given as trophies or plaques. The metaphorical meaning here is that those who overcome in the struggle against the deceptions of Satan will receive their prize (Ph 3:13,14).

## TO THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

**2:18-20 Thyatira:** There was a dye industry in this city. The city was also well known for its manufacture of fine brass. Thyatira was also the city from which Lydia came (At 16:14). The principal god of the city was Apollo, the sun god. **The last are greater than the first:** The church in this city seems to have grown in its work for the Lord. **You tolerate ... Jezebel ... teaches and deceives My bond-servants:** Not only were the Christians apostatizing from the faith by allowing Jezebel to influence their affairs, they were also following after her immorality (See the character of Jezebel in the Old Testament in 1 Kg 16:29-33; 21:25). **Commit fornication:** Fornication was often a part of pagan worship, for some pagan worship was created after the desires of the flesh. In this case, Jezebel was encouraging fornication on the part of the members (See vss 6,14).

**2:21,22 I have given her time to repent:** The Lord is patient for the repentance of those who fall into sin (Rm 2:4; 2 Pt 3:9). However, this statement of Jesus teaches

that His patience will come to an end. ***I will cast her into a sickbed:*** She would reap physical punishment for the sin she had sown (See Gl 6:7,8). As Ananias and Sapphira, she would reap the direct physical punishment of the Lord (See comments At 5:1-10; see vs 16). Her final judgment was at hand (See Hb 9:27).

**2:23,24 *I will kill her children with death:*** In view of the severity of the apostasy of the church as a result of the influence of Jezebel, this reference may be to the same judgment as Acts 5:1-10 (Compare 1 Co 11:30). “Her children” possibly refers to those of the church who had aligned themselves with her sin. ***The deep things of Satan:*** This was possibly what pagan worshipers or Gnostics referred to as the profound practices of Satan. They were things one had to actually experience before one could truly know and understand the inner circle of beliefs of the religion (See 2 Tm 3:1-9; 2 Pt 2:18; Jd 16).

**2:25-27 *Power over the nations:*** It would be Rome that would launch an attack against the church by imposing emperor worship. However, through the Lord’s deliverance from persecution, Christians and their word are seen as victors over evil, and especially, over the evil nations that would seek to persecute them (Compare 20:4; Lk 20:13-17). In this sense, Christians now reign in life with Jesus (Rm 5:17). ***Rule them with a rod of iron:*** The kingdom reign of Jesus extends to all the nations of the world (Dn 7:13,14). He is now King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). All things are now under His authority (1:5; 12:5; 19:15; Ps 110:1-6; Is 11:4; Mc 5:15; Ep 1:20-22; Ph 2:8-11; 1 Pt 3:22). Since He now has all authority (Mt 28:18), He has the authority to judge the wicked and to give victory to the righteous. ***The morning star:*** As the morning star was hope for a new day, so these Christians must have hope for a new day from the darkness of the persecutions that they must endure. They must not lose hope (Compare

22:16; 2 Pt 1:19). As God promised His people in the Old Testament that judgment would come on those nations who persecuted His people, He promises that He would also bring judgment on the nation of Rome for her persecution of His people.

## Chapter 3

### TO THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

**3:1 Sardis:** This city was located on a plateau with cliffs on three sides as a natural protection of the city from enemies. However, it was captured at least two times in history by enemies who approached it by scaling these unguarded cliffs. Cyrus captured it in 546 B.C. and Antiochus the Great did the same in 214 B.C. **Name that you live, but you are dead:** The church was well known. Nevertheless, though they had a reputation for being a church that was active and alive, they were actually spiritually dead (1 Tm 5:6).

**3:2 Be watchful:** Those who think that they are strong and stand on their own merit are sure to fall victim to Satan's deceptions. Their self-confidence would lead to their self-destruction. **I have not found your works completed:** They possibly trusted in past successes in work for the Lord, but had grown lazy by trusting in their heritage. Their indifference had led them to be complacent about their work for the Lord. They had a great heritage, but had fallen from their zeal for the Lord in the past.

**3:3 Remember:** They must remember (2:5) how they received the gospel. They had heard the gospel with the confirmation of the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit (See comments Mk 16:20; At 2:38,39; 19:1-6; 1 Th 1:5; Hb 2:3,4). **I will come on you as a thief:** Jesus will come as a thief upon those who are not expecting Him (16:15; 1 Th 5:2; 2 Pt 3:10). These Christians had thus become so self-confident and indifferent that they had forgotten that they

could cease to be a church of Christ by their own indifference. Jesus' coming here is a coming in judgment in time upon a group of disciples who had become complacent concerning their awareness of the ever-present Son of God.

**3:4-6 A few names:** As in every case of dying disciples, there are those who have not given up their faith. In this case they had not given in to immoral religiosity (See Jd 23). These will dwell with Jesus in eternal glory because they have kept the faith (4:4; 6:11). **The book of life:** As the Roman society had the register of those in a city who were citizens, so the metaphor here applies to those whom God has enlisted with citizenship in heaven (13:8; 17:8; 20:15; 21:27; Is 4:3; Ez 13:9; Lk 10:20; Ph 4:3). God does not have to write down the names of the saved in order to remember. The meaning is that He knows those who are His. **I will confess his name:** Those who claim Jesus will be claimed by Jesus as His brethren (Mt 10:32; Lk 12:8).

## TO THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

**3:7 Philadelphia:** The Greek word for Philadelphia means “love of brothers,” or “brotherly love.” The city was probably founded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. by Eumenes, king of Pergamos, and named after his brother Attalus who was called “Philadelphus.” This city was known as the “city of earthquakes” because of the number of earthquakes that had occurred in the area throughout the years. **Holy ... true:** See 6:10. These are the attributes of Jesus who now has the authority of David to reign as king (19:11; 1 Jn 5:20). Jesus now has authority over all things and is King of all kings of the world (17:14; Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-22; 1 Tm 6:15).

**3:8,9 An open door:** Jesus had providentially presented to these Christians an opportunity for evangelism (See At 14:27; 1 Co 16:9; 2 Co 2:12; Cl 4:3). **Kept My**

**word:** In order to keep the word of Jesus, one's life must conform to the direction of His will and the demeanor of Jesus' principles of conduct (See Mt 7:21; Jn 14:15; 15:14; 2 Jn 9). Those who do not keep the will of Jesus have denied Him (See comments 2 Pt 2:20-22).

**Synagogue of Satan:** See comments 2:9. **I will make them come:** In some way, some of the Jews who had formerly persecuted the church would come to the realization that Jesus was the Messiah, and thus, they would seek to worship Him with the church. This is one statement in the book of Revelation that has led many interpreters to affirm that the beast and false prophet of Revelation was Jerusalem and Judaism, and not Rome and Roman imperial religion. When the destruction of national Israel culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, many Jews finally realized that God had rejected Israel. In this destruction, therefore, many Jews throughout the world realized that God was with the new Israel, the church. They thus accepted Jesus as the Messiah, and came to believe that the end of national Israel was in the plan of God.

**3:10,11 The hour of trial:** A time or period of trial was about to come upon the church throughout the whole Roman Empire, not the entire world (See comments Lk 2:1; see Lk 21:17). **I am coming quickly:** As in the other cases of the coming of Jesus in judgment, this is an in-time coming of judgment (1:1; see 1:3; compare 22:6,7,10,12,20; 2 Th 2:1-3). This coming in judgment, however, is in reference to those who were persecuting the church. The Philadelphia church must be reassured that the One who has control of the nations is coming in judgment upon their persecutors.

**3:12,13 A pillar in the temple of My God:** As magnificent marble pillars upheld the pagan temples of the idolatrous religions of the social and cultural environments, Jesus metaphorically uses such to refer to those who are tested,

but stand in the midst of great persecution (See 1 Co 3:16,17). When enduring trial, their character is made strong. Their endurance thus becomes an encouragement to others who also suffer trials and persecution (Js 1:2,3; compare 1 Kg 7:21). **The new Jerusalem:** This is the church that originated out of heaven and was in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (Hb 12:22; see Rv 21:2,10; Gl 4:26; Hb 13:14). **The name of My God:** See 9:4; 14:1; 22:4.

## TO THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

**3:14 Laodicea:** This city was named by Antiochus II (261-246 B.C.) after his wife, Laodice. At the time John wrote, the city had an industry of medicines and a medical school. It was the location of many hot springs to which people went to bathe for medical reasons (See Cl 4:16). It was also a center of banking and imperial worship of the Roman Empire. **The Amen:** Jesus is the certainty, or guarantee of all that God says, or all that was promised concerning the Messiah in prophecy (2 Co 1:20; see Rm 4:21). **The ruler of the creation of God:** Since the Son of God was the creator of all things, He is thus the beginning of all creation (See comments Jn 1:1-3,10; Cl 1:15-18).

**3:15-17 You are lukewarm:** This church had become an indifferent and lazy group of Christians who had lost their zeal for good works and evangelism of their area (See Rm 12:11; Gl 6:10; Ti 2:14; 3:8). **I am rich:** Laodicea was a banking center. There were possibly several in the church who were wealthy, and thus, they trusted in their riches for security. However, their financial affluence had made them spiritually destitute and void of good works (Compare Hs 12:8; Zc 11:5; 1 Co 4:8; see Mt 5:3; 6:24). They had possibly become lukewarm because they trusted in the contribution of their money without personal involvement in good works. **You do not know:** In their financial prosperity,

they did not recognize their spiritual poverty. Their riches had moved them to form a religion after their own desires, a religion that was void of spirituality and commitment to Jesus.

**3:18,19 *Buy from Me:*** The rich and lukewarm are here exhorted to purchase spiritual clothes and medicines of righteousness from Jesus. They must dress their spiritual nakedness with Christ (See Gl 3:26,27; compare 1 Pt 1:7; Js 1:27). Their trust in their riches had turned them from trusting in God. ***I rebuke and chasten:*** The Lord disciplines His sons in order to keep them on the right path (Jb 5:17; Pv 3:12; 1 Co 11:32; Hb 12:5,6,8). ***Be zealous:*** The rich have the tendency to hire their work for the Lord to be done by someone else. Here Jesus says that they must become directly involved in bringing forth fruit worthy of repentance (See comments Ep 2:10).

**3:20,21 *I stand at the door and knock:*** The problem is that men leave Jesus. Jesus is always there seeking an opportunity from the one who will voluntarily open his heart. Jesus will not send the Holy Spirit or an angel to break down the door of one's heart. One must take the initiative to allow Jesus in (See 2 Pt 3:9). ***Sit with Me on My throne:*** Christians now reign with Christ who presently reigns over all things (Rm 5:17). They reign with Jesus in the sense that they are the ambassadors who deliver His authoritative word to the world (Rm 10:14,15; 2 Th 2:14; 1 Tm 4:16; 2 Tm 2:11,12). ***I also overcame and sat down ... on His throne:*** Jesus is presently reigning. His reign is not reserved for the future. When He comes again, kingdom reign will be returned to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See comments 1 Co 15:24-28). Jesus now has all authority over all things (Mt 28:18; Jn 13:3; 17:2). But in the age to come, all authority will be returned to all that God is.

**Christ and Judgments to come****(4:1 – 16:21)**

**Outline:** (1) Celestial adoration of Jesus (4:1-11), (2) The book and the Lamb (5:1-14), (3) Opening of the seals (6:1-17), (4) God protects His people (7:1-3), (5) Interlude: The 144,000 (7:4-8), (6) The great multitude (7:9-17), (7) Opening of the seventh seal (8:1), (8) Sounding of trumpets (8:2 – 9:21), (9) Interlude: The little scroll (10:1-11), (10) The two witnesses (11:1-14), (11) Sounding of the seventh trumpet (11:15-19), (12) Interlude: The woman and the dragon (12:1-17), (13) The sea beast (13:1-10), (14) The land beast (13:11-18), (15) The Lamb and the saints (14:1-5), (16) Judgment on Babylon (14:6-12), (17) The time of reaping (14:13-20), (18) Preparations for judgments (15:1-8), (19) The bowls of God's wrath (16:1-21)

**Chapter 4****CELESTIAL ADORATION OF JESUS**

**4:1 After this:** After seeing the visions of chapters 1-3, John sees a door of opportunity standing open (See 3:8,20). He hears the voice of Jesus (Compare 7:1,9; 15:5; 18:1; 19:1; 20:3). **Things that must take place:** These are historical events that will soon take place in the lifetime of the audience to whom John writes (1:1; 22:6). They are events that are relevant to the immediate readers of John. John mentions the final coming of Jesus in judgment at different times throughout the revelation. However, he does not mention such in order to fill in historical events that would extend from his time to the final coming. The final coming and judgment are mentioned only as a final encouragement to persecuted Christians in order to remind them that their home is not this world, but in heaven to come. At the end of all things, God will accomplish the purpose of His plan for the existence of this world. The purpose will be bringing into eternity those who have prepared themselves in this world (17:14). We must keep in mind, however, that when one dies, he faces his final judgment at that time (See comments Hb 9:27). Therefore, when the Christian dies, he will go to be with the Lord (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). There is no waiting period after death until Christians are with the Lord. However, when the wicked die,

they also meet their final judgment. They, as the rich man of Luke 16, will lift up their heads in torment. Therefore, when John writes of judgment for the wicked, we must not conclude that such will be the last of all judgments that will occur at the end of time when Jesus comes. Final judgment in the life of any individual is immediate at the time of death. There will be a final judgment that will conclude all final judgments. However, all who have died before this judgment will have been finally judged at the time of their death.

**4:2 *I was in the Spirit:*** John was in a mental state of inspiration where he encountered the visions of the revelation (1:10). **A throne was set in heaven:** The metaphor of the vision pictures the authority and rule of God in a heavenly realm, not on this earth. Heavenly rule and authority will never originate from this earth (See Ps 103:19; 119:89; Is 66:1; compare Ez 1:26; Dn 7:9). Neither will heavenly rule ever be placed on this earth. To place the reign of the God who created the galaxies on one speck of dust of all the universes of space is a ridiculous effort on the part of some to minimize the greatness of the awesome God of all creation. **One sitting on the throne:** Throne is metaphorical of control. The fact that God sits on the throne brings comfort to all Christians for they understand that all things are working for the accomplishment of His eternal plan. Nothing is out of His control (See Hb 1:3). Jesus will later be pictured in the revelation as standing beside the throne (5:6,7). The meaning of the metaphorical picture is to reassure Christians. When enduring tremendous persecution, one is often tempted to question God's control of all things. God answered Job's questioning with a description of all that He does and is. God never directly answered Job's question as to why the righteous suffer. He simply answered him with a description of how great He is. God's answer, therefore, was deductive. If God is so great, then Chris-

tians must conclude that He has all things under control.

**4:3 Like a jasper and a sardius stone:** Jasper may have been a reference to a diamond that has the capacity to endure time. Sardius would be a ruby that shines forth with great brilliance. The symbolism of stones that is used throughout Revelation is often difficult to determine. Some believe that the jasper here signifies the purity and mercy of God, whereas the sardius signifies His justice in judgment. **Rainbow around the throne:** This is possibly God's faithfulness in the deliverance of those who have put their trust in Him as did Noah (See Gn 9:12-17; compare Ps 89:14,15; 97:2,3).

**4:4 Twenty-four thrones:** This would be the combination of two sets of twelve (See 11:16). The righteous of the Old Testament (the twelve tribes) combined with the righteous of the New Testament dispensation (the church represented by the twelve apostles). Both Jew and Gentile, past and future, stand victorious before the throne of God (See 5:9,10; Rm 5:17; Ep 2:6). Because of the cleansing blood of the Lamb, all have received the forgiveness of their sins (Rm 3:25; Ep 2:16; Hb 9:15; 11:40).

**4:5,6 Lightnings and thundering and voices:** These symbols indicate the announcement of God's presence, power and majesty in judgment upon the wicked (8:5; 11:19; 16:18; Ex 19:16; Ps 18:13,14; 144:6). **Seven spirits:** This would be the totality of the presence of the Holy Spirit. **Sea of glass:** This is possibly a representation of the turbulent populations of the world. Such presents a separation between the saints and God because the saints are still in an environment of persecution on the earth. This separation will eventually be removed in 21:1 (See comments 15:2). **Four living creatures:** See Is 6; Ez 1:5; 10:20 (Compare Rv 5:8,9; 15:7).

**4:7-11** These living creatures could represent either spiritual forces sent forth from God or a special group of

majestic beings (Compare Ez 1:18; 10:12). They could represent that which is noble (lion), strong (calf), wise (man) and bold (eagle) among all living creatures. **Six wings:** Compare Is 6:2,3. Those who surround the throne continually give worship to God with their reverent attitude and humble obedience. **Full of eyes:** They continually give recognition to God as the almighty. **Cast their crowns before the throne:** Any victory one wins over the forces of evil must be credited to God. It is only through the work of God in our lives that we are able to accomplish anything against Satan. And thus, God deserves all glory, honor and power.

## Chapter 5

### THE BOOK AND THE LAMB

The content of this chapter is a continuation of the revelation of chapter 4. There is the added revelation here of the Lamb who is in the throne scene. The preceding vision of chapter 4 revealed the power and glory of God who is creator of all things. In this chapter, John records that God is loving and willing to deliver His people.

**5:1-3 A scroll:** This would be the common system of writing on which there were inscriptions made on both the front and back of the roll of material. Hereon are recorded the mysteries of God concerning the judgment of the wicked and deliverance of the righteous that are revealed in the visions to come. **Who is worthy:** The angel says there are conditions for opening the scroll. The One who would open the seals must be worthy in righteousness, holiness and power. Angels in the heavenly realm are not worthy to open the seals. No one on earth is worthy. Neither is there anyone in the unseen world of Satan with the sufficient power to open the seals.

**5:4,5 I wept much:** John weeps because of frustration. He realizes the hopelessness of man in reference to

the necessity of dethroning the world of wickedness. He realizes there is no hope of relief from those who would persecute the church. **The Lion:** This is the victorious Christ (Gn 49:10; Hb 7:14). **The Root of David:** Jesus is the fulfillment of the prophesied descendant of David who would reign on the throne of David (2 Sm 7:11-14; Is 11:1-10; Rm 15:12; Hb 7:14). **Has overcome:** Because the Lamb (Jesus) has prevailed over all powers of Satan, He is worthy to open the seals of the scroll (vs 9; Hb 1:3ff; 10:13).

**5:6 A Lamb as if it had been slain:** The Lamb who is Jesus had been slain according to the eternal plan of God (Is 53:7; Jn 1:29,36; 21:15; At 8:32; 1 Pt 1:19). Not only had the Lamb been slain before John writes these words, in the plan of God, the Lamb was slain before the creation of the world (13:8). **Having seven horns:** The Lamb has full and complete power and authority over all things (Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-22; 1 Pt 3:22; compare the metaphor “horn” in Dt 33:17; 1 Sm 2:10; 2 Ch 18:10). There is nothing that has been left outside His power to control. **Seven eyes:** He is omniscient, complete or perfect in knowledge of all things (Cl 2:3; compare Zc 3:9; 4:10). **Seven spirits:** See 3:1; 4:5. It is the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the throne of the Father and Son.

**5:7,8** John is seeing in vision that that has already taken place. Here is the picture of the Son who ascended unto the Ancient of Days in order to receive dominion, glory and kingdom reign (Dn 7:13,14; Ep 1:20-22). **Fell down before the Lamb:** When Jesus ascended to the Father and sat down at His right hand, He began His rule over all things. All should now fall down before Him in worship (See comments Ph 2:8-11). **Harp ... golden bowls:** These were instruments that produced the background music for the sacrifices at the temple in the Old Testament. They are here metaphorically used by John to describe the spiritual worship that the saints give to the Lamb. The golden bowls

(vials) here represent the prayers of the saints (8:3; Ps 141:2).

**5:9,10 You are worthy:** Jesus was worthy because He carried out the predestined plan of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to redeem man by the crucifixion of the incarnate Son (Jn 1:29). **A kingdom and priests:** Christians now reign with Christ who is the authority behind the word they speak, for they speak for the King (See 1:6; Jn 12:48; Rm 1:16; 5:17; 2 Co 5:18; Hb 4:12). They serve on earth as priests of God, for they minister among men on behalf of God (1:6; 1 Pt 2:5,9). **They will reign on the earth:** The saints are presently reigning on earth by the authority of Jesus who is on His throne in heaven (Rm 5:17; 2 Tm 2:11,12). They will continue to reign until Jesus comes again. It will be at the time of Jesus' coming that He will do away with that over which Christians now reign.

**5:11,12** John now pictures a doxology of praise on behalf of all that exists which is directed toward the One who is on the throne. They pour out praise to the Lamb because they recognize that the Lamb was their creator (See comments Jn 1:1-3; Cl 1:16). Jesus should receive such praise because He received all authority from the Father to reign over all things (Dn 7:13,14; Mt 28:18; Ph 2:8-11).

**5:13,14** The Lamb (Jesus) created all things in heaven and earth (Cl 1:16). Now that He is exalted above every name, every knee should bow to His reign (Ph 2:9,10). And thus, John says that all that exists gives honor and glory and power to Jesus who now sits on the throne. The power of the message of the book of Revelation is in the fact that Jesus is presently reigning over all things. The encouragement for the saints is in the fact that since He is reigning, they can trust that He has all things under control (Hb 1:3).

## Chapter 6

The judgments of the seals do not follow one another

in consecutive order. Beginning with the vision of the seals, John seems to present a series of judgments that are parallel in their message. They are parallel in the sense that the events of the judgments do not follow in consecutive order, but happen simultaneously or in conjunction with one another. He presents the events of these judgments in this manner in order to be repetitious in giving hope and encouragement to the persecuted. Hope is given to the saints because the judgments of the seals affirm that God rains down judgment on the enemies of the saints. Though it may seem that things are out of control, the saints must be encouraged that the King who is reigning has all things under control.

The remainder of the revelations are actually continued explanations of the contents of the scroll of chapter 5. The vision that begins here, and continues throughout the remainder of the book, pictures the victorious Christ in His work of redemption. This work was culminated in His ascension to the throne of God in order to reign with all authority over all things (Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-22). John pictures how Jesus is now in control of all things that presently exist (Hb 1:3). He pictures that in the time of the saints on earth, He rains down judgment upon the enemies of His body. At the end of all things, He will rain down His final judgment upon all the earth (See comments 1 Co 15:24-28). His power to so judge the world is evidence that He is now reigning over all things (1 Tm 6:15).

## OPENING OF THE FIRST SEAL

**6:1,2** God has summoned John to see what He is doing among the nations. The vision of the first seal is probably of Jesus on the white horse leading the triumphant church in victory over Satan (19:11). **Voice of thunder:** As thunder is heard everywhere, so the proclamation here is a call to all to come and see (14:2). **White:** In the visions, white

is a symbol of purity, holiness and glory (1:14; 2:17; 3:4,5,18; 4:4; 6:11; 7:9,13). It stands in contrast to that which is dark and evil. **Horse:** See 19:11 (See Jb 39:19-25; Jr 4:13; Hk 1:8; Zc 1:8,10; 10:3). The horse here is probably a symbol of strength in war. **Bow:** He has the power to take the offensive in the spiritual war against the enemies of the saints (See Gn 48:22; 1 Ch 5:18; Ps 7:12; 45:5; Hk 3:8,9; Zc 9:13). Throughout the visions of Revelation, the apocalyptic symbols that are used are often taken from the battle scenes of the world in which the saints lived. We must not assume that because the figures are taken from such battle scenes that Jesus will launch a physical military battle against the forces of evil on the earth. The kingdom of Jesus is not promoted by the carnal means of war. Any-one who would affirm such a theology does not understand the spiritual nature of the kingdom of God (See comments Jn 18:36-38). **Crown:** This is the victory crown (*stephanos*) that was given to conquerors who returned from the defeat of enemies (14:14; Zc 6:11). **Conquering:** As in 19:11, the victorious Christ sits on the horse. He is going forth to conquer the enemies of truth with the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16; compare Ep 2:17; Rv 3:21).

## OPENING OF THE SECOND SEAL

When messengers of the gospel went forth with the power of the gospel, the result would be that Christians would suffer persecution for their faith (Mt 5:10-12; At 14:22). Satan would unleash his forces against the church in order to destroy the influence of the gospel (See Mt 10:34-39).

**6:3,4 Red:** The symbol is of war and bloodshed. Emphasis in the context of John's readers is on the spiritual war that results in persecution that is brought on Christians because of who they are (See Mt 10:21,34-39; Jn 15:18,19; 2 Tm 3:12). This could also include the suffer-

ing that Christians must endure as a result of carnal wars within the Roman Empire (See Mt 24:6). **Great sword:** The Greek word used here was applied to the short sword that was invented by the Romans and effectively used by the Roman armies against their enemies. Thus efficiency in spiritual warfare was granted to the One on the red horse. He was given great power to accomplish His destruction among men.

### OPENING OF THE THIRD SEAL

**6:5,6** The vision now pictures the suffering that comes from great economic difficulties. The picture here seems to be of economic discrimination against Christians, as well as the suffering that results from famines. **Black:** Black is symbolic of sorrow, mourning and grief that Christians suffer because of living according to their faith and their advance against the kingdom of darkness (See Is 50:3; Jr 4:28; 14:2; see comments At 14:23). **Pair of scales in his hand:** In the hard times that John pictures, food will be so scarce that it is measured in small quantities to those who suffer (See Ez 4:16). **A measure:** The measurement is here given in the volume of liquid measurements. This amount is about three-fourths of a liter. **Denarius:** This is about the day's wage for a common laborer. Therefore, in these times of suffering, a day's wage would not even buy a liter of barley which was less expensive than wheat (See Mt 20:2). It would thus be hard times for the poor. One wage earner of the family could buy only enough to provide food for one member of the family. **Do not harm the oil and the wine:** These were luxuries afforded only by the rich. The meaning of the vision seems to indicate that the rich class is here discriminating against the poor class. At least the rich are indifferent towards the needs of the poor. And since most Christians were of the economically poor, they suffered from the indifferent and calloused hearts the rich had toward the poor.

## OPENING OF THE FOURTH SEAL

**6:7,8** The picture here is of limited judgments of this world that are measured out with the sword (the second seal) and famine (the third seal), but also, with wild beasts (Compare Ez 14:21). Christians did suffer death by sword, famine and being thrown to the lions in the arena of Rome. However, the persecutor was not allowed to consume the saints. **Pale:** This color is symbolic of terror, disease or death. **Death:** Death is personified as the rider of the horse who inflicts physical death. Hades always follows death because it is the unseen abode of the spirits of the dead (1:8; 6:8; 20:13,14; see Is 14:9). **Fourth:** This is a fourth part of mankind, and thus limitation is inferred. The human calamities that are here brought on by the wickedness of men is restrained by the providence of God. If God did not limit the destruction of evil men, the destruction of humanity by mankind would spread throughout the world (See comments Mt 24:22). In the context of John's audience and vision, it seems that God allows this destruction to continue against the unregenerate world of unbelievers because of their disobedience to the will of God.

## OPENING OF THE FIFTH SEAL

**6:9,10** John sees the martyred saints, who in the disembodied realm of the dead, plea for God's vengeance on those who persecuted them unto death (See 2:10). In the following seals, John reveals the reasons for the judgments of the preceding seals. **Under the altar:** Those who die in Christ are with Christ (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23; 1 Th 4:13-18). **Those who had been slain for the word:** Here are the souls and spirits of those Christians who had been martyred for their faith. They had been offered up as a sacrifice because they lived and preached the gospel (1:9; 2:10; Ph 2:17; 2 Tm 4:6). **How long ... until You judge and avenge:** Those who are dead in Christ are conscious after death. In this

statement, they are not pleading for personal vengeance (See Lk 18:7; compare Gn 4:15). The plea to God is that He terminate earthly persecutions and hardships for those on earth. God's judgment against the beast and false prophet will terminate the persecution of the saints, and thus answer the requests of these saints. In the visions of Revelation, this prayer is answered in 19:2.

**6:11 White robes:** See 3:4,5; 7:9. The white robes are symbolic of glory given to the martyrs. They are told that their requests will soon be answered (Compare Mt 22:11,12). However, they must wait until the time that is determined by the One in whose control all things lie. **Rest:** See 14:13. **A little while longer:** See Hg 2:6,7. Though the time may be measured in years by men, it would be only a short time in God's plan. Therefore, it would be some time before the Roman Empire would eventually be restrained by God to terminate her persecution of the saints. Until that time, the persecuted must be reassured that God would eventually bring judgment upon the persecutors. **Fellow servants and their brethren ... killed:** The persecution and death must continue on earth. However, there would be a time when it would cease because of the restraining hand of God.

## OPENING OF THE SIXTH SEAL

**6:12** The opening of this seal introduces a vision of the fall of the Roman State that had launched persecution against the saints. The symbolism is from the Old Testament in texts where God portrayed the fall of kingdoms and governments (See Is 2:19; 13:10-13; 29:6; 34:4; 50:3; Jr 4:23ff; Ez 32:7,8; Hs 10:8; Jl 2:30; Hg 2:6). Though God used other nations throughout the Old Testament to judge His people by proxy, He eventually brought judgment upon those who persecuted His people. Though God used the Roman Empire to bring judgment upon national

Israel, He would bring an end to the Empire because of its persecution of His people. ***Earthquake:*** The fragile stability of a kingdom is shaken by God in order to bring it down (8:5; 11:13; 16:18; see comments Mt 24:7). When the kingdom is brought down, it is the end of a dispensation. To be consistent with how these figures are used in the Old Testament, John is here seeing the termination of a great kingdom on earth.

**6:13,14** When an earthly kingdom ends, its presidents, governors, kings and princes (“sun, moon, stars”) all fall (See Nm 24:17; Is 14:12; Dn 8:10). All of its dictates (“scroll”), power (“mountains”), and controlled territories (“islands”) are removed from its domination (Is 34:4).

***Heaven departed:*** Compare Is 34:4; Mt 24:35; 2 Pt 3:10,11.

***Mountain:*** See Is 40:4; 54:10; Jr 3:23; 4:24; Ez 38:20. John has just seen the termination of a great kingdom. His readers would be given hope that the Roman Empire would eventually be judged by God.

**6:15,16** Those who have nurtured the existence of a wicked Empire are seized with fear when the Empire starts to disintegrate. ***Fall on us:*** The symbolism here is of men who are living. They request death in order to be separated from the glory and power of the One who is bringing judgment upon them by the destruction of their empire (See Is 2:19; Hs 10:8; Lk 23:30; compare Rv 9:6). Verses 15,16 indicate that John was not talking about the final coming of Jesus and the end of the world. At the time of the end of the world on the last day, there will be no time for pleading with God. All events will happen in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet and with the shout of an archangel (See 1 Co 15:51,52; 1 Th 4:13-17).

**6:17 *The great day of His wrath:*** We would not assume that this is the last day. Days of God’s wrath have occurred throughout history when He brought judgment upon wicked nations (See Is 13:9; 63:4; Jl 1:15; 2:1,2,11,31;

Nh 1:6; Zp 1:14,15; At 2:20; 2 Pt 3:7; Jd 6; Rv 16:14). The end of the Roman Empire would not happen in a 24-hour day. The word “day” is used to symbolize the time of termination of the Empire. **Who will be able to stand:** When God has determined the end of a kingdom, there is no one who can escape the judgment of God.

## Chapter 7

### GOD PROTECTS HIS PEOPLE

The contents of this chapter are an interlude or parenthetical statement between the events that are revealed in the sixth and seventh seals. Herein is the answer to the question of 6:17, “Who is able to stand?” The answer will be that no one is able to stand against God’s judgments. The heavenly scene of chapter 7 follows the overthrow of evil that is revealed in chapter 6. It assures the saints on earth of the welfare of those who have died in the faith (See comments 1 Th 4:13-18). However, the total desolation of all things is restrained until the saints are sealed.

**7:1 After these things:** John is not discussing a chronology of world events, or events that will follow one another in consecutive order. He is simply stating that after he saw the preceding vision of events, he was now seeing more visions. He affirms that the vision of the sixth seal is complete, and now he sees an interlude vision of God’s people who are under His care. **Four angels:** These are the messengers of God (9:14; compare Mt 24:29-31). **Four corners of the earth:** This would be symbolic of the entire world (20:8; Is 11:12; 24:16; compare Mt 24:31). **Holding the four winds:** The messengers of God are restraining those forces that will be released upon those who persecuted the saints of God (Compare Jr 49:36; Dn 7:2; Mt 24:31). **Earth ... sea ... tree:** All three symbols represent earthly enemies that had launched their attack against the community of God, the church.

**7:2,3 The seal of the living God:** Those who are sealed by God have their salvation in Christ (Rm 8:16; Ep 1:13; see Rv 9:7; compare Rv 22:4). Their salvation in Christ by God's grace is their protection against evil (See 1 Co 10:13). **Do not harm:** The destruction of the enemies of God is restrained until the elect are gathered into the fold of God (6:11). **Until we have sealed the bondservants:** God foreknows those who are His. He knows the number of the saints. Therefore, destruction of the enemies of Christianity will not occur until the foreknown number of the saints is reached (Compare Ez 9:1ff). **On their foreheads:** This is the most noticeable place of the individual. It is here that the mark is placed in order to identify one's allegiance. The figure indicates that the righteous are clearly identified (Compare 3:12; 14:1; 22:4; Ez 9:4-6). The destruction, therefore, must wait until all the saints are identified. God's work among men in His judgments upon the wicked depends on the protection of the saints. The destruction of the wicked signifies the deliverance of the righteous.

## THE 144,000

**7:4-8 One hundred and forty-four thousand:** The number twelve would find its symbolic meaning in the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament who were God's called out people. In the context here, the twelve tribes would indicate all of God's people in any dispensation of time. Twelve times twelve times one thousand equals the 144,000. The revelation is not referring to an exact number of 144,000, but the numerical symbol of the complete body of God's community (14:1,3). John has in mind a symbolic number that represents the true Israel of God by faith. The number would represent the complete and total number of the redeemed on earth at any time in history (See Mt 19:28; Rm 3:28,29; 4:16,17; 9:6; 10:12; Gl 3:29; 6:16; Ph 3:3; Js 1:1).

## THE GREAT MULTITUDE

**7:9 After these things:** After John saw the 144,000, he now sees the great multitude (See vs 1). The 144,000 (living saints) are those who have been sealed, and thus protected by God. The great multitude are those triumphant saints who have passed beyond earth to heaven.

**Before the throne and before the Lamb:** The picture here is of a jubilant and exalted multitude in the presence of the Lamb (4:1-4; 5:6-11). They are before God who is on the throne (vs 10; see comments 1 Co 15:24-28).

**Clothed with white robes:** This symbol is of purity, victory and righteousness (4:4; 6:2). **Palm branches in their hands:** Palms were used by Romans to symbolize the victory of returning soldiers. With victory, there was great rejoicing. Thus the saints who have died in Christ are greatly rejoicing because of the victory they have accomplished through the blood of the Lamb (17:14; 1 Jn 5:4).

**7:10 Salvation to our God:** Salvation can only come from God since only God is eternal and only God can give eternal life. There is nothing eternal outside the presence of God. And since the saints are here pictured in the presence of God, we would conclude that they have the blessing of eternal life (See 2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). However, we would also assume that the wicked do not have eternal existence because they are cast from the presence of God (See comments Mt 10:28; 2 Th 1:7-9). In this vision, the Father and Son are continually praised for the salvation that has been granted to the saints (Compare 1 Pt 1:9). **Throne:** We must not make the mistake of visualizing a physical throne in heaven. The word “throne” is metaphorical of the source of authority and power. In this scene, the saints are pictured as standing before the authority and power of God who gives them eternal existence.

**7:11,12** At the time this vision is given to John, those who are dead in Christ are giving praises to God. In this

vision, all fall on their faces before God and worship. The triumphant community of God that is composed of every nation, tribe, people and tongue (vs 9) is now worshiping before the God who radiates power and authority.

**7:13,14** One of the twenty-four elders now asks a question in order for us to identify the ones who stand before the throne. ***Those coming out of the great tribulation:*** These are the saints of God who have endured the tribulations of sonship on earth, and thus have come into the glory of God (See comments Jn 16:19,20; At 14:22; Rm 8:18; 2 Tm 3:12). They have died, and at the time John writes, they are with the Lord in rest (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). ***Coming:*** The Greek tense here is progressive action. Thus those who have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb are by death continually coming out of the tribulation of the earth into the throne room of God. The picture, therefore, was happening at the time John wrote. It was not a single event that is yet in the future. ***Washed their robes:*** See 1:5; 5:9,10; 22:14. Here are those who have obeyed the gospel in order to be washed clean of sin by the blood of Jesus (See At 22:16; Rm 6:3-5; Gl 3:27; Ti 3:5; 1 Jn 1:7; compare Zc 3:3-5; Ep 5:25-27; Hb 9:14; 1 Jn 1:7).

**7:15** Persecuted and suffering saints need to remember that when they die, they will immediately be with God in a heavenly state of existence in which there is no suffering (4:8; 5:8-14; 7:12; 11:15; see Rm 8:18; 1 Jn 3:2). At the time of Jesus' final coming, they will come with Jesus in order to be embodied for residence in a new heavens and earth that is yet to come (See comments 2 Co 5:1-8; 1 Th 4:13-18; 2 Pt 3:18).

**7:16,17 *Hunger no more nor thirst:*** In contrast to the suffering brought on by economic discrimination and famine on earth, there will be no physical hunger or thirst in the realm of heavenly existence (See 21:4). ***The Lamb ... will lead them:*** Jesus will tenderly care for those who have

undergone hardships for His name (Jn 10:11; 21:16; compare Is 26:8; 49:10). **Wipe away all tears:** All those things that caused sadness to the saints on earth will be taken away (See 21:4,6; 22:1; Is 25:8; compare Mt 5:4). The saints will dwell in an environment wherein nothing will bring sorrow to their hearts.

## Chapter 8 OPENING THE SEVENTH SEAL

**8:1** This verse brings us to the end of the vision of the seals. **Silence in heaven:** Nothing is revealed concerning the activities of the triumphant church in the heavenly realm of the throne of God that was viewed as being in existence in chapter 7. The seventh seal is the picture of the saints who have transitioned into eternity. They have thus escaped the tribulation of the world and gone into the realm of eternity where they are in the presence of the Lord (2 Co 5:8).

## THE SEVEN TRUMPETS

**8:2** This is the beginning of the third series or cycle of visions that will end in 11:19. Verses 2-6 are an introduction to the visions of the seven trumpets. The trumpet visions are a warning. The symbolic picture of verses 2-5 seems to be both direct and indirect judgments of God upon those who are oppressing the community of God. When studying through the trumpets, and bowls that will follow, the vision of the trumpets in chapters 8-11 seems to cover the same period as the vision of the bowls (chs 15,16) and seals (ch 6). Though the symbolism of the trumpets is vivid, one should not lose sight of the message that John is trying to convey. John uses those figures that strike awareness of what God is doing in His work among men in order to bring about the victory of the saints, and then bring them into heavenly glory. **Seven trumpets:** The seals involved ordi-

nary events that God had brought about on behalf of the saints. The trumpets involved the intervention of God. What is common to both visions is that judgment is restricted to a “third part.”

**8:3 Was given to him much incense:** The effect of the saints’ prayers is aided as their pleas go to the throne of God. The saints must remember that Jesus is the mediator for the saints’ prayers before the throne of God (See Lk 22:31-34; Jn 16:23,24,26,27; Rm 8:34; Hb 7:25; 1 Tm 2:5).

**The prayers of all saints:** See 5:8. The picture here is that the prayers are answered by bringing God into action to affect the outpouring of His judgments. In 4:1 John saw the door open in heaven. However, he is here permitted to advance into the symbolic sanctuary of the heavenly realm. In 11:19 and 15:5 he is allowed to advance even further.

**8:4 Ascended before God:** God hears the prayers of the saints. He hears the prayers of those who are persecuted for the name of Jesus. In this historical situation, He hears the prayers of those who plead for deliverance from the persecution of the Roman State. Their plea is that judgment be brought down upon those who have instigated the persecution. God’s answer is now revealed to John through the vision of the trumpets.

**8:5 Cast it onto the earth:** The authority and power of all God’s judgments originate from heaven. Therefore, the answer to the prayers of the saints comes forth from the divine power of heaven (Compare Lv 16:12; Lk 18:1-8).

**Noises and thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake:** The symbolism here is that when God works, the attention of man is aroused. When God unleashes His judgments, things happen among men (See 4:5; 6:12).

**8:6 Seven:** This figure is symbolic of perfection or that which is complete. The visions portray that God completely accomplishes His purposes and His judgments.

**Trumpets:** Trumpets were used in the Old Testament for

warning (See Ez 33:3ff; Hs 5:8; Am 3:6). The figure of trumpets is used here to warn of God's partial judgment upon the wicked persecutors of the saints. However, there is also in the vision of the trumpets comforting assurance for the saints that final judgment will come on the wicked at the time of their death. When they die, they will face final judgment (Compare 1 Co 15:52; 1 Th 4:16; Hb 9:27). In the first four trumpets that follow, the symbolism comes from God's literal judgments as they were brought on Egypt (Ex 7 – 10). These were judgments brought on the enemies of God in time in order that God work on behalf of the saints. God worked in such judgments on Egypt in order to accomplish His work through Israel. In the historical context of the book of Revelation, He was working in judgment on the Roman Empire in order to accomplish His work through the church. Therefore, as Egypt's power was held back in order to allow the people of God to go free, in like manner, Rome will be restrained in order not to destroy the church.

## SOUNDING OF THE FIRST TRUMPET

**8:7** The first four trumpets are directed toward the physical environment in which man lives. The last three judgments affected the spiritual part of man. Since these first four involve the physical environment of man, their effects are indirect judgments upon man. ***Hail ... fire ... blood:*** This is reminiscent of the judgment of the plagues that God sent upon Egypt in order to motivate Pharaoh to release His people (Ex 7 – 10; compare Ez 38:22; Jl 2:30). These natural disasters shake men out of their comfortable environment on earth. When righteous men experience natural disaster, their minds are pointed toward heaven. When wicked men experience the same, they complain because they have no hope beyond their physical environment. ***A third:*** These judgments are limited.

## SOUNDING OF THE SECOND TRUMPET

**8:8,9** John's symbolism seems to come from the natural occurrence of a volcano that would spill its lava into the seaport that is filled with ships and crowded with people. He pictures a calamity that is parallel with the first trumpet. However, this second trumpet affects the population of humanity (sea). It causes misery to come upon humanity in order to turn people's minds toward a higher power than what is of this world.

## SOUNDING OF THE THIRD TRUMPET

**8:10,11** *The name of the star is called Wormwood:*

Named after the natural bitterness of wormwood, this figure represents the bitter sorrow that is generated in humanity as a result of the judgments that are being poured out by God (See Jr 9:15; 23:15; Lm 3:19). In the outpouring of this judgment, fresh waters are affected. Intense sorrow and anguish are thus caused among people. **Many men died:** The bitterness of the judgment brought men down (See Is 14:12-17). This is the first time in the revelation that men died as a result of the judgments of God.

## SOUNDING OF THE FOURTH TRUMPET

**8:12** *Sun ... moon ... stars:* The emphasis of the fourth trumpet is to reaffirm God's control over all that comprises the natural environment of man. This vision manifests God's power and control over that which seems to be the most permanent in man's environment. Though permanent in the view of man, such heavenly bodies are the creation of a God who can snuff them out of existence at His will (See Jb 9:7; Ps 136:8; Jr 31:35; Hb 1:3). John's message is that Christians should find comfort in the fact that God is in control of all things, not only on earth, but also in the heavenly bodies. If He has such control, then certainly He can bring judgment upon those who are persecuting the saints.

**8:13 An eagle:** The better Greek manuscripts have the word “eagle” here, and not “angel.” This bird would represent the swiftness and certainty of the coming woes that will be visible to the inhabitants of the earth (See 2 Sm 1:23; Jb 9:26; Hk 1:8). **Woe, woe, woe:** Because the first four trumpets were the judgments of God that were unleashed in an indirect way upon humanity, they were less intense than the trumpets to come. Because the last three are direct judgments, the severity of their effect upon man is introduced by the three woes. **To the inhabitants of the earth:** This refers to the wicked of the earth on whom God is to release His judgments. These are the judgments that are poured out in answer to the prayers of the saints (6:10). In the context of John’s readers, this refers directly to the Roman State.

## Chapter 9

### SOUNDING OF THE FIFTH TRUMPET

The judgments of the three woes correspond with the next three trumpets. Now comes the first woe and fifth trumpet.

**9:1 A star fall from heaven:** The fallen Satan is here given limited authority (“key”) over the abyss (“bottomless pit”) (Compare 10:15; see Rv 8:10). God unleashes His judgments on mankind through the proxy of Satan, allowing him to afflict humanity according to the nature of his character (8:10). Here he has power over the abyss, but in 20:3 he will be cast into the abyss. The abyss is the present realm of Satan and his angels (Lk 8:31). As the prince of this world, he has the authority to deceive the nations to rebel against all that is of God (See 2 Co 4:4; 2 Th 2:9-12).

**9:2-4 Smoke:** The false philosophies and teachings of Satan go into the minds of humanity in order to deceive those who do not love the truth (2 Co 4:4; Ep 2:2; 2 Th 2:10-12). **Locusts:** The deceived minds of men organize

movements that are based on evil philosophies and teachings that are promoted by Satan to lead men away from truth and righteousness (Compare Ex 10:12-15). **Only those men who do not have the seal:** The righteous have the seal of God (7:2,3). Therefore, the evil organized movements that promote the deceptions of Satan affect only those who do not love and obey the truth (2 Th 2:10-12). As Satan is allowed to go about as a raging lion, he is not allowed to devour those who know his limitations that have been put on him by God (1 Pt 5:8). He does not, therefore, have the power to devour the saints. Therefore, the community of God is affected only in an indirect manner, that is, by having to live in an environment that is dominated by the deceptive work of Satan. The greater the plague of lies in this environment, the greater the hostility the environment is against the righteous. However, the called, chosen and few—the 144,000 of 7:4—are the faithful on earth who remain in the care of the Lamb. No one can snatch these out of the Lamb’s hand against their will (See comments Jn 10:27,28; see 2 Tm 2:19; 2 Pt 2:9).

**9:5,6 To torment them five months:** All power to accomplish the judgments of the woes originates from God. Therefore, God allows Satan, through his organized works of deception, to torment those who have given themselves over to wickedness. However, he is not given power to kill those who are not sealed. **Five months:** Satan’s reign of power against those he controls is limited. **Scorpions:** The venom that is inflicted by a scorpion is long and painful. So it will be with the lingering judgment that is pronounced upon the wicked. The time of the judgments listed here is in conjunction with the torment that is unleashed by the sixth trumpet (vss 13 – 11:14). **Men seek death:** The judgments that are unleashed on men will turn men to misery that is so great that they will seek death over life (Compare Jb 3:21; 7:15; Jr 8:3).

**9:7,8 Horses prepared for battle:** Wicked teachings are as horses of war that battle against all that is true. **Crowns:** John uses the word “crowns” as a simile. Therefore, the crowns were not of gold. The false teachings were as appealing as gold. Being deceived by that which is counterfeit, wicked men exalt in their minds what is false (See 2 Th 2:10-12). **Faces of men:** Men are the instruments of Satan to propagate his deceptions throughout the world. **The hair of women:** The deceivers are identified as appealing to men. But the appeal is to believe that which is false. **Teeth:** Once drawn by the appeal of the hair, one is devoured by the teeth of falsehood.

**9:9-11** John continues the dramatic portrayal and horrible description of the nature of those who have been deceived, and thus, seek to be enemies of all that is true. Their march of wickedness is frightening. They seek to consume all that is in their way. **The angel of the abyss:** Their king was Satan. He led them by their self-deception. What they thought was truth was actually a lie (See vs 1; Jn 8:44; see comments 2 Th 2:10-12). **Abaddon ... Apollyon:** These words mean “destruction” and “destroyer.” Compare the use of the Hebrew word as it is used in other texts (See Jb 31:12; 26:6; 28:22; Ps 88:11; Pv 15:1; 27:20). The march of error across the minds that refuse to accept the righteousness of God leads to destruction.

## SOUNDING OF THE SIXTH TRUMPET

**9:12-14** This is the beginning of the second woe that is a complement of the first. It is climaxed by the final judgment of the wicked. This woe is similar to the judgments of the vision of the red horse (See 6:1-8). **I heard a voice:** This is God’s last authoritative call for men to repent from their wickedness (6:10; 16:17). **The golden altar:** See Ex 30:3; 40:26. **Release the four angels:** It is now time for judgment. God’s permission is given to unleash calamity

upon the wicked because of their hostilities against the community of God. **The great Euphrates River:** See Gn 15:18; Dt 1:7. This could possibly be a reference to the Parthian armies that were beyond the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. They were feared by the Romans because they were at the eastern extremities of the Empire where the forces of Rome were weak. The Parthians were never brought under the control of Rome. The significance of the vision is that God is about to set forth vengeance on those who have worked against His work through the saints (See 16:12).

**9:15 Four angels:** The judgment is to reach to the extremities of the persecutor's boundaries (4:6). God's judgment, therefore, is not on individuals of the Roman State, but the entire state of the government of Rome because she set herself against the saints of God. **Hour ... day ... month ... year:** God had a specific time when He would release His judgment upon the wicked. **Third of men:** Reference is not to the judgment at the end of time when the destruction will be total. Here the judgment is only partial.

**9:16** The 200,000,000 horsemen signifies a great host or a complete number. Emphasis is not on a specific number. In comparison to what an earthly army would be with this number of soldiers, the extreme number signifies the greatness of God's power to overcome any force that would set itself against His work. These horsemen are sent to accomplish the work of God by making war against the tormentors of His people (Compare Ps 68:17; Dn 7:10).

**9:17-19** The terror that is portrayed here by the forces of God emphasizes the fact that God's judgment is with wrath against those who would harm His people. **By these three:** Fire, jacinth (smoke) and brimstone are the plagues that afflict the wicked. In the vision, the locusts are not allowed to kill men (vs 5). However, the horsemen in this

vision are. Thus in the vision there is a progression of the intensity or severity of the punishment of the wicked. ***The power ... in their mouth and in their tails:*** The greatest wickedness comes from the slanderous lies that are propagated by the mouths of men. The wickedness of men results in the suffering of many on earth. However, such wickedness will finally end with the punishment of those who propagate evil among men (See Gl 6:7,8; Js 1:14,15).

**9:20 *The rest of mankind:*** There are those who are so hardened and calloused that they will not repent in the face of reaping severe retribution on earth for their wickedness (See Rm 1:18-28). They will reap the partial judgments of God on earth. However, at the time of their death and final judgment, they will be cast into the torments of the wicked in the hadean world. At the end of time, they will reap the punishment of a fiery Gehenna (Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:7-9). John indicates that the punishments that are unleashed by God on earth do drive some to repentance. ***Works of their hands:*** What seems to be indicated here is the idolatrous practice of creating gods after one's own imagination, and then, carving the image of those gods in wood and stone. The creation of these gods was the result of men who had given up a knowledge of the true God in order to create a god who would condone their wickedness (See Dt 4:29; Ps 115:4-8; 135:15-18; Is 2:8; 44:12-20; Jr 1:16; Ez 22:4; Hs 13:2; Rm 1:18ff; At 7:41).

**9:21** Men who had committed these sins had created gods in their minds that condoned their wicked actions. They would not repent because they had deceived themselves into believing that the gods they imagined had approved the nature of their wicked life-style. Religiously wicked men will not repent because they have convinced themselves that they are right according to the standards of their man-made religions. Religions, therefore, that find their authority for belief and practice in the traditions of

men, or the misguided emotions of hysterical religious performances, will always go astray. They go astray because the authority for such religions is centered on man and not on God. The adherents find comfort and religious security in the traditions of the fathers or the uncontrollable outburst of emotional hysteria that deceives them into thinking that what is felt must be true (See comments Mt 15:1-9; Mk 7:1-9). **Sorceries:** The Greek word here is often translated “witchcraft” (See 18:23; Gl 5:20). This is religious belief that brings adherents into conformity through fear (See comments At 8:9-11; 19:19).

## Chapter 10 THE LITTLE SCROLL

As chapter 7 was an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals, this chapter is a transition from the sixth trumpet to the seventh trumpet. The message of this vision is meant to comfort the saints. The comfort is produced by drawing the saints’ attention to the contents of the little scroll. The contents of the little scroll probably refer to the destiny of the saints, which destiny is their final dwelling in eternity with the Lamb. We discover the significance of the little scroll in verses 9-11.

**10:1 Mighty angel:** This is not Jesus but a strong messenger from God to carry out His work (See 5:2). **Down from heaven:** The angel originates from the heavenly power and authority of the throne of God (18:1; 20:1). The coming of the angel thus begins the comfort that God extends toward His community of saints. All comings of the Lord in judgment bring comfort to the righteous because God comes in judgment upon the wicked. **Cloud:** With the exception of three occasions in the New Testament (Lk 12:54; 2 Pt 2:17; Jd 12), the word “cloud” is used as a symbol of divine appearance. This appearance is often portrayed as a time of divine in-time judgments on the wicked.

These in-time judgments are upon the wicked, and thus, the coming of the Lord on the clouds in judgment signifies an indirect blessing for Christians who are suffering from the hostility of wicked men.

**10:2-4 A little scroll that was open:** The mighty messenger of God comes with the word of God in his hand. The message that he brings is for all the world. **Loud voice:** Because the message is from God, the attention of all creation is required (Compare Is 42:13; Jr 25:30; Hs 11:10; Jl 3:16). **Seven thunders:** The proclamation of the angel stimulated a response that echoed throughout humanity concerning the divine judgments of the wrath of God (See 8:5; 11:19; 16:18). **I was about to write:** As he had obediently done with the other visions, John states that he was about to write down what was stated by the angel (1:1,11,19; compare 2 Co 12:4). **A voice:** This could be either the voice of the Father or Son (1:10-13; 6:1; 18:4; 21:5,15). **Do not write them:** John is restrained from recording what was revealed to him. Not all revelation to man, therefore, has been recorded concerning things that are yet in the future (See 22:10; Dt 29:29; Dn 12:4; At 1:7; 2 Co 12:4). However, this could also mean that in the process of the visions that were given to John, there was not to be given anymore revelation at this time.

**10:5-7 Lifted up his right hand:** The messenger raised his hand to make an oath to God. **There should be delay no longer:** God has been patient, but time has run out for the rebellious who are mentioned in 9:20,21 (See At 17:30,31; 2 Pt 3:9). They have refused to repent, and thus, they must reap the judgments of God. Therefore, by the time of the final coming and judgment, God's redemptive plan in reference to men on earth will have been completed. **In the days ... of the seventh angel:** This is an idiomatic way of stating the time when the angel sounds the seventh trumpet. That time will be the end of all things. **The mys-**

**tery of God would be finished:** It would be the time when the mystery of God has been accomplished. The plan of redemption was made known, both through the prophecy of the Old Testament prophets (1 Pt 1:10-12), and proclaimed through the New Testament apostles and prophets (1 Co 2:6-12). “Mystery” refers to the gospel plan of salvation that was revealed through Jesus, preached throughout the world by evangelists (prophets), and recorded for history (See Rm 16:25; Ep 3:3-5,9; 6:19).

**10:8-11 Go, take the little scroll:** John must now take the little scroll (“book”) in order to consume its message. So must all do concerning the revelation of God (Ps 119:97; At 17:11; 2 Tm 2:15; compare Ez 3:10). **Take and eat it:** See Ez 2:8 – 3:3 (Jr 15:16ff). God’s revelation was meant for consumption by the spiritual man (1 Co 2:6-13). **Sweet as honey:** God’s revelation is sweet in that it brings peace of mind (See Ps 19:9,10; Ph 4:7; 1 Pt 3:21). **My stomach became bitter:** When one consumes the word of God for righteous living, it will bring the bitter persecution that is launched against the community of God (Jn 15:18; 2 Co 11:23ff; 2 Tm 3:12). Obedience to God means disobedience to the principles of Satan. For this reason, Satan will persecute the righteous. The messenger concludes by exhorting John to speak forth more concerning revelation that is to be given to him. He does this in chapters 11 – 22.

## Chapter 11 THE TWO WITNESSES

Verses 1-13 of this chapter conclude the sixth trumpet and the picture of the triumphant saints. Though under persecution, the community of God is determined by measurement, and thus identified and preserved for eternal glory.

**11:1 A measuring rod:** A reed was used for making measurements (See Ez 40:3-42; Zc 2:1). The people of God are those who have obediently responded to the gos-

pel. They are here measured according to their continual faithfulness to the commitment they made at the time they obeyed the gospel (See comments Rm 6:3-6). ***Measure the temple of God:*** The symbolism is from the Sinai tabernacle. In John's context, reference is to the church. With the word of God, John is to measure those of the church who have remained faithful to the Lamb. The 144,000 of 7:1-4 are here referred to as the tabernacle of God. In other contexts, the church is also referred to as the temple of God (1 Co 3:16,17; 2 Co 6:16; Ep 2:21; compare 1 Pt 2:5). It is the temple of hearts in which God dwells.

**11:2 But leave out the court:** Lukewarm and uncommitted members are left out of the measurement (See 3:14,15). Only those who have endured unto death are able to be measured for eternal dwelling (2:10). ***The holy city:*** Here is the spiritual Jerusalem, the holy Zion that is subjected to the persecution of the wicked (See 3:12; 20:9; Gl 4:26; Hb 12:22; compare Rv 21:2,10; 22:19). ***Tread ... under foot:*** The community of God would be subjected to the persecution of those who desire to make war against all righteousness. ***Forty-two months:*** This is the three and a half years that is half of seven, the number of perfection. This symbolizes the time of persecution that is represented by 1,260 days in 11:3 and 12:6, and the "time, times, and half a time" in 12:14. This is the same as the forty-two months in 13:5 (See also Dn 7:25; 12:7). The emphasis here is on a brief time of persecution that the saints must endure before they are delivered.

**11:3 The two witnesses:** The witnesses represent God's people who testify concerning the gospel (Compare 6:9; 12:11,17; 19:10; 20:4). They give their testimony of the truth during persecution, and eventually, are overcome by their persecutors. Some students believe that the witnesses here refer to the apostles who were the special witnesses of Jesus and His resurrection (Lk 27:49; Jn 15:26ff; At 5:32).

***They will prophesy:*** The witnesses proclaim the gospel. However, at the same time they realize the rejection of those who are hardened. Those who are hardened rise up in persecution against the witnesses (See vs 2).

**11:4-6 *The two olive trees:*** The totality of God's revelation comes forth from the witnesses. They proclaim the sanctity, or holiness of God's people of all time. ***Two lampstands:*** As representatives of the church, the witnesses stand as a light to all men (See Zc 4:2-6; compare Mt 5:16; Rm 14:4). ***Fire proceeds:*** Though the church can be persecuted to the point that members lose their lives, no one can fight against the truth of God's word (Mt 24:35; 1 Pt 1:25; compare Lk 18:6-8; Hb 4:12). Regardless of whether men accept the word of God, it remains the standard by which all men will eventually be judged (20:11-14; see comments Jn 12:48). ***Power:*** The power that is behind the witnesses originates from God. There is no supernatural power that exists apart from the existence of God. Throughout history this power has been manifested to man (See Ex 7:20ff; 1 Kg 17:1; 18:1-45). Through the revelation of this power, God gave witness to those who were His witnesses (Mk 16:17-20; Hb 2:3,4).

**11:7 *They have finished their testimony:*** It would be a time when the forces of wickedness would overcome those who preach the gospel. If reference here was to the apostles, then it was a time when they had completed their ministry. The truth would continue, but they would be martyred for the truth. If reference here was to the church, then the proclamation of the gospel would continue until the time God says that all things concerning the eternal plan of the gospel dispensation have been completed. ***The beast:*** Satan is pictured as the one who stands behind the beast. The beast originated out of that which is evil. Herein is the government persecution of the Roman Empire that is launched against the work of the apostles and church in

order to terminate the proclamation of the gospel (13:1ff).

**11:8 The great city:** See 14:8; 16:19; 17:4,18; 18:2,10-19. There is some discussion among Bible students centered on whether reference here is to Rome or Jerusalem. If the phrase “where also our Lord was crucified” is taken literally, then certainly Jerusalem is the city to which reference is made. If it is understood figuratively, then it could refer to Rome. Rome is the world power that has launched a vendetta against Christianity at the time John wrote. It is the evil power that crucifies the Lord by persecuting the body of Christ (See comments At 9:4,5). The great city could possibly refer to that influence which is greater than either Rome or Jerusalem. John may be referring to the world of wickedness that is the global scene for the crucifixion of Jesus and the persecution of His body. **Sodom:** This figure is taken from the city of wickedness in the Old Testament that was destroyed because of her wicked inhabitants (Dt 32:32; Is 1:9,10; 3:9; Jr 23:14; Ez 16:46,49). **Egypt:** The figure refers to tyranny against all that God is because Egypt was the place of great idolatry and the nation that held captive the people of God (See Ez 23:3-27).

**11:9,10** The bodies of the witnesses are not allowed to be buried in order that intense scorn be manifested against them and the message they preached. Those who have been convicted of their wicked ways by the proclamation of the truth here demonstrate the intensity of their hate toward those who are messengers of truth. **Those who dwell on the earth:** John seems to go beyond the picture of either Jerusalem or Rome. It is the nature of the unregenerate world to launch persecution against the proclaimers of that which convicts the hearts of the wicked (Compare 1 Kg 18:17; Jn 17:14; At 2:37; 24:24,25). Truth torments the wicked of the world, and thus, the wicked rejoice over the destruction of those who proclaim it.

**11:11,12 Life from God entered them:** The torment-

ers of truth supposedly killed those who were only vessels of truth. The vessels were martyred, but the truth they proclaimed was resurrected after a brief silence in order to go forth again to the hearts of willing audiences. A resurgence of the preaching of the gospel once again spread rapidly as in the early days of the establishment of the church. Men were amazed at the resilience of the message of the gospel and the tenacity of those who obeyed God rather than man (See At 4; compare Ez 37:5-14). **Come up here:** There will be a final time when the righteous will be called to dwell in the new heavens and earth. This will be the time of the final coming of Jesus (1 Th 4:12-17). We could correctly assume, therefore, that John has included here the encouragement of the persecuted saints by reminding them of their eventual call to heavenly dwelling. However, if one dies from persecution, he will immediately be at home with the Lord. He will be called home to rest in the presence of the Lord (2:10; see 2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). The call of many Christians will happen before the final coming. As they die at the hands of persecutors during times of persecution, as that in which John's readers were enduring, they would immediately go to be with the Lord.

**11:13,14 A tenth of the city fell:** This was the tithe of the Sinai law that was contributed to God by the people. And thus, a portion of the great city is taken in order to be dedicated to God (See Gn 28:22; Lv 27:32; Nm 18:21). **Seven thousand:** That which is dedicated to God is destroyed at the hands of the wicked. This numerical figure seems to indicate a complete amount that is symbolic of the determined judgment of God. **The rest were terrified:** The emotional impact of the judgment has shaken the remainder of the people into concluding that the judgment is from God. When God's final judgments are poured out upon the wicked, it is always too late for the wicked to recognize the work of God, and then repent for the purpose

of salvation. When God determines that judgment is to be brought upon the wicked in time, it is not a time for repentance, but a time for destruction (See Gn 18:16-33). The judgment of the wicked in time is deliverance for the saints of God.

## SOUNDING OF THE SEVENTH TRUMPET

In view of 10:7 and 11:13, this last woe and trumpet seems to bring the reader to the conclusion of God's work to bring the mystery of God into the world and manifest it through the cross. The sounding of this last trumpet seems to bring to a conclusion the redemptive work of God. He brings the Redeemer into the world, and then, pictures Him being received up to the throne in order to reign over all things.

**11:15 Great voices in heaven:** The loud voices, possibly the redeemed, make a proclamation. The proclamation is that the present kingdom reign of the Son has been exalted over all the kingdoms of this world (See comments Dn 7:13,14; Ep 1:20-22; Ph 2:8-11). We must keep in mind that Jesus is presently reigning over all things (12:10; see comments Mt 16:18,19; 1 Pt 3:22). He will reign over all things until the end of time when He will relinquish His kingship to the eternal reign of God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See comments 1 Co 15:24-28).

**11:16 The twenty-four elders:** These representatives of the church (1:6; 4:4) do what is natural in reference to the source of all power and creation. They worship God (4:11; 5:9,12,14). **On their thrones:** The saints are now reigning with Christ because they have committed themselves to His lordship (Lk 22:29,30; Rm 5:17).

**11:17-19 Have reigned:** The past tense of the verb used here indicates that what is stated has taken place. If the picture is of Jesus' reign after the ascension that is recorded in Acts 1, then this is a picture of hope for those

who have overcome in the persecution, for they will be rewarded (14:13). If the picture is of the end of time, then the final reward is in view. However, in view of the fact that at death one goes to be with Jesus (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23), the reward of the persecuted is immediate at the point of death (See comments Lk 16:19-31). **The dead:** If in-time judgment is discussed, then it is a time when the vengeance of God will be poured out on the spiritually dead. The in-time judgment of the wicked, therefore, would be a reward to the persecuted saints. They would be relieved of their persecutors. **The temple of God was opened:** The presence of God is manifested through the opening of the sanctuary (See 21:22). What was once concealed in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, is now revealed to all. God's presence that is revealed through the coming of His judgments is manifested to all because His judgments are unleashed upon the wicked.

This chapter begins the second series of visions of the book of Revelation. The visions of this section portray the effect on society that took place with the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. The visions also picture the church under persecution, but reveal the victory of the church at any time in history, as well as, the victory of the church at the end of time. Beginning with this chapter, and extending through the end of chapter 14, John first records the visions that picture the beginning of the gospel dispensation. He then records the effects of the gospel that continue throughout the gospel dispensation until the end of time. He seeks to encourage the saints by reminding them that Jesus has already given them the victory. They must stay in the battle. They already know the final score of the game. They win! Therefore, they must simply stay in the game. The persecuted must always understand that their victory is their faith.

## Chapter 12

### THE WOMAN AND THE DRAGON

**12:1** *There appeared great wonder in heaven:* The following battle between good and evil takes place in the spiritual world. It is not a physical battle since it is between the forces of evil and good. John writes from the viewpoint of heaven. In the vision, he is viewing the events from heaven's viewpoint. **A woman:** This is a reference to God's remnant of those Jews who were sons of Abraham by faith (vss 5,17; see Is 54:5,6; Mc 4:10; Rm 3:4; compare Gl 3:26; Ep 3:15). This remnant of the twelve tribes of Israel came into the body of Christ because their faith moved them to respond to Jesus as the Messiah of Israel. It was the seed of the woman (the church) that was persecuted after the church was established (See vs 17). **Clothed:** She was clothed with the heavenly glory that is characteristic of the sons of God (See comments Gl 3:26,27). **Twelve stars:** The heritage of the woman would be in the twelve tribes of Israel who were the manifestation of God's people before the coming of the Messiah. It was from the Jews that Jesus was born. It was also from the Jews that the first members of the church originated (At 2:41,47).

**12:2** *She cried out in labor:* Hatred of the Christ child began even before His birth (Mt 2:13-21). Righteous Jews by faith even endured suffering and persecution in hope of the birth of the Deliverer (Lk 2:25; Rm 8:22). Jesus said during His ministry, “*And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force*” (Mt 11:12).

**12:3** *A great red dragon:* Satan is here pictured behind the scenes (See verses 9,13; 13:2,4,11; 20:2). He is waiting with evil forces in order to destroy the Seed of woman that he knows will deliver him a crushing blow (Gn 3:15; see Is 24:1; Jn 12:31). Satan did not know the mystery of God before it was revealed. However, he knew that

something was up when the Deliverer was about to be born into the world (See comments 1 Pt 1:10-12). **Seven heads and ten horns:** In view of 17:10,12, this could be the full wisdom and power of worldly governments and institutions that Satan uses against the work of God through His people (See 13:1; 17:3,4,12,16). As will be explained in chapter 17, this could refer to the Caesars of the Roman Empire, which Empire is here beginning to rise up in persecution against the saints of God. **Seven diadems:** These are not crowns of victory (See 13:1; 19:12). They indicate royal power or rule.

**12:4 His tail drew a third of the stars:** Here is symbolized the power of Satan to deceive the nations (“stars”). It is within this environment of deceived national leaders and nations that the community of God must live until the end of time on earth. Because the inhabitants of the nations have been deceived by Satan, they often present an environment that is hostile to Christianity. **The dragon stood before the woman:** This is simply one more attempt by Satan to destroy the Seed of the seedline of woman that began in the garden of Eden (Gn 3:15). Satan had sought in the past to destroy the seedline. He now seeks to destroy the Seed in order that the foreplanned crushing blow by the Seed not be inflicted upon his control over the nations (See comments Ep 3:8-13).

**12:5 A male child:** Jesus is born into the world as the rod of iron (Ps 2:9). **Who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron:** It was prophesied that Jesus would be King of kings and Lord of Lords (Dn 7:13,14; Lk 1:31,32). Since His ascension to the right hand of God, He has exercised this reign over all things (Ep 1:20-22; Ph 2:8-11; 1 Tm 6:15). His kingdom reign was never meant to be an earthly kingdom (See comments Jn 18:36-38). His rule was always meant to be from heaven in the obedient hearts of men on earth who submit to the power of His word (See comments Lk 17:20,21; see Rv 2:27; Rm 1:16). **Caught up to God:**

Satan assumed he had gained victory over Jesus at the moment of His death on the cross. However, Jesus was resurrected from the dead. Satan thought he maintained control over all the world by His deception of the nations. However, Jesus ascended to the right hand of God to receive authority over all things (Ep 1:20-22; Hb 8:1).

**12:6 *The woman fled into the wilderness:*** Because of persecution, the sons of God by faith who brought forth the Messiah, now flee into the wilderness from persecution. However, though they are persecuted, God continues to care for His people. He providentially watches over those who are His (Mt 18:18-20; 23:20). The time in the wilderness is 1,260 days (11:2,3). It is a determined time set by God until His deliverance of His people from persecution.

**12:7-9 *There was a war in heaven:*** John writes from a heavenly viewpoint in explaining that spiritual warfare broke out in the heavenly realm. **Michael:** This angel's name means "who is like God" (See comments Jd 9; see Dn 10:13,21; 12:1). Michael is the archangel (1 Th 4:16; Jd 9). However, in reference to the birth of Jesus, we must keep in mind that Gabriel played a significant role in both announcing the birth of the male child Christ, as well as, in His protection from the wicked hands of Herod (See Lk 1 – 2). **The great dragon was cast out:** He was cast down in the spiritual realm (vs 10). Before Jesus came into this world, Satan controlled the world by the power of his deception. However, beginning with the ministry of Jesus, Jesus' redemptive words and works have cast Satan and his forces down from their control over all humanity of the world (See 20:1-6; Mt 12:29; Lk 10:18; 11:21ff; Jn 12:31; 16:11). Those who hear and believe the gospel are not under the deceptive control of Satan. When Jesus was resurrected from the dead, He signaled the resurrection of all men at the end of time (Jn 5:28,29). When Jesus ascended to the right hand of God, He became King and head over

all things for the sake of the church (Ep 1:20-22). Every aspect of Jesus' redemptive work was against Satan in order to cast him down. John's visions show that Satan was defeated on earth by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Satan's power in the heavenly realm was defeated by Jesus' ascension to the right hand of the Father to receive kingdom reign over all things. This vision actually symbolizes a conflict that raged since the garden of Eden but came to its climax with the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The conflict simply carries on with Satan's attack against the spiritual seedline of the Lamb, that is, the church. Satan lost the battle against the Seed at Calvary and the garden tomb. He now thinks he can win the battle against the sons of the kingdom of the Seed.

**12:10 Now the salvation ... the kingdom ... have come:**

The eternal plan of redemption was accomplished on the cross and in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (See comments Ep 1:3-14; 3:1-11). The predestined redemption through the cross and resurrection have affected the lives of men through the preaching of the gospel to all nations (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15). Men can now free-morally choose to allow the kingdom reign of Jesus to come into their hearts (See comments Mt 6:9,10; Lk 17:20,21). They have been delivered from the fear of physical death (Hb 2:14,15). **Cast down:** When men choose to allow the will of the Father to be done on earth in their hearts as it is done in heaven, Satan is cast down. Jesus' ministry began the defeat of Satan (Jn 12:31). The final blow came with the redemption of the cross and victory of the resurrection (See 1 Co 15:1-4,56; Cl 2:15; Hb 2:14). What subsequently followed in Acts 2 was the first official announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus (At 2:29-36). When men and women submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus, His reign was established in the hearts of men (See 1:9; 11:15; Dn 2:44; 7:13,14; Mt 16:18,19; Cl 1:13).

**12:11 Overcame him by the blood ... by the word:**

The saints had power over the results of their sins by the power of the cleansing blood of Jesus (7:14; At 20:28; see comments 1 Jn 1:7). They had power over the kingdom of darkness by the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16) and the word of God that they preached (1:9; 6:9; Hb 4:12). They were willing to suffer unto death because they knew that death was only a transition into a better realm (2:10; See At 22:4; Ph 1:23; Hb 2:14,15).

**12:12 Has a short time:** In comparison to eternity, the time Satan has before being cast into the torment of hell is short (Mt 25:41). It brings the saints comfort to know that there will be an eventual end of Satan. Christians know that they will eventually enter into an environment that will be free from the presence of Satan and his deceived followers (See 3:11; 10:6; Rm 9:28; 1 Co 7:29; compare Rv 6:11; 20:3,7). However, because Satan knows that his time is limited, he unleashes all his powers against the unregenerate world (“the earth”) and the masses of humanity (“the sea”). It is his goal to destroy the work of the Seed by taking as many of the inhabitants of the world as possible into his realm of deception, and eventually, into his own eternal destiny of a fiery hell (Mt 25:41).

**12:13** When Satan was defeated by Michael at the birth of the male Child (vss 7-9), he turned his energy to incite persecution against the spiritual heritage of the woman. He thus launched his attack against the saints of God who were to live after the establishment of the kingdom reign of the Christ (Jn 15:20; At 8:4). All who determined to serve the King of kings made themselves the enemies of Satan.

**12:14 Fly into the wilderness:** Wings signify God’s deliverance of His servants (See Ex 19:4; Dt 32:3,11; Ps 36:7; Is 40:31). He providentially protects His people from those who would seek to destroy His work through them. **A time and times and half a time:** The number three and a

half is one half of seven which is the number that represents God's perfection and completion of eternal redemption. Three and a half, therefore, symbolizes a limited time of turmoil and trouble for those who suffer as a result of those who work against God's cause. This is the same period of time as the forty-two months and 1,260 days (See 11:2,3; compare Dn 7:25; 12:7). Reference here could be to the time when the church was under the persecution of Judaism and the Roman Empire. Reference could also be generic in the sense of having application to the time until the end of time. It will be at the end of all things that the true instigator of persecution, that is, Satan, will finally be destroyed in the lake of fire (Mt 25:41). However, in the context of John's message, reference must be primarily to his audience who would suffer the intensity of Roman State persecution.

**12:15,16 Water ... like a flood:** Satan uses every form of destructive force—lies, false philosophies, false religions, malicious slander, wicked governments—against the church in an effort to destroy her (Ps 69:15; 90:5; 11:22; Is 59:19; Jr 46:7; Dn 9:26; see Js 3:14,15; 4:1ff). The minds of the unregenerate inhabitants of the world soaked up the lies and falsehoods of Satan. As dry riverbeds, the willingness of men to be deceived by the lies of Satan is unending. However, because the church is not of the world, she can know that those things that the world believes are certainly not the truth of God. And thus, she shuns the empty philosophies of the world and does not believe such simply because those of the body love the truth (See 2 Th 2:10-12). The church derives truth from God, not deceptions of the world.

**12:17 Rest of her seed:** Satan launched his war against those who were the Israel by faith in order to destroy the birth of the Seed of woman. But he failed. He then turned his attack against the heritage of the Israel by faith (the

church) in order to take his rage out on the saints of God. John now moves us into this rage of Satan against the saints of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Satan raises up religious and state persecution in order to destroy the church. However, as John will reveal to us, Satan can never win against the saints of God. God takes Satan's work and turns it against him.

## **Chapter 13**

### **THE SEA BEAST**

Though the initial persecutor of the church was institutional Judaism, the primary persecutor of the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was the Roman Empire. In the time after A.D. 70, Rome made Christianity an illegal religion, viewing it as an insurrection against Rome. When the Roman emperors deified themselves, and subsequently demanded to be referred to as lord, they imposed the submission of the subjects of the Empire to their lordship. When Christians would not confess Caesar as lord, they were thus considered insurrectionists to the Empire. For a century and a half, Christians were tortured and killed as insurrectionists. This government opposition to the church had its beginnings in the insane behavior of Nero who persecuted both Jews and Christians in the middle 60s. This persecution, though centered in Rome, eventually set the stage for a government policy of opposition against Christianity in the years of Domitian. This opposition would periodically arise in the behavior of Roman Caesars against Christianity well into the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. However, the severest time of this persecution occurred during the reign of Domitian (81-96). Only when Constantine became Emperor of Rome did the dark age of State persecution pass. The official lifting of the persecution occurred by the issuing of the Edict of Toleration in 311, and then the Edict of Milan in 313.

Until the relentless persecution ceased, however, the church went through a time of turmoil that has been unpar-

alleled throughout history. Christians have suffered persecution in hostile environments. However, the persecution that was carried out by the Roman State was the persecution of a world empire that was specifically aimed against the church in its infancy. For this reason, God saw it necessary to write this special revelation in order to comfort the church throughout these years of great testing. Regardless of the conflict between good and evil, God wanted Christians to know that they would always emerge victorious over any persecution Satan might launch against them. Though Christians in the times of persecution may lose their lives, the church itself would continue to exist throughout history until Jesus comes.

Chapter 12 began the second major division of the series of visions to encourage the church. The vision of chapter 12 began with a pictorial account of the birth of Jesus and concluded with the dragon launching persecution against the church. In 12:17 the dragon became enraged with the woman (God's people who brought forth the Christ). He then launched war against the heritage of the woman. When the vision comes to chapter 13, the two beasts of Roman government and imperial religion now arise out of humanity through the working of Satan to make war against the church.

The first major persecutor of the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was Judaism. Opposition toward the "Man Child" (Jesus), the woman (God's people of the Old Testament), and the woman's offspring (God's people of the New Testament), was carried out through Satan's apostate Judaism. However, in A.D. 70 this persecuting force was essentially eliminated by the destruction of national Israel by the Roman Empire. After the demise of this persecuting force, however, a second and more terrible persecutor arose. This was the governmental power of the Roman Empire. In chapter 13 of Revelation, the inspired John pictures this perse-

cutor as two beasts that emerge from the populations of humanity. The sea beast is the legislative strength of the Roman Empire that is launched against the church. The land beast is Roman imperial religion that is upheld by the legislative power of the sea beast. Roman religion is forced upon all citizens of the Empire in order to stamp out any opposing insurrections against Rome. The church did not submit to such religious tyranny, and thus, Rome launched persecution against Christians whom she considered to be insurrectionists against the authority of the Roman Empire to impose religion upon its subjects.

It is in the context of Revelation 13 that John pinpoints the persecution of the church by a state government. It is possible that John received this vision during the time Vespasian was Caesar of Rome. Vespasian is the “one who is” of chapter 17:10. Nero (54-68) led a personal vendetta against Christians during his reign in the 60’s. This persecution of Christians was only a prelude to what was to come under the reign of Domitian. When Domitian came to power in A.D. 81, he instituted State persecution of the church by making Christianity an illegal religion. Those who would not give total allegiance to Rome were tried on charges of treason. Submission to Rome meant submission to Caesar as lord. Those who would not confess Caesar as lord, therefore, were considered insurrectionist rebels by the Roman State. The persecution led by Nero was nothing in comparison to that which was unleashed by Domitian to turn the Roman State against Christianity.

The vision of this chapter is given to John in order to prepare the church for the coming decades of persecution. The message of the vision is to assure the church throughout the Roman Empire that the persecution was coming. However, Rome would eventually come to an end. It would end when the instrument used by Satan—ungodly Roman Caesars who use Roman government to satisfy their egos—

was taken out of the way. The church, therefore, must be patient and endure, though their faithfulness will mean the death of many Christians (2:10).

**13:1 A beast rising up out of the sea:** The sea beast (15:2; 16:13)—Rome's legislative power—is here set against the church. Rome originated from the sea which represents the restless and ever changing populations of humanity (See Is 57:20ff; Jr 49:23). World governments arise out of conflict among world population groups. Thus humanity is as a turbulent sea that continually gives birth to different governmental powers throughout the ages (See 16:3; 20:13; 21:1). **Seven heads:** The sea beast had the seven heads of great control. Rome was seated upon seven hills. John possibly took his imagery from this geographical position of the city in order to convey the meaning that the rulers of Roman government are sick with pompous power. **Ten horns:** The sea beast has ten horns, or ten kings that exercise complete governmental power throughout its designated territory (See 12:3; 17:3). **Ten crowns:** It had ten crowns of complete authority that could be possessed by an earthly government. John's vision refers to the fourth world kingdom of Daniel's recorded visions of Daniel 2 and 7. Daniel interpreted in Daniel 2 Nebuchadnezzar's vision of a great image. The vision was of four kingdoms. The fourth was Rome. It was in the days of this kingdom that had feet part of iron and clay, that God set up the kingdom reign of the Son (Dn 2:44). The church to which John was writing, therefore, existed in the days of the Roman kings. Daniel's personal vision of Daniel 7 was also of the four world kingdoms. Daniel's vision portrayed the rise of the Roman Empire. In the vision of Daniel 7, Rome was pictured as the beast that was "dreadful and terrible" (Dn 7:7). It was the kingdom that devoured and broke into pieces other kingdoms. However, the kingdom glory of the previous three kingdoms was exemplified

in the totalitarian rule of Rome. Daniel pictured the stirring of the sea (the populations of the world) as the cause that produced the four governmental powers (Dn 7:2). The origin of all government is from the people of the world. God has ordained that government exist to prevent anarchy (Rm 13). However, men devise all types of government. The fourth governmental power of the world of Daniel's vision unleashed its strength against the people of God. This government had a blasphemous name. It was known to speak great things against those who represent God. This is the same beast of 17:3 that is identified with "names of blasphemy." The visions of chapters 13 and 17, therefore, have their background in the prophecy of Daniel 7. In view of this, the vision of Revelation 13 refers to the Roman Empire. For this reason, the interpretation of chapters 13 and 17 must be consistent with the fulfillment of Daniel 7 which foretold events that would transpire during the days of the Roman kings. There are at least five historical and interpretive thoughts that one must consider in order to interpret chapters 13 and 17.

**1. Rome's totalitarian influence over the territory it controlled:** In 17:9-12 the "heads" and "horns" refer to kings and their reigning control. Rome was seated on seven hills. John may have been referring to this geographical fact in order to symbolize the powerful control that radiated from this seat of the Empire. Rome was the seat from which the "horns" exercised their power. Thus, the symbol of "heads" and "horns" could be understood in this way in Daniel 7, Revelation 13 and 17.

**2. God's viewpoint of Rome's history:** God looks at the beast of the Roman Empire from a "collective time." His omnipresence in eternity allows Him the privilege of viewing history from beginning to end. In other words, God sees the whole of the time of the kingdom as one point in time. He sees time instantaneously. It would be like

God's knowledge of an entire book while we have to read the book page by page in order to understand the book and come to the final chapter. Through His omniscience, God knows the conclusion and every detail of the book. However, because we are limited to living out time one page at a time, we can read only one page at a time until the entire book is completed at the end of time. The book of Revelation gives us a panoramic view from heaven of the kings of Rome as they lived out history. However, God's view of Rome's history is from the perspective of knowing all the book of Roman history from beginning to end. What we see as unfolding in the early years of the Roman Empire, God has already viewed through His foreknowledge of all things. He thus gives us a view of the kings of this kingdom from such a view point. It is important to understand this "view" of the Roman Caesars in order to understand Revelation 17 as it relates to the history of Roman Caesars in chapters 13 and 17.

**3. Rise and fall of Roman Caesars:** As stated before, the "heads" of Revelation 17 possibly find their symbolism in the seven hills upon which the city of Rome was situated (17:10). Therefore, the figure is probably a reference to the power that was manifested by the Caesars (kings) from the seat of Roman government. In Daniel's vision, the eleventh horn ("king") "*will subdue three kings*" (Dn 7:24). In the vision of Revelation 17, three of the kings are simply ignored (17:10,11). They are ignored because they are of no significance to Rome's history or persecution of the church. What John is doing is using Daniel 7 as the prophetic historical background for counting the kings (Caesars) of Rome. He is ignoring the kings that have no significance in the persecution of the church because they were Caesars that assumed the throne out of selfish ambition and plots of murder. In view of the preceding thoughts, therefore, consider the Caesars of the beast (kingdom) that

were “dreadful and terrible” (Dn 7:7) as they relate to the early church. The following are the Caesars of Rome during the time when the church began in the 1<sup>st</sup> century to the time John recorded the visions of Revelation:

**Augustus** (27 B.C. - A.D. 14), **Tiberius** (A.D. 14-37), **Caligula** (A.D. 37-41), **Claudius** (A.D. 41-54), **Nero** (A.D. 54-68), [Galba (A.D. 68), Otho (A.D. 69), Vitellius (A.D. 69)], **Vespasian** (A.D. 69-79), **Titus** (A.D. 79-81), **Domitian** (A.D. 81-96)

These were not all of the Roman Caesars that reigned throughout the history of the Roman Empire. However, these were those Caesars that affected the beginning of the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> century and the evangelism of the early Christians. When studying the New Testament, it is good to keep in mind those Caesars who were reigning at the time the early Christians were preaching throughout the Roman world. When considering the Caesars that reigned during the time of the beginning of the church, one wonders why Daniel said that Galba, Otho and Vitellius were “subdued,” whereas this statement is not made in reference to the other kings. The reason may lie in the historical fact that these three Caesars never really exercised any power or influence during the two years of civil war when they rose and fell as Caesars. In a space of two years these three became Caesar and were quickly removed. Galba came to power by the sword. However, he enraged all classes of citizens in Rome. After being in power for only six months, the historian Seutonius says that Otho had him murdered by a group of assassins. Otho then seized power as Caesar. However, Otho came into conflict with Vitellius. After Vitellius defeated Otho in battle, Otho committed suicide. He had ruled only ninety-five days. The soldiers of Vitellius revolted against him as a result of his cruelty. After less

than a year in control of Rome, he was murdered by Vespasian's guard. His body was thrown into the Tiber River. Because these three kings played no significant part in the history of the Empire, they were ignored as "subdued" (or, "uprooted" in some translations). Daniel and John did not consider them as Caesars of Rome.

**4. The date of Revelation:** If the preceding background history is accepted, then the visions of Revelation would have occurred during the reign of Vespasian (69-79). While John was experiencing the visions—not necessarily the writing of the book—"one [king] is" (17:10). Five previous kings had fallen (17:10). Those who had fallen would be Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero. Since John ignored the three who were "subdued" (Galba, Otho and Vitellius), the one who is would be Vespasian. Thus, the revelations to John would have occurred during the reign of Vespasian, and probably before A.D. 70. This date of the visions would harmonize with the historical context of the visions. John speaks of the great persecution that was yet to come. "*The beast that ascends out of the abyss will make war against them [the saints]*" (Rv 11:7). The tense of the verb here is future in reference to the time the saints lived. The saints to whom John wrote were yet to endure a great persecution. The same future tense is again found in Revelation 17:8 in reference to the beast that "*will ascend out of the abyss and go to destruction....*"

**5. The persecutions of Nero and Domitian:** It is true that Nero launched a limited persecution against Christians. However, this persecution was not an official legislative edict of the Roman government. In fact, there is no evidence that this persecution spread outside the area of Rome to the rest of the Empire. Imperial Roman persecution against the church would come later. Vespasian and Titus, as far as historical records are concerned, were indifferent

to Christianity. However, Domitian unleashed an official Roman policy against Christians. He demanded of all Roman citizens their confession of him as “god.” Those who would not so recognize the “deity of Caesar” were viewed as insubordinate to Roman rule. In the Roman Empire, insubordination was equal to insurrection. Thus, capital punishment was handed down to any who would not submit to “Caesar as lord.” Since Christians would not confess “Caesar as lord,” such meant that they would suffer the punishment of the Roman State that was carried out against all insurrectionists. Such meant capital punishment for many Christians during the reign of Domitian.

**13:2 Leopard ... bear ... lion:** In Daniel 7, the lion of Daniel’s vision represented the Babylonian kingdom, the bear, the Medo-Persians, and the leopard, the Greeks. Their collective power and glory is now resurrected in the fierceness of the fourth beast, the Roman government. In Daniel’s vision, the “dominion” of the former three kingdoms was terminated (Dn 7:12). However, *“their lives were prolonged for a season and a time”* (Dn 7:12). In other words, the power that is characteristic of governmental rule was continued in the existence of the fourth beast, the Roman kingdom. However, their “lives” were prolonged only for a short season. The wickedness of the three former kingdoms was added to the wickedness of the fourth (Rome). Their punishment would be fulfilled in the destruction of the fourth. Therefore, when God’s judgment came upon the fourth, it also symbolically fell upon the first three, Babylonia, Medo-Persia and Greece. Satan is thus working behind the scenes to persecute the offspring of the woman (the church) with the totality of Rome’s government. Satan could not directly overthrow the power of God in the heavenly realm (12:9), therefore, he “resurrected” his work in an ungodly king his work to lead a pagan government to carry out his mission. Satan is the “*god of this*

*age*" (2 Co 4:4) and the prince of the world (Jn 12:31). He is the one who has blinded the eyes of the unbelieving in order to destroy the work of God through the church.

**13:3** Nero launched the first major persecution of the church in the latter part of his reign (54-68). He was Caesar of Rome when Paul was beheaded around A.D. 67.

**Mortally wounded:** When Nero committed suicide in A.D. 68, his personal vendetta against Christians ceased. Thus the wave of persecution that swept through Rome was wounded. However, the persecution of the church later went from the personal onslaught of one wicked Caesar to the entire legislative government of Rome through the leadership of Domitian. A statement that was made by the historian Eusebius (260-340) in his *Ecclesiastical History* (Book 3, Para. 17) is very significant concerning this transition of persecution. Eusebius wrote,

He [Domitian] finally showed himself the successor of Nero's campaign of hostility to God. He was the second to promote persecution against us, though his father, Vespasian, had planned no evil against us. With this agrees Tertullian, who said, "A long time after, Domitian, a limb of the bloody Nero, makes some like attempts against the Christians ...."

The historical significance of Eusebius' statement helps us understand how the "deadly wound" of the beast was healed. Though Nero did not launch an official government persecution against Christianity, the severity of his persecution would be resurrected and increased by a later Caesar. Nero's persecution only gave birth to what would later become an official policy of the Roman Empire. This official policy would be born ("resurrected") by Domitian who would launch legislative persecution against Christianity that would be considered an illegal religion. Domitian would resurrect the behavior of Nero in his persecution of Chris-

tians. Vespasian and Titus would be indifferent to Christianity. Therefore, we go from the personal persecution of Nero to the resurrected persecution of a governmental force that was led by Domitian. ***All the world was amazed:*** “All the world” is a limited figure referring to the world of the Roman Empire. The phrase is so interpreted in passages as Luke 2:1 when a decree went out from Augustus that “all the world” of the Roman Empire be registered. This certainly did not include the entire physical world. Only those who were in the jurisdiction of Rome’s control were to register. The same meaning is in the context of Revelation 13. Everyone in the Roman Empire marveled at the strength and control of Rome in its power over people.

**13:4 *They worshiped the dragon:*** The world of unbelievers in the Roman Empire worshiped Satan in their reverence of Rome. When Domitian became Caesar, Roman imperial religion was propagated throughout the Empire through Caesar worship. Domitian claimed to be deity. The test for allegiance to Rome became one’s submission to “Caesar as lord.” Those who would not confess Caesar as lord, were accused of insurrection. Such insurrection carried with it the death penalty, and thus, came the great persecution against Christians who would not confess Caesar as lord. Worship of a man as a god was also given to Herod. The unbelieving world said of Herod, “*The voice of a god and not of a man*” (At 12:22). Herod was subsequently eaten by worms as a judgment by God. Those on earth who would profess to be gods, will certainly find their destiny in the place where the “worm does not die” (Mk 9:44-48).

**13:5,6 *Speaking great things and blasphemies:*** Rome would set her course against the church. Eventually, Caesars would exalt themselves to the status of god. They would be as “*a mouth that spoke very great things*” against the church (See Dn 7:8,20). Daniel prophesied of Rome, “*And*

*the king will do according to his own will. And he will exalt himself and magnify himself above every god, and will speak marvelous things against the God of gods and will prosper until the indignation is accomplished. For what is determined will be done”* (Dn 11:36). **War forty-two months:** The governmental authority that is given to the beast would continue for forty-two months. This was the time when the horn of Rome “*made war with the saints and prevailed against them*” (Dn 7:21). Domitian’s arrogance as deity would lead him to “*speak great words against the Most High*” (Dn 7:25). He “*will wear down the saints of the Most High. And he will intend to change times and law. And they will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time*” (Dn 7:25). The “time, times and half a time” is the same as the forty-two months (11:2). This is a specific time, but limited in duration. Thus, there would be a specific time of persecution, but the persecution would end. Though Rome would “*tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months,*” God would not allow the persecution to continue indefinitely. **His tabernacle:** The tabernacle of God is the church (See 11:1,2). Because the church receives her origin and authority for existence from heaven (Mt 16:18), blasphemous words that are spoken against her are spoken against God (See At 9:4,5).

**13:7 Given to him to make war with the saints:** The deceived citizens of the Roman Empire (vs 14) are led by the pompous behavior of Domitian to launch full persecution (“war”) against the church. The duration of the persecution is limited (vs 5). Daniel had prophesied, “*I beheld, and the same horn made war with the saints and prevailed against them*” (Dn 7:21). John’s vision of chapter 11 revealed, “... *the beast that ascends out of the abyss will make war against them, overcome them, and kill them*” (11:7). Any who would persecute the church find their origin in the kingdom of darkness. **Given:** Keep in mind that this

authority to make war against the church was “granted to him.” Satan would be the immediate source of such wicked behavior. However, God allows Satan to go about as a roaring lion among the nations in order to devour the world of unbelievers (1 Pt 5:8). Satan is allowed by God to have his way with wicked governments. God is not responsible for the wicked behavior of unbelieving governments whose dignitaries choose wickedness. It is Satan working in the individuals of government. God has ordained that government exist in this world (Rm 13:1-3). However, He allows Satan to have his way with government officials who reject the will of God.

**13:8 All who dwell on the earth will worship him:** All who are under the jurisdiction of the Roman State gave their reverential allegiance to Caesar and the Roman State. Those who believe that reference here is to the entire literal earth, miss the hyperbole of the metaphor. John wants us to understand that in view of the fact that all the citizens of the Roman Empire paid homage to Caesar and Rome, it would be very difficult for believers not to do the same. It would appear that everyone has been deceived by the beast and the false prophet of Roman government and religion. John says that those who have been so deceived are not written in the book of life (20:12). And the end result of those who are not written in the book of life will be eternal destruction (20:12-14; Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9). Herein is the comfort of the saints. The saints are comforted in knowing that God has all things under control, which control extends to those who persecute them. **The Lamb slain from the creation of the world:** The Lamb (Jesus) was foreordained before creation to be crucified for the sins of man (See Is 53). One can only marvel at the love of Jesus for His creation because of His foreknowledge of the cross even before the incarnation. Those who choose to submit to the Lamb, and thus, be cleansed by the blood of Jesus, are writ-

ten in the book of life. God foreordained that the “recorded saints” (the church) would be destined to eternal salvation (Ep 1:4-11). The church is predestined to eternal glory. Those who free-morally choose to be a part of the church by obedience to the gospel are destined to heaven (See comments Rm 8:28-30). One is thus destined to heaven when he makes a free-moral choice to become a part of the group that is destined to heaven.

**13:9,10 Will go into captivity:** John now demands that the readers give special attention to what he is saying (See 2:7,11,17, Mt 11:15). The persecutors would take saints into captivity. However, there is here a turn of events in the spiritual war against the saints. The forty-two months (time, times and half a time) are now pictured to come to a close. The captors themselves will now be led into divine captivity. This is reminiscent of the destiny of the disobedient angels who, because of their rebellion against God, are *“reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day”* (Jd 6; See 2 Pt 2:4). And so Domitian and his host of persecutors are reserved today in the tormenting captivity of the hadean world in order to be condemned to Gehenna in the last day. They will eventually go away into the punishment and destruction of Gehenna (Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:9). **The patience and the faith of the saints:** The second death is reserved for those who would launch carnal persecution against the city of God, the church. When Christians know this, then they will remain patient under persecution (14:12). They can maintain their faith in God who will eventually deliver them (See Hb 6:12). The principle is stated by the Hebrew writer, *“But we are not of those who draw back to destruction, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul”* (Hb 10:39). John’s statement in verse 10 is reassurance to the persecuted church that she has victory over the Roman State by faith in Jesus (1 Jn 5:4). Christians must therefore remain faithful (2:10).

They must remain faithful to their calling in view of the fact that they will receive a reward for their faithfulness to the Lord in times of persecution. They must not give in to the temptations of Satan (See 1 Co 10:13).

## THE LAND BEAST

**13:11 *I saw another beast:*** Here is imperial religion, or emperor worship, that forces upon all Roman citizens the worship of Caesar. This is the “false prophet” of 16:13; 19:20 and 20:10. ***Out of the earth:*** This religion rises out of the earth, for it is of human origin. It is a religion created after the desires of men. ***Two horns like a lamb:*** This religion has the deceptive appearance of an innocent lamb. However, since the book of Revelation was originally directed to churches in Asia, John possibly has in mind a figure of two powers in the Asian province that worked against the church. First, by Roman law the Roman pro-consul of the area enforced Caesar worship on all citizens. Second, a religious commune was established in the area to promote the cult of emperor worship. In the following verse, John continues an explanation of what this religious cult did.

**13:12 *Exercises all the power of the first beast:*** Roman religion was forced upon the populace by the authority of the Roman government. Domitian claimed deity. Submission to him as lord signified loyalty to Rome. Those who did not submit were viewed as insubordinate to the Empire. In the theocratic politics of the Roman Empire at this time in history—the time of Domitian’s reign—government and religion were entangled together into a powerful cult that trampled on any who would resist total submission.

**13:13,14 *He performs great wonders:*** What the Roman religious commune sought to do reminds us of Jesus’ warning, “*Be not deceived*” (Mt 24:4,24). John later says

that these religionists go out “*performing signs*” (16:14). This is the false prophet “*who performed signs in his [the beast’s] presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image*” (19:20). But these are those who are deceived, and who deceive (2 Tm 3:3). They worked great wonders that were false (2 Th 2:9). If the wonders were actually miraculous, then those who followed the false emperor worship would not be deceived by believing the wonders. They would have been believing that which was true. ***Makes fire come down from heaven:*** Only those who were deceived affirmed that fire came down out of heaven. “Fire coming down out of heaven” was a miraculous sign of the presence of God in the Old Testament (See Gn 15:17; Lv 9:24; Jg 13:20; 1 Kg 18). But here John uses the symbol, not to speak of something Roman religious leaders actually performed, but to show the strength of their deceptive power.

***He deceives:*** God did not allow Satan to work miracles through false priests of Caesar worship in order to lead Christians to submit to the beast. We do not serve a God who would cast such a stumbling block before the saints at a time when they were under severe persecution, and thus, were so vulnerable. God does not allow Satan to have authority over the supernatural to the extent of being able to work miracles before men in order to confuse those who believe (See comments Mk 16:14-20; At 8:1-25).

***13:15 It was given to him to give:*** God allowed the deceptions by not countering with true fire from heaven (Compare 2 Th 2:10-12). The deceptive works were not true for such would have nullified all the miraculous work the Holy Spirit had done through the early church in order to confirm the word of God’s early messengers (Mk 16:20; Hb 2:3,4). Roman religionists set up busts (images) of Caesar throughout the Empire in order to promote Caesar worship. These images were the symbol of Rome’s false

religion. Those who would not submit to Domitian's image were subject to the penalty of death. The fact that John is not talking about real miracles in verses 13-15 is seen in the imagery of this verse. ***Give breath to the image:*** The image certainly did not become a living thing and literally begin to speak as a man. Naïve interpreters who believe that Roman religionists actually worked miracles are inconsistent if they do not continue the literality of their interpretation of verses 13 and 14 into verse 15. If real miracles are indicated in verses 13 and 14, then certainly the same would be true of verse 15. But who wants to take the position that these images of Caesar actually began to speak like men? John's point with the "speaking image" figure is to show the intensity of belief in the false religion of those who refused to worship the one true God. However, many Jews and Christians did succumb to confessing Caesar as lord in the heat of persecution. They were intimidated by the mass belief of those who affirmed that Roman religionists were working miracles of some god. They thus confessed Caesar as deity. Some of those faithful Christians who did not reverence "lord Caesar" as deity were persecuted unto death. However, the angel warned in 14:9,10 that if any would succumb to the intimidation of the beast, he would drink of the wrath of God (See 16:2; 19:20; 20:4). Christians, therefore, should be very careful when they start believing that false religionists can work real miracles. We must remember that God would not allow Satan to work miracles through false religions in order to entice Christians to believe false teachings (See comments 2 Th 2:10-12).

***13:16,17 He causes all ... to receive a mark:*** Rome commissioned that all citizens give both political and religious allegiance to the State. In this sense, Rome became to some extent a theocratic system. At least from the viewpoint of the Roman priests, one had to submit to the reli-

gious laws in order to be true to Rome itself. The “mark” refers to those who would direct worship toward Rome (14:9; see 20:4). The mark, or identification, was both psychological (on “their foreheads”) and physical (“on their hands”). Domitian wanted total allegiance. He wanted the minds of the people. He also wanted an outward manifestation of allegiance. If one would not submit to confessing Caesar as lord, then he or she was subject to the fury of the Roman government. ***That no one may buy or sell:*** There was a boycott against those who would not give their allegiance to Rome. They would not be able to carry on the normal work of life in buying and selling goods.

**13:18 *The number of the beast:*** John knows that the number referring to the beast can be understood by the immediate readers. As verse 10 stated the end of the “sea beast” (Roman government), so verse 18 signals the end of the “land beast” (imperial religion). John identifies the beast by the number of man. It is not the number of a man. The indefinite article “a” does not need to be placed in the text before the word “man.” It is simply the “number of man.” The same word structure is used in 21:17 in reference to the measuring of the holy city “*according to the measure of man.*” The indefinite article here does not signify a specific man. It means only that the calculation was according to man’s numbering rules. ***His number is six hundred and sixty-six:*** The most consistent interpretation is to maintain the figurative significance of numbers as John uses them throughout the visions. A Hebrew method of communication through numbers was to use the number of letters in words or numbers themselves to signify something other than the numbers. This is called a gematria. Therefore, as a gematria, the number six was used by the Jews to signify that which was imperfect or incomplete. Six is also the number that signifies that which is earthly. The three sixes used together in a gematria in this text would possibly indi-

cate that which is “triple” imperfect or incomplete. It is that which originates “out of the earth,” but tries to claim heavenly origin. It is found to be fake and incomplete. And so it is with Caesar worship and the whole system of Roman religion. Roman government originated from the populations of the world. Roman emperor worship originated from arrogant Caesars who claimed to be deity. Both government and religion were earthly and totally insufficient. When it came to religion, they had insufficient truth and were incomplete in being acceptable to God. In reference to government, all governments change throughout history. No nation exists throughout history. Such would be the case with Rome. Rome would come to an end.

## Chapter 14

### THE LAMB AND THE SAINTS

In the previous chapter, John portrayed the overthrow of the persecutors of the saints. In this chapter he discusses the glorious victory of the saints over the beast and false prophet who have persecuted them. John also reveals the horrible fate of those who were so arrogant as to set themselves against the flock of God. The vision of this chapter is divided into three sections. The three sections begin with the phrase “I looked” (vs 1), “I saw” (vs 6), and “I looked” (vs 14).

**14:1 *The Lamb stood on Mount Zion:*** Jesus is pictured standing with those who are His. The symbol of Mount Zion is from the Old Testament where the name referred to Jerusalem (2 Sm 5:7; 1 Ch 11:5; Ps 149:1,2; Is 28:16; Zc 9:9; Ml 4:1-6). Here reference is to the heavenly Zion (vss 2,13; 21:2; Ps 125:1; Hb 12:22-24). ***One hundred and forty-four thousand:*** This is the 144,000 of 7:4 who compose the whole community of God on earth. In one sense these who are redeemed have reached heavenly Zion as a result of coming to the sanctuary of the Lamb.

The reality of their blessings in Christ, however, will not be fully realized until they have come into the new heavens and earth that are yet to come. ***His Father's name:*** In 13:16 there were those who had submitted to the beast, and thus, they had his name written on their right hands. But these here are identified by the disposition and nature of the Father that they manifested, and thus, are identified to be with the Lamb (3:12; 7:3; 22:4; see Ph 2:5).

**14:2-5 Sound ... as the sound of many waters:** This is a powerful voice that thunders and demands the attention of all (See 1:15; 6:1; 19:6). ***Harpers harping:*** The metaphor emphasizes the sound of the voice. The voice had the melodious appeal of the sound that is made by a harp (See 5:8). ***A new song:*** They sang the song of victory because they had overcome all enemies by the power of the Lamb (See 5:9). ***No one could learn:*** It was a song that was sung only by those who were of the nature of the Lamb. The song, therefore, could originate only out of the hearts of those who had submitted to the kingship of the Lamb. ***The ones who were not defiled:*** Those who had given themselves in submission to the Lamb had not compromised themselves with the worship of idols. They had not committed spiritual adultery (See 2:20; 3:4; 17:5,6; 2 Ch 21:11; Jr 3:9; 2 Co 11:2; Js 4:4; 1 Jn 5:21). ***Firstfruits to God and to the Lamb:*** As the best at the beginning of the harvest was offered to God in the Old Testament, so here the best of humanity is offered to God. These are those who have given themselves in submission to the will of God (Js 1:18; 1 Pt 5:5,6; compare Hb 12:23). ***They are without fault:*** It is not that they are without sin, for Christians commit sin. However, they are cleansed in the blood of the Lamb, and thus, seen by the Father through the blood (1 Jn 1:7-9). It is the blood of the sacrificial Lamb that presents them perfect before the Father (7:17; see comments Cl 1:22,28; compare Ps 32:2; Zp 3:18; Ep 5:27; Jd 24).

## JUDGMENT ON BABYLON

**14:6,7 Having the everlasting gospel to preach:** The angel is used to signify all those who have gone out with the message of the gospel (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15; At 8:4). They go with the message of the Lamb's death for the redemption of all who would hear and learn from the Father (Jn 6:45). They go with the message of the resurrection of the Lamb for those who have been held captive by the fear of death (Hb 2:14). The message, therefore, is God's answer for mankind's sin problem and physical death problem (See comments Rm 5:12; 1 Co 15:20-22). **Fear God and give glory to Him:** As opposed to fearing Rome and State religion, the plea of the evangelists of God is to fear Him who has power that infinitely exceeds that which is presumed by Rome or any earthly power (11:18; see comments Mt 10:28; At 10:2,22,35; Rm 11:20). Christians must fear God more than they fear anything that is of this world. **Worship Him who made heaven and earth:** It is only natural to worship the Creator of all things. That which is created can never logically demand worship that is to be given to God (See comments At 17:22-29).

**14:8 Fallen is Babylon:** Rome is the Babylon that is fallen (16:19; 17:2,5; 18:2,3,10). Though the actual fall of the city of Rome occurred in A.D. 476, this is a prophetic statement. The fulfillment of the prophecy was in the future, though it is given in the present tense as if it had already taken place. In other words, the fulfillment of the prophecy is certain because it has originated from God. It is so certain that it is conveyed to men in either the present or past tense in order to convey certainty of fulfillment. Such was the manner by which the prophets spoke in reference to those who were against God's people in the Old Testament (See Is 46:10; 48:3; Jr 51:8). God used Babylon to take Israel into captivity in 586 B.C. However, He pronounced judgment on Babylon for her onslaught against

His people. He would in a similar manner use Rome to terminate national Israel in A.D. 70. But He would bring judgment on Rome for her merciless actions as He brought judgment on Babylon. ***Made all the nations drink:*** The Roman State and religion had intimidated the citizens to submit to both the State and religion as men should submit to God only. She thus intoxicated the minds of the citizens with the venom of religious deception. Since the Roman State allowed herself to be so used by Satan to deceive the nations, God would pour out His wrath upon her (See Ps 75:8). And so it is with any earthly government that sets itself against God. Those governments that give themselves over to evil and to the forceful subjugation of their citizens, have pronounced their own judgment. They will eventually be swept from the pages of history to make way for a government that brings freedom.

**14:9,10 *If anyone worships the beast:*** Those who would submit to the worship of Rome and her diabolical imperial religion (vs 8; 13:14), will also be recipients of the wrath of God that will be unleashed on the State and her pagan priests (Compare Jr 25:15,27-29; 51:7). ***Receives his mark:*** These would be those who both spiritually and mentally dedicate themselves to the State in order to trust in her for both economic security and spiritual fulfillment.

***Poured out in full strength:*** The wrath of God will not be diluted as with some wines that were served. The wicked politicians and priests, with those who have given allegiance to them, will receive the full measure of God's judgmental wrath. God will have no mercy on those political leaders and their cohorts who set themselves against humanity, and especially, against His sheep. They will reap the full condemnation and fury of God's wrath. ***Tormented with fire and brimstone:*** This metaphor of their punishment is the most severe that could be constructed from the realities of this present world. It is the greatest metaphor of human

experience that could be used to portray the punishment that is awaiting wicked government officials who would torment their people, and especially, the people of God (See 19:20; 20:10,14ff; 21:8; Gn 19:24; Ez 38:22; 2 Th 1:8,9).

**14:11** These wicked government rulers are subjected to a definite punishment that matches the crimes they have inflicted upon the citizenship of the nations they ruled (19:3; Is 34:9,10; Mt 10:28; 25:41; Mk 9:44). We need not view this punishment of torments as something that is yet in the future for the wicked. After death, comes final judgment for all men (Hb 9:27). As the rich man of Luke 16, he, as well as all the wicked, go immediately into torment when they die. John wants us to understand that the “fire and brimstone” for the wicked is not something that is still in the future in reference to the death of the wicked. It is happening simultaneously as he writes to comfort persecuted Christians. “In the presence of the Lamb” signifies that Jesus has all authority over this matter and will render punishment to those who have harmed His body. And truly, *“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God”* (Hb 10:31).

**14:12** Those who undergo the pains of persecution know that their persecutors will receive their just punishment at the time of their death. Therefore, the saints are patient for the retribution that God will render to those who have afflicted His flock. They are also patient concerning their rest. At the moment of death, the righteous go to be with the Lord (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). At the time of their death, the wicked go into everlasting torment for their rebellion.

## THE TIME OF REAPING

**14:13** *The dead who die in the Lord:* Christians have died to the world, and thus can die in the Lord in peace (See comments Rm 6:3-6; 2 Tm 2:11,12). Those faithful

Christians who physically die in the Lord are in the care of the Lord after death (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23; see Rv 2:10; Ph 3:9; see comments 1 Th 4:13-18). ***Their works follow them:*** Their works are not the condition upon which they have been saved, but the manifestation of their faithful thanksgiving for their salvation (See comments 1 Co 15:10,58; 2 Co 4:15). The good works of the righteous are not in vain because they are in the Lord (1 Co 15:58). However, the good works of the unrighteous are in vain because they are not in the Lord (See comments Rm 6:3-6).

**14:14 A white cloud:** This is symbolic of judgment (Is 19:1; Jr 4:13; Mt 24:30; 26:64; compare Mt 24:30; At 1:9,11; Lk 21:27). Judgment means calamity to the wicked but deliverance for the righteous. When in-time judgment comes upon the wicked in this life, then the righteous are relieved of the persecution the wicked bring upon the righteous. ***One like the Son of Man:*** The term “Son of Man” was the Jewish reference to the Messiah, the Christ. Jesus is the one who has been anointed to be the judge of all things (Jn 5:22,27; At 17:31). All things were created for Jesus (Cl 1:16). He died for the sins of mankind (Jn 1:29; 1 Co 15:3). Therefore, He is the One who will judge those He created. In the historical context of the fulfillment of all Old Testament prophecies in reference to Jesus as the Messiah, it was prophesied that when the Messiah came, national Israel would be brought to an end. Jesus was proclaimed to be the Messiah in A.D. 30 (See At 2:36,37). His work as the Messiah was not only to bring salvation to all men, but also to bring an end to national Israel. Once this was accomplished in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, then it was time to bring judgment upon the fourth kingdom of Daniel 2:44 and 7:13,14, which kingdom was used as God’s instrument to bring national Israel to an end. ***A golden crown:*** The Greek word here (*stephanos*) is the one that is used to refer to the victory crown (6:2). It is the

crown that was given to those who had been victorious in battle. *A sharp sickle:* This was a sharp harvesting instrument that was used to gather in the fruit of the harvest. The meaning here is that all men are gathered in for judgment (See Jl 3:12,13; compare Mt 13:30; 9:38). The gathering in is pictured as sufficient and complete.

**14:15,16 Another angel came:** This is the messenger that comes from God and announces that all has been concluded. It was time for the end of all things (See Mt 24:46; compare Mt 13:39-41). *Thrust in Your sickle and reap:* The fruit of the harvest for judgment is taken from mankind (Jr 51:33; Mt 9:37ff). At the command of the messenger from God, Jesus thrusts the sickle throughout humanity in order to bring men into judgment before Him (Mt 25:30,31; 2 Th 1:7-9).

**14:17-20** A parallel command goes out in order to reap the wicked for their judgment and condemnation. *Grapes are fully ripe:* When the grapes were ripe, it was time for harvest. The metaphor, therefore, is that the wicked have come to the time of their judgment where they must reap what they have sown among men (Is 63:2,3; Jl 3:13). *Outside the city:* Jesus was crucified outside the city of Jerusalem (Hb 13:11,12). It is appropriate, therefore, that the wicked will be punished far from the presence of the city of saints (See 21:10; Hb 11:10; 12:2). *Blood came out:* The cryptic imagery here is to make Christians wonder with awe at the judgment God has in store for those who persecute the body of Christ. *One thousand six hundred furlongs:* This imagery is difficult to explain. It could be that the vision seeks to portray the severity of the judgment in terms that would strike horror in the minds of the wicked. Whatever the real meaning, at least one thing is very clear. The punishment that is in store for the wicked cannot be explained with the most horrifying words of the human language. There is no metaphor that will lift our minds high

enough in order to contemplate the horror of hell. The reason for such cryptic language here is obvious. The saints are to be comforted in knowing that their persecutors will be punished. The wicked who care nothing about these things will with their seared consciences carry on in life until they are doomed to the punishment of hell.

## Chapter 15

### PREPARATIONS FOR JUDGMENTS

The preceding judgments indicated partial judgments of God. The trumpets affected only a third part of humanity. The following seven bowls are poured out in order to affect the totality of mankind. The witness of the saints has already gone forth by the time we come to the judgment of the bowls. Since the unrighteous did not repent with the preaching of the gospel, then God's judgment is brought down upon them in these last plagues. But before John records the pouring out of the judgment of the bowls, he pictures the victorious saints.

**15:1,2 Another sign in heaven:** This is the beginning of another series of visions (See 12:1). **The seven last plagues:** The number seven signifies completeness. Thus the seven angels prepare to deliver full and complete judgment upon those who refused to repent as a result of the witness of the saints. **Sea of glass:** If the sea here symbolizes the same turbulent masses of humanity as 4:6 that produced the beast and false prophet who persecuted the saints, then John's portrayal of the saints in reference to the sea is significant. The victorious saints have here risen above the masses of unregenerate humanity. In fact, they are standing upon the masses who have been judged ("mingled with fire"). The saints have overcome those of the world who have tormented them (See Zc 13:9; Ml 3:2ff; 1 Co 3:12-15; 1 Pt 1:7). The saints have gained the victory (7:9). **Harps of God:** Melodies of thanksgiving flow from the redeemed

because of their victory that was given to them by God (5:8; 14:2). The harps are metaphorical for songs of joy in their hearts.

**15:3,4 *The song of Moses:*** When Israel was delivered from Egyptian captivity, the nation sang a song of praise to God (Ex 15). The victorious saints sing here in the same manner and for the same purpose. They sing the song of the Lamb because they have received deliverance by the Lamb (5:9). ***Great and marvelous are Your works:*** This song is directed to God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit (See 4:8; compare Ex 15:7; Dt 32:4; Ps 111:2; 139:14). When the saints of all the nations of the world come to the complete understanding of the work of God among men, then they will break forth in reverential awe at the marvelous workings of God in the affairs of men (See Ex 15:11; Jr 10:6,7). The same would be especially true when the saints come into the glory of God in heavenly dwelling. It will be only then that they will realize the works of God throughout the history of the world.

**15:5 *The temple of the tabernacle:*** The tabernacle of the Old Testament was only a physical structure with which the Jews could have a physical identity with the presence of God. However, God's presence cannot be confined to a physical structure on earth, for His presence consumes the totality of the heavens (Hb 8:5; see Ex 25:16,21; 38:21; Nm 1:50,53; 9:15; 10:11; compare At 7:44; 17:22-29). In the New Testament, the inspired writers looked beyond the tabernacle to heaven as the true abiding place and presence of God (13:6; Hb 8:5). John here portrays heaven opening for revelation from God.

**15:6,7 *The seven plagues:*** The messengers of God are now delivering final judgment upon the unregenerate world. ***Clothed in pure and white linen:*** They are adorned in the purity that proceeds from the One who has sent them (1:13). They prepare to deliver the judgments of their

Master to the inhabitants of the world (Compare Ex 28:6-8). **Four living creatures:** See 4:6; 5:9. **Golden bowls:** These are the precious and valuable judgments of God that are to be poured out on the wicked of humanity (Compare 14:10).

**15:8 The temple was filled with smoke:** The active work of God filled the heavenly realm (See Ex 18:10; 24:16; 40:34; compare Ex 19:18; Ps 18:8; Is 14:31). No one could thus approach God (2 Ch 5:14; Is 6:4ff), for the time of opportunity that God had given to men for repentance had come to an end. It was now time for judgment against those who ignored the grace of God that was poured forth on the cross.

## Chapter 16

### THE BOWLS OF GOD'S WRATH

The judgments of the trumpets of chapters 8 and 9 were partial. They were judgments against the persecutors of the saints in the 1<sup>st</sup> century in order to take them out of the environment of the living in order to relieve the saints. However, the fact of God's judgment that was revealed in the partial judgments of the trumpets is brought to full strength in the judgments of the bowls. The judgments of the bowls must be understood to run parallel to the judgments of the trumpets as the wicked died and went into the torments of the hadean world. God judges wicked men on earth for their sin by bringing them down and nullifying their works. God poured out His judgments on Rome and her imperial religion. The wicked Caesars of the Empire met their doom. The Empire itself came to a close. However, after all those who were involved in the wickedness of the Empire had died, they, as the rich man of Luke 16, lifted up their heads in torments. They had faced their final judgment and were condemned to torments. In this sense, therefore, God hands down partial judgments in life (the trumpets) in order to

bring down the wicked and take them out of the way in order to relieve the living saints of their persecutors. However, after death, the wicked face their final judgment. They subsequently go into torments (the judgment of the bowls) (Hb 9:27). Therefore, the wicked who have been taken out by God in the judgment of the bowls are now waiting for torment that is yet in the future in a devil's hell. Their final judgment has already taken place in their existence in that their destiny is sealed. Their torment begins at the time of their death (See comments Lk 16:19-23). John here portrays the "after death judgment" that the wicked, who persecuted the saints, had received. There were those persecutors who were still ravaging the church. However, those who had died were in certain torments of "fire and brimstone." Therefore, the immediate persecutors of the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians have already received their final judgment. They are in torments even as we read John's revelation.

## THE FIRST BOWL

### ***16:1,2 Pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God:***

The first four bowls are judgments that seem to be poured out on nature. However, indirectly they affect men who live in the environment that is affected by the bowls. The immediate judgment is upon the persecutors of the saints, that is, the Roman government and her insidious imperial religion. ***Loathsome and malignant sore:*** After the nature of the judgments that were heaped upon Egypt in Exodus 9:8-11, this would possibly be physical diseases. This could also have a spiritual meaning in the sense that the fruit of men's sins destroys their lives (See Gl 6:7,8). ***Mark:*** See 13:15-17; 14:9. ***Worshiped:*** See 13:14.

## THE SECOND BOWL

***16:3 On the sea:*** The sea of humanity was the origin of the sea beast. It was the political turmoil of the world at

the time that produced the Roman Empire (See 8:8; 13:1; compare the second trumpet of 8:8,9). Government exists for the purpose of controlling populations. When turmoil arises with a particular population group, a new government often arises. **Became ... blood:** Reference is probably to the moral environment of the multitudes of society. A moral stench rose up as the result of the spiritual death of men who were void of values (Compare Ex 7:17).

### THE THIRD BOWL

**16:4-6** After the judgments on the earth and sea comes the affliction of the fresh waters (8:10; see Ex 7:17-20; Ps 78:44). **Angel:** It is the duty of this messenger of God to deliver God's judgment upon the waters (14:18). **You are righteous:** God is righteous and just because His judgments are being meted out according to the crimes of those who have set themselves against His people. **They deserve it:** God could not be just in reference to the righteous if He did not render judgment to the wicked according to what is due them. Those who have put to death innocent people must receive just punishment for their crimes against humanity (17:6,7). If such crimes were left unpunished, then certainly God could not be considered a just God.

### THE FOURTH BOWL

**16:7,8** **The altar:** In 6:9,10 the martyrs under the altar cried out for vengeance. Here, another proclamation comes from the altar saying that the judgments of God are true and righteous (8:3). It is in this fourth bowl that the judgments of God are poured out directly upon the persecutors of the righteous, and thus, the requests of the martyrs of 6:9,10 are granted (8:5; 9:13; 13:3; 14:18; Rm 12:19). **True and righteous:** The judgments are just and right. We must not forget the scene that is behind the actual persecution of the saints. There is a struggle between good and evil, be-

tween Satan and all that is of God. If Satan's work on earth is allowed to go unpunished, then the righteousness of God would be questioned. God must work against that which is of Satan in order to manifest that He is the final authority in all things. ***Poured out his bowl on the sun:*** The false religionists of the culture gave reverential worship to the sun. The sun was a source of supposed enlightenment to astrologers and mystical prognosticators who worshiped it. But these false religionists would lead their followers into wickedness as the desires of men would seek their own justification by their religious inventions. The religious beliefs of the false religionists would be used by the religious leaders to enslave the adherents of the religion (See Ps 97:3,7). Such is the nature of religions that have been created after either the traditions or emotional desires of men. The leaders of such religions hold the consciences of the people in bondage by their false teachings.

**16:9 *Blasphemed the name of God:*** The false religionists would assign the work of God to the forces of evil, and thus, refuse to submit to God's chastisement. As a result, they would not repent and give glory to God (vss 11,12; see comments Mt 12:31). It is always the nature of false religions to be guided by those who have been deceived. When one is religiously self-deceived, he feels that anything that is contrary to his beliefs must be from that which he opposes. Therefore, when the word of God is heard by such people, it is rejected as false (See comments Mk 7:1-9).

## THE FIFTH BOWL

**16:10 *On the throne of the beast:*** God now pours out judgment on the authority of the Roman Empire (13:2). ***His kingdom became full of darkness:*** The struggles between the Caesars within the Empire at the time of persecution led to the downfall of Caesars because they propagated violence against the saints of God. The Empire as a

whole was eventually brought down in A.D. 476 with the conquest of Rome itself. **Gnawed their tongues:** The pride of the Romans intensified their pain at the fall of their Empire. National pride was based on their confidence in the government. But their pride was humbled at the death of every Caesar. With the termination of the Empire, the citizens were in great fear for the future because the center of their nationalistic confidence, Rome, had collapsed.

**16:11 They blasphemed:** They would not repent because their false religious beliefs led them to misinterpret the devastation of their government and environment. They assigned the judgments to what they thought were the forces of evil, and thus, refused to recognize that it was God who was chastising them for their wickedness. God had allowed them to believe the lie, but in the end, their belief in the lies of false religion would not move them to repent in response to the judgments of God (See comments 2 Th 2:10-12). And so it is today. The foundation of false religions is in the security of tradition or the misguided emotions of religious people who trust in traditions or emotions. Such becomes the validation for false religionists who have long forsaken the word of God. If God's word contradicts either tradition or subjective emotionalism in such religions, it is rejected (Compare comments Mk 7:1-9).

## THE SIXTH BOWL

**16:12 On the great Euphrates River:** This is a figure of the barrier between Rome and her hostile enemies to the east (9:14). This possibly refers to the feared Parthians and other enemies of Rome like them. They are here allowed to begin the destruction of the Empire. They are allowed to do such by victorious battles against the extremities of the Empire that could not be easily defended.

**16:13** Verses 13 -16 are an interlude. As with interludes in previous visions, the events of these verses stand

between the sixth and seventh bowls. ***Three unclean spirits:*** These are the false religious beliefs that come forth from Satan (the dragon) who is the source of all lies (12:3,9; Jn 8:44). Satan's great weapon against humanity is to direct the religious beliefs and inclinations of men away from God. By focusing the religious beliefs and behavior of religious men on that which is false, Satan soothes the consciences of men, and thus, he deceives them into rejecting the word of God (19:20; see comments Mk 7:1-9; 2 Th 2:10-12).

**16:14 *Performing signs:*** These deceptive magical tricks are meant to counterfeit the supernatural power that proceeds only from God (See comments 13:13; At 8:9-13; 19:16-20; compare Mt 24:24; 2 Th 2:9; 1 Tm 4:1). Those who have fickle spirits that are easily misguided will follow after the supposed wonders of clever men who seek to gain the confidence of the innocent. Because of this ever-present danger among men, the saints must equip themselves with a knowledge of the word of God (See comments Ep 4:11-16; 6:1-20). ***Kings of the whole world:*** The deceived rulers of the Roman government throughout the Empire had given allegiance to Rome. They had given allegiance to the false prophet of Roman imperial religion. They are thus aligned against the truth of God that is being believed and proclaimed by the saints of God. ***The battle of that great day of God:*** In the war of truth against error, the forces of evil have deceived themselves into believing that they have God on their side (See 19:11-21). But the god they have on their side is only an invention of their minds. They have deceived themselves into creating a religion after their own desires and a god after their own image. They have allowed Satan to twist their religious inclinations to form a humanistic religion that conforms to their political ambitions and lusts of the flesh. They have thus set themselves against the God of heaven by setting them-

selves against the sons of God on earth.

**16:15 *I am coming as a thief:*** God's judgments come as a thief on those who have deceived themselves into believing false religions. Because the righteous know that God comes in judgment, they are prepared. He will not come upon the righteous as a thief because they will be continually prepared and waiting for the coming of the Lord (3:3; compare Mt 24:43; Lk 12:39; 1 Th 5:2,4; 2 Pt 3:10).

**Blessed is he who watches:** The righteous watch. They remain prepared. However, Rome and all her false religionists are unprepared for the fate that is coming upon them. And so it is today in reference to the final coming of Jesus. Those who refuse to believe the truth of God will be unprepared for the final coming and judgment of God.

**Keeps his garments:** See 3:4,17ff.

**16:16 *Har-Magedon:*** In the Old Testament, there is no geographical location called Har-Magedon ("Armageddon" in some versions). However, some believe that reference is to the Mount of Megiddo in Palestine (Compare Ja 17:11; Jg 1:27; 5:19; 2 Ch 35:22). The battle that is mentioned here is not a physical battle. There is no physical army of God mentioned. The battle that is about to take place here is a spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil. The battle, and its outcome that are here pictured as ready to take place, actually occurs in the vision of chapter 19. In reference to our study of this revelation today, therefore, the battle has already taken place.

## THE SEVENTH BOWL

**16:17,18 *Into the air:*** The seventh bowl of judgments is now poured out against the evil spirits of wickedness (See Ep 2:2). ***It is done:*** The Greek perfect tense is used here in reference to the pouring out of this judgment. The judgment had already been initiated. The results were continuing even as John sees and writes the book of Revela-

tion. All that is left is the conclusion of what God had set into motion. ***Thunders and lightnings:*** God's judgments manifest His presence (See 4:5; 6:12-17). The righteous recognize the presence of God in the in-time judgments that God pours out on humanity. They understand that they may have to endure hardship as God pours out His judgments on the nations in which they live. They thus accept the judgments because they realize that God is working all things together for their eternal good (Rm 8:28).

**16:19 *The great city was divided:*** This is Rome and all cities that have given allegiance to her wickedness against the saints of God (See 11:8,13; 14:8; 17:18; 18:10,16). When God brought judgment upon the heart of the Empire, all the tributaries dried up. The judgments that God is here pouring out are against this Empire of the world. The judgments have come because of her State persecution against the community of God. These are thus in-time judgments. However, at the end of time, God's judgments will go out to all of the world, not just to a single empire as Rome.

**16:20,21 *Every island fled away:*** All the extensions or tributaries of the Roman Empire vanished when the heart of the Empire came to a conclusion (6:14; 20:11). ***The mountains:*** The subsidiary governmental powers that stood because of the strength of the Empire also vanished from existence with the fall of Rome. God set His judgments against the heart of the Empire, and the rest of the Empire collapsed. ***Hail out of heaven:*** This was symbolic of God's judgments upon those governments that would set themselves, as Egypt, against the work of God (8:7; 11:9; see Ex 9:23; Ja 10:11; Ps 78:47; Is 28:2; 30:30; Ez 13:11). ***The weight of a talent:*** This is about thirty-five kilograms. John here emphasizes the gravity of the wrath of God that is poured out upon wicked governments that set their course against His people. ***Men blasphemed God:*** Here again,

the religiously self-deceived refuse to recognize that the judgment is from the God of heaven (See vss 9,11). They assign the calamities of the judgments of God to be the work of Satan in their lives. Because they attribute the work of God to forces of the devil, they would not repent in response to the judgments of God. The vision of the bowls has now ended and John moves us into the actual fall of Rome and its imperial religion. God has unleashed the judgments of natural disasters, internal deterioration, and external invasions in order to bring about the fall of the Empire.

### **Judgment Of The Great Harlot (17:1– 19:21)**

**Outline:** (1) Judgment of the sinful city (17:1-18), (2) The fall of Babylon (18:1-19), (3) The saints rejoice (18:20-24), (4) Praises of victory (19:1-10), (5) Judgment from Jesus (19:11-21)

## **Chapter 17 JUDGMENT OF THE SINFUL CITY**

In this chapter John briefly concludes the vision of Rome's overthrow that was discussed in chapter 16. Chapters 17-19 are an expanded panoramic view of the fall of Rome that is given in greater detail than previous visions. The visions of chapters 17-19 must be viewed as parallel with the revelation of the previous visions because the judgments that are released on the Empire by God begin its fall. The initiation of the judgments, therefore, may be small in their beginning, but their result is the destruction of the Empire.

**17:1 *The judgment of the great harlot:*** Rome is the great harlot who seduces all nations by intimidation to follow after her wickedness (See vss 5,18; 19:2). As with many cities that are mentioned in the Old Testament (Is 1:21; 47:5-15; Jr 2:20; Nh 3:1,4), the worldly influence of Rome seduces all whom she encompasses within the do-

main of her control. Some Christians even fell victim to the pride of life by falling victim to her political and economic influences. This should be a warning to those who seek recognition through political ambitions. If the environment of politics within a country encourages a compromise of Christian values, then the Christian who would be involved in politics must flee lest his own faith be destroyed. **Many waters:** Many nations, and thus, masses of people, were drawn under the control of the Roman Empire (vs 15; compare Jr 51:13). As a result, her influence extended throughout the known ancient world.

**17:2** The rulers of the world that fell under the control of the Empire were intimidated to conform to the wicked influences of Rome (See 18:3). **The wine of her fornication:** Those nations that came under the political control of Rome were forced to comply with decisions that were handed down from Rome (See 14:8; 16:9; 18:3; compare Jr 51:7). If one disagreed with the decisions, he was intimidated to conform lest he suffer the punishment of the Roman State.

**17:3 Carried me away in the spirit:** John will be shown the judgment of Rome by vision (1:10; 4:1; 21:10). **Into the wilderness:** This is the place of protection for the saints of God (12:6,14). Since it is the place of protection for the saints, then it is of necessity the place where the wrath of God is poured out on those who would set themselves against the saints (vs 16; 18:2,14; compare Is 21:1,9; Zp 2:13; Ml 1:3). **A scarlet beast:** This is the sea beast of 13:1. It is the Roman Empire dressed in garments of luxury and royalty in order to lure innocent people into the bondage of her wickedness (18:16). **Full of names of blasphemy:** Roman religion was full of blasphemy (See comments vss 9,12; 13:1). Any religion that contradicts the commandments of God is full of blasphemy because its adherents have religiously accepted as authority that which

contradicts the will of God. They blaspheme God by calling His work among those who have submitted to His word, a false religion.

**17:4 Adorned in purple and scarlet:** Her appearance is such that it draws others into her rebellion against the work of God. Her fabulous riches appeal to the greed of men (Compare Ez 16:13; 28:13). Her social and political environment lures into the company of those who are set on self-destruction, those who are selfishly ambitious for fame and power. Those who sought political or economic advantages over their fellowman lusted after the benefits that came from Roman citizenship. **A golden cup full of abominations:** Her symbol of wealth (“golden cup”) indicated the corruptness that was bred into the souls of men who gave their allegiance to Rome. But her cup is full of idolatrous worship that draws men away from the one true God. It is full of internal moral deterioration that will eventually lead to the downfall of the Empire (vs 16).

**17:5,6 Mystery, Babylon the Great:** “Mystery” is part of the name that is assigned to Rome (14:8; 16:19). Rome is the symbol of worldly lust that thrives on selfish ambition and greed. She is the mother of all who would follow her example of sin and opposition to God and His people.

**Drunken with the blood of the saints:** The harlot killed Christians who would not conform to her idolatrous worship, nor give allegiance to Caesar as lord (6:9,10; 13:15; 18:24). Because they would not submit to emperor worship, they were considered insurrectionists, and thus, suffered the penalty for the crime of insurrection. Therefore, Rome had the blood of the body of Jesus upon her hands, and now it was time for her judgment as a kingdom of this world.

**I wondered with great amazement:** Before these visions, John’s knowledge of Rome’s onslaught against the church may have only been limited. He is now informed as to what is happening throughout the Empire. He sees what

is to come. The devastation the Empire was causing against the community of God, both at the time of the visions, but also in the near future, greatly astonished him. He was shocked by the great persecution that was brought upon the church.

**17:7,8 *The woman and of the beast:*** The politicians and government officials were propped up by the government of the Empire. They made their dictates against the work of God with the support of the law of the land. When Christianity was made an illegal religion, the enemies of the church used the law of government to justify their wickedness against the saints. ***The beast ... that was, and is not, and yet will be:*** Understanding this verse, and the following material of Revelation, depends on the general view one takes concerning the forces that opposed God's work in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. There are at least three views of interpretation of this and the following verses: (1) Some have taught that reference is to five world kingdoms that had arisen since the existence of the Babylonian Empire of the Old Testament. The Empire that is at the time John writes would be the Roman Empire. The seventh would be a collective figure of all wicked governments that would stand against God's work until the end of time. (2) Another view is that reference in this and the following verses is to the Caesars of the Roman Empire. Five have fallen, one is reigning at the time John writes, and another is to come (See comments 13:1). (3) Still another view is that "seven" is symbolically used to refer to all kings and kingdoms of the past, present and future in reference to the time John writes. These are the kings that set themselves against the work of God. Each of these kings and kingdoms continue for a brief period in world history, and then vanish away. All of the preceding interpretations have their good points. Nevertheless, all of them have their difficult points. We are thus challenged concerning what the angel is here

revealing to John. It is certain, however, that when this book was read to the churches of Asia, the Roman Empire came to their minds, because it was this Empire that was launching persecution against the saints. However, in this particular revelation, the angel may have been looking beyond the immediate predicament of the church. He may have been looking to a great persecution that would come at the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> century during the reign of Domitian. Nevertheless, the visions here have direct application to the saints to whom John wrote for they were suffering persecution. He thus gives the vision in order to give these saints encouragement in their times of persecution. However, God may want us to view the revelation as comfort for Christians throughout history who would suffer from similar persecution at the hand of governments that set themselves against God. In view of John's immediate audience, our thoughts here will be directed toward making application of the vision to the Roman Empire's wicked onslaught against the Christians to whom John wrote this letter.

We must keep in mind that in the early 60s Christians suffered at the hand of Nero who had a personal vendetta against the church. This persecution, however, was not the result of the policies of the Roman government. It was Nero's personal persecution, and thus, it continued to the time of his death in A.D. 68. However, Nero did set a precedent for the state persecution of the church that would rise in the latter part of the 1<sup>st</sup> century during the reign of Domitian. This persecution would be government sanctioned, and thus, it would last for many years. John, therefore, may have been writing in the middle sixties during the period of persecution led by Nero. At the same time, he may have been prophetically speaking of the great persecution that would begin during the reign of Domitian.

**17:9-11 *The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits:*** We must keep in mind that the

book was written with a great number of figures, specifically metaphors, that portrayed a message of comfort and encouragement to John's immediate audience. "Seven" here represents the full and complete power ("mountains"), wisdom ("heads") and authority ("kings") of Rome, and all those rulers throughout the Empire who follow after the harlot of false religion. Such kings and kingdoms would rise for a period of time, and then fall. Another would rise after the wickedness of its predecessor. The alternative meaning here is that reference is specifically to world kingdoms that have preceded the Roman Empire, the Roman Empire being the sixth. Some students have affirmed that this series of empires began with Egypt and continued with Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and then Rome. The first five are fallen. The one that is, is Rome. The one that is to come is a collective of all world governments that would set themselves against the work of God. These governments would continue until the end of time. Though this interpretation has its merits, we must keep in mind that John is writing to Christians who are enduring persecution at the time of writing. They were also heading into an even greater persecution. It is probable, therefore, that John refers to the kings of Rome. Five have fallen, one is, and another has not yet come. If he refers to the Caesars of Rome, then Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius and Nero have fallen. Vespasian is the one that would be Caesar at the time of writing. Titus was yet to come, and the eighth that John identifies as "the beast," would be Domitian. The saints had endured persecution under Nero, but there was a greater persecution that was yet to come under Domitian (See comments 13:1-4).

**17:12 *Ten horns:*** This is possibly the total of anti-God world powers that were yet to come after the downfall of the Roman Empire. Some students have affirmed that God was revealing ten more kings within the Roman Em-

pire that were yet to come before the final fall of the Empire in A.D. 476. Whichever view is correct, there is one thing that is common to all interpretations and directly applicable to the situation of John's audience. These governments that are led by their wicked kings will set themselves against the work of God. They will persecute the church.

**17:13,14** The kings are united with a common thirst for power and domination over the wills of those they dominate. Their thirst for power and domination sets them against the saints of God who have sworn allegiance to Jesus as their only Lord. ***The Lamb will overcome them:*** The angel's message to John is clear. Though the kings of the earth, whether Rome or any government that may follow, set themselves against the King of kings and Lord of lords, they will be destroyed. In the context of the visions, the powers that receive their leadership from Satan will make spiritual war against the church and her Head (16:14). However, they have involved themselves in a war against God, and thus, are destined to defeat. Since all supernatural power is indigenous with and originates from God, there is no possible way any power that God may have allowed Satan to exercise could overcome the source of supernatural power that is God Himself. Once the Lamb has overcome all that Satan is and represents, then will come the finality of all things (See comments 1 Co 15:26-28).

**17:15** ***The waters:*** See 5:9; 13:7. The Roman Empire was the assimilation of many kingdoms that were brought under the umbrella of her government. When a particular kingdom swore allegiance to Rome, then the king and kingdom had to follow the dictates of Rome. However, in time this allegiance would turn to treachery. Those who had sworn allegiance to Rome would eventually turn against her. ***The harlot:*** The angel continues the description of the harlot that was introduced in verse 3.

**17:16-18** ***These will hate the harlot:*** The angel ex-

plains exactly what happened to the Roman Empire. She deteriorated from within. Though the city of Rome fell in A.D. 476, the Empire had already lost her glory. She fell because of the moral decay that was within. Her wickedness manifested her moral decay that eventually led to her destruction (See Dn 2:42ff). ***God has put in their hearts to fulfill His purpose:*** Credit for the fall of Rome, therefore, must be given to God. By turning Rome against herself, He destroyed her. God has worked in this manner among kingdoms of the world in the past (See Jg 7:22; 1 Sm 14:20). He will continue to do so until the end of time. ***The woman:*** The woman is the mother of all governmental harlots who would set themselves to seduce world governments. The harlots seek to turn away all governments from the work of God in the world (vss 3,7; 11:8). In this case, it is Rome who has instituted State persecution against the body of the Lamb, and thus, Rome was fighting against the God of heaven.

## Chapter 18 THE FALL OF BABYLON

This chapter continues the flashback picture of the judgments upon Babylon (Rome) that were announced in 16:20. John records in chapters 18 and 19 the messenger's announcement of the total destruction of the beast and false prophet.

***18:1,2 Having great power:*** Since these messengers are from God, they manifest the glory of God (10:1; 19:6,15,17). As representatives of God, they carry with them the authority of God. The judgments that they carry are manifested to all. ***Fallen is Babylon:*** Though Rome was still in existence at the time of this statement, this prophetic language in the present tense emphasizes the certainty of God's judgments. The fulfillment is stated as if it had already come to pass. And thus, Rome is fallen, though

the fall was yet in the future (See 14:8; 16:19). When God states that something is going to happen, it is as if it had already happened. ***The habitation of demons:*** In a spiritual sense, the Empire had already fallen. It had fallen because it had become at the time John wrote the dwelling place of every possible lie and deception of man. The causes of the fall were already at work in the Empire. The Empire harbored the religions of sorcery, witchcraft, idolatry and every false religion that could be created after the imagination of men who had long since left the truth of God (Compare Is 13:21,22; 21:9; 34:11-15). She developed a State religion that was propagated by the law of the government.

***18:3 The nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication:*** Since the nations that were encompassed by the umbrella of Roman government had succumbed to the wickedness of her nature, they also would reap the wrath of God's judgment (See 14:8; 17:2). ***Rich through the abundance of her affluence:*** The nations that had greedily followed Rome in order to prosper politically and materially, therefore, must accept God's judgment that she will reap from fighting against God. When Rome fell, a host of other kingdoms that were linked to the Empire also fell.

***18:4 Come out of her:*** God calls on his people to come out from under the influence of her intoxicating wickedness (Compare Is 48:20; 52:11; Jr 50:8; 51:6,8,45; 2 Co 6:7; 7:1; Ep 5:11). Those who would not separate themselves from the evil influences of the Empire would reap the consequences of her sin. Herein is a warning to all Christians who would engage in politics to the point of compromising their Christian values. The lust for power and prominence in the political arena has led to the downfall of many. They found themselves in compromising situations in which they sacrificed Christian values for pomp and pride.

***18:5,6 Sins have been heaped up to heaven:*** God sees the sin of wicked nations. They will not go unpun-

ished (16:19; see Gn 18:20; Er 9:6; Jr 51:9). ***Give back to her double:*** God will deliver twice the destruction of vengeance to the harlot because of her persecution of His people (Compare Ps 137:8; Jr 50:15,29; 51:24). Governments, therefore, that would specifically launch persecution against the saints of God are doomed to destruction. ***The cup:*** As she has poured out violence against the community of God, so it will be poured out against her. Wicked nations will reap what they sow (Is 40:2).

**18:7,8 *In the same measure give her torment:*** There is a balance of justice portrayed here. The pain she inflicted against the saints of God would be inflicted against her. It will be an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. God's punishments always fit the crime. In this case, the crime is against the saints of God. Therefore, the punishment for the crime will be harsh. ***I sit as a queen:*** Rome glorified herself above all the nations of the earth. However, she would be humiliated out of existence by her own self destruction (See 2 Sm 22:28; Pv 11:2; 16:18; 26:23; Is 47:7ff; Ez 28:2). ***In one day:*** This is not to be taken as a literal statement concerning the amount of time it took for Rome to fall, for she did not fall in one 24-hour day. The emphasis is on the swiftness of her fall in comparison to her age (See Is 47:9; Ez 26:16). ***She will be utterly burned with fire:*** This is exactly what eventually happened (17:16). The city of Rome was burned in the end.

**18:9,10** The rulers of the tributaries of the Roman Empire would lament the fall of the heart of the Empire, for it was from the city of Rome that they received their wealth. ***Standing at a distance because of fear of her torment:*** They will disassociate with her in order not to be consumed in the wrath of judgment that would be poured out upon her (Compare Jr 50:46; Ez 26:16).

**18:11-16 *The merchants ... will weep and mourn over her:*** Kings of the earth (vs 9), merchants (vs 11) and sea-

men (vs 17) despised Rome (17:16). However, all received their power and wealth from her existence, for the Empire opened up trade throughout a vast territory of the ancient world. The merchants remained loyal to Rome as long as they reaped material wealth from her. Their lamentation here is over the fall of their source of wealth, not over their pride in her government and Caesars. They simply stood helpless as the greatness of the Empire could not be salvaged by the efforts of any one king or nation.

**18:17-19** The citizens stand in amazement at the possibility and reality of the fall of such a powerful kingdom. The fall of the Roman Empire restated a historical truth that is without question. There are no empires, governments or kingdoms that last throughout all time. Some may carry on for centuries, but their demise is inevitable. The vast majority of governments last for only a short time in comparison to history, and then they pass into history.

## THE SAINTS REJOICE

**18:20** *Rejoice over her:* The request of the martyred saints of 6:9,10 is finally answered. God has poured out vengeance on those who had persecuted the saints unto death (19:2; Lk 11:49). It is thus a time for the saints to rejoice because God has remained just by rendering to the unjust the judgment that they so justly deserved. Evil has been defeated and good continues to reign. This is the occasion over which the persecuted apostles of Christ and New Testament prophets were to rejoice. They were the ones who suffered great persecution from those who were directed by Satan. The demise of those who give themselves to the persecution of the church is an occasion for rejoicing on the part of the church. After the persecutors have been stopped, it is a time of peace for the saints. It is in times of peace that the church can carry on with her work of world evangelism (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15).

**18:21-23** *Will not be found anymore:* A thrown stone that sinks to the bottom of the water will never rise again. So it will be with the Roman Empire. It is destroyed into extinction. She will never rise again. She is gone forever. To emphasize the overthrow of the Empire, it is stated that business life, civil life, parties, and all that commonly goes on in thriving kingdoms, will no longer be activities in the Roman Empire. Rome was destroyed in the sense that after the fall, she has never been the great center of world influence that she enjoyed during her world-dominating times of the first centuries of the first millennium.

**18:24** *The blood of prophets and of saints:* For this reason the Roman Empire fell. Historians may attribute her fall to a host of political, social and economic conditions. But from the viewpoint of Scripture, she fell because she set herself against the saints of God, and thus, against God Himself. When any nation of the world sets itself specifically against the work of God through the church, then the days of that nation are numbered (See Dn 4). Government officials would do well to be cautious about working against God by working against those who represent God.

## Chapter 19 PRAISES OF VICTORY

**19:1** *After these things:* This is not after the happening of the formerly stated historical events, but after the previous vision. **Hallelujah:** This rejoicing is on the part of heavenly beings. They also rejoice because the prophecy of the downfall of the harlot of chapter 18 has been revealed to them (See Ps 104; 135:1). **Salvation ... glory ... belong to our God:** The One who can deliver is the Lord. He is the One who has delivered the saints from their persecutors. Because He has power over all things, He can subject all things to His power.

**19:2-4 True and righteous:** See 15:3; 16:7. **Because He has judged:** The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous because justice has been poured out on the harlot for her sins. **Avenged:** The judgments of the Lord have answered the prayers of the martyrs of 6:9,10 (Dt 32:43; 2 Kg 9:7; Lk 18:7,8). **Forever and ever:** See 14:10,11; 18:9,18. The judgment of the harlot is certain. She has thus gone into torments where she is punished for her crimes against the saints. **Elders ... living creatures:** The redeemed (4:4,10), with all creation (4:4,6,8), pour out worship to God because of the justice of His judgments.

**19:5,6** At this point in the revelation to John, the Spirit took John into a heavenly vision of the splendor of God. **Praise our God:** This address is a call on the saints to give glory to God (1:1; 7:3; 22:6). **Small and great:** The Greek idiom here emphasizes that all Christians are to give praise and glory to God. **Voice of a great multitude:** When the multitude of saints responded to the request of verse 5, their sound was like that of great waves of water (See 1:15; 14:2). The reverberation of the praise sounded throughout the heavens. **Lord God the Almighty, reigns:** The judgments of God upon the greatest government power in history at the time, has proved the all-powerful rule of God. As was pictured throughout the visions, Rome's power was the manifestation of Satan's work among men. Satan had accomplished the deception of a world kingdom, and yet, God brought Rome down. As a result, the destruction of this evil force against the saints of God manifested the power of God (Compare 1:8; 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7,14; 2 Co 6:18).

**19:7 Let us be glad and rejoice:** Because God is omnipotent, there can be the marriage of the Lamb with the bride, the church. **Marriage of the Lamb has come:** The present church is pictured in the New Testament as the bride of Christ (Mt 9:15; Rm 7:4; Ep 5:22-32; compare Is 50:1; Jr 2:32; Ez 16). The church is now betrothed (engaged) to

Christ at this time (See Mt 1:18). At the final coming of the Bridegroom, the chaste virgin, the church, will come in order to be married to the Bridegroom (2 Co 11:2; Ep 5:27).

**Bride:** The church is the radiant woman of chapter 12 who has been faithful to the Lord, and thus, has spiritually prepared herself for marriage to the Bridegroom.

**19:8-10 *The righteousness of the saints:*** The righteousness of the church manifests the inner grace of the members (2 Co 4:15). The members have responded to all that has been done for them concerning their salvation (See 14:13; 2 Co 4:15; 5:10; Ph 2:12,13). The church is pure and without blemish because of the grace of God through the blood of the Lamb (Ep 1:7). Those who would partake of this marriage feast with the Lamb, must respond to the calling of the gospel of the Lamb (1 Co 1:9; 2 Th 2:14).

**Marriage supper of the Lamb:** The word “supper” here is from *deipnon*, meaning a full meal. This is the celebration meal to which all Christians look forward to having with the Bridegroom. Christians eat the Lord’s meal every Sunday in preparation for the celebration meal with the Lord Jesus when He comes again (See comments Mt 26:26-29; At 20:7; 1 Co 11:17-34).

**Worship God:** John was overcome with emotion concerning the things that had been revealed to him. He fell down before the angel. He thus momentarily forgot the One to whom all worship must be directed (See comments Mt 4:10; compare At 10:25,26). Any individual or nation that would receive worship that is to be directed toward God alone has misdirected his worship. Worship on the part of man must be directed only to God.

**The spirit of prophecy:** Those who know the good news of Jesus are moved to proclaim such to the world (See comments Mt 28:19). The very nature of the gospel, therefore, is that it must be proclaimed to every creature of every nation (Mk 16:15).

## JUDGMENT FROM JESUS

**19:11,12 *Faithful and True:*** In this heavenly scene, John sees the Christ seated on the throne of judgment (4:1; 11:19). Jesus' judgment is just and righteous (6:2). The judgment scene that is pictured here is the judgment that Jesus has meted out in the visions of the seals, trumpets and bowls. ***Fire ... crowns:*** Jesus judges on the basis of His omniscience (1:13). He judges because He has all authority (Mt 28:18). Because He is Kings of kings and Lord of lords, He has the right to judge all kings and lords of this world (1 Tm 6:15). ***A name ... no one knows:*** No one knows this name because it has not been revealed (Compare 2:7).

**19:13,14 *Dipped in blood:*** Isaiah refers to the blood of God's enemies (Is 63:3). But here the symbol could be the shed blood of Jesus on the cross, for it was because of His sacrifice that He was made worthy to open the little book and release judgments on the world (See ch 5). ***Word of God:*** See comments Jn 1:1,14; 1 Jn 1:1; 5:7. ***Armies ... in heaven:*** The holy family of God and angels follow the One who is head over all things (1 Pt 3:22; see Mt 24:31; 27:53; 2 Th 1:7).

**19:15 *A sharp sword:*** The word of God is the rod of iron by which He judges the hearts of men (Hb 4:12; see Rv 1:16; 2:12,16,27; 12:5). ***Rule them with a rod of iron:*** Since it is the reigning Jesus who has authority over the nations of the world, in the visions of John He is portrayed as the one who would bring down the Roman Empire. We would correctly assume, therefore, that Jesus is now ruling the nations with great discipline (See Ps 2:8,9; Is 11:4). This is not something that is yet in the future. The fact that Jesus brought down the Roman Empire is enough to convince us that He now reigns as King of kings and Lord of Lords (1 Tm 6:15). ***Treads the winepress:*** This is a picture of judgment that Jesus renders to the nations (See 14:10,19; Is 63:3).

**19:16 King of kings and Lord of lords:** Jesus' reign extends beyond the realm of the church (12:14; 1 Tm 6:15). His kingdom encompasses all that exists (See comments Mt 16:18,19; 28:18). Ephesians 1:22 makes sense in reference to this context where John now portrays the work of Jesus in reference to the Roman Empire. Jesus is truly head over all things for the sake of the church (See comments Ep 1:20-22). If one confines the kingship and headship of Jesus to the church alone, then His power to judge the nations in this time with the rod means nothing. The fact that the visions have given the Lamb credit for judging the Roman Empire in the 1<sup>st</sup> century is evidence that He is presently reigning with all authority as King of kings. The authority of the reign of Jesus extends beyond the church. It extends to all things of this world and that which is not of this world (See comments Ph 2:8-11; 1 Pt 3:22). Though we may not understand how He brings down nations, or builds them up, we understand through faith that He is working all things according to His will.

**19:17,18** This supper is in contrast to the supper with the saints in verse 9. This supper is for the judgment of the wicked. As Jesus reigns in this time, the saints also reign with Him (Rm 5:17; compare Ez 39:17). Their preaching and living the truth stands as a judgment against all those who would reject the word of Jesus that comes through them to the world. Those who reject their word are thus rejecting the word of God. When one rejects the word of God, he judges himself (See comments Jn 12:48).

**19:19,20 The beast:** This is the sea beast of 13:1. This is the Roman Empire in a spiritual alliance with the harlot in order to carry out spiritual warfare with the saints of God (16:13-16; see comments Ep 6:10-20). When spiritual warfare is waged against the body of Christ, it is war against the King of kings who rules the nations with a rod of iron. The enemies of the church thus wage a war that

they cannot win for He who sits on the horse is omnipotent (vs 6). ***The beast ... false prophet:*** This is Rome's State government and State religion. ***Performed signs:*** God never gave the false religionists of imperial religion the right to work miracles in order to deceive even the wicked (See 2 Th 2:9). God would never cast such a stumbling block before the saints in order to confuse the miraculous confirmation of His word that was preached by the saints (See comments Mk 16:17-20; Hb 2:3,4). ***Cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone:*** This is the destiny of all those who would set themselves against God (See 20:10,14,15; 21:8; Mt 25:41; 2 Th 1:7-9). There has always been debate concerning the literality of the fire and brimstone in scenes of the judgment. The use of fire and brimstone here in Revelation must be consistently considered with our figurative interpretation of the book. One cannot switch to literality as he so pleases when studying through the figures and symbols of the visions. "Fire and brimstone" would be the most severe punishment that one could endure in this physical world. If we understand fire and brimstone in a metaphorical sense, then the suffering must be greater than the earthly and literal understanding. The metaphor points us to something greater. And thus, we would assume that the punishment of the wicked is something that is far beyond our understanding. It is something greater than the fire and brimstone that one might unfortunately have to experience in this life.

**19:21 *The rest were killed with the sword:*** These are the kings and their armies that compose the armies of verse 19. They also will not escape the judgment of the Christ on the white horse. John thus closes this vision with the victory of the Christ and His saints over the beast and the false prophet. Through the proxy of Rome and imperial religion, Satan has sought to destroy the heritage of the Seed. But the Seed has prevailed. In the visions, revelation now

turns directly to the judgment of the source of all evil on earth. Judgment is poured out on Satan.

### The Consummation

(20:1 – 22:21)

**Outline:** (1) The binding of Satan (20:1-6), (2) The defeat and doom of Satan (20:7-10), (3) The great white throne (20:11-15), (4) The new heaven and earth (21:1-8), (5) The new Jerusalem (21:9 – 22:5), (6) The coming of Jesus (22:6-21)

## Chapter 20

In this chapter, John uses prophetic figurative language in order to rehearse the effect the gospel has had on the work of the kingdom of darkness. This seventh and last symbolic vision of John in Revelation is given to reveal the totality of the victory of the gospel over the spiritual powers of darkness. The beast and false prophet have been judged. Now it is time for the vision concerning the judgment of the enemy of all righteousness. This vision begins with the revelation of the gospel. It concludes with the judgment of the wicked. In this one chapter, John is given a truly splendid picture of what this dispensation of the gospel is all about. It is a thrilling vision and revelation of what the early Christians experienced through the preaching of the gospel. It is a comforting vision because of the revelation of what will be the end of those who persecute the church. In reference to John's audience, this vision concludes with the torment into which their persecutors are cast. In chapters 12-14, John gave an expanded picture of the beginning of the gospel dispensation to the time that the Son of Man was told to thrust in His sickle (14:15). In chapter 20 we begin with the coming of the binding power of the message of the gospel. The vision ends with the final judgment after the death of those who were "*not found written in the Book of Life.*" They were cast into the lake of fire which was especially prepared for the devil and his angels (vs 15; see Mt 25:41).

## THE BINDING OF SATAN

**20:1 An angel coming down:** As in the other visions, this angel is simply another messenger of God. He comes bearing the power to confine. That which will confine the work of Satan is the gospel of Jesus' atoning sacrifice on the cross and resurrection from physical death (1 Co 15:1-4). As the woman brought forth the Man Child (Jesus) in chapter 12, so the result of Jesus' coming (the gospel) is emphasized here. **Key:** The key is symbolic of authority. This figure is taken from the Old Testament in passages as Isaiah 22:20-22. Eliakim was given the "key" of the house of David. He "*will open and no one will shut; and he will shut, and no one will open*" (Compare 1:18; 3:7,8; Mt 16:18,19). This messenger, therefore, has the authority to bind the works of Satan with the power of the gospel (Rm 1:16). **Abyss:** The word "abyss" in this verse is a transliteration of the Greek word (9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; Lk 8:31). The abyss is confinement. It is the confinement of the power of Satan. Satan is thus thrown into a bottomless pit where he does not hit the bottom. His confinement is sure. **Chain:** Satan is restrained with a chain. He is limited by that which confines him. Those angels who did not keep their original places for which they were created, but were disobedient, have been confined with everlasting chains (2 Pt 2:4; Jd 6). During His ministry, Jesus was in the process of binding the strong man Satan and plundering his house (See comments Mt 12:29). By His miraculous works and preaching of the good news He was confining the work of Satan in this world. In this sense, therefore, Satan was being cast down in a world that he formerly controlled by deception. But when the truth of the gospel was revealed, Satan was bound.

**20:2 Laid hold of the dragon:** The dragon was a fictitious creature that caused fear in the hearts of men. The serpent was a cunning deceiver. The devil is the accuser.

All such metaphors portray a grim picture of Satan as the enemy of humanity. Nevertheless, Satan is bound with the power of the gospel. Jesus died for our sins that cause spiritual death in our lives (Rm 6:23; 1 Co 15:3). However, He was resurrected in order that He might destroy death (See comments Hb 2:14,15; see 1 Co 15:20-22).

**Bound him:** Satan is bound. In chapter 12:1-9, the dragon, Satan, is cast out of his place of authority. He is cast down. The same truth is taught here by a different picture. Jesus said, “*Now is the judgment of this world. Now will the ruler of this world be cast out*” (Jn 12:31). The word “now” referred to the time of Jesus’ ministry. During His ministry, Jesus was in the process of beginning the casting down of the prince of the world. He visually manifested His power over Satan by His own supernatural power and by His giving control of supernatural power to the disciples, who in turn, manifested their power over Satan by casting out demons. After Jesus had sent them out on various preaching tours, they returned from one such tour and said, “*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name*” (Lk 10:17). Jesus then said that Satan is fallen (Lk 10:18,19). Through the cross, men can be delivered from sin. Through the resurrection, they can be delivered from death, and thus, live forever. Therefore, Jesus disarmed Satan at the cross (Cl 2:15). Jesus now exercises kingdom reign over all things (Ep 1:20-23). Through one’s obedience to the gospel, he can “*reign in life through the one, Jesus Christ*” (Rm 5:17). Though Satan goes about in the world as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, he cannot separate faithful children of God from God (See comments Rm 8:31-39; 1 Pt 5:8). **For a thousand years:** Since it is by the gospel that Satan is bound, then we conclude that the binding began when the gospel was first made effective in the lives of men. That time was when the first official announcement of the death, burial and resurrection and kingdom reign of

Jesus was publicly made by Peter on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 as Luke recorded in Acts 2. The binding will continue while the gospel is continually preached throughout the world. It will be preached until Jesus comes again. Therefore, we would conclude that the one thousand years of binding began in A.D. 30 and will continue until Jesus returns. This is the definite period of his confinement. However, the amount of time is not determined by the “one thousand years.” The number “one thousand” is only figurative of this period of confinement of the power of Satan by the preaching of the gospel. Again, this figure is taken from the Old Testament where the number 1,000 referred to a definite time, but not to a period of time that was determined by a specific number of years (Ps 90:4; 105:8; Dn 7:10).

**20:3 *Cast him into the abyss:*** Satan was confined. The binding was effective in reference to his work. He was also sealed, that is, consigned to the abyss and its consequences. He was not cast into the abyss as punishment, for this will come later in this vision. He is bound in the abyss to prevent him from ravaging the saints. He would no longer have the freedom to lead masses of people, especially the saints, into darkness by deception. The influence of the gospel would permeate the very constitutions of many nations with values that would preserve societies. The whole earth would not be led astray as in the days of Noah when every imagination of man’s heart was continually evil (Gn 6:5). Before the preaching of the gospel, there was a time when men gave up the knowledge of God in order to worship the creation (Rm 1:18-32). But the gospel brought life and immortality to light (2 Tm 1:10). The binding of Satan by the gospel does not mean the cessation of the activity of Satan. Within the realm of the preaching of the gospel, however, he is bound by the gospel. He goes about outside the realm of gospel influence as a devouring lion (1 Pt 5:8). Wherever the gospel is preached and obeyed, he is

confined. Where it is not preached, he seeks to deceive and devour. Those of the Roman Empire who rejected the truth of God continued in deception and the clutches of Satan. However, the saints of the Lamb did not fall under the deception of the harlot. In the church, God will not allow Satan to tempt the saints beyond what they are able to endure (1 Co 10:13). In this sense, Satan is bound. However, he goes about as a devouring lion among those to whom the gospel is not yet preached. Nevertheless, his work is bound in reference to the saints. The deceived of the world live without any understanding or concern for either their souls or eternal consequences of their sin. They live in ignorance of God and the judgment to come. However, those who have come to a knowledge of Jesus and His word have been enlightened through Jesus concerning the reality of God and our responsibility to His law. We are thus not deceived by our own ignorance of God and what He would have us do in reference to His will. The world that walks in ignorance of God and His will remains bound by darkness. Those who have a knowledge of Jesus and His word are no longer in darkness. ***Released for a little time:*** If Satan is bound within the area where the gospel is preached (the church), then he is unleashed in the church when members cease standing on the foundation of the gospel. This is certainly the meaning of Paul's exhortation to the Achaians when he wrote concerning their belief in the gospel, "... *by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you ...*" (1 Co 15:2). The Achaians had to continue believing the testimony of the gospel if they were to continue in a saved relationship with God. John seems to indicate that there would be a brief time when his audience would cease believing in the power of the gospel. When the church ceases believing in the gospel, Satan is unleashed. However, a second understanding of this "loosing" would be in reference to the end

of time. Satan would be loosed for a little season. If he is bound by the preaching of the gospel, then at the end of the gospel dispensation, he would be loosed when the gospel is not preached. Could this be a brief time before the end of time when the church has lost its purpose or is suppressed in persecution to the point that the disciples cease preaching the gospel? If we refer to the one thousand years as a quality of time in reference to the present dispensation of the gospel age that began with the establishment of the church in A.D. 30, then we would also assume that the little time here refers to quality and not a period of time. In other words, the effect of the gospel upon those who have obeyed it is much greater than the influence of Satan in their lives. The obedient live in the realm of the gospel, though they are not outside the temptations of Satan.

**20:4 *I saw thrones:*** The thrones were kingly seats of power or authority. This is a place of royalty. In this verse, authority and royalty are given to two groups of the saints. First, there were the martyrs who had given their lives for preaching the gospel (6:9,10). They continued to live and reign in the world through their testimony. They were as Abel who continues to speak, though he is dead (Hb 11:4). Secondly, there were the living saints who refused to be identified with the worship of the Roman Empire. These were those of Revelation 13:12-15 who received great persecution because of their stand for the faith. They overcame the beast “*by the word of their testimony. And they did not love their lives to the death*” (12:11). ***They lived and reigned with Christ:*** Those who did not submit to the worship promoted by Rome, lived because of their obedience to the gospel (Rm 6:4,5). They reigned with Jesus (Rm 5:17; 2 Tm 2:11,12). Christians have died with Jesus (Rm 6:6), and thus, they endure with Him in this life (At 14:22). While on earth, Jesus said the apostles would reign on twelve thrones in the time of the regeneration (Mt 19:28).

The “time of regeneration” is the same as the “one thousand years.” It is the time when the apostles rule through the authority of their inspired word. This word brings judgment to those who do not receive it. Through the preaching of this inspired word, Christians bring judgment to those who reject it. They bring judgment by the preaching of the gospel because those who reject the gospel judge themselves by their rejection of Jesus (Jn 12:48).

**20:5 *The rest of the dead:*** John said that the rest of the dead, that is, the spiritually dead, did not live until the end of the one thousand years. This would be the time explained by Jesus in John 5:28,29. The spiritually dead would be resurrected to go away into eternal destruction (Mt 25:46; 2 Th 1:9). Those who do not partake of the spiritual resurrection will be raised to face the judgment of destruction (2 Th 1:7-9). ***The first resurrection:*** This is the key verse that helps us understand the meaning of the entire chapter. We assume from the first resurrection that there was a first death. This would be spiritual death in sin as a result of separation from God (Is 59:1,2; Rm 5:12; 6:23). When Adam ate the forbidden fruit, he spiritually died (Gn 2:17). When every man reaches the age at which he can determine rebellion against God, and subsequently chooses rebellion, he sins and thus spiritually dies (Rm 5:12). This is the one who “lives in pleasure,” but is dead while he lives (1 Tm 5:6; see Mt 8:22). The first resurrection, therefore, is a spiritual resurrection from spiritual death (Rm 6:3-6; Ep 2:5,6; Cl 2:12,13). The one who partakes of the spiritual resurrection has “passed from death to life” (Jn 5:24; 1 Jn 3:14). The first resurrection implies a second. Though the first is spiritual in the sense that one is spiritually regenerated when resurrected from the grave of water, it is the condition for the second to be bodily. The context of Revelation 20:4-6 speaks of a spiritual resurrection (resurrection from the waters of baptism), and the in-

dication of the second resurrection (the bodily resurrection) at the end of time when Jesus comes again. In John 5:24-29, Jesus also spoke of both a spiritual and physical resurrection. Jesus said that those who believe on Him have "*passed from death to life*" (Jn 5:24). This statement refers to a spiritual resurrection from a state of being spiritually dead to a state of being saved, and thus spiritually alive in Christ. Jesus spoke of the final resurrection when the righteous would be raised to life (Jn 5:25). Those who would live are those who would hear, believe and obey the gospel by immersion for the remission of their sins (At 2:38; Rm 6:3-6). In verses 28 & 29 of John 5, however, Jesus changes in the context from the spiritual resurrection to a physical resurrection that would take place in the future. Those who have worked that which is good, will be resurrected to life. They will be resurrected at the same time as those who have worked evil. But the unrighteous will be resurrected to condemnation and punishment. According to the statement of Jesus in John 5:24-29, both resurrections will take place in the same hour. John 5:24-29, therefore, is a commentary on what John symbolically reveals in Revelation 20:1-6. Jesus came to preach to those who were spiritually dead. Those who heard could in their lives bind Satan by their obedience to the gospel. In Christ, therefore, they were protected from the power of Satan, for in Christ we are not allowed to be tempted beyond that which we are able to endure, but with temptation we are given a way of escape (1 Co 10:13). Through the blood of Jesus the Christian has come into a realm wherein Satan is bound. As long as one faithfully remains in this realm, he will not suffer the second death, that is, removal from the presence of God, and thus, destruction (See 2:11; 20:14; 21:8; 2 Th 1:7-9).

**20:6 *The second death has no power:*** John talks of a coming second death (2:11; 20:14; 21:8). The second death is the eventual banishment into eternal destruction those

who are presently spiritually dead because they did not obey the gospel (Mt 10:28). The result of their banishment will be their second death that will have unending consequences (See comments 2 Th 1:9). However, those who are obedient to the gospel are made spiritually alive. They are priests of God and Christ who minister the gospel to the world (1:6; 5:10; 1 Pt 2:5,9). They are reigning with Christ during this gospel dispensation (1:6; 5:10; Rm 5:17). ***Reign with Him a thousand years:*** Those who partake of the first resurrection (obedience to the gospel), reign in life by their victory over sin. Because of their obedience to the gospel, they have victory over death (Hb 2:14,15). They were thus reigning on this earth with Jesus at the time John recorded this vision (2 Tm 2:12). This is what John had earlier written in chapter 5:10. Jesus has made us “*a kingdom and priests to our God. And we will reign on the earth.*”

## THE DEFEAT AND DOOM OF SATAN

**20:7,8 *Satan will be released:*** The beast, or Roman government, oppressed the church. The period of oppression was earlier identified by John to be the three and a half years, though this time is not a specific three and a half years in reference to time (Rv 12:12; 13:5). This was a “short time” (vs 3). In the brevity of such a short time, Satan will be released at the end of the one thousand years, or gospel dispensation. He will be released from confinement because of the lack of the preaching of the gospel, or the suppression of preaching by governmental powers. The majority of the inhabitants of the world will thus be deceived as they were during Roman oppression in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. ***Deceive the nations:*** Satan will go forth to the four corners of the world, that is, the entire world. Gog and Magog are references to God’s enemies in the Old Testament (See comments Ez 35 – 40). The battle is parallel with the Har-magedon of 16:16. At the end of the gospel

dispensation, the number of the deceived will be as the sand of the sea. In other words, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the world will be resistant to the truth. They will be resistant to the gospel either by indifference, or through oppression.

**20:9 *Surrounded the camp of the saints:*** The “beloved city” is the church of saints who have not submitted to the intimidation of whatever Satan uses. These are those who have not become indifferent to the gospel, or submitted to the oppression of any force that might intimidate them to reject the power of the gospel. The end of the gospel dispensation will be a time when it seems that the church will be oppressed out of existence. However, “fire,” or God’s judgment, will come upon those who persecute the people of God (2 Th 1:7-9; compare Jd 14,15). As God intervened in the days of Noah with the global flood (Gn 6), and in the case of delivering righteous Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah (Gn 18,19), so He will deliver those who remain faithful. In the historical context of John’s readers, this surely referred to the persecution of the church by Rome. The enemies of God went throughout all their world (the Roman Empire) to encompass and attack the church. However, in a secondary sense, this has happened to the church among wicked governments since the days of the 1<sup>st</sup> century. In numerous places of the world, the church has been suppressed out of existence. It is suppressed out of existence by those who have given themselves over to false religious beliefs. As in the days of Roman imperial religion, religiously misguided men deceived themselves into following after false religions in order to reject the commandments of God (Compare comments Mk 7:1-9). It was God’s purpose in the creation of the world to populate heaven. When the present world accomplishes the purpose for which it was created, then God will terminate the world. Therefore, when few people will respond to the message of

the gospel, then there will no longer be a reason for the existence of the world.

**20:10 *The devil ... was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone:*** All the wicked hear the words of Jesus, “*Depart from Me you cursed into everlasting fire that is prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Mt 25:41). Hell is the intended place of punishment for Satan. All those who would be messengers of his cause will end up in the same place and suffer the same punishment. The severity of the punishment is manifested in the metaphor “fire and brimstone.” We do not make the mistake, as some biblical interpreters, of literalizing the metaphor. “Fire and brimstone” is something literal and of this world. That which is signified by the metaphor in the heavenly realm is always greater and above this world. Therefore, we must assume that hell is more horrible than the literal fire and brimstone of this world. ***Where also are the beast and the false prophet:*** The nature of this statement indicates that the wicked Roman persecutors had already been cast into this place of torment before the devil is cast there. This indicates that at the time of physical death, one immediately faces final judgment, and is subsequently cast into torments as the rich man was in Luke 16 (See comments Hb 9:27). The beast (Roman government) and the false prophet (Roman religion) have been cast into the place that is reserved for the devil who will end up in torment at the conclusion of all things (Mt 25:41). John’s comfort to the righteous is that those who have tormented them are now in torment themselves. ***Forever and ever:*** The duration of the torment is indefinite, though certain. It is everlasting (*aionios*) in the sense that God has appointed it to happen, therefore, it will not be taken away. The destruction into which they are cast will have unending consequences that cannot be undone. There is thus no chance to escape the finality of the consequence that will result from the destruction of both

soul and body in hell (See comments Mt 10:28). As in the Old Testament, “everlasting” and “forever” are English words that translated the Hebrew word *olam*. This word carries with it the Jewish understanding that the torment will last throughout God’s intended time of duration. Emphasis is not on the length of time, but on the certainty of the punishment’s existence and the consequences that will result from such after the punishment has served justice for the crime. Consider the use of the Hebrew word *olam* that is translated “everlasting” and “forever” throughout the Old Testament (Ex 12:24; 29:9; 40:15; Lv 3:17; Dt 15:17; Ja 14:9; 1 Kg 8:12,13; 2 Kg 5:27). When the Jews translated the Old Testament into the Greek language (the Septuagint), they used the Greek word *aionios* to translate *olam* that carries with it a similar meaning. Therefore, time without end must not always be read into the meaning of the texts that use these words, for both *olam* and *aionios* are used to refer to God’s covenant with Israel (Lv 24:8), slavery under the law (Dt 15:17), the Passover (Ex 12:24), the Sabbath (Ex 31:16), the Levitical priesthood (Ex 40:15), leprosy (2 Kg 5:27) and mountains (Hk 3:6). All these things had an end, and thus, *olam* in reference to these things and institutions did not continue without end. Therefore, with reference to the use of the equivalent Greek word *aionios* we must not assume an unending existence of those who will be separated from the presence of God (See comments 2 Th 1:7-9). The fact that God can destroy both soul and body (Mt 10:28), and that the disobedient will face destruction from the presence of God, assumes that there will be a termination of the unrighteous after just punishment has been rendered. The process of destruction will not go on without end, but the results of the destruction will.

## THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

**20:11** *A great white throne and Him who sat on it:*

The Father has given all judgment into the hands of the Son (Jn 5:22; At 17:31). Since Jesus will “*judge the living and the dead at His appearing*” (2 Tm 4:1), all men must submit to His word, for Jesus said of those who reject Him, “*The word that I have spoken, the same will judge him in the last day*” (Jn 12:48). ***The earth and the heaven fled away:*** The physical world and present heavens will perish (See Ps 102:25-27; Hb 1:11,12; 2 Pt 3:10). Even those living on the earth seek to flee from the judgment to come, but there will be no escape. All must stand before the judgment seat of Christ (See comments 2 Co 5:10; see Rv 6:14; 16:20; 18:21; 19:20).

**20:12** This verse possibly refers to the resurrection and final consignment of the saints to the eternal dwelling of the new heavens and earth (See 2 Pt 3:13). The following verse 13 probably refers to the final judgment of the wicked. Regardless of the interpretation, both verses state that everyone will be raised from the dead (Jn 5:28,29; At 24:15; 2 Co 5:10). ***Books were opened:*** These books are possibly a reference to Daniel’s vision of the judgment in Daniel 7:10. “*The judgment was set, and the books were opened.*” The metaphor here could be from the “book of remembrance” in the Old Testament that was a record of the righteous (Ml 3:16). It could also be a metaphorical reference to the record of the deeds and character of the unrighteous as was spoken by Isaiah (Is 30:8,9). The metaphor could also include the Old Testament (Lk 24:25; Jn 5:36; 10:35) or the New Testament (Jn 12:48). ***Book of life:*** The names of citizens of Roman cities were inscribed in a “book of life.” John uses this book in a metaphorical manner to indicate the listing of the saved in heaven (See Ps 69:28; Is 4:3; Ml 3:16; Lk 10:20; Ph 4:3; 13:8; 17:8; 21:27). God certainly does not need a literal book in which

to write a list of the saved. The One who knows every hair of our head can certainly call each of us by name. The metaphor, therefore, signifies that God knows exactly who the saved are. The thought is to comfort us. **Judged ... according to their works:** The elect will be saved by grace, not on the merit of how they performed law and accumulated good works (See comments Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16; Ep 2:8,9). Christians are not saved as the result of legally keeping law simply because no one can keep law perfectly. However, they are created in Christ for good works (Ep 2:10). The result of their faith is that they obey the law of God (Rm 3:31). We would say, therefore, that it is by these works and obedience that we will be judged. The deeds of the Christian are the result of his salvation by grace. The works, therefore, are the manifestation of the Christian's thanksgiving for his salvation in Christ (See comments 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). Christians must respond to the grace of God in their lives with a working faith (Rm 3:31). James warned, "*Even so faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*" (Js 2:17; see Hb 4:13).

**20:13 The sea gave up the dead:** John emphasizes that no one of the wicked masses of the world will escape the final judgment. The beast (the wicked of Rome) and the false prophet (Roman religion) will all be judged. The sea refers to the masses of humanity from which the wicked persecutors of the church have come (See 13:1; 16:3; 21:1). They will all face the judgment. **Death and Hades delivered up:** Death and hades will deliver up those who are in them. Death and hades go together because hades is the abode of the souls and spirits of the dead. Even if the wicked have died, they will be resurrected in order to continue their torment. In this "end of time" picture, John also wants us to know that the termination of physical death is coming.

**20:14 Death and Hades:** When Jesus comes again, physical death will be no more. Therefore, there will be no

more need of an abode of the souls and spirits of the dead. Physical death and the abode of the dead will be cast into the lake of fire, or place of fiery termination (Mt 10:28; 2 Th 1:7-9). **The second death:** This is the second death, or second time in the life of the wicked that they have been separated from God. In life, sin spiritually separates one from God (Is 59:2). He thus dies and is spiritually dead because his sins have separated him from God. In the second death, one's existence is separated from God in the destruction of Gehenna (2 Th 1:7-9). Thus in the second death, the wicked will be sentenced to their just punishment that was incurred by their disobedience in life. They will be separated from the only One who is eternal. They will be separated from the eternal God.

**20:15 Cast into the lake of fire:** This statement certainly emphasizes the point that one should have his name recorded among the saved. Jesus will eventually say to the disobedient, "*I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness!*" (Mt 7:23; see Mt 25:41). It will certainly be a sad day when the unrighteous hear these words of departure from the One they resisted throughout their lives. Such words will mark the end of all things in reference to the earth and its purpose for existence (See 2 Pt 3:10-12). God will have concluded the plan of redemption to bring souls into eternal dwelling. In this last vision of God's judgments and rewards, John's picture of the gospel dispensation is complete. Through visions he has given the saints a picture of the gospel dispensation that was first announced on Pentecost in A.D. 30 and would extend to the termination of all things that have not been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. In this particular picture, he wants the righteous to know that the wicked persecutors of Christians will not escape their judgment that will be final (See Hb 9:27). Therefore, the saints must be patient, for vengeance belongs to God who will repay (Rm 12:19; see

Rv 13:10). Regardless of what happens in life, God will settle the matter at the end of all things.

## Chapter 21

Having finished a picture of the end result of evil in chapter 20, John now gives a picture in 21:1 – 22:5 of the redeemed state of the church on earth. As Jesus did in the parables, John describes the church in all its true splendor as viewed through the cleansing blood of Jesus. He views the church as the ideal fellowship of this world, as well as the fellowship of the redeemed after they have transitioned into the eternal glory. Students have debated as to whether his picture of the church here refers to the church on earth or to the church in her final place of rest in eternal glory. It is sometimes difficult to determine which interpretation is correct, especially in view of the fact that the present church on earth is in nature the same church that is redeemed out of this world into eternal existence. The nature of the members is the same. It is only the environment that changes. It is the church, however, that determines the environment of its fellowship by the relationship of disciples with one another both on earth and in heaven. Therefore, whether we talk about the church on earth or heaven, in the eyes of God it is still the same people who enjoy a common fellowship with one another. The church in her heavenly dwelling has her roots in the fellowship that began on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. Since it is the glorious church on earth, then we assume that it will be more glorious in an environment where all persecutors have been done away with by the conclusion of earth history. Therefore, in Revelation, John views “*the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem ... and assembly of the firstborn ones who are written in heaven ...*” (Hb 12:22,23). He views the church, the spiritual Israel of God, as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy to be the new heavens and earth (Is 65:17; 66:22). The

ideal church on earth is an indication of the church in eternity. In the eyes of God, as pictured through the visions of Revelation, the ideal church is the same in nature through the blood of the Lamb, whether in time or beyond time. However, in reference to the saints, they look forward to a realm of existence wherein there is no hostile environment with which to contend on a daily basis. It is this environment that we also must consider to be revealed to John for the comfort of the saints to whom he is writing.

## THE NEW HEAVEN AND EARTH

**21:1 *I saw a new heaven and a new earth:*** The Greek word *kainos* (“new”) that is used here indicates that this environment is new in quality and kind. There will be a new order that is in contrast to the present heaven and earth. It will not be a physical world that now sustains the physical body. It will be an environment that is designed for the dwelling of a new habitation, that is, a residence for the spiritual body in which we will dwell throughout eternity (See comments 1 Co 15:35-57; 2 Co 5:1-8; 1 Jn 3:2). Isaiah spoke of the present order of things as a new heavens and earth (See Is 65; 66:22-24). Isaiah had the church in mind when the prophecies were made. Thus the new heavens and earth did not refer to the physical environment of the earth, but to the spiritual community of God within the environment of this physical world. John could be indicating the same thing as Isaiah. Christians look forward to the continuation of a new relationship with Deity in an environment in which the present world has been done away.

***The first heaven and first earth had passed away:*** If John’s reference is primarily to the present church, then he would be indicating that the old order of the Jewish covenant had passed away (See Ep 2:14-16; Cl 2:14; Hb 10:9). Christians are now living in the time of regeneration (Mt 19:28), the time of restoration of all things (At 3:21) that includes

the restoration of the tree of life (22:2) from which man was driven in the garden of Eden (Gn 3:22-24). However, if John's reference is to the heavenly existence to come, then there seems to be a parallel between what is revealed here and what was revealed to Peter. Peter spoke of a new heavens and earth after the destruction of this material world (See comments 2 Pt 3:13). Before the coming of the new heavens and earth there would be the destruction of the ungodly, which John has also revealed (Compare 2 Pt 3:7 with Rv 20:13). Peter also spoke of the passing of this present heavens and earth which John has also conveyed (Compare 2 Pt 3:10 with Rv 20:11). After the passing of the old heavens and earth, there would come the new (Compare 2 Pt 3:13 with Rv 21:1). ***There was no more sea:*** While the church is on earth, neither the restless and unstable populations of the world (13:1; 20:13; Is 57:20), nor anything of this world, can separate faithful Christians from their relationship with God (Rm 8:35-39; see Rv 4:6; 15:2). When the church comes into the heavenly realm of existence, the hostile environment that was produced by the populations of the world will have been done away.

**21:2 New Jerusalem:** This is the glorious church, the spiritual temple of God, that is in contrast to the physical Jerusalem of the Old Testament (See vss 9,10; Gl 4:22-31; Hb 1:10; 12:22,23; 13:14; compare Ps 48; Is 26:1; 40:9). Again, John uses the word *kainos* to signify that which is greater in quality and kind. ***Coming down from God:*** The concept of the pure and holy church originated with God in heaven (See 13:6; 15:5). It has been revealed in these last times through the apostles and prophets (See Gl 4:3-7; Ep 3:3-5; compare 2 Co 5:18; Js 1:17). ***Prepared as a bride:*** On the Pentecost of A.D. 30 the bride was born. She is now being prepared for marriage to the Bridegroom (18:23; 2 Co 11:2; see comments Mt 9:15).

**21:3 The tabernacle of God is with men:** The word

for “tabernacle” is in its verb form here. Thus, God tabernacles, or “pitches His tent” among men. The Greek verb *skenoo* (temple) emphasizes the dwelling of Deity among men. John earlier wrote concerning the incarnation, “*And the Word was made flesh and dwelt (skenoo) among us ...*” (Jn 1:14). **With men:** “Men” here refers to “His people,” not men in general. The church is the temple of God (2 Co 6:16; see 1 Tm 3:15). God dwells in His house, the church (Rm 8:10,11; 2 Co 6:16-18). Such was prophesied by the prophets (Ex 29:45; Lv 26:12; Is 43:6; Jr 31:1; Ez 37:27; Hs 1:10; see Jn 14:23). **His people:** Under the Sinai law, God was in a covenant relationship with His people, the nation of Israel. However, under the new law and covenant, He is in a covenant relationship with the spiritual Israel, the church (Mt 28:19,20; Mk 16:15). God dwells in His people because they have submitted to His will. The will of God is thus done on earth as it is done in heaven (See comments Mt 6:9,10; Lk 17:20,21).

**21:4 God will wipe away every tear:** It is true that Christians have been reconciled to God (7:17) through the gospel of God’s grace (2 Co 5:17-19; Ep 2:1-10). Having been thus redeemed by the blood of the Lamb (Ep 1:7), it is now a time for always rejoicing in the Lord (Ph 4:4; Js 1:2; see Is 25:6). However, in the new environment of the heavenly existence, the present hostile environment of the populations of the world will be no more. It is a time of rejoicing now, but a time of greater rejoicing is yet to come. **There will be no more death:** In Christ, the Christian has a remedy for both spiritual and physical death. There is now no more separation from God in spiritual death as long as one remains in Christ (20:14; Rm 8:1; 1 Co 15:26; see Jn 5:24). In reference to the church’s transition into the heavenly realm, physical death will cease to exist. Death and hades will have been cast into the lake of fire after the saints move into a new heaven and earth (20:14). However, when the

Christian dies, physical death has no more reference to his state of existence. All those things of the physical world that caused sorrow and pain in this physical environment will have been done away when Christians enter into the heavenly realm of existence after death. Isaiah could have prophesied of the present environment of the church, but surely his prophecies also had application to the dwelling of the saints in a heavenly realm (See Is 35:10; 51:11; 65:19).

***The former things have passed away:*** When Jesus came, the old order of the Sinai law and covenant passed away in order to give way to the new law and covenant of the new heavens and earth of the church (Gl 3:11-13; Hb 10:1,4,9). In a similar manner, the old order of the things that now exist will give way to the new heaven and earth that are to come in the heavenly dwelling.

**21:5 *I make all things new:*** Isaiah prophesied that God would make all things new in the church (Is 43:19). When one becomes a Christian, he becomes a new creature (2 Co 5:17; see Rm 6:3-6). Christians now live under a new order of things that is better than the old law and covenant (See Hb 7:19,22; 8:6; 9:23; 10:34; 11:16,35; 12:24). However, when the church transitions into heaven, things will again be made new. ***True and faithful:*** In other words, we can trust that God will do what He has promised to do (19:9; Rm 4:21).

**21:6 *It is done:*** What has been stated has come to pass. The church was in existence at the time this statement was made. For this reason, it has been affirmed that John was discussing the church in this context and not the heavenly realm of existence. However, we must also keep in mind that when the Christian dies, he is immediately with the Lord in His presence in a heavenly dwelling (2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). He is with the Lord in comforts, and according to our time, awaiting embodiment at the time of the final coming of Jesus (2 Co 5:1-8; 1 Jn 3:2). In some way,

therefore, at the time John wrote, the persecuted saints who have been martyred for the Lord, had passed into eternal glory with the Lord. There will be no waiting for rest. Those dead in the Lord are now resting with the Lord. They have passed out of time into eternity. We are only told that the embodiment of all saints will be when Jesus comes again (See comments 1 Co 15:39-57; 1 Th 4:13-18). When the saints die, they have passed out of an existence wherein time is a factor. However, when God writes concerning these things, He has to communicate to us in reference to our time. Therefore, we are waiting for the final coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. At that time, the spirits of the dead in Christ will come with Jesus in order to be reunited with their resurrected and changed bodies (See comments Jn 5:28,29; 1 Th 4:13). ***Alpha and Omega:*** These first and last letters of the Greek alphabet signify the eternality of God. He is the beginning of all things for all originated with God (See Is 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12). He is the ending of all things, for it will be God who will terminate all that is not written in the Lamb's book of life (1:8; 22:13). ***Fountain of the water of life:*** Salvation flows freely from the city of God (22:1,13-17; see Ps 46:4). In heaven, Christians will continue their possession of the eternal life that they now have (1 Jn 5:13; see Jn 4:10; 7:37).

**21:7 Will inherit all things:** This does not refer to inheriting material things, for the Christian has worked diligently to keep his mind off those things that are of this world (Cl 3:1-3; see comments Mt 6:19). It refers to those things in verse 6 and the things discussed in 2:7-11,17,26; 3:5,12,21 (See Mt 19:29; Ep 1:3). God does not promise Christians that they will inherit that which they have worked all their lives to reject, that is, the material things of this world (Cl 3:1-3). **Son:** See Jn 1:12; Gl 3:26.

**21:8 Cowardly:** Those who are fearful and timid in reference to their faith (Hb 10:38,39; see 1 Jn 4:17,18).

**Unbelieving:** These are those whose faith did not move them to make a commitment to God in order to be faithful servants (Jn 8:24; 12:48). **Abominable:** These are those who participate in the wickedness of idolatry that leads their minds and behavior into wicked deeds (17:4). **Murderers:** These are those who have the blood of innocent people on their hands (Ex 21:12; Rm 13:4). **Immoral people:** The Greek word here means “fornicators” (Rm 13:13; 1 Co 6:9-11; Ep 5:3-5; see Gl 5:19-21). Reference is to all immoral and illicit sexual activity. **Sorcerers:** This would include all those who practice magical arts of deception in order to lead the thinking of people away from God and truth (9:21; 18:23). **Idolaters:** These would be those who created gods after their own imaginations in order to justify their self-made religious beliefs (1 Co 5:11; 6:9; 10:7,21; see Ep 5:5). An idolater would be one who considers the riches of this world of greater value than his faith in God. Idolaters have thus led their thinking away from God because they have focused on those things that are of this world. **All liars:** These are those who slander, deceive and promote falsehoods for their own selfish desires. They seek to injure the reputation of others by spreading slanderous lies and rumors about their fellow man. **Fire and brimstone:** The preceding will suffer the same fate as the devil and his angels (20:14,15; Mt 25:41; see 2 Th 1:7-9).

## THE NEW JERUSALEM

**21:9,10 I will show you the bride:** From this verse forward it seems clear that the angel is describing the church that was predestined before the creation of the world and purchased by the blood of the Lamb. In contrast to the picture of the angel pouring out judgments on the harlot city in chapter 17, here John shows the beauty and splendor of the holy bride, the new Jerusalem, the church of Christ as viewed through the blood of Jesus. **In the spirit:**

John is carried away in vision (1:10; 17:3). **A great and high mountain:** John gives this description from an exalted spiritual standpoint. It is only from this perspective that the true church can be seen in its purity apart from the false religions that permeate the world in which the saints must reside. **The holy city:** In contrast to the harlot of false religion that was earthly (ch 17), the church is holy and originates out of heaven. The truth upon which the church is built has come from God (See Jn 14:26; 16:13). Therefore, the church, God's holy city, is holy and heavenly (20:9; see Hb 11:16). **Descending out of heaven from God:** The authority of the kingdom of God originates from heaven. When men respond to the kingdom reign of God, the church on earth comes into existence in any part of the world (See comments Mt 6:9,10; Lk 17:20,21). The validation of the church, therefore, must always originate from God and not man (See comments Mk 7:1-9).

**21:11 Having the glory of God:** God's presence among men is made known on earth through the church (15:8; compare Ex 40:34; 1 Kg 8:11). **Her light:** Christians are the light of the world because of the light of God that dwells in them (See comments Mt 5:15,16; 2 Co 4:6).

**21:12,13 A great and high wall:** From the ancient cities of the Old Testament, the wall referred to here signifies the strength, security and protection of those who are encompassed by the wall (See 1 Kg 17:10). **Gates:** These gates are not shut (vs 25). Therefore, entrance into the city for salvation while the city is on earth is always possible (Mt 11:28-30; 28:19,20; Mk 16:15,16). While the preaching of the gospel continues throughout the world, the gates will remain opened for all who answer the call of the gospel. Peter opened the doors of the church with the keys of the kingdom by making the first official announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus (See Mt 16:18,19; At 2:14-36). The proclamation continues to be made today by faithful

disciples. ***At the gates:*** Compare Is 62:6; Hb 1:14. ***Twelve tribes:*** God's people of the twelve tribes of Israel under the Sinai law and covenant offered the gospel call to the Gentiles at and after the announcement of the kingdom reign of Jesus on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30 (See comments At 2). It was through the Jews that God brought forth the Messiah into the world, and thus, through Jesus God created the new spiritual Israel (See comments 17:1ff). ***Gates:*** See Nm 2; Ez 48:30-34.

***21:14-16 Twelve foundations:*** The church is built upon the foundation of truth that was revealed through the twelve apostles (See Jn 14:26; 16:13; Ep 2:20-24). ***Measure the city:*** The church on earth was measured by John in 11:1. However, here a heavenly measure (golden) is used by an angel to measure the victorious church as it would enter heaven. The measurement is to manifest the greatness of the body of Christ. ***A square:*** The city is a perfect cube. 12,000 furlongs is about 2,200 kilometers or about 1,400 miles. The number "12," which is the religious number for perfection, is multiplied by "1,000," the number that means full or complete. The numbers thus represent the perfection of the church in all its fullness.

***21:17 The measure of man:*** John wants us to know that these measurements are according to the common measures that are used by men (13:18). The measures are of man, but the measurements are meant to signify something that is spiritual. The 144 cubit wall is small in comparison to the size of the city. The wall is possibly pictured to be small because the church should always be aggressive against the armies of Satan. The body of Christ is not a fortress into which one withdraws from the world. It is a citadel from which the truth is proclaimed to all the world (See 2 Co 10:3-5; 2 Tm 4:1ff). The church is a holy city from which the praises of God are to be announced to the world (See comments 1 Pt 2:9).

**21:18-21** Through metaphorical language, John seeks to lift our imaginations to comprehend that which cannot be defined by simple words of human communication. The true nature of the body, and especially its final dwelling place in the heavenly realm, cannot be defined with a dictionary of human understanding. Legal religions that propose the church to be a set of rules and regulations, based on logic and deductions, find it difficult to mentally transcend their legal definition of the church. It is difficult for the legalist to understand the church as God sees her through the blood of the Lamb. In this context, John seeks to lift our minds through metaphor in order to stimulate our imaginations concerning the city of God. Those things that are most precious to man on earth are used to take our minds out of this world in an effort to comprehend the spiritual nature of God's people. If John's primary purpose here were to describe the glory of heaven, then certainly, heaven is beyond his greatest metaphor.

**21:22 *I saw no temple in it:*** This is the fulfillment of the promise that was made in 3:12. The whole city itself is the temple. God dwells in His temple, the church (vss 2,11; 2 Co 6:16; compare 1 Co 3:16,17). God's people on earth is the temple that offers worship to Him. It is not a physical temple of this world (See Jn 4:21-24). The church is composed of the people of God, and thus, the people worship God.

**21:23,24 *The Lamb is its light:*** Jesus is the light of the world. And it is the church that has been attracted to His light (Jn 1:1-6; 8:12; 9:5; 12:35; 2 Tm 1:10; compare prophecy of Is 60:19,20). The members of the body are a light to the world in the sense that they receive their light from Jesus (Compare Mt 5:16). ***Nations ... will walk in the light of it:*** Those who obey the word of God walk in the light that proceeds from God (1 Jn 1:5-9; see prophecy of Is 60:3-5; 66:12). All the glory that is received by earthly

kings is here focused on God's people. John proposes to contrast the glory of the church with the glory that is claimed by the government of Rome in which the church dwelt. Those of the world glory in those things that are temporary and constructed by the ingenuity of men. However, God built the church (Mt 16:18). It is far more glorious than anything that man can imagine.

**21:25,26 Gates ... will not be shut:** Until Jesus comes again, there will always be an invitation through the preaching of the gospel that men come to the Lamb (Mt 11:28,29; Lk 14:15-24; see Is 60:11,20). All the glory that is given to the nations of the world is brought unto the church. Therefore, the greatness of the church far exceeds the glory of any particular nation. When all the kings and nations of this world come to a close at the end of time, all the glory that they possessed will have vanished away. It will be then that the Lamb and His bride will stand glorious in victory.

**21:27 Written in the Lamb's book of life:** When one believes on Jesus and is immersed into Christ for remission of sins (At 2:38; 22:16), God forgives all sins (Hb 8:12,13; 10:17). Therefore, one comes into the holy city a new creature (2 Co 5:17; see Jl 3:17; Rm 6:3-6). By obedience to the gospel one's name is written in the Lamb's book of life. Because of the blood of the Lamb, the church will then transition into eternal glory without blemish. **Book of life:** See comments 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12,15. Those who are members of the body of Christ (the church) are written in the book of life. Only these will enter the eternal city. This is the comfort of the saints, knowing that their names are known by the God who can number the hairs of their heads. Every saint is important to God, for it was for each saint that God poured out the blood of His Son (Jn 3:16).

## Chapter 22

In the first five verses of this chapter John continues to

describe the holy city that he began to describe in chapter 21. The background of these concluding comments finds its setting in the creation that is recorded in Genesis 1. It was in the garden of Eden that man lost his right to the tree of life (Gn 3:22-24). It is in Christ, which relationship will extend into eternal existence, that man is once again restored to the tree of life in order to have eternal life (1 Jn 5:11-13).

**22:1,2 A river of water of life:** The gospel that brings eternal life proceeds from God (vs 17; 7:17; 21:6; see Jn 4:10,11,14; 7:38; compare Ps 46:4; Ez 47:1-12). It is through obedience to the gospel that one is saved (See comments Mk 16:16; Rm 6:3-6; 1 Pt 3:20,21). Therefore, when one obeys the gospel, he comes into a realm of eternal existence where his eternal life begins (1 Jn 5:11). **The tree of life:** Adam was driven out of the garden of Eden and from the tree of life when he sinned by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gn 2:9; 3:22-24). The guilt of his sin was upon his own shoulders, and thus, he spiritually died as a result of being separated from God (Is 59:1,2; Rm 5:12). The consequence of his sin resulted in all humanity being separated from the tree of life, for all humanity was driven out of the garden of Eden with Adam (1 Co 15:20-22). No one could eat of the tree, and thus, live forever. Therefore, it is now appointed unto all men that they must physically die (Hb 9:27). But when one obeys the gospel, he is restored to the tree of life, and thus has access to eternal life once again (See comments Jn 10:27,28). Though eternal life of the Christian is conditioned on the faithfulness of the Christian in this life, he is still in possession of eternal life. His eternal life will be made sure when he transitions into the heavenly realm of existence that is beyond this world. In other words, those who hear the voice of Jesus, and thus follow after His will, begin their eternal life in this world. This eternal life will

be made sure in heaven after the final coming of Jesus. **Twelve kinds of fruit:** The fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil brought into the world both spiritual and physical death. However, the tree of life brings into the world reconciliation to God and the beginning of eternal life that will eventually result in one's dwelling in the heavenly realm of existence in the presence of God. All that is associated with the tree of life about which John speaks is for the spiritual healing of the nations. Life was lost in the garden of Eden when sin entered into the world through the sin of Adam. It is regained in Christ, and eventually, continued in heaven to come.

**22:3 There will be no more curse:** The translation here could be that there would be "no more any accursed thing." Man lives in a world that is cursed. He was cursed in the garden of Eden (Gn 3:14-19). Those who break God's law are cursed (Dt 27:15-26; 28:15). One is cursed if he tries to live under law in an effort to keep it perfectly to save himself (See comments Gl 3:10-14). However, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of law, having become a curse for us*" (Gl 3:13). Those who are in Christ have been redeemed from the curse of death, both spiritually and physically. When the saints are brought into the realm of heavenly dwelling, there will be no more separation from God. There will be no more physical death. **Serve Him:** Because the saints have been delivered from the curse of sin and death, they are able to serve God out of gratitude for their salvation (See comments 1 Co 15:10; 2 Co 4:15). Their service is motivated by the fact that God so loved them that He manifested His grace toward them through the cross (Ti 2:11).

**22:4 They will see His face:** It is not that God has a physical face to see, since He is spirit (Jn 4:24; see Ps 17:15; 42:2; Mt 5:8; Jn 14:9; 1 Co 13:12; 1 Jn 3:2). They will see the presence of God in the heavenly environment wherein they will dwell for eternity. Christians now see the true

and living God by their knowledge of His nature and character that are revealed through Jesus. In eternal heaven they will be in the presence of His nature and character. **Name will be on their foreheads:** Those who followed the beast and false religion of Rome, labeled themselves with the wickedness of the Roman Empire. But here, and in contrast, the saints of God are identified with the mark of God's righteousness (See 3:12; 7:3; 14:1). The identification is an open acknowledgment that Christians are God's people (Hb 2:11,12; 11:16; 1 Jn 3:1).

**22:5 There will be no night there:** Christians are now the light of the world because they have been enlightened by the light of Jesus (21:23; Mt 5:16; Jn 8:12; 1 Th 5:5; 1 Jn 1:5-7). **They will reign:** Christians are now reigning in this life with Christ by conquering the lusts of the flesh, lusts of the eyes and pride of life (20:4; Rm 5:17; 2 Tm 2:11,12). In the world to come, they will take their mental maturity into heavenly dwelling. The emphasis in the New Testament on the reign of Christians is not in the sense of fulfilling any lust or pride of life. Carnal mentality would drive one to seek to rule over his fellow man. Carnal mentality would drive one to consume the material world in a manner to satisfy one's self or to use the things of the world to exalt one's self over his fellow man (See Mt 6:19-21; Rm 12:1,2; Cl 3:1-3). However, contrary to such uses of this world, the reign of the Christian refers to a mental attitude where one does not allow the world to rule over him by his subjection to the carnal desires of life. The Christian has mentally and spiritually sought to conquer the lusts of life, and thus worldly influences must have no power over him. He will carry this mental and spiritual attitude with him into heavenly existence. In fact, only those who have this mental and spiritual attitude will be allowed into the presence of God in eternity. There will be no one in heaven with selfish ambition who is seeking to rule over

others. There will be no one there who lusts after gold or silver, for these things will have passed away with the present world (See comments 2 Pt 3:10,11).

## THE COMING OF JESUS

In these last verses of Revelation John concludes by reaffirming the truth of the visions. All things have been concluded. John is now given final revelation concerning thoughts that emphasize the conclusion of the visions and the finality of revelation.

**22:6 *These sayings are faithful and true:*** The angel affirmed that what has been revealed from God is true since it is from God (Compare 3:14; 19:11). And since the revelation is from God, then the message can be trusted. One can be assured that it will come to pass. ***Things that must shortly take place:*** This is the second reminder that the revelations of judgment upon the beast and false prophet will take place in the lifetime of the immediate audience to whom John wrote (See comments 1:1). The visions were not presented as an outline of history until the final coming of Jesus. Neither were they given as a list of signs for the saints to follow in order to determine the final coming of Jesus over two thousand years after they were written. They were given for the purpose of comforting the saints who were suffering persecution at the time John wrote. This final statement by the angel, therefore, is to silence all those who would twist these Scriptures out of their historical application, and thus, twist them to their own destruction (See comments 2 Pt 3:16,17). The Holy Spirit knew that men throughout the history of the religious world would seek to twist the book of Revelation in order to fit into the text their preconceived ambitions to rule over their fellow man while they possessed the treasures of this world. Such materialistic fantasies are contrary to the very nature of the encouragement that God gives to the persecuted Christians

who first received these revelations. They were suffering from economic persecution by Rome and enduring the oppression of a worldly government. God's encouragement was that they would soon come into an environment that was not governed by the desire for physical necessities. They would come into an environment that was not manipulated by politicians or governments of this world. Any theory of interpretation, therefore, that would encourage a reversal of these basic principles of the message of Revelation to comfort persecuted Christians, cannot be true. One cannot correctly interpret Revelation with principles of theology that contradict teachings of the rest of the New Testament.

**22:7 *I come quickly:*** Reference is to Jesus' coming in time in judgment upon those churches of Asia who do not repent. The coming also refers to the coming in judgment upon the beast and false prophet who will not repent (See 2:16; 11:3). The judgments of Jesus will come speedily upon the persecutors of the saints. It will not be delayed. Judgments upon the unrepentant apostates of the church will also come quickly in order that the rest of the church not be infected with the virus of their wickedness. We must not misunderstand the coming of Jesus that is here under consideration. It is not the coming of Jesus at the end of time. The New Testament does not teach the imminent return of Jesus, that is, that He would be coming in His final return in the lifetime of the immediate audience to whom the inspired writers wrote. The Holy Spirit did not deceive the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians into believing that Jesus was coming in His final coming in their lifetime in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. The message of the inspired writers was simply that the 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians be prepared at all times in their Christian life. However, there are at least two major in-time comings of Jesus in judgment. These were in-time judgments upon Jerusalem (Mt 24) and Rome. These

comings of Jesus were accomplished in the sense that Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70, and the Roman Empire eventually came to a close as a result of God's judgment (See comments Mt 24:29-31; Js 5:7,8). **Keeps the sayings:** Keeping the words of God's revelation means to remain obedient to God's commandments (See 1:3). One cannot simply intellectually know the commandments of God without obediently responding to them. Keeping God's word means that one must know the word of God (Js 1:12; 1 Jn 5:3).

**22:8,9 I am your fellow bondservant:** John again was overcome with the wonder of the visions and revelation. His natural response was to fall down and worship before the bearer of the message (See comments 19:10). However, the angel was not worthy of worship. Only God is to receive worship. If an angel of God would refuse the worship of man, then certainly any man who receives worship that should be directed only to God, is arrogant and puffed up (See comments At 10:45,46). **Worship God:** Man's worship must be directed solely toward God. It is idolatry to worship man, angels or anything other than God to whom all worship must be directed. Any religion that encourages worship of any man is a false religion simply because the worship of the adherents of the religion is not directed totally toward God. One of the first ways to determine the validity of any religion, therefore, is to determine the direction of the worship of the adherents of the religion.

**22:10 The time is at hand:** John had to record these visions in order to allow others to read them (See 1:1). They were in the process of being fulfilled. This statement should silence all those who would extend the fulfillment of the prophecies of this book to refer to events that would occur throughout history until the end of time. The angel certainly assumed that some religious prognosticators would do such. Therefore, he has reemphasized that these judg-

ments are to take place shortly in reference to the audience to whom John wrote. The occurrence of the events was at hand in reference to the time in which the recipients lived.

**22:11** The angel affirms that those who have determined to live as they desire, will be judged in that state (See Jn 3:18-21). The judgments are soon to happen. Therefore, the Judge will come as a thief upon those who have determined to live in rebellion against God. However, those who are the saints of God must continue in their righteousness because God will soon bring relief to the persecuted church.

**22:12 *I come quickly:*** This is Jesus' coming in time in judgment. Not only does the Holy Spirit direct John's hand to write that the judgments of this revelation will shortly take place, Jesus reveals directly that His coming is soon to occur. Emphasis here is to encourage the saints that there will be no delay. Jesus' comings are swift and not delayed outside His intended time of coming in judgment (See vss 6,7,10,12,20). ***My reward is with Me:*** When Jesus comes in judgment, He will bring condemnation to those who have refused to repent. However, His coming in judgment is always a blessing to the saints of God. When Jesus came in time in judgment upon Jerusalem, the saints were relieved of the persecution of the Jews. When He came in judgment upon Rome, they were delivered from the persecution of the Roman State. When He comes at the end of time, Christians will be delivered out of the hostile environment in which they now dwell, for the environment of this present world will be terminated. The reward, therefore, that Jesus brings is relief from the environments in which Christians live that make it difficult for them to have peace. "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*" (2 Co 5:10).

**22:13-15 *The beginning and the end:*** The assurance that Jesus gives concerning His coming in judgment upon the persecutors of the saints is that He has all authority (Mt 28:18; 1 Pt 3:22). All things are under His control, and thus, He works among the nations as the King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15; see Rv 1:8; 21:6; compare Is 41:4; 43:10; 44:6; 48:12). ***Those who wash their robes:*** Reference here is to those believers who submit to the conditions for coming into a covenant relationship with God. Those who believe in Jesus and are obedient to the gospel by immersion into the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus come into contact with His blood, the blood of the covenant. They are washed of sins by the blood of Jesus (At 22:16; Ti 3:5). Those who obey the command to repent and be baptized wash their robes in the blood of the Lamb (At 2:38). ***Right to the tree of life:*** All those who have come into contact with the blood of the Lamb by obedience to the gospel, are born again in Christ (Jn 3:3-5). They have eternal life in Christ (1 Co 15:21; 2 Tm 2:10; 1 Jn 5:11; see Gn 3:22-24). Such gives them the right to enter into the gates of eternal heaven. Outside Christ, and thus, outside the gates of the holy city, the church, are those who are filled with the wickedness that is here revealed (See 21:8). But when one is baptized into Christ, it is different. “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bondservants or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit*” (1 Co 12:13).

**22:16** Jesus here affirms that the things that have been revealed to John are to be read to the saints (1:1). Jesus is the Root of David (5:5; 2 Sm 7:12-16; Ps 132:11; Is 11:1,10; 53:2; Jr 23:5; Ez 34:24; 37:24ff). He is the descendant of David to whom it was promised that He would sit on David’s throne (See comments Lk 1:29-33). Jesus is the Bright and Morning Star who gives hope (Nm 24:17; Lk 1:78; 2 Pt 1:19).

**22:17 Come:** John's visions were delivered to a people who were suffering the onslaught of a hostile environment. The hope and comfort that were revealed through the visions were that Jesus is head over all things, and thus, He has control over all things (Mt 28:18; Ep 1:20-22). This is the invitation the angel and saints make to the world. It is an invitation for all to come to Jesus where there is comfort and hope (See Mt 11:28-30). As the organic body of Christ, it is the function of the body to reach out to the world in order to increase the body. It is thus the nature of the members of the body to be evangelistic by preaching the gospel to the world. Dysfunctional members are those who have ceased in their function to share the good news of that Jesus died for our sins and was resurrected for our hope (1 Co 15:1-4).

**22:18,19** The Holy Spirit knew that the nature of the book of Revelation would lend itself to being misinterpreted by those who come to it with frivolous speculations about the spirit world and fantasies concerning their end-of-time predictions. He knew that men are often more driven in their interpretations of the Scriptures by the misguided religious world in which they live than by objective investigation of Scripture to allow the Bible to speak for itself. Therefore, this last warning is given in reference to the revelations of John in order to strike fear in the hearts of those who would seek to read into the visions the speculations of a biblically ignorant generation. **If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him:** John concludes with a principle that has been established by God since the first Scriptures were inscribed by Moses (See Dt 4:2; 12:32; Pv 30:6; Gl 1:6-9). One adds to God's word when he binds on the consciences of men those things that God never intended to bind (See comments Mk 7:1-9). Men bind either religious traditions or misguided emotional experiences of others in order to establish religious direction and authority

that does not originate from God. In this way they add to the things God has revealed to man. They lead people away from the authority of the Bible, and thus, away from what God would have them believe and obey. It is this same religious mentality that will loose where God has not loosed. Those who participate in such religiosity will suffer the same harsh judgment that God poured out on the imperial religion of Rome. John's concluding warning is a directive that should guide every Bible student. One must allow the Bible to speak for itself. And when it speaks, one must obediently comply with what God communicates to us through His word. We must not add to the consciences of men things that God has not bound. Adding to God's word man-made religious practices and beliefs is more than what God requires of men in order to be saved. Subtracting from what He requires is less than what God would have us believe and do. It is imperative, therefore, that Bible students speak where the Bible speaks and guard their mouths where there is silence by God (1 Pt 4:11). One would be arrogant to bind where God has not bound and to loose where God has not loosed (See comments Mt 16:19). Where God has not spoken, there is freedom. However, our freedom to do some things traditionally must never become law that would be bound on the consciences of men. It is not wrong to do things traditionally. It is wrong, however, to bind as law that which is only tradition.

**22:20,21** Jesus is the one who testifies to the things that have been revealed. He here affirms that His coming in judgment upon the wicked will be swift (See 1:1; 22:6,7,12). John's answer to the statement of Jesus is that Jesus come quickly in judgment upon the enemies of God in order to relieve the suffering of the saints. ***The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ:*** By the grace of God, Christians are who they are in their relationship with God (1 Co 15:10). It is by the grace of God that God protects His people in

their journey from the confines of this world to the eternal dwelling of heaven. Christians must be assured, therefore, that their reward in eternal glory is secured by the grace of God. *“For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ep 2:9,10).

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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Ci**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pl**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv****