

Revelation

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Richard Rogers

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

The Book of Revelation

Richard Rogers

Published by
Sunset Institute Press
3710 34th Street ♦ Lubbock, Texas
800/687-2121 ♦ extschool@sibi.cc

“Revelation”

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Cover Design by
Beth E. Miller & Richard Cravy

Format and Edit by Darlene Morris
Under the supervision of:
Virgil Yocham
Dean, External Studies

ISBN 0-9762496-1-8

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This Book is Dedicated to:

all the former students of SIBI who sat at the feet
of Richard Rogers learning of the great
victory of the Church over all opposition
and to all those yet learning through
video instruction still being given by Richard.



Special Acknowledgment

A special “*thank you*” to
The Rusty Russwurm family
and
The W.R. Collier family
for making the printing of this book possible.

A companion workbook on the study of Isaiah by Richard Rogers is available for purchase through Sunset international Bible Institute External Studies: 1 (800) 687-2121

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This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a video taped course. The voice track of the video tape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of Sunset External Studies Division who

wrote the study guides, Darlene Morris and to the staff of Sunset Translation Center who edited the manuscripts and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

This book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible Study Library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.



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Introduction

The attack by Satan on the Lord's church might leave the impression that he is the ultimate victor in the battle between good and evil, and over God's people. The many attacks through the centuries presents the false concept that he is stronger than God and God's people as the church is trampled under the continuous persecutions that are designed to destroy and annihilate. He first used nationalistic Judaism against Christians in the first century and then ratcheted up his attack by using the persecuting Roman government and her rulers to beat down faithful followers of Christ.

The book of Revelation addresses the difficulties which confronted the church in the first century. The principles taught in this book concerning God's care and protection for His people are yet relevant in the 21st century. The central theme of Revelation is that God will ultimately save and protect His church and will not allow Satan to destroy it. God encourages His people to be overcomers in their struggles against the wiles of the devil and promises great rewards for them with the ultimate reward revealed in chapters twenty-one and twenty-two, that reward being heaven itself where all persecutions and tribulations will be forgotten in the presence and splendor of God Himself.

As you read this book you will experience the emotions of those Christians in the first century who, by their faithful lives, paved the way for us and showed us how to live victoriously in the 21st century. You will feel with them as they plead for God to vindicate them and hear God's response to His people. You will marvel at the response of all creation to God's victory over

the earth and sea beast and the great harlot. You will shout with them: *“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns”* (Revelation 19:6b).

A quotation from the Forward in Jim McGuiggan’s Commentary on Revelation says it well:

“Revelation has one grand thrust. Comfort in the knowledge of ultimate triumph! It has an historical setting and deals with historical events. It is Rome against the Church—it is Satan against Jesus! The principles involved in the book—the principles of good and evil—are timeless. Truth will triumph whether in the first centuries or in these. Evil will wage an unceasing war with truth. The record of the victory of the Church of God over Rome stands for all time as a token of its deathlessness! Of the supremacy of its Lord; the truth of its doctrines; the strength of its hope and the reality of its joys.”

Defining Terms

Introduction

Welcome to a study of the Book of Revelation. This last book in the Bible has been considered by many to be the most difficult. It has been debated, argued, and ignored. People have been afraid to approach it. One of the primary reasons a person might think that is because most students do not really understand the nature of this book. It is important to understand that this book has a three-fold nature. If a student understands that, then he is ready to approach this book with an open mind, which can bring understanding.

Revelation Is a “Picture” Book

Revelation Cannot Be Approached the Same Way as Books of History or an Epistle

The Book of Revelation is a “picture” book:

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he **saw** — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (Revelation 1:1–2).*

The Book of Revelation is the revelation of God, given to John, God’s servant, to show him the things which “. . . *must soon take place.*” God made His revelation known to John through an angel so that he could testify to everything he

“saw.” The key word in Revelation 1:2 is **“saw.”** John did not write what he had heard even though he heard many sounds along with the things he saw. John wrote about what he **“saw.”**

Revelation is a “picture” book — a book written in symbols. Therefore, it cannot be approached the same way one would approach a history book like Joshua, 1 and 2 Chronicles, or the Book of Acts. In that kind of book the student simply sees the historical events, learns what happened, and makes whatever application he wishes of that which happened. The Book of Revelation cannot even be approached as one of the epistles, which were written to actual churches to correct real problems going on in a particular congregation. A person studying Revelation cannot approach the book asking, “What does God demand?” Neither can he approach it as he would the Book of Romans, which is a doctrinal book. Doctrinal books are literal with only an occasional figure of speech and very little symbolic language.

The Book of Revelation is stated to be a series of visions. John wrote (*“testified”*) “. . . to everything he **saw.**” In Revelation 1:19, God said, *“Write, therefore, what you have **seen**, what is now and what will take place later.”* What is the picture that was being drawn in Revelation? What does the beast coming up out of the sea and a beast springing up out of the land symbolize in Revelation 13? It is important to know what John’s visions represented. What does this vision mean? What does that picture portray? And what lessons do Christians today need to learn from each one?

Why did this writer express this book, with such an important message, in this specific kind of language? Why did John use symbols and pictures? There are no firm answers to these questions because God does not answer them for us. However, here are a few suggestions.

Revelation Is an Apocalyptic Book

The Book of Revelation is a particular type of literature — it is an **apocalypse**. That is a big word used in religious circles.

Apocalyptic literature simply means that it is used to unveil or reveal something. Apocalyptic literature revealed the thought of victory, of good over evil, in the first century using all the symbols and figures of that day and time. Revelation may have been written in such a way to hide from the enemy the things that were being said.

First, they used symbols that were already understood in that day to convey the thought that good would always triumph over evil. Second, symbols draw a much more dramatic picture than mere words do.

Third, a teacher can **tell** his students something and they may remember it for a little while. However, if the teacher **shows** them something, they will remember the lesson for a longer time. Confucious said, “A picture is worth a thousand words.” That is a conservative thought. No amount of words can make as dramatic an impact upon the mind as pictures do. Words that are illustrations for the eye, and not merely spoken, are much easier to remember. When a student is able to use his eyes and ears to learn, he remembers 80% of the lesson and is able to retain it for many weeks. Compare that to a retention level of just 30% of the lesson being retained for less than a week when the lesson is simply heard by the student.

Fourth, a picture also makes the point quicker than an essay does. An editorial cartoon or a picture can be seen for just a moment, but it will be remembered for a long time.

The Book of Revelation is either viewed as a mystery or it is used as a basis to support specific and personal doctrines. It is important for people to know that there is a key to understanding the symbols in the book. The key to understanding Revelation will be discussed later.

Revelation Is an “Imminent” Book

A Study of the Words Translated “Soon”

The Book of Revelation is not only a “picture” book using symbols, it is also a book that must be understood in the

immediate time of the people to whom it was written. Read Revelation 1:1–3:

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must **soon** take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. Blessed is the one who **reads** the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who **hear** it and **take to heart** what is written in it, because **the time is near**.*

Notice the bold words in this passage: John as an inspired writer said, “*Blessed is the one who **reads** the words of this prophecy . . .*” The word “*reads*” in this context refers to reading the written words aloud. Then, “*. . . blessed are those who **hear** it . . .*” The word for “*hear*” means understanding the prophecy. And finally, “*. . . blessed are those who . . . **take to heart** what is written in it . . .*” The phrase “*take to heart*” means obeying what has been written “*. . . because the time is **near**.*”

Notice the word “**near**.” There is a lot of “revealing” between Revelation 1:1–3 and Revelation 22. Take a look in the last chapter of Revelation:

*The angel said to me, “These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must **soon** take place” (Revelation 22:6).*

Revelation 22:6 contains another key verse. This verse is a confirmation that this book would be immediately fulfilled. Revelation 1:1 says, “*. . . what must **soon** take place.*” Revelation 1:3 says, “*. . . because the time is **near**.*” Revelation 22:6 says, “*. . . the things that must **soon** take place.*” In

Revelation 22:7, Jesus said, “*Behold, I am coming soon! . . .*” Jesus, the Judge, told John that He was coming **soon** to do the things written in the Book of Revelation. He followed that statement with “. . . *Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book.*” John wrote in Revelation 22:10, “*Then he told me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because **the time is near.**’*”

Once again Jesus spoke and said:

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.” . . . He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen. (Revelation 22:12, 20–21).

When Jesus told John that He was coming soon, John’s own reply was, “*Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*” and his wish was that God’s grace be on His people.

The Bible is plain. The Book of Revelation is plain. In Revelation 1 it says that the things spoken about in this book “. . . *must soon take place.*” It says “*the time is near.*” The word “**soon**” comes from two original words which mean with speed, haste; it is to happen quickly. This same word is used in the English words tachometer, which means speed, and taxicab, which means a fast car. Everything John wrote about was going to happen with speed.

The word that is translated as “*near*” is also composed of two words which literally mean “in your hand,” meaning present at the time. This is a very common word in the New Testament. In geographical situations during the first century, it was used over and over again in the Bible. John 19:42 says the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea was “**nearby**” to the place where Jesus was crucified. Luke 19:11 talks about Jesus traveling and “. . . *he was **near** to Jerusalem . . .*” In John 3:23 John was baptizing people at Aenon “**near** Salim.”

John 6:19 is a classic example of the use of the word “*near*.” The Apostles were in a boat on the Sea of Galilee crossing to the other side in the midst of a storm. This is the time when Jesus came walking upon the water. The New International Version says, “. . . *they saw Jesus **approaching** the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified.*” That is the word “*near*.” The New King James Version says, “*So when they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and **drawing near** the boat; and they were afraid.*” The American Standard Version says, “. . . *they behold Jesus walking on the sea, and drawing **nigh** unto the boat . . .*” Each one of these are the word “*near*” referring to something that is close by.

Another geographical example of this word is found in Acts 1:12, “*Then they [the Apostles] returned to Jerusalem . . . a Sabbath day’s walk from the city.*” The New King James Version says, “*Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is **near** Jerusalem, a Sabbath day’s journey.*” A Sabbath day’s journey is only considered to be 7/8 of a mile at the most. When the word “*near*” is used in references geographically, it refers to something really close.

The same word was used spiritually by Paul when he wrote to the Ephesians. He said:

*But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought **near** through the blood of Christ. . . . He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were **near** (Ephesians 2:13, 17).*

Spiritually, the words used for “*near*” mean close to or in an intimate relationship with someone. In the Ephesians passages, the Christian is brought “*near*” to God by the blood of Christ.

In Romans 10:8 Paul said: “*But what does it say? ‘The word is **near** you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,’ that is,*

the word of faith we are proclaiming:” Paul told the Romans that the “*word of faith*” was so near that it was “*in your mouth and in your heart.*” Paul also told the Philippians that they did not need to worry because “. . . *the Lord is **near***” (Philippians 4:5).

In regard to time, the word “*near*” is used to refer to things that would soon come to pass. In the Gospels, when Jesus was talking about the fig tree, He said, “. . . *As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is **near***” (cf. Mark 13:28; Luke 21:30, Matthew 24:32). In Matthew 26:18 Jesus told His disciples that His “*appointed time*” was drawing “*near*” telling them that it was time for Him to die. Three times in the Book of John, the reader is told that Jesus was going up to Jerusalem because the Passover was “*near*” (cf. John 2:13, 11:55 [NASV]; John 6:4). John 7:2 says, “*But when the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles was near . . .*” once again referring to a time that was close.

The verb form of the word “*near*” was used by John the Baptist and by Jesus when they were declaring, “*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is **near***” (Matthew 3:2; 4:17). The Apostles and the seventy-two disciples were sent out to preach this same message (cf. Matthew 10:7; Luke 10:9). Over and over again these same words were used to mean that something was about to happen; it was close at hand; it was right there. Within the Book of Revelation that would indicate that the things being foretold would be fulfilled immediately.

Contrast Between “Sealed” and an “Unsealed” Book

The second reason which indicates that this is an immediate book is the contrast between some quotations from Daniel and Revelation. In Daniel 12:4, 9, and 12 Daniel was told:

“ . . . Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end . . . Go your way, Daniel, because the words are closed up and sealed until the

time of the end. Many will be purified, made spotless and refined . . . Blessed is the one who waits for and reaches the end of the 1,335 days."

The reason Daniel was told to seal up the book was because it was not "*the time of the end*." His message was not for that present time; it would be fulfilled hundreds of years in the future. Jesus said:

"So when you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel — let the reader understand" (Matthew 24:15) and "When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near" (Luke 21:20).

Daniel's book was not written for the immediate time. He did not live in "*the time of the end*" or even during the time when his words were to be fulfilled. A book of prophecy was "*sealed*" when the fulfillment was not near, but further into the future. The time of Daniel's prophecy was not near, so he was told to "seal up the book." However, in Revelation 22:10 John was told by the angel of God, "*Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, **because the time is near.***" Notice the contrast between what Daniel was told and what John was told. Daniel was told to seal up the book. John was told, "*Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book.*" The reason for the difference between what the two prophets were told was because the time was "*near*" for the fulfillment of the things that John saw, but the things which Daniel saw were in the future.

The Express Statement of the Book

After the introduction, John began by saying, "*Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it,*

because the time is near” (Revelation 1:3). He was testifying to “*everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*” (Revelation 1:2). It would be impossible for anyone to understand, much less “*take to heart*” and obey, something that was talking about the distant future. Those who were going to read the book were to read, hear, and obey what had been written. Those who read this book during the first century were able to understand “*because the time is near.*” It will be helpful in understanding the Book of Revelation if a person is able to transport his imagination into the first century.

The Book of Revelation was written between the parenthesis of the statements, “*the time is near*” at the beginning and the end of the book. In Revelation 1:3, as John began the book, he said “*the time is near.*” In Revelation 22:10, as he closed the book, John said, “*the time is near.*” Interpretations and explanations of the Book of Revelation were meant to be understood for that present time. Do not try to look for them in the distant future. That is exceedingly important! This book is to be viewed as something beginning to take place immediately and something which would be completed within the lifetime of the people who read the book.

In Revelation 5 John saw a scroll in the hand of God that was sealed with seven seals. A mighty angel was proclaiming that no one could open the scroll, which meant that no one could understand it. John wept at this thought, but then one of the elders said, “*See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah . . . has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals*” (Revelation 5:5). Seal by seal the future days were revealed to John and to the persecuted brothers and sisters of the first century.

Revelation Is a “Biblical” Book

The Language of the Book of Revelation Is Deeply Rooted in the Old Testament

The language within the Book of Revelation is deeply rooted in the Old Testament. There is not a single situation

where the Scriptures say, “This is a quote from Ezekiel 4:7.” There is not a single quote from the Old Testament that is quoted word for word. But of the 404 verses in Revelation, there are over 370 definite, direct allusions to Old Testament passages.

Passages That Are Rooted in the Old Testament

Going through the Book of Revelation chapter by chapter will prove that it is a book deeply rooted in the Old Testament. Revelation 1 contains a description of “. . . *seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone ‘like a son of man’ . . .*” (Revelation 1:13). This is a favorite Old Testament designation of the coming Messiah, the coming King and Lord of all the earth. In Daniel 7 there is a description of “*one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven*” (Daniel 7:13). In Ezekiel 1:26–28 there is the same kind of description: “*high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man . . . This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD*” (Ezekiel 43:4). The One in Revelation is the One in Daniel and Ezekiel. He is the Messiah who will come to judge the nations of the earth.

In Revelation 2 there are Old Testament expressions in nearly every letter written to the churches. The “overcomer” in Revelation 2:7 will be given “*the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.*” In Revelation 2:14 some of the things recorded against the Church in Pergamum dealt with the “*teaching of Balaam*” which comes from the Book of Numbers (cf. Numbers 22–24). In Revelation 2:20 and the letter to the Church in Thyatira, the enemy was a woman named Jezebel. That is a name that just rings of wickedness from the Old Testament (cf. 1 Kings 16:31– 2 Kings 9).

Revelation 3 promises that those who overcome will have their names written in the “*book of life.*” The “*book of life*” is an Old Testament expression. In Exodus 32:33 the LORD told Moses, “*Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book.*” Psalm 69:28 refers to a list of the righteous in the “*book*

of life.” The Book of Malachi was written in the midst of one of the deadest days of all Israel’s existence, and yet, in Malachi 3:16 it says:

*Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A **scroll of remembrance** was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name.*

The setting in Revelation 4 is a throne room scene in heaven. On the throne sits One who had:

. . . the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne . . . In the center around the throne, were four living creatures and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back” (Revelation 4:3, 6b).

Old Testament passages leap off the pages with this description of the throne room. In Isaiah 6:1 Isaiah said, “*In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple.*” Ezekiel saw the throne of God, a throne set in heaven and One sitting on the throne — “*a figure like that of a man.*” The One sitting on the throne had the look —

. . . as if full of fire . . . and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow . . . so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD (Ezekiel 1:27–28a).

Ezekiel saw One who looked like He had a fire in His head, in His loins, and in His feet. He was a fiery One from top to bottom. Earlier in that first chapter of Ezekiel, Ezekiel saw a windstorm surrounded by brilliant light. In the center of the fire there were:

. . . four living creatures. In appearance their form was that of a man, but each of them had four faces and four wings. . . . Their faces looked like this: Each of the four had the face of a man . . . the face of a lion . . . the face of an ox . . . the face of an eagle (Ezekiel 1:5–6, 10).

In Ezekiel 10 there is another throne room scene with cherubim — *“Each of the cherubim had four faces: One face was that of a cherub, the second the face of a man, the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle”* (Ezekiel 10:14). These images are the same as the ones found in Revelation 4:7: *“The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle.”*

In Revelation 5 John’s vision continues as he saw the *“Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David . . . He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals”* (Revelation 5:5). Ezekiel saw a *“scroll”* in his vision concerning the destiny of Israel in Ezekiel 2:9. Zechariah saw a *“flying scroll”* (Zechariah 5:1–3). God told Judah in Genesis 49:9–10 that he was *“a lion’s cub”* and that from his lineage would come the One who would rule Israel.

The entire chapter of Isaiah 11 talks about Jesus as *“. . . a shoot . . . from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit”* (Isaiah 11:1). Within this chapter there is also a lion and a lamb. Isaiah 11:6 says, *“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them.”* The natural tendency of the lion would be to eat the lamb, but this lion will take care of the lambs as a shepherd would. Isaiah 11:10 says, *“In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the people; the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest will be glorious.”*

In Revelation 6 John watched as *“the Lamb”* opened the first four of seven seals. He saw four horses with riders upon

them to save and judge the persecuted people of God. Psalm 45 also contains pictures of Jesus in a *“majestic ride”* with a sword and arrows and nations falling beneath His feet. Zechariah had a vision of *“a man riding a red horse . . . standing among the myrtle trees in a ravine. Behind him were red, brown and white horses”* (Zechariah 1:8). In his vision in Zechariah 6, Zechariah saw chariots with red, black, white, and dappled horses representing *“the four spirits of heaven, going out from standing in the presence of the Lord of the whole world”* (Zechariah 6:1–6). Revelation is a book deeply rooted in Old Testament pictures.

Revelation 7 holds the picture of the sealing of the righteous who number 144,000 before judgment comes. In Ezekiel 9 there is a picture of judgment coming, but before the nation is judged *“a man clothed in linen who had a writing kit at his side . . . [he] put a mark on the foreheads”* of the people who would not be touched by the slaughter.

Revelation 8 and 9 pictures the opening of the seventh seal with seven angels holding seven trumpets. This part of John’s vision is based on the plagues in Exodus 9 and following. Revelation 10 contains a mighty angel holding a *“little scroll, which lay open in his hand”* (Revelation 10:1–2). The angel told John to eat this scroll. It was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. John was told that sometimes preaching the judgment of God is not that tasteful. When men eat the Word it is always sweet, but living and preaching that Word sometimes makes the stomach bitter.

In Revelation 11 there is a measuring reed that measures the temple, the altar, and those who worship. In Ezekiel 40–48 Ezekiel saw a man measuring all of Israel. Zechariah 2 also contains the picture of a *“man with a measuring line in his hand.”* He is going forth to measure Jerusalem to separate the holy and to judge the profane. Revelation 12 contains a vision of a woman, a child, and a dragon trying to devour the child:

a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head . . . she gave birth to a son, a male child who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne (Revelation 12:1, 5).

This is a reference easily linked to Genesis 3:15 when God told the devil, “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; **he** will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.*” The “*he*” in this verse is definitely singular, masculine gender — a male child referring to Christ the Lord.

In Revelation 13 there is a beast coming up out of the sea. He has seven heads and ten horns and ten crowns on his horns, but on each head there was a blasphemous name. This beast “*was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation*” (Revelation 13:7). This is like the fourth beast, the Roman beast, from Daniel 7 whose mission it was to persecute the people of God.

In Revelation 14 an angel swings his sickle to gather the grapes and throw them “*into the great winepress of God’s wrath.*” In Isaiah 63:3 God said:

I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing.

Revelation 15:3 says, “. . . those who had been victorious over the beast and his image . . . sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.” That is the song the Israelites sang on the other side of the Red Sea — it was also the other side, away from their persecution in Egypt. When the

Egyptian persecutors drowned in the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites sang a song of deliverance (cf. Exodus 15).

Revelation 16 has a description of what is called the battle of “*Armageddon*,” which is a very contested subject in the 21st century. Judges 5:19, 2 Chronicles 35:22, and Zechariah 12:11 speak of a place called Megiddo, a city in Palestine where there were actual battles (“*Armageddon*” actually means the mountain of Megiddo, Ed). In these battles the enemies of God met the people of God, and though the people of God were greatly outnumbered, the enemy was defeated.

In Revelation 17 and 18 there is “*Babylon*,” the whore (excuse the word, but that is what she was) and her fall. Isaiah 13–14, 21, 46–47, 48:20; Jeremiah 25, 50–51; and Daniel 2 all give references that indicate this woman represents the monetary pull of the world. But the good news is that:

“... in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She [the woman, Babylon] will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the Lord God who judges her” (Revelation 18:8).

Revelation 19:17–18 is an invitation for the birds of the heavens to “*Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of...*” the enemies of God. The same kind of call was sent forth in Ezekiel 39:17–20.

Revelation 20 tells of a time when Satan “*will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore*” (Revelation 20:7–8). In Ezekiel 38 and 39 these words seem to symbolize an enemy the size of which the Israelites had never seen before. That enemy would be destroyed and buried.

In Revelation 21 John saw “*a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away...*” (Revelation 21:1). He saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven. Those were the conditions for the people

of God when they were able to leave captivity, go back into their own land, and enjoy fellowship with God again (cf. Isaiah 65–66, Ezekiel 48).

Revelation 22 gives the picture of “*the river of the water of life, as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb . . . On each side of the river stood the tree of life . . .*” (Revelation 22:1–2). This scene brings to mind Genesis 2 and Ezekiel 47 where the river flowed without any tributary and in which Israel could find the blessedness of health and wealth.

Conclusion

Each of these chapters will be studied further within this book. It is important to see and understand that the Book of Revelation is rooted in the Old Testament and fully in harmony with the rest of the Bible. It is refreshing to know that there is a key that will unlock this picture book. Revelation is a prophecy that was immediately fulfilled during the days of the people to whom it was written. There is no reason to search history to find out what the visions in the Book of Revelation mean. The Word of God was meant to be understood by the His people in the day it was written. God wants His children today to understand that His Word is His Word, and that it can be understood and used by Christians in any age.

Historical Background

The Historical Background and the Prophetic Principle Approach to Revelation

This is the second chapter of the study of the Book of Revelation. It is important to discuss the best way to approach the Book of Revelation before beginning a verse by verse study of it. Since this book is symbolic, it must be approached properly to understand the symbolism. There are two important principles to remember in understanding the Book of Revelation. These are the historical background and the prophetic principles. The simplest way to think about these titles is to first remember that the background for this book is during the first century. Second, remember that the prophecy will be explained by God. Before studying these two principles, it is important to remember some interpretive principles in the approach to studying the Book of Revelation.

Interpretive Principles Used with this Method

Number one, remember that the writer wrote primarily for the encouragement and edification of the Christians during the first century. This is an important principle to remember for any of the books in the New Testament. Acts, First and Second Corinthians, Philippians, and many New Testament books were written either to an individual, a congregation, or group of congregations to discuss a particular problem or need. Future generations of Christians have benefitted from these writings, but it is important to understand that the book itself was written primarily to encourage and edify the Christians during John's day.

Number two, remember that the book was written primarily in symbolic rather than ordinary speech. Since the Book of Revelation has numerous symbols and figures it cannot be approached as an essay, letter, doctrinal presentation, or discussion of law.

Number three, remember that the Book of Revelation uses Old Testament terminology to present a New Testament meaning. For example, the woman in Revelation 17 will be referred to as “*Babylon*” as if referring to the city itself. However, she cannot possibly be Babylon from the Old Testament because that city had been in ruins for hundreds of years. The fall of “*Babylon the Great the Mother of Prostitutes*” in Revelation 17 is described as if it were the fall of the city of Tyre. That is also impossible because the city of Tyre had not existed for hundreds of years. This means there must be a New Testament equivalent parallel to that Old Testament meaning.

Number four, remember that the series of visions need to be seen as a whole without picking apart all the details to find unnecessary symbolism. If the details within the visions are important, then the writer will discuss those specific details. For example, there is the detail of Jesus walking in the midst of the seven lampstands in Revelation 1:12–13. Jesus explained the symbolism of the golden lampstands: “*the seven lampstands are the seven churches*” (Revelation 1:20). John saw “*a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name*” (Revelation 13:1). Normally, one would not worry about the seven heads and ten horns; the reader would only look at the beast itself, but John said:

. . . *The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. . . . The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive*

authority as kings along with the beast (Revelation 17:9–10, 12).

We know these details because John has included them in his writings. It is not important to figure out every detail of a vision. It is important to know what the vision means.

Number five, remember that Revelation was written to appeal to man's imagination. John saw and was commanded to write so that others might also see. The Book of Romans was written to man's intellect. It is not necessary to use your imagination to understand Romans. The Book of Psalms was written to appeal to man's emotions. When someone reads the Psalms, he is supposed to feel something. When he reads Romans, he is supposed to think. When someone reads Revelation, he is supposed to see the things John has described.

When someone reads the Book of Revelation and finds a prophecy that is fairly applicable to a situation, he might say, "This fulfills that prophecy." The prophecy can be fulfilled in an event or person, but that does not exhaust the prophecy. There are principles to be learned and there are things about God to be learned and appreciated from these prophecies. The Bible in general and the Book of Revelation particularly have the purpose of showing Christians the forces of good and evil and the final outcome rather than predicting future events.

The Historical Background

It is important to study the background of the first century to be able to understand the Book of Revelation properly. What is the historical environment during the time this book was written? First, who was the author? The writer called himself "*John*" (Revelation 1:1,4). To my knowledge there was only one person in the Church during the first century who could write a book and just say, "This is from John." That would be John the Apostle, the brother of James. He calls himself, "*his servant*" meaning he was a slave of Jesus Christ (cf. Revelation 1:1). In Revelation 1:9, he said, "*I, John,*

your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus . . .” He was a brother and fellow sufferer with the saints, the Christians, of Asia Minor. John was not writing as someone who did not understand the battle these Christians were involved in. He had already fought some of the same battles they were fighting. He had gone through the same troubles they were going through. He had suffered, just as they were suffering, and won. He wanted them to know that even though he was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos, the Word of God and the visions of God could not be imprisoned. The world cannot imprison the people of God.

The recipients of the Book of Revelation were those who heard John’s message for the first time — they were the Christians of Asia Minor, who were already enduring persecution but were going to be even more severely persecuted. They needed to know the reasons why they could be faithful until death.

The followers of Christianity were persecuted for several reasons during the first century. Christianity was an illegal religion. Rome only tolerated the religions that did not try to proselyte (a person converted from one religion to another, Ed.), and Christianity was a universally aspiring religion. Christians wanted to take the whole world for their Savior.

Christians were accused of all kinds of evil and slandered for their beliefs. Because they spoke to one another of the love they felt for each other, they were often accused of sexual immoralities. Because they talked about eating the flesh and drinking the blood of their Savior, they were accused of cannibalism.

Christians refused to go to war or to mix and mingle in the social life of the first century Romans because of the Roman worship of the emperors during that time. They were considered wild fanatics because nothing mattered to them except the advance of the Gospel and the glorification of God

and Jesus. They refused to worship the emperor and so they faced persecution.

The worship of emperors, except in extreme cases like Caligula and Domitian, was not a literal worship of the emperor, but instead it was a pledge of political loyalty to the empire. To the Christian, this fact did not matter, because in their pledge of loyalty, a person was required to put incense on the altar and say, "Caesar is Lord." That statement was a denial of everything the Christians believed. In this situation, the policy of the Roman government was to exterminate Christians.

The policy of extermination alone would have been sufficient menace to bring horror and despair to the hearts of confused Christians. However, that was not the only thing they faced. The Roman government threatened from outside the Church and a fierce monster in the form of Gnosticism was stalking within. Gnosticism was a heresy — the combining of Judaism and Gentile Gnosticism — worshipping man and his knowledge. This produced bewilderment, controversy, and dissension among brethren. Many times it destroyed the fellowship of the people of God and threatened to destroy Christianity. When people were being killed, exiled, and robbed of all their property because they would not renounce their religion, was there any hope for the future of the Church? When evil was threatening to strike a blow from within the Church was there anywhere to turn? The Book of Revelation had the answer. There was hope! There was a place to turn. There was a purpose in the lives of the children of God.

The Purpose of Revelation

The purpose of the Book of Revelation in the background of the first century was to show that even a power as great as Rome was doomed to be overthrown in the end. The Kingdom of God would triumph. Christ would reign supreme over all mankind. The purpose of the Book of Revelation was to present a call to loyalty. They were called to maintain their loyalty to the faith at all cost, even in the face of martyrdom.

The Prophetic Principle

The Book of Revelation is a book of prophecy that can only be explained by God. Man looks at the prophecies of God and is tempted to see prophecy primarily as a prediction of coming events. It is important to remember that the biblical view of prophecy is more about forth-telling — telling the judgment of God in the immediate or sometimes the distant future. It is not always foretelling what is going to happen. **Prophecy** is primarily proclaiming God's word to the people.

Consider when God chose Moses to be His spokesman. Moses was commanded by God: *"Go; I will help you speak and will teach you what to say"* (Exodus 4:12). Moses made all kinds of excuses so God provided Aaron: *"He will speak to the people for you, and it will be as if he were your mouth and as if you were God to him"* (Exodus 4:16). In Exodus 7:1 God actually told Moses, *". . . your brother Aaron will be your prophet."* Aaron was chosen by God to be Moses' mouth, his spokesman, and his prophet to speak the words that God wanted.

As God's spokesman, a prophet proclaimed the sins of the people as God instructed him. There were false prophets who spoke their own words for their own benefits, but God's prophets spoke by His power: *"But as for me, I am filled with power with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin"* (Micah 3:8). A prophet of God proclaimed the sins of a nation for God so that those people might learn what God wanted and repent if that was necessary. A prophet was simply one who told forth God's word to a sinful people about their judgment so that they might have a chance for deliverance.

Prophecy is not to be privately explained. All prophecy is based on a vision that comes from God. Since the vision is from God, then the explanation of the vision must also come from God. Peter wrote:

And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation. For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:19–21).

The prophets of the Old Testament received heavenly visions. When they interpreted and explained these visions, it was not the product of their own spirits, but the Spirit of God because they spoke from God. A good example can be found in Jeremiah:

The word of the LORD came to me: "What do you see, Jeremiah?" "I see the branch of an almond tree," I replied. The LORD said to me, "You have seen correctly, for I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled." The word of the LORD came to me again: "What do you see?" "I see a boiling pot, tilting away from the north," I answered. The LORD said to me, "From the north disaster will be poured out on all who live in the land. I am about to summon all the peoples of the northern kingdoms," declares the LORD (Jeremiah 1:11–14).

God asked Jeremiah what he **saw**. Jeremiah was a seer, just like John. He saw the visions from God. Jeremiah saw "*the branch of an almond tree*" and "*a boiling pot, tilting away from the north.*" God told Jeremiah that he had "*seen correctly.*" God was going to see that His Word was fulfilled and had planned to use the people of the north. God told Jeremiah what his visions meant. The explanation was not the prophet's work; it was God's pronouncement.

The same kind of thing happened in Revelation. John saw seven lampstands and “someone ‘like a son of man’” (Revelation 1:19). John was told, “*The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*” When God interprets the signs, there is no need to question. The explanations are from God, not from John. When a sign is not revealed by God, it can be understood by observing a like vision that is known within the text.

Consider using the principle of interpreting Scripture by Scripture in cases where a sign has not been revealed. For instance, Revelation 7 records:

*“Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a **seal** on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel* (Revelation 7:3–4).

This “*seal*” was not a seal of identification as Paul referred to in 2 Timothy 2:19. This “*seal*” is comparable to the “**mark on the foreheads**” in Ezekiel 9:1–9, a sign of God’s protection during God’s judgment on evil nations.

Consider the vision of the “*little scroll*” in Revelation 10:5–11. An angel told John to eat the little book and it was “*sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour.*” Ezekiel also ate a scroll (cf. Ezekiel 2:8–3:3, 14). Both of these visions were explained when God told them both to go and preach. They were to preach the sweet message of God’s grace in the midst of the bitter judgment of God.

The Date of the Book

The last point in historical background is determining when the Book of Revelation was written. It was written in 78 A.D. This date is based upon the comparison of Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 and 17. It was written after the fall of five

Roman rulers, one was, one was going to come for just a little while, and after him would come the beast. There will be more on this later.

The Purpose of the Book

The purpose of the Book of Revelation was to cause and maintain faithfulness unto death. This purpose was accomplished by showing the ultimate victory of the Church. No matter what was going to happen, the Church was going to be victorious. The church of Christ was built on a rock and all the troubled times would not be able to erase the fact that in the end the Church would be victorious. The Rider on the white horse would defeat every enemy including Satan and all his forces. Civil power and persecution in the sea beast, anti-God religion in the earth beast, and worldly seduction in the harlot will all be destroyed. And finally Satan will be totally defeated when he is cast into a lake of fire that will burn eternally. This vision does not refer to the end of time, but to the end of Satan's attempts to destroy the children of God at that time (cf. Revelation 19–22). This message of the Church's victory and Satan's destruction was not only needed in the day in which it was written; it is desperately needed in the 21st century also. The devil continues to make the same push against the people of God as he did in the first century.

The purpose of the Book of Revelation to maintain the incentive to remain faithful unto death is accomplished by showing the ultimate triumph of the Church. John saw all the angels standing around the throne and around the elders in Revelation 7:

Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, they

are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Revelation 7:13–17).

The great multitude John saw were those who had come out of the “*great tribulation.*” They had died in the Lord and were resting from their labors. They were before the throne of God and would never be hungry or thirsty again. They would never cry again and would walk hand in hand and face to face with Jesus. What a victorious picture! This is the incentive that all Christians have to remain faithful unto death. This picture tells the Christian that to die in Christ is gain. It is for his good. At death the Christian will be transferred from an earthy world full of tribulations to a home where earthly trials can no longer touch him.

There is another picture in Revelation 6 that teaches the same kind of victory for the saints. John saw “*the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.*” Even though they were dead, they were still praying to God, crying out, “*How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?*” (Revelation 6:10). They wanted to know how long it would be before the world knew that God was in control. To them it looked like the devil was in control. It looked like Rome was in control. Romans were killing Christians in large numbers. They were stomping them under their feet, killing them in the arena, and wicked evil things to them during the first century. God’s children were given white robes and told to wait. They did not understand that Death was not the end. God’s children were resting “*under the*

altar . . . until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed" (Revelation 6:9).

The devil appeared to be winning the war. The devil is a liar. The first thing he did in the history of man was to lie. The second thing he did was to murder. And he has been lying and murdering since that time. But the devil has never defeated the people of God. He will never be able to defeat God's children because they can simply go into God's presence where they have His protection. They talk with God and commune with Jesus. God meets their needs, but there is much more.

In Revelation 21–22 there is a picture of the glorious city. This is the city where all Christians now and forever will live. It is a *"new heaven and a new earth,"* the new and holy Jerusalem. This is not the city that persecuted the saints. It is not the city that killed Jesus. It is the *"heavenly Jerusalem"* written about in Hebrews 12:22–23a:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

The *"heavenly Jerusalem"* is the city where the saints live. It is the city where angels, Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, and Jesus live. It is the city where there is protection and provision from God. It is the city where saints commune with and have fellowship with God.

Every time God's people were under severe persecution, He told them, "This is not the end. This is the old way. There is a new way coming." They people of God today are looking for *"a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness"* (2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 22:1). They are looking for the city where the righteous will live forever. This *"new heaven and a new earth"* is not the Church because the Church is looking for *"a new heaven and a new earth."* The

“*new heaven and a new earth*” is the Church on the other side of all the troubles and tribulations. The Church itself is viewed by God as “*a new heaven and a new earth*,” but man will only be able to see this perfect Church when the persecutor is dead and when the people of God surround the throne. God knows that Satan has already been defeated, but the Church longs for the day when the deceiver is no more.

These facts are important because it really **does matter** who man chooses to follow and what he wants his destiny to be. Man must choose where he wants to spend eternity and to whom he wants to belong. It is as simple as — Do you want to be with Jesus or do you want to be with the devil? If a person belongs to Satan, then his end will be in a “*lake of fire*” that burns with fire and brimstone (cf. Revelation 20:14–15). If a person wants to belong to Jesus and live for Him, then his destiny will be the glorious new Jerusalem as the bride of Christ and eating the feast eternally.

The Book of Revelation was written to encourage man to choose to have a relationship with Jesus.

Introduction (First Vision)

**Revelation 1:1–20; 2 Peter 1:19–21;
Daniel 7:13–14**

Review

This is the first chapter in the actual study of the Book of Revelation. The first two chapters have introduced this book which is so different from most books in the Bible. Revelation is not a book of law where one finds precepts to obey. Neither is it a book of psalms to inspire or an epistle with instructions for life. The Book of Revelation is a visionary book. John “saw” this book in a series of visions. John testified to “*everything he saw — that is the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*” (Revelation 1:2). John was instructed to: “*Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches . . . Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later*” (Revelation 1:11, 19). Over and over again in the Book of Revelation, there are phrases which use the words: “see,” “saw,” and “seen.” This is a book of seeing; that is why John is called the Seer.

The time spent in the previous chapters was necessary to show that this book can be understood by men. As nearly any book of the Bible does, this book starts with an introduction. This chapter will cover the introduction of the book itself in Revelation 1:1–8.

The Introduction

Pronouncement of Blessing

The first thing that is found in the introduction of the Book of Revelation is a pronouncement of blessings:

*The revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John, who testifies to everything he saw — that is, the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ. **Blessed** is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near (Revelation 1:1–3).*

John said:

Blessed is the one who reads — read it aloud.

Blessed are those who hear it — understand it.

Blessed are those who . . . take it to heart — obey it.

The nature of the Book of Revelation is a revelation. It means to uncover something. The original word is **apocalypse**. **Apo** means from and **calypsos** is a cover. Literally it means to take the cover off. John was writing to uncover something that “*must soon take place.*” John was testifying to “*the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.*” It was going to happen immediately: “*must soon take place*” and “*the time is near.*” These phrases tell the one reading Revelation that there is no reason to look far into the future for its meaning.

The primary nature of Revelation is symbolism. An angel came to show John “. . . *the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ*” (Revelation 1:2). He wrote according to what he saw. It is important to be able to see the picture John was describing. Do you see the picture? And what does this picture

mean? These are questions that need to be asked as a person reads this book.

Revelation 1:2 states the source of the book to be God and Jesus. The things John saw were “*the word of God and the testimony of Jesus*” — the Word of God about Jesus — that is what the Book of Revelation is written to say. The Book of Revelation pictures Jesus in many ways, but every time He is pictured, in every place, and in any way. He is the winner. He is the Victor.

The outcome of Revelation is important. What did John intend for this book to do for those to whom he wrote? John intended for them to read it aloud. Today’s Living Bible says:

*If you **read** this prophecy **aloud** to the church, you will receive a special blessing from the Lord. Those who **listen** to it being read and **do** what it says will also be blessed. For the time is near when these things will all come true (Revelation 1:3).*

There are many places in the world where the Bible is not readily available. Even in the 21st century there are villages and outposts where only two or three people have the ability to read. Many tribes and nations do not have the Bible available in their own language. Those who have the ability to read so that others can understand will be blessed. John intended for this book to be read aloud.

John also intended for people to be careful listeners. He said, “. . . *blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written . . .*” The original word for “*hear*” means to hear with understanding. John intended for the listeners to pay attention to what was being said. The phrase “*take to heart*” means to treasure, keep, or follow. The Book of Revelation was written so that it would be read aloud, understood by the listener, and primarily followed and treasured.

The Message

John, To the seven churches in the province of Asia: Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen (Revelation 1:4–7).

Notice that the destination of this message was “*to the seven churches in the province of Asia.*” These were seven real congregations in seven real cities in Asia Minor. These congregations had real problems with distinctive characteristics that are addressed in epistles to specific churches. However, these congregations are typical of churches everywhere in every age. There is a common phrase in each letter — “*He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the **churches***” (Revelation 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). The letters were addressed to specific churches but were written to be read and heeded by every Church in the world.

The content of the message begins with a blessing: “. . . *Grace and peace to you . . .*” (Revelation 1:4). Notice that the blessings come before the visions. God wanted them to know that they were blessed before John wrote to them about the troubles that were to come. John mentioned two blessings: grace and peace. “*Grace*” is the undeserved gifts that God gives to man (cf. Romans 3:21–31; Ephesians 2:1–22; Titus 2:11–3:7). Paul wrote these words to Titus concerning grace:

For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say “No” to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good. These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you. . . . But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone (Titus 2:11–15, 3:4–8).

This passage is a good description of God’s grace. Notice there is kindness, love, and mercy.

“Peace” is the harmony which is restored between God and man through Jesus Christ (cf. Romans 5:1–5, 8:1–39; Ephesians 2:12–22). Paul wrote to the Romans:

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did

by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit (Romans 8:1–4).

The Spirit of God dwells within those who belong to Christ and there is no condemnation for them because they are given power over the sin that once ruled their lives. Those who belong to Christ still sin for they are still in the flesh, but sin has lost its power over their lives. It was once a welcome guest, but because of the relationship Christians have with God, Jesus, and the Spirit, sin is now an unwelcome intruder. That is what it means to be reconciled with God; that is “*peace*.”

The source of the message is the eternal God: “*him who is, and who was, and who is to come*.” This phrase denotes the self-existing eternity of God. When God spoke to Moses in Exodus 3, He asked Moses to go back to Egypt to deliver God’s people. Moses began to make excuses and one of those excuses was:

... “Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:13–14).

There is no way to explain why God is or how He came to be because He is. He did not come to be; He has always been. He never came into existence. The only way for God to explain His existence so that man can understand it is to say He was, He is, and He always will be. He is the One from whom the message of grace and peace comes.

The next source John lists is “*the seven spirits before his throne.*” The “*seven spirits*” are mentioned later in Revelation indicating that this is the Spirit of God (cf. Revelation 3:1, 4:5, 5:6). There is not a definite reason here for why the Spirit of God is called “*the seven spirits.*” Since seven is considered a divinely perfect number, perhaps it signifies the perfection of the Spirit of God. Isaiah 11:2 refers to the Spirit of the LORD resting on Jesus with seven-fold results but all still one Spirit.

And finally, this message is from Jesus Christ, Savior, Brother, the One who became man so that man could become like Him. He is — “*Jesus Christ . . . the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.*” Caesar may have said this One was going to die on the cross, but he was wrong. Jesus proved him wrong. This One could not die. He is the firstborn from the dead, the One who has priority to and preeminence over not only all creation, but also over death itself.

Christians in all ages will join the dead one day. Christians during the first century who were reading this letter may have already been told they were going to be stoned, ripped apart by lions in a Roman arena, or beheaded. Death laughs at the Christian and says, “I will have you.” But Jesus said that death could not win. He took death to a cross and because He now lives, Death died there on the cross. Anyone who accepts that cross is no longer under death’s power.

Jesus Christ is also called the Ruler of the kings of the earth. That is a definite allusion to Psalm 2, 89, and 110. Caesar did not rule the world. He did not rule the nations even though he boasted to such. Jesus rules the world by appointment. In Daniel 2:21 Daniel said, “*He [God] changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.*” God through Isaiah said:

Woe to the Assyrian, the rod of my anger, in whose hand is the club of my wrath! I send him against a

godless nation, I dispatch him against a people who anger me, to seize loot and snatch plunder, and to trample them down like mud in the streets (Isaiah 10:5–6).

God sent Assyria to do His bidding against the enemy. Assyria was in the hand of the Redeemer, in the hand of God. Ezekiel 14:21 lists some of the things God uses to rule the world:

“For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: How much worse will it be when I send against Jerusalem my four dreadful judgments—sword and famine and wild beasts and plague—to kill its men and their animals!”

God also rules the world through the prayers of saints: *“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness”* (1 Timothy 2:1–2). Paul urged Timothy and all men to pray so that men might lead lives in godliness and holiness. God rules the world. Jesus is the Ruler of the kings of the earth.

Look at Revelation 1:5–6 again: *“To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom of priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.”* The phrase *“to him who loves us”* is a continual phrase. It means that Jesus is a constant lover. He does not stop. He loved each one of us at the cross, but His love did not stop there. The cross was the apex of His love, but He loved man even before creation. Before God said, “Let there be light” and in that instant light had no choice but to be—even before that point Jesus loved YOU. When the trumpet blows and He comes again, He will love you

then. And He will love you through all the times in between. The love of Jesus for man is a continual action.

Not only is man continually loved by Christ, he is also continually freed from sin. All the work that needed to be done for man to obtain freedom has been done. Man is freed because of the finished work of Christ. There was a past action (the cross of Christ) and now there is a continuing result. God's love continues to shine from the cross to a sinful world and He continues to declare that man is free from sin. There is an old black spiritual song in America that says, **"Free at last. Free at last. Thank, God Almighty, I am free at last!"**

Man is not only loved and freed continually, he is also given royal service. Revelation 1:6 says, He *"... has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father — to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen."* Man has been coronated to the place of kings and rulers in the place of priests. God appoints the Christian to function as a priest so that man can serve God. Man serves as a priest offering sacrifices to God. Man's sacrifices are his body (cf. Romans 12:1), the fruit of his lips, and doing good (cf. Hebrews 13:15). With the fruit of his lips, man confesses God's name over and over again. All that the Christian does is offered to God. The result of these sacrifices needs to be *"— to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen."* The purpose of God's eternal plan is that there will be royal and holy praise. All that God created was intended to be for His glory.

This message also has a judgment which is going to happen soon. John said, *"Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all the peoples of the earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be Amen"* (Revelation 1:7). It sounds like the judgment that John was talking about was going to be visible. It was the coming of Jesus on the white horse of Old Testament judgment to bring judgment upon the Roman empire for persecuting the people of God. It would be sorrowful and dreadful for mankind.

There was no question that this was going to come. It was certain.

Finally John closed his introduction with an admonition for the people to trust God. The Lord God said, *“I am the Alpha and the Omega . . . who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty”* (Revelation 1:8). In this one verse there are **five reasons** given to trust God. Number one, He is absolutely complete — He is the *“Alpha and the Omega.”* That is the first and last letter of the Greek alphabet. As *“Lord,”* He is the Master of the universe. As *“God,”* He is the Creator of all things. He is eternally self-existent — One who is, and who was, and who is to come. As *“the Almighty”* He is the Ruler of all the rulers. These are important reasons to remember in times of trouble or joy, so that in all things, man trusts God.

Introductory Vision — The Son of Man in the Midst of the Lampstands

Revelation 1:9–20 is considered to be the introductory vision, but it ought to be called the basic vision. Of all the visions in the Bible, it is the vision of the Son of Man in the midst of the lampstands. First, there is the greeting:

I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that is ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 1:9).

John had the right to speak because he was a *“brother.”* He had fellowship and companionship in all the troubles and concerns for the churches. He had a depth of concern for the Christians he was writing to because he was where they were. He was in tribulation. The word tribulation literally refers to the grinding of wheat or pressing of grapes. Tribulation appears for

a moment to destroy the wheat or the grapes, but the action simply refines them for better use. That is what trouble does for the Christian.

John was a partaker with the Christians in the Kingdom, which is the spiritual realm of Jesus. He shared with them in the patient endurance which gives courage — the kind that can take the suffering of the moment and transform it into victory.

The place John was writing from is interesting. He said, “*I, John . . . was on the island of Patmos.*” First, he said he was writing as a brother in Christ which would enable him to endure to the end. Then he was writing from Patmos, a rocky prison island. John’s loyalty to Christ caused him to be exiled for punishment.

Revelation 1:10–11 gives the power base from which John was writing:

On the Lord’s Day I was in the Spirit, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet, which said, “Write on a scroll what you see and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea.”

John said he was “*in the Spirit*” — that is the key to the Book of Revelation. He was carried out of the world of space and time and carried into the world of eternity in God. In the Book of Ezekiel, there are occasions when Ezekiel was “*in the Spirit*.” Ezekiel 8:3 says, “. . . *The Spirit lifted me up between earth and heaven and in visions of God he took me to Jerusalem.*” Ezekiel’s body remained in Babylon but his soul went to Jerusalem so that he might see the blessings of God.

John was “*in the Spirit . . . on the Lord’s Day.*” This was not the Day of the LORD — the day of judgement from the Old Testament. The “*Lord’s Day*” in this reference refers to the day

that was devoted to the Lord, the first day of the week, a day devoted to the worship of God.

The key to all that is in the Book of Revelations is the picture of the Risen Christ seen in Revelation 1:12–18. These verses contain a literal description of the Messiah from the Old Testament. These verses discuss where the Messiah stood and the clothes He wore and the twelve different titles that were given to Him.

The Picture of the Risen Christ

I turned around to see the voice that was speaking to me. And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance. When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. Then he placed his right hand on me and said: “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades” (Revelation 1:12–18).

John saw the Risen Christ standing among the lampstands. He had the appearance “like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest.” This is a description of the eternal King and Priest of the Old Testament.

The Titles for Christ (Revelation 1:14–18)

- *“His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow”* — this description refers to the fact that Christ is the **Eternal One** (cf. Daniel 7:9).
- *“ . . . his eyes were like blazing fire.”* — Christ is the **Omniscient One**. He is all knowing (cf. Daniel 10:6; John 2:25).
- *“His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace . . .”* — Christ is **The Judge**. With His feet He treads the winepress of the wrath of God (cf. Revelation 14:19–20; Ezekiel 1:7).
- *“ . . . his voice was like the sound of rushing waters.”* — Christ is the **Word of Jehovah**. His voice is like the sound of rushing waters. Ezekiel discussed God’s voice in the same way (cf. Ezekiel 43:2).
- *“In his right hand he held seven stars . . .”* — Christ is the **Provident One**. He is the One who will care for all the Christian’s troubles. Jesus is the One holding the stars in His right hand. He is the God who controls all the stars. He calls for the morning star and it comes out. He names the Pleiades and the Orion. Job described God as the One who holds the stars in the palm of His hand (cf. Job 38:31).
- *“ . . . out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword.”* — Christ is **The Vindicator**. With this sword He is going to smite the nations (cf. Revelation 19; Isaiah 11:4, 49:2).
- *“His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.”* — Christ is the **Glorious One**. His face is as the sun shining in its strength.
- *“When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead.”* — Christ is the **One to be worshiped**. Ezekiel *“fell facedown”* (cf. Ezekiel 1:28, 3:23). Whenever a person sees the glory of God, the posture demanded is flat on his face.

- “... *he placed his right hand on me and said: ‘Do not be afraid.’*” — Christ is **The Comforter** (cf. Matthew 14:27, 17:6–7).
- “. . . *‘I am the First and the Last.’*” — Christ is the **Omnipresent One**. He is always there no matter where a person goes. Wherever he goes, Christ is already there. Isaiah described God in that same way (cf. Isaiah 44:6, 48:12).
- “*‘I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever!’*” — Christ is the **Ever-Living One** (cf. Joshua 3:10; Psalm 42:2; Hebrews 1:10).
- “*‘I hold the keys of death and Hades.’*” — Christ is the **Conqueror of Death** (cf. Psalm 9:13, 107:18; Isaiah 38:10).

Christ is the One all men must bow before because He is the Eternal God. He is eternal. He knows all things. He is the Judge of all mankind. He is the Word of God. He is the One who provides all needs and cares about every trouble. He is the Vindicator, the glorious One, the One to be worshiped, the Comforter, the One who is always there, the ever-living One, the Conqueror of death.

What circumstance of life does Christ not meet? And where does He stand in the midst of the candlesticks and in the midst of the lampstands? The explanation of the vision is seen in Revelation 1:19–20. Jesus said to John:

“Write, therefore, what you have seen, what is now and what will take place later. The mystery of the seven stars that you saw in my right hand and of the seven golden candlesticks is this: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.”

Jesus said the seven lampstands are the seven churches. That is the outward manifestation of the Church, the

congregation itself, the people. The lampstand is the image of what appears, it is what is seen with the eye. When Jesus wrote these letters, He wrote to the angel of the Church that the star represented. The Church is the reality. For example, Sardis had a name that they were alive. That was the appearance, but they were dead; and that was the reality. In the case of Smyrna, it appeared that they were poor and persecuted, but Jesus said, “. . . *yet you are rich!*” The “*candlestick*” was poor and persecuted, but the “*angel*” was rich.

The Church is viewed in two different ways: the outer manifestation and the inner manifestation. This is the mystery of the lampstands and the stars. The congregation/church has the outward manifestation or appearance of being one thing . Even so, there is the reality, which is seen by the inner manifestations represented by the angels of each Church.

Letters to the Seven Churches

**Revelation 2:1–17; Acts 19–20; 1 Timothy 2:1–4;
Numbers 22–25:4, 31:16**

Introduction

This is chapter four in the study of the Book of Revelation. Chapters Four and Five will cover the letters written to the seven churches in the province of Asia as seen by John. He saw visions of the Son of man in the midst of the lampstands. These seven letters follow the standard form of letters written during the first century. Just as secretaries today have forms to follow when they write a basic business letter, there was a format used during the first century.

The following ingredients are going to be found in each one of these seven letters. First, there is the salutation of Jesus “*to the angel of the church in . . .*” Second, there is the self-designation of Who is writing — “*him who holds the seven stars in his right hand*” or “*him who is the First and the Last*” and so on. Third, there is a commendation in which Jesus will commend the Church for their good things when He can. Fourth, there is the condemnation when one was needed. Fifth, there is a warning about what the Church needs to do to escape the judgment that their condemnation will bring. Sixth, there is an exhortation to hear what the Spirit says. And seventh, there is a promise to the overcomers. Sometimes the exhortation and the promise will be switched, but most of the time all seven of these things are found. Sometimes there is no commendation that can be made, so there may be only six ingredients in the letter.

The Ephesus Church

Revelation 2:1–7

*“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: I **know** your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I **know** that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place. But you have this in your favor: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”*

The City — Its Characteristics:

The First and Greatest City of Asia Minor

The city of Ephesus was the first and greatest city of Asia Minor because of the trade routes in that area. It had the greatest harbor in Asia and large caravans of camels brought their goods to Ephesus to be shipped on to Rome. This made Ephesus the richest city in Asia Minor.

Ephesus had three political distinctions: it was a free city — a miniature Rome — which meant that anyone born in that city was automatically a Roman citizen and he was given every right as if he had been born in Rome itself. It was a judicial city in which one of the courts of that province met. Many referred

to it as the Supreme Court. Ephesus was considered a fun city because they had the yearly games of Asia. These games were comparable to the modern day Olympics.

Ephesus was the center for the worship of Diana, who is called Artemis in the Greek. The worship of Diana was not as immoral as some god/goddess worships during the first century, but it had immoral characteristics.

Ephesus' population, like most port cities, was a very mixed population. This is probably one of the reasons it was a center for crime and immorality. The city is in ruins today. Nothing exists on that ancient site. It is one of the places that can be described with the phrase, "How the mighty have fallen!"

The key phrase throughout these seven epistles is "***I know . . .***" The Church needs to know that Jesus knows; He is not fooled. He says, "*I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. . . .*" This epistle was written to a church who was loyal in all the ways a church could be loyal, but it was lacking in the one thing the church needed. Jesus said, "*You have forsaken your first love.*"

The best way to be able to understand what it means to "*forsake your first love*" would be to see the Church in the city of Ephesus at its very beginning (cf. Acts 19–20; Ephesians 1:15). The Church in Ephesus was known to be one of great faith. They had enough faith to burn all their magical books because those books stood between them and Jesus. Acts 19:19 says the value of the scrolls that were burned was "*fifty thousand drachmas.*" That would be worth nearly two million dollars worth of books. They no longer had faith in the magical arts because they had faith in Jesus. They also proved their faith by refusing to enter the temple of Diana/Artemis as most of the residents of Ephesus would.

The Church in Ephesus had a deep love for God as is shown by the burning of their magical books. They also had a great love for Paul himself. Acts 20:36–38 describes the grief of the Ephesian elders when they thought they were never

going to see Paul again: “. . . he knelt down with all of them and prayed. They all wept as they embraced him and kissed him.” They had a deep love for each other as Paul confirmed in Ephesians 1:15: “. . . ever since I heard about your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints . . .” Paul also commended them for their love for the lost which can be proven by their growth in numbers and in spirit (cf. Ephesians 4:1–16).

The Church and Jesus’ Message

When John wrote “*to the angel of the church in Ephesus,*” he was not writing to one of the lampstands which represented the outward manifestation of that congregation. He was writing to the inner reality of that church. Notice the designation Jesus gives Himself: “*These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands . . .*” Jesus was holding the destiny of the Church in His hands. He was holding the seven stars; He was in control of their spirit. He walked amidst the lampstands. He wanted them to know He was in control of their world — He was in control of this rich, politically powerful, fun-loving city.

Jesus commended the church in Ephesus for five different things. They were an **active** church — “*I know your deeds.*” They were a **toiling** church — “*I know your . . . hard work.*” Toil is work that is produced at the cost of pain. They were a **persistent** church — “*I know your . . . perseverance.*” They were an **intolerant** church —

“I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. . . . You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate”
(Revelation 2:2b, 6b).

In this age of tolerance in the 21st century, it may seem a little strange that Jesus would praise a church for being

intolerant. There are some things a Christian cannot stand for if he stands for Jesus. Since the church in Ephesus **had taken a stand** for Jesus, they **could not stand** for certain things.

The church in Ephesus was a **consistent** church — “*You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.*” This was a great church. They were active, toiling, persistent, intolerant, and consistent. It is important to understand the nature of this church.

It is amazing that even in the midst of all the great things this church had, there was still something lacking. Jesus said, “*Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love.*” The church in Ephesus had the kind of love that had burned magic books. They had the kind of love that caused them to weep with Paul. They were not doctrinally wrong. They were still right in everything they believed, and their actions were not wrong. They were doing everything they ought to do, but the spark was gone. They were no longer on fire with love for Jesus. Jesus was actually more concerned with the spark they had lost than He was with their deeds. He was more concerned with their love than with their doctrine. He praised them for being doctrinally right and for their activities in the Kingdom, but He condemned them for no longer being in love with Him.

Jesus said, “*Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*” They could go back; they could regain the spark they had lost. They needed to remember how it used to be. Jesus told them to repent, which means they needed to change their minds and hearts. He urged them to repeat the things they had done at first. Those would be the things that caused them to love. Those would be the things that would enable them to fall in love again. They needed to repent from allowing the world to put out the fire of love they first had. If the church in Ephesus could remember how it used to be, repent, and repeat the things they did at first, then Jesus would not come to remove their

lampstand from its place. Any time a Christian loses his fire for Jesus, he needs to remember how it used to be, repent from allowing the world to influence him, and repeat the things he did at the first.

The exhortation from Jesus says: *“He who has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”* Every church needs to listen to what the Spirit says. The promise from Jesus is precious: *“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.”* The ones who overcome will be those Christians who return to their first love with Jesus. In this letter to the Ephesian church, there is the lesson that Christians must never lose their first love. They must not lose the heat and the ardor they have for Jesus.

The Smyrna Church

Revelation 2:8–11

*“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again. I **know** your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich! I **know** the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death.”*

The City of Smyrna

The second letter was written to the church in Smyrna. This church also had some unusual things about it. Smyrna was a center of emperor worship. Normally, emperor worship was

not planned as an exclusive religious faith, but instead it was simply a test of political loyalty. People would line up in front of the image of Caesar, take a pinch of incense, throw it on the fire, and say, “Caesar is Lord.” When they did this they were simply saying that Caesar was politically the king. Christians could not do this because to them there was only one Lord, Jesus Christ.

Trouble from Rome was to be expected in Smyrna. The city of Smyrna was a center of Jewish people and influence because many Jews had settled there. The Jews had a ghetto in Smyrna and were so militant against Christianity they put one of the brothers, who was named Polycarp, to death on the Sabbath Day. They gathered sticks on the Sabbath Day to burn him, which was in total violation of their law. The Jews did not even do that to Jesus. They were so committed to destroying Christianity that they would even violate their own laws concerning the Sabbath.

The Church and Jesus’ Message

The salutation shows that Jesus always looks on the heart — He looks on the inside — as He wrote *“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write . . .”* Notice the self-designation: *“These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again”* (Revelation 2:8). Jesus is always present even though it may not appear that He is. He is the *“First and the Last.”* He was there at the beginning, He will be there until the end, and He will be there all the time that is in between. He died and lived again, therefore, He is not threatened by anything. Jesus knew the brethren in Smyrna were going to be threatened and put in prison. Some of them would be killed. He wanted them to see that it was going to be all right. He had experienced the same things and yet He lived again. And because His tomb is empty, the Christian cannot be threatened by death because he will live beyond this life.

Once again Jesus used the phrase *“I know.”* He said, *“I know your afflictions and your poverty — yet you are rich! I*

know the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan” (Revelation 2:9). This is the commendation — “*yet you are rich.*” In spite of their poverty, the Christians in Smyrna were rich. In spite of slander from others, they were rich. In spite of coming persecution and imprisonment, they were rich. It really does not matter how poor the world counts you, Christians are a rich people.

The word that Jesus used for “*poverty*” is an unusual word. There are many words that mean similar things. There is a word for poverty that simply means the person does not have enough — he has run out of money before the next pay day, but that is not the word used here. There is another word for poverty that can be translated as someone who is down to the bottom poor, one who has nothing and no ability to get anything. This is the kind of poverty that was in Smyrna. They had absolutely nothing and they did not have the ability to get anything. In the midst of that kind of poverty, Jesus told them they were rich.

The word “*rich*” is another unusual word, which comes from the word ***plutocrat***. A plutocrat is someone who is so rich that he can do anything he wants. He is rich enough to rule and he can be above the law and criticism. Jesus told this down-to-the-bottom poor church that they had enough resources to rule the entire world. They did not have anything, but their Father in heaven owned everything and they were the heirs of their Father.

There is no condemnation for Smyrna; there is not a single word spoken against this poor, persecuted church who was rich. There is a warning/admonition to “*Be faithful.*” Jesus told them to hold on even in the face of death; literally, to hold on even when your faith causes your death. Death cannot threaten the Christian so there is nothing to fear.

Next there is an exhortation to continue listening to the Spirit of God and there is the promise: “*. . . I will give you the crown of life. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all*

by the second death” (Revelation 2:10–11). Jesus’ promise to this church was actually two-fold. If they were faithful unto death, they would receive a crown of life. The word for “*crown*” describes a victory crown. It was a wreath of olive branches that had been woven together into a crown and was placed on the head of the man who had won the race in the games. This man would be one who had trained hard and run the race with diligence. He would have been the one who felt the tape across his chest as he crossed the finish line as he won the race. He would be the one who received the crown. Jesus said all they had to do to receive the victory crown was to be faithful unto death.

Jesus also promised the man “*who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death*” (Revelation 2:11). These Christians would have a victory with Jesus in life’s race and they would have victory over death when life was finished. What a blessed promise that is.

I want diligently to be able to know that I am one of those overcomers, that I am one of those victors in life and, therefore, I will always be crowned with a victory crown. But I want even more than that to know that when I die I have victory over death itself and will go to be with Jesus.

The Pergamum Church

Revelation 2:12–17

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword. I know where you live — where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city [Antipas is called “faithful witness,” a name that was also used to describe Jesus in Revelation 1:5] — where Satan lives. Nevertheless,

I have a few things against you: You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality. Likewise you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans. Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it."

The City of Pergamum

The third letter was written to the church in Pergamum. Pergamum was the capitol of the Roman province of Asia, and therefore, the very center of emperor worship. Emperor worship was stronger here than anywhere else. It was the place where Satan's power could be found. It was the intellectual center of the province, making it Roman to the core. Its intellect was strictly Greek and Roman with no basis in God or God's way. Satan's mind was found here rather than the wisdom of God.

Pergamum was the medical center of the province. As the medical center, the people worshiped the god of healing whose symbol was a serpent (Satan's own sign) wrapped around a cross. Satan's power, his mind, and his own sign were predominately found in this one city. The Church in that kind of environment would probably have some difficulty.

Once again there is a simple salutation and self-designation: *"To the angel of the church in Pergamum write: These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword"* (Revelation 2:12). This self-designation picture is of One who will be a judge and warrior. The commendation of this church is, that in spite of the fact that they lived where

Satan had his throne, they held on to the teachings of Jesus and had remained faithful to Christ.

Jesus' condemnation of this church is first, "*You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality*" (Revelation 2:14). Balaam was called by the wicked king of Moab, Balak, to curse the nation of Israel. Balaam tried numerous times to curse Israel and every time, God put a blessing in his mouth instead. Other scriptures indicate that Balaam went so far as to advise the people of Moab to marry the Israelites and then get the Israelites to worship Moabite idols so that they would turn away from God. The Israelites even ate the food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality. Thousands of people who Balaam could not curse were killed because God sent a plague to destroy His people when the Moabites "*followed Balaam's advice*" (cf. Numbers 22:1–25:4, 31:15–18; Deuteronomy 23:44–5; Joshua 13:22, 24:9–10; Nehemiah 13:2; Micah 6:5; 2 Peter 2:15).

The second portion of Jesus' condemnation involved a people who were called the "*Nicolaitans*." These were probably Gentiles who taught compromise in order to further material safety and prosperity. The word *Nicolais* comes from two words that mean to destroy people. The word Balaam also comes from two words that mean to destroy people. One is the Greek and the other is Hebrew. That probably indicates that these were both Jewish and Gentile teachings.

If someone does not go along with the world or if he does not make some peace with the world, then he is not going to be able to live the life he wants to live. In some cases, one would not even be able to live at all. The world says a person needs to go along with the world to be able to get along in the world. That was not the advice Jesus gave in Revelation 2:16 when He said, "*Repent therefore!*" That was the warning for the church in Pergamum — Repent or face Jesus and His sword. They needed to repent of tolerating the compromisers. The church

itself was not compromising, but they were tolerant of the people who taught Balaam's or Nicolais' teachings. They allowed the compromisers to be there among them.

Is it not strange that Ephesus was praised for intolerance and Pergamum was condemned for tolerance? It is important for the Church not to tolerate those who would want the Church to compromise its faith in Jesus. Churches need to repent of that. If a congregation stands for Jesus, then there are some things that it cannot participate in.

Next is the exhortation which tells the church to listen to what the Spirit says. The final portion of this letter is the promise which says, *"To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give him a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to him who receives it"* (Revelation 2:17b). The reference to *"hidden manna"* is a reminder of the wilderness wanderings as the Jews came out of Egypt. They were hungry and God caused a wheat-like substance to fall from the sky. It hung on all the bushes and sat upon the ground. They gathered the manna from God, ate it, and were sustained by it. Jesus was telling the church in Pergamum to quit tolerating the compromiser and get back to the steadfast stand they had once taken with Him, then He would supply all their needs. All a person's needs come from above — *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights . . ."* (James 1:17).

Not only will Jesus provide *"hidden manna,"* He also said He would give them a *"white stone with a new name."* A white stone would be significant to these people since the court of all courts was in their city. When a person was accused of a crime and called to stand before a court of justice in the city of Pergamum, each judge had a black stone and a white stone in front of him. When the case had been heard, a box was passed to each judge, he would put a black or white stone in the box — he gave a black stone if he thought the person was guilty or he gave a white stone if he thought the person was innocent. Then the box was given to the supreme judge and he would count the

stones. If the white stones were predominate, then the person was innocent and free to go. If the black stones were predominate, then the person was found guilty and he died or lost his case before the court. If the person was found innocent, he was handed a white stone with Caesar's name on it and he carried that stone on his person so that if anybody asked about his accusation for the crime, he could show the white stone to prove his innocence.

If a slave had been freed because of a good deed he had done, he could go before the same kind of court system and the supreme judge would give him a white stone to carry as proof of his freedom. A slave usually had a mark on his forehead or his right hand that signified he belonged to a particular person. The slave bore the "mark" of the person he belonged to. He carried that "mark" forever and someone could challenge him to prove that he was a freed slave instead of an escaped slave. All the freed slave had to do was show his "*white stone*."

In the case of all Christians, we carry a "*white stone*" with Jesus' name on it. We have in our possession the proof of our innocence. A sinner carries the "mark" of Satan, but once a person becomes a Christian, he is given a "*white stone*." That "*white stone with a new name written on it*" says the Christian belongs to Christ.

Within the three churches in this chapter, there was a church which was loyal but lacking. There was a church which was poor but rich. There was a church which was in Satan's place, but it was a haven for the saints. Christians today are blessed in these same ways.

Letters to the Seven Churches (2)

Revelation 2:18–3:22

Introduction and Review

This chapter is a continuation of chapter 4 dealing with Revelation 2 and 3 and the letters to the seven churches. Jesus told the church at Ephesus they were good people, but they had lost their spark (*“forsaken your first love”* — Revelation 2:4b). He told the church at Smyrna that He counted them as rich even though others might look at them as poor and in tribulation. Jesus told the church at Pergamum they were doing well in “holding on” in an area where Satan was thriving, but they were not doing well in the fact that they were tolerating the compromising teachings of Balaam and the Nicolaitans within their midst.

The Thyatira Church

Revelation 2:18–29

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write: These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first. Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls

herself a prophetess. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds. Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets (I will not impose any other burden on you): Only hold on to what you have until I come. To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations — "He will rule them with an iron scepter; he will dash them to pieces like pottery" — just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The City — Its Characteristics

This letter was written to the church in the city of Thyatira, which was a very interesting city. Thyatira was not big or famous, but it was in a good position for trade routes. It would have been the last place that people would stop when taking their goods to Pergamum. Because of this fact, there would have been inns, motels, hotels, and food places making them a rich city. The trade people in Thyatira dealt especially in a royal purple dye and in the purple cloth made from this dye. The city itself was noted for its trade guilds, which were much like unions found in America today. Each guild had its own god and feast days dedicated to those gods. To be able to prosper in any kind of business in this city, the people had to be a part of one or more of the guilds and participate in the polytheistic idol

worship. At each of these feasts, there were two things primarily emphasized. The meat that had been sacrificed to the idol was eaten by everyone to show their loyalty to the guild god. The “religion” for each guild also involved immorality with temple prostitutes, either male or female.

Thyatira was an ugly place for a church to exist, but that is sometimes the kind of place where the Church does really well. A diamond looks prettier when it is placed on black velvet rather than on white. The testimony and character of a church can be seen more powerfully in the midst of wickedness than other situations.

The Church and Jesus’ Message

Notice the salutation: “*To the **angel** of the church in Thyatira write:*” Jesus was telling John to write to the inner personality, which is the **reality** of a church. The self-designation is: “*These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.*” Jesus is the “**the Son of God.**” He is the infallible One who has eyes “*like blazing fire,*” which indicates that He knows everything. He has feet “*like burnished bronze,*” which indicates that He is an all-powerful judge, Who knows everything and will judge everyone. He is the One sending this epistle to the church. The church in Thyatira should have been ready to listen **carefully** to any condemnation coming from One who is the “*Son of God,*” and surely they would treasure any commendation given by Him.

Jesus used the phrase “*I know . . .*” again. That is a very encouraging word. In life people sometimes need someone who will listen to the difficulties they may have and to only interrupt to say, “I know. I know.” A person feels comfort just knowing someone else knows the situation and can sympathize. **Is** said:

“**I know** your deeds” — they were a working church.

“**I know** . . . your love” — they were a caring church.

“**I know** your . . . faith” — they were a daring church.

“I know your service” — they were a ministering church.

“I know your perseverance” — they were a steadfast church.

“I know . . . you are now doing more than you did at the first” — they were a growing church!

What a congregation! They were a working, caring, daring, ministering, steadfast, and growing congregation. What could Jesus have to say negatively about a church like that? Jesus did have a condemnation for even this active congregation — they were tolerant. He said, *“Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate **that woman Jezebel** . . .”* (Revelation 2:20; Jezebel: cf. 1 Kings 16, 21; 2 Kings 9). They were not like the church in Pergamum who tolerated compromise. Thyatira was tolerant of the evil in their midst. Notice this is the second church condemned for being tolerant while the church in Ephesus was praised for intolerance.

Jezebel was the true example and model for wickedness. After her death, surely no one ever named a daughter Jezebel because giving someone that name marked her by that name. Just as other names have come to stand for evil or ungodliness, the name *“Jezebel”* has come to stand for the embodiment of evil. Some people might say, “If you want to conquer Satan in his world, you must know him. You will never be able to conquer sin unless you become thoroughly acquainted with it by experience. Go to a guild feast. Commit fornication. This will make you a better Christian. Don’t cut your ties with the world or you will never understand it.” Others of the world might say the only person who can help a drunk is an ex-drunk. These are not true statements. If a person is stuck in quick-sand, he does not need someone to jump in the quick-sand with him to save him. One stuck in sin needs someone standing on firm ground to throw him a rope and pull him to safety. That is exactly what Jesus told the church in Thyatira. They did not need to learn *“Satan’s so-called deep secrets”* (Revelation 2:24).

Jesus gave the church in Thyatira, who was tolerant of the evil in their midst, a warning calling to repent and to *“Only hold on to what you have until I come”* (Revelation 2:25). He urged them to be faithful to Him, not to hold onto Jezebel’s teaching, and not to learn Satan’s deep secrets. Jesus was telling them that just because others liked to talk about the kinds of things that no one else seemed to know, they needed to remain ignorant about sin. Paul wrote about the same thing in Romans 16:19: *“. . . I want you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil.”* The word translated as *“innocent”* in the NIV simply means stupid. There are some things to which God wants His children to remain stupid; these things are the *“deep secrets”* of Satan. God wants His children to stay as far away from Satan’s secrets as possible.

Jesus urged the church in Thyatira to wait for Him. They did not need to curse God for what they did not have; they needed to hold on to what they had and wait for His coming. In the midst of all the wickedness in Thyatira, a little bit of righteousness would shine as the *“morning star”* forever and ever.

After the warning, notice that the exhortation and the promise change places (in this passage as well as in those following this one). Jesus promised, *“To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations . . . I will also give him the morning star”* (Revelation 2:26, 28). Jesus told them that they ruled the world. They had joint-rulership with God. Paul told the Corinthians the same thing in 1 Corinthians 6:2a, *“Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?”* Not only would they rule, they were promised the *“morning star.”* The morning star is not the first star to appear at night, it is the last star to disappear. It stays out longer than any other star. It is the star that signals that night is ending and a new day is dawning. This is a beautiful promise. They must remain faithful and overcome. The exhortation tells the church what to do while they wait for Jesus to return: *“He*

who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:29). They need to keep listening to what God has to say.

The Sardis Church

Revelation 3:1–6

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The City — Its Characteristics

The fifth letter was written to the church in the city of Sardis. Once again this is a very interesting city. It was located on a nearly inaccessible hill so it was a very easily defensible city. The people were arrogant and proud to the point of becoming overconfident. These people did not think anyone or anything could **overcome** them. Maybe someone should have told them about the verses from the Book of Obadiah where God told the people of Edom:

The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks . . . who say to yourself, “Who can bring me down to the ground?” Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down . . . (Obadiah 1:3–4).

Sardis was a great commercial center. It would have been considered a wealthy city in which everyone had plenty; in fact, many had too much. These people were like the Israelites Moses sang about in Deuteronomy:

[They]. . . grew fat and kicked; filled with food . . . [they] became heavy and sleek. . . . abandoned the God who made him and rejected the Rock his Savior . . . They are a nation without sense, there is no discernment in them (Deuteronomy 32:15, 28).

For every person who endures riches, there will be a thousand who will endure poverty. Riches are harder to endure. Sardis was so immoral that it was recognized as such by the heathen, who said it was the second most immoral city in all of the Roman empire. The most immoral city was known to be Corinth, but Sardis was considered second.

The people in Sardis worshiped a goddess called Cybele, who was known as the goddess of frenzy. As the people worshiped Cybele they went through all kinds of fits and maneuvers. Any church in this kind of environment is sure to be influenced by the people around them.

The Church and Jesus’ Message

Notice the salutation. Once again Jesus said, *“To the angel of the church in Sardis”* speaking to the inner personality of this church. The self-designation is *“ . . . These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars . . . ”* (Revelation 3:1). Jesus holds the seven

spirits of God meaning He is able to give eternal help. He holds the seven stars which means He controls the destiny of the Church. Jesus holds the Church in His hand both as their eternal help and the controller of their destiny.

Jesus did not offer a commendation to the church as a whole in Sardis. He said, “. . . *I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead*” (Revelation 3:1). If He was going to offer a commendation, it could have been for their deeds, but those deeds told a lie. They were doing what was right and they had the reputation of being alive, but that was all a lie. The inner being of the church was dead. A person cannot always tell by looking at the outer manifestations of a congregation whether or not it is alive. All the deeds, works, and the great things they accomplished may not tell the truth. In Sardis, their deeds said the church was alive, but Jesus said they were dead. There are churches and individuals like this today whose reputation is great, but one day God will say, “This person is dead. This church is dead.”

Jesus gave Sardis a warning in Revelation 3:2–3:

“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.”

The church in Sardis was dead. They were asleep. They had allowed the world and the things of the world, perhaps even the riches of their city and the fun of their feasts, to lull them into a spiritual sleep. They were still going to church. They were still singing the songs and praying the prayers. They were probably still preaching and teaching all the right lessons. They were giving liberally of their means to God, but they were asleep. Jesus urged them to “WAKE UP!” They needed to strengthen what remained; they needed to work on what was

“about to die.” Jesus told them to remember how they had received the blessings from God — *“what you have received and heard; obey it, and **repent**.”* They needed to repent of being dead and falling asleep. If they did not repent, Jesus was going to judge them. He would be the One who would take away their candlestick.

Take note that in the midst of this deadness, there was a little bit of life. Jesus said, *“Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for **they are worthy**”* (Revelation 3:4). That is a tremendous phrase, *“. . . they are worthy.”* God looked down on this living remnant and saw them as worthy. Not only was He going to give them a robe of purity and allow them to walk with Him, but He was going to recognize them before all the world as people who were worthy. They were probably weak and still committing sin; they were still falling short of the mark that God had in mind for them, but at this moment in time, God recognized them as *“worthy.”*

Notice the promise Jesus gave to the “overcomers”: *“He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels”* (Revelation 3:5). Jesus is going to give the “overcomers” a white robe. These will be the people who did not bow to the teachings in Sardis. He is going to write their names in the book of life and it will never be erased. He is going to acknowledge their names to God and His angels. There can be no greater honor than this.

The church in Sardis was in the midst of a situation that was characterized by spiritual deadness. A Christian today might find himself in the same situation. He must not try to run away. He needs to grab hold of what he has and hold on. Every Christian should expect the Lord to one day name his name before all the angels of heaven and His Father and say, “This is a worthy brother. This is a worthy sister.”

The Philadelphia Church

Revelation 3:7–13

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars — I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

The City — Its Characteristics

The sixth letter that is recorded in Revelation was written to the church in Philadelphia. Philadelphia was an unusual place. It was a poor, unnoted city built by the Greeks to spread the Greek culture in that area. When Rome took over, they did not particularly like the city. It had been built on an earthquake fault. Over and over again it was declared a disaster area and

had to receive government aid to the extent that it became totally dependent upon Rome. The city had no spirit of its own. It was an out-of-the-way city that was not located on any of the trade routes. They were a poor, destroyed, and despicable city, but Jesus did not say one word against the church in this city.

The Church and Jesus' Message

Once again there is the same salutation, *"To the angel of the church in Philadelphia."* The self-designation is: *"These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open"* (Revelation 3:7). Jesus is the One who is holy and true. That speaks of His character. He is the One who holds the key of David. That speaks of His royalty. He is the One who can open and shut irrevocably; no one can change that. This speaks of His finality.

Jesus told the church in Philadelphia that He knew their deeds. They were a working church with *"little strength."* The *"little strength"* was enough so that they had not denied His name. They were persecuted, but He protected them. Jesus opened a door for them and crowned them with a crown that no one could take away. There is absolutely no condemnation given of this church.

This kind of city and the church inside it would probably have a feeling of inferiority, but Jesus took care of that. He did not condemn them or issue any warning to these people. He did not even tell them they needed to repent. He did not tell them to change anything they were doing. They had taken the little bit of power and ability they had and used it to remain steadfast. They might see their crown as nothing, but there were encouraging words from Jesus: *"Hold on to what you have . . ."* (Revelation 3:11).

Jesus promised the church in Philadelphia:

"I am coming soon. . . . Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again

will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name” (Revelation 3:11–12).

Jesus did not tell the church in Philadelphia to change anything they were doing. He told them to keep on doing what they were doing. He urged them to remain steadfast. Then He promised them He would make a pillar in the temple for those who overcome and they would never again have to leave it. No doubt the people in Philadelphia had seen pillars in earthly temples and in their own houses which had fallen during the many earthquakes they had endured. Jesus told them there would be eternal pillars. He gave honor and a new name to people who had probably been dishonored and hated by the world around them. All they needed to do was remain steadfast and to keep listening to what the Spirit had to say.

The Laodicea Church

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, “I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.” But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

The City and Its Characteristics

The last of the epistles written to the churches in Asia Minor was written to the church in Laodicea. This city was perhaps the richest among these seven cities. Laodicea was located on the same earthquake fault as Philadelphia, but they always refused to take any kind of aid. Laodicea was a health resort with lukewarm, mineral sulfurous water that helped to ease aches and pains. The city became a medical center because they were famous for a powder or ointment used on the eyes. The city was also a clothing and fashion center, famous primarily for selling a beautiful black cloth. They were a center of banking and finance for all the area. Laodicea was a rich opulent city with resorts and spas that catered to the rich. This particular city was known for its indifference through self-satisfaction. The church in Laodicea was a thermometer instead of becoming a thermostat. They reflected the temperature of the city rather than causing the temperature to change.

The Church and Jesus' Message

The salutation for this church is the same as all the others. Jesus through John was speaking *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea."* The self-designation says, *"... These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation"* (Revelation 3:14). Jesus is *"the Amen"* meaning He is establishing the last word. He is the faithful witness and the ruler of God's creation. Jesus was letting the church in Laodicea know that even Caesar himself was ruled by Him.

There is a short commendation: *“I know your deeds . . .”* but *“. . . they were neither cold nor hot.”* Apparently the church was active, but activity does not mean they were correct. They were lukewarm and Jesus threatened to spit them out of His mouth. They were sickening to Him. The basis of being lukewarm is usually prideful worldliness. The city of Laodicea was a place that boasted they did not need anything. In reality they were *“wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked”* (Revelation 3:17).

Jesus counseled the church in Laodicea to *“. . . buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich . . .”* (Revelation 3:18). He was referring to spiritual riches. The church needed to buy *“white clothes . . . to cover your shameful nakedness”* to replace the black clothes they were so famous for. They needed to buy eye salve to correct their blindness so they could see.

As a warning Jesus said, *“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent”* (Revelation 3:19). The church needed to accept His rebuke and discipline and to repent of their worldly pride. Then He said: *“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me”* (Revelation 3:20). When a person allows Jesus in to eat at his table, before the feast is finished, that person is eating at His table.

Laodicea may have been the worst of the churches, but they received one of the sweetest promises: *“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne”* (Revelation 3:21). If a person will repent of worldly things and worldliness and live for Jesus, then he will live to reign with Him eternally.

The exhortation is simple — listen to what God has to say through His Spirit — *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”* (Revelation 3:22).

Final Note on the Seven Letters

Within the seven letters in chapters two and three of the Book of Revelation there are three tools introduced which the devil was able to use in his attack on these churches. First, there was the anti-Christian persecution coming from the civil power of the nation of Rome (cf. Revelation 2:10, 13). Second, there was the anti-Christian religion as seen in the earth-beast (cf. Revelation 2:13, 13:1–10). Third, there was the anti-Christian power and seduction of the world as seen in the harlot (cf. Revelation 3:17–18, 17:1–18). These three tools or instruments of evil will be used by Satan again and again and again as he continually attacks the church of Christ.

The Magnificent Throne

Revelation 4:1–11; Ezekiel 1, 10; Isaiah 6

Review

Studying Revelation 1–3 shows some great principles taught by God. There is the fact that the Book of Revelation needed to be understood immediately by the people it was written to. It was written in symbols they already understood. They would have been familiar with the Old Testament scriptures in which the Book of Revelation is rooted.

Jesus Christ, the brother of all Christians, walked in the midst of the churches He addressed in Revelation 2–3. He walked among them not only to judge and to help the churches in their errors, but also to commend them in the areas where they were right. He was there to protect and reward the churches when they overcame. Churches in general will face enemies of all kinds throughout their existence. For some of the seven churches in Asia Minor, Jesus declared that they had already been victorious over their enemies. In most cases those enemies were the civil powers who persecuted the Church of Jesus Christ. These civil powers were the anti-Christ religions of the world who wanted to turn men's minds away from Jesus to some other power who was thought to be in control of their lives.

The strongest tool, the strongest enemy, that opposed the Church during the first century was the worldly seductiveness of creation. Mankind has an inherent desire to have things, the desire to be something, and the desire to have the approval of his own kind. This desire could possibly be the strongest enemy men throughout the ages face in their Christian lives.

Introduction

Revelation 4 conveys to the Church the assurance that He who is the ultimate source of all existence is on their side. In the center of the universe is the throne. On that throne sits the Father, and He is in control. Caesars or worldly kings are not ruling this world, but it is God the Father who rules. Revelation 5 says the Church may depend upon Christ and His redeeming work. The Christian's power is the finished work of Christ. The Slain Lamb has no problem approaching the throne of God. The book of destiny for the whole world that is in the hand of God upon the throne is passed over to the Lamb because He has been slain.

Revelation 4–5 is a cry to the Church from her glorified Head, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God. Trust in Me also.” He utters this encouragement even before the Church entered into the tribulation that was awaiting her. God is ruling; He is the one in control, not man. That is the message Christians needed to hear. That is what Christians today need to know also, because sometimes it does not look like God is in control through human eyes.

After John's vision that included Jesus' words to the churches of Asia Minor, the curtain was lifted and John began to see things from heaven's view point. In rapid succession, visions were presented to him to assure the persecuted Christians that the cause of Christ was not a lost cause. Christ has never promised His children an easy time, so undoubtedly, those struggles will be long and bitter. But when the last curtain falls, complete victory will belong to Christ and His people. Even though the Kingdom belonging to Christians is not of this world, they still must dwell here on this earth. The child of God will not be spared the horrors of God's four sore judgments: war, famine, wild beasts, and plague. These judgments will be used by God both to vindicate His name and to avenge His children. It is important to remember this two-fold result: God uses His judgments to vindicate His name and to avenge His children. If the children of God will remember that all

judgments that come are from God, then they will know that those judgments are for their benefit. This is because He is the Father and everything that happens, happens to glorify Him, to advance Christ, and to help the children of God.

Revelation 4 has been called the throne scene throughout all time. The “*throne*” is mentioned ten times in the English New International Version, but in the original Greek text the word “*throne*” is found twelve times. Since there are only eleven verses in Revelation 4 that indicates that the throne should be at the center of any discussion on this chapter.

The Description of the Throne and It’s Occupant

*After this **I looked**, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this.” At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne (Revelation 4:1–3).*

Notice what John did — he did not listen, he “**looked**.” It is important to remember that this is a book of visions. John is on the isle of Patmos and he has already seen great visions. He is imprisoned on this isolated island because of the Word of God and his testimony of Jesus. He is a prisoner because of his faithfulness to Christ and his diligence in the Kingdom. His faith did not bring any material reward, it brought him to this time and place where physically he was not doing well. He was probably in chains on a rocky island with all the winds and storms of the sea. His personal spirit had to be depressed, but John was “*in the Spirit*” (Revelation 1:10; 4:). “*In the Spirit*,”

even though his body was imprisoned on Patmos, his soul was free and John was able to go before the throne into the very presence of God. John was lifted up by the voice of God, carried away by the Spirit of God. John was in the flesh on the isle of Patmos, but he said, *“At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it (Revelation 4:2).*

The throne occupies the center of the vision throughout this whole chapter. Imagine a piece of paper with a rectangle in the middle. The paper represents **everything that exists**: all creation, all the world, and all the worlds within this universe. In the middle of **everything** is the throne of God. God sits upon that throne in the middle of everything He created. Revelation 4:2–3 gives a vivid description of God the Father. He is likened to a jasper stone. Revelation 21:11 describes this stone as *“ . . . a very precious jewel . . . clear as crystal.”* The jasper stone would be parallel to a diamond. God is both pure and precious. He is the Holy One, exalted above all others. There is nothing that could compare to His worth.

Revelation 4:3 also says, *“The one who sat there had the appearance of . . . carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircles the throne.”* The King James Version translates this as a *“sardius”* stone. It is a blood red stone which depicts the power of judgment for the One who is sitting on the throne. God is not only holy and pure, He is the judge. Revelation 6 talks about a day when there will be judgment upon the inhabitants of the earth. The wicked wanted to flee and hide in the caves and rocks on the mountains rather than face the One who was sitting upon the throne.

Around the throne was an emerald colored rainbow instead of the typical multi-colored rainbow. The color green has always represented a picture of peace. David talked about lying down in green pastures (cf. Psalm 23:2). Green is a soothing color. Counselors will sometimes paint their walls a pale green because it soothes man to be among the grasses in the field. The rainbow signifies the sureness of God’s covenant of peace

with His obedient people. The rainbow was a sign sent from God when Noah and the ark rested on sinless ground that had been cleansed by the water of the flood (cf. Genesis 9:12–16). The first thing Noah did was build an altar and worship God. The first thing God did was make a covenant of peace with Noah:

And God said, “This is the sign of the covenant I am making between me and you and every living creature with you, a covenant for all generations to come: I have set my rainbow in the clouds, and it will be the sign of the covenant between me and the earth. Whenever I bring clouds over the earth and the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind. Never again will the waters become a flood to destroy all life. Whenever the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth (Genesis 9:12–16).

A green emerald rainbow says the storm is over and mankind does not have to worry about anything because God is in control. God will keep His covenant and man does not need to fear or worry about the storms of life. This is a wonderful revelation telling man that the One upon the throne is in control of the whole universe and He will use that control to bring peace to His persecuted people.

The Scene Around the Throne

Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of

lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come" (Revelation 4:4–8).

The scene around the throne of the One who controls all the universe is a thrill to read. What a fabulous scene that is! It is a joy to be a part of the scene around the throne of God. Imagine the piece of paper again with the throne of God in the center of everything He created. Around God's throne in the center of that piece of paper are twenty-four smaller thrones. Seated on those thrones are the twenty-four elders. These elders share the rulership of the universe with God.

The twenty-four elders are the overcomers from Revelation 2–3. Revelation 3: 21 says: *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."* The overcomers were promised a seat representing rulership. Compare Revelation 4:4 and Revelation 3:4–5 where Jesus promised the overcomers they would *"... walk with me, dressed in white for they are worthy. He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white."* The twenty-four elders are described as: *"dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads."* The white robes are a sign of victory and purity for the overcomers. They wore gold crowns just as Jesus promised in Revelation 2:10: *"Be*

faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life."

The twenty-four elders are in the exact place where Jesus promised the overcomers they would be. Revelation 2:7 says, *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God."* Revelation 3:12 and 3:21 promised that the overcomers would be in the presence of God. The twenty-four elders have all the same characteristics of the overcomers from the seven churches of Asia Minor. The twenty-four elders are before the throne of God. They are the representatives in heaven for all the redeemed and persecuted on the earth. They represent the people with victory, with a crown, wearing clothes of purity. Jesus has pronounced them worthy — they have won. This scene tells those who are being persecuted where they will be one day if they are *"faithful unto death,"* if they keep the Word of God to the end, then they will be before the throne of God.

The Bible does not give a reason for there being twenty-four elders. It is possible that the twenty-four elders of Revelation correspond to the twenty-four orders of servants/priests/ musicians ministering in the temple and twenty-four lots cast for the duties of the musicians in the temple (cf. 1 Chronicles 24:4; 24:7–18; 25:9–31). The men in the Old Testament represented all of Israel as they stood before God to serve Him. The twenty-four elders would be temple servants representative of all the saints who have passed from life into a greater life, from service to greater service, and from duties in an earthly temple to duties in a heavenly temple.

Another possibility could be that the twenty-four elders correspond to the twelve heads of the twelve tribes of Israel in the Old Testament added to the twelve Apostles of Jesus in the New Testament. These two covenants together would represent the redeemed of both covenants. The Book of Revelation does talk a lot about the redeemed ruling:

- Revelation 1:6 — *“and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father. . .”*
- Revelation 5:9–10 — *“. . . purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”*
- Revelation 22:5 — *“. . . And they will reign for ever and ever.”*

This second possibility seems more appropriate since it represents the ruling redeemed and not just the servant aspect. Christians, who are the redeemed are also servants, but for the Christians during this time of persecution, it would be important and comforting for them to know that they were indeed going to rule one day.

Revelation 4:5–6 says:

From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.

“Lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder” issued from the throne of God. This would indicate the presence and the power of God. In the Old Testament when Moses was upon the mountain with God, there was a thick cloud over the mountain, thunder and lightning and a very loud trumpet blast so that everyone in the Israelite camp trembled. There was smoke and fire and the whole mountain trembled violently (cf. Exodus 19:16–19). Psalm 29 describes the presence and the power of God using these same words.

Many times in the Old Testament, lightning, voices, earthquakes, thunder, and other such things are the

manifestation of God's wrath coming down from heaven (cf. 1 Samuel 2:10, 7:10; Psalms 18: 13–14; Job 37:4). Revelation 8:2–5 describes the following scene:

And I saw the seven angels who stand before God . . . Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints . . . The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.

In 1 Samuel 2 and 7, God thundered and judgment came. In the Books of Psalms and Job even when a literal storm was brewing it was referred to as the coming of God's judgment. Judgment does not come from the decisions, plans, or the schemes of men. It comes from the throne of the One who loved His children enough to send His only son to Calvary. All judgments come from God.

In front of the throne are seven lamps which represent the “seven spirits of God.” The work of the Spirit is to bring the light of God into a world that has been made so dark by Satan and sin. The Spirit's first work in creation was to bring order to the chaos of the original creation by bringing light: “*And God said, ‘Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky . . .’*” (Genesis 1:14). Where ever the Spirit of God goes darkness is dispelled and the light comes. Why does Revelation 4:5 say there are “seven spirits of God” when Ephesians 4:4 plainly says, “*There is one . . . Spirit . . .*”? The number seven is the perfect number for God indicating perfection, completion, and the absolute nature of the Spirit of God. In Isaiah 11:2 when a singular “**Spirit**” rested upon Jesus, that Spirit was broken

down into aspects of the Spirit indicating the completeness of the work of the Spirit. Isaiah prophesied:

*The **Spirit of the LORD** will rest on him —
the Spirit of **wisdom** and of **understanding**,
the Spirit of **counsel** and of **power**,
the Spirit of **knowledge** and of the **fear of the LORD**.*

Revelation 4:6 records another element of the throne scene: “*before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal.*” One possible way to look at this description is to realize John was separated from his brethren by the Aegean Sea. It was and still is a clear glassy sea except during a storm. Perhaps John saw this “*sea of glass*” separating the most holy God from His redeemed children.

Knowing that “*sea*” can easily be translated as laver or basin, it is possible that this “*sea of glass*” corresponds to the laver used by the priests during the Old Testament times to wash themselves before they entered into the tabernacle or temple. Perhaps the “*sea of glass*” was representative to that laver, but used by the twenty-four elders/priests to wash their garments and make them white in the blood of the lamb to qualify them to serve God (cf. Revelation 7:9–17).

Revelation 4:6–9 (cf. Ezekiel 1, 10) reveals that in the center, around the throne, there were four living creatures:

Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. In the center, around the throne, were four living creatures, and they were covered with eyes, in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty,

who was, and is, and is to come.” Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever. . .

In Revelation and Ezekiel these parallel-type creatures are called “*four **living** creatures*.” Their faces were described as that of a lion, ox, man, and an eagle. In both places (Revelation and Ezekiel) the living creatures were associated with the throne of God. Fire and flashes of lightning moved among them. Each creature had multiple wings and eyes all around indicating that they could see everything and every place. In both books, a rainbow encircles the scene around the throne. Ezekiel 10:20 states that these living creatures were the cherubim, which were the angelic forces of the highest order who guarded the holy things of God. Consider the fact that a cherubim stood at the gate of the garden of Eden to prevent mankind from entering into a sinless garden once sin had invaded (cf. Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:20). These cherubim are sometimes responsible for bringing judgment to the earth (cf. 2 Samuel 22:8–16; Psalm 80:1, 99:1).

The “*four living creatures*” depicted with faces of different creatures perhaps symbolized different characteristics: the lion is a symbol of power, the ox a symbol of service, the man a symbol of intelligence, and the eagle a symbol of swiftness. These creatures are symbols of God’s highest, most powerful, and most intelligent creatures. In Revelation the creatures had six wings rather than the four wings listed in Ezekiel. Isaiah described the angels around the throne as: “*seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying*” (Isaiah 6:2). These seraphs sang the song of “*Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory*” (Isaiah 6:3). The positioning of their wings perhaps relate to reverence, humility, and service. These creatures saw everything and they sang continual praise to God.

The Climax — Praise to the Throne's Occupant

Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Revelation 4:9–11).

Whenever the living creatures gave glory, honor, and thanks to Him who sits on the throne and who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders would fall down before the throne and worship Him. They laid their crowns before the throne and praised the One who had created all things. He is worthy of all glory, honor, and power because He reigns. He is worthy because He is eternal. The redeemed represented by the twenty-four elders laid their crowns of victory before God's throne and sang praises to Him who was worthy, to Him who created all things.

Thousands of years before these elders offered their praise to the Father, the psalmist David wrote Psalm 148 to offer the same kind of praise. Angels, redeemed men and women sing:

Praise the LORD.

*Praise the LORD from the heavens,
praise him in the heights above.
Praise him, all his angels,
praise him, all his heavenly hosts.
Praise him, sun and moon,
praise him, all you shining stars.
Praise him, you highest heavens
and you waters above the skies.*

*Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for he commanded and they were created.
He set them in place for ever and ever;
he gave a decree that will never pass away.*

*Praise the LORD from the earth,
you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,
lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
stormy winds that do his bidding,
you mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars,
wild animals and all cattle,
small creatures and flying birds,
kings of the earth and all nations,
you princes and all rulers on earth,
young men and maidens,
old men and children.*

*Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for his name alone is exalted;
his splendor is above the
earth and the heavens.
He has raised up for his people a horn,
the praise of all his saints,
of Israel, the people close to his heart.*

Praise the LORD.

Psalm 148:1–14

Caesar and many other ungodly men may appear to be on the thrones which have controlled and even now control the Church, but Christians must remember God is forever the One who is in control. He is never surprised, He is never upset, His plan is never thwarted for He rules the entire universe. Remember that He shares that rulership with angels and the redeemed, persecuted children of God.

The Sealed Book and the Worthy Lamb

Revelation 5:1–14

Review and Introduction

The throne scene in Revelation 4 honors the One who sits on the throne which is located in the middle of all the universe. The One who sits on that throne is the Father who loves His children so much that He has done everything for their benefit. Twenty-four elders, representatives of the persecuted saints of God on earth, sit on twenty-four thrones surrounding the throne of God. There is a sea of glass which represents the cleansing which is necessary to be in the presence of God. There are seven lamps in front of the throne which represent the Holy Spirit. Four living creatures, cherubim representing the highest orders of God's creation, are around the throne to guard and to carry out God's judgment. The elders, the four living creatures, and all creation sing praises to God because He is eternal. He is the creator of all things and worthy of praise. The purpose of the throne scene was to build hope, confidence, and peace in the hearts and minds of the people to whom Revelation was written.

Revelation 5 has the same general purpose — honor must be given to the One on the throne who will protect His persecuted children. The scene before John shifted from the throne scene to a scroll held in the right hand of God. There is a scroll and a Lamb in Revelation 5. The Lamb comes to honor and serve the One who is on the throne, but the Lamb is also

given equal honor because He is the One who can open the scroll. The emphasis changes from God the Creator to Christ the Redeemer. Creation is an important thing to remember because in God the Creator there is confidence in the power of the One who is in control. Redemptive power is perhaps more important because in Christ the Redeemer there is the confidence of being a part of the power that works in all Christians and being able to use that power as it dwells within. The power of redemption is manifested in every Christian.

The Sealed Book

*Then **I saw** in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?” But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (Revelation 5:1–4).*

Remember this is a book of symbols. John recorded what he “saw.” John saw a “*scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals.*” Some versions may say a “book,” but this literally was a scroll with seven pages and writing on both sides. Each page was sealed with a seal as a Roman will used to be done. A Roman will would be one or more pages rolled up and sealed so that its decree could only be revealed at a later date. The focus of attention shifts in this chapter from the One who is on the throne to a scroll which is held in the His right hand. The scroll could not be read because it was rolled up and

sealed with seven seals. The fact that the scroll was written on both sides indicates that it was full of meaning and importance. Nothing could be added to the decree because it was written on both sides and had been sealed. This scroll is the book of destiny for all mankind but particularly for the persecuted children of God. The scroll contains the fate of the suffering saints, the final end of Rome's move against the Church, and a forecast of the outcome of the continuing struggle between Christ and Satan.

John knew the importance of this scroll because he had been told to write what he saw, "*what is now and what will take place later*" (cf. Revelation 1:1, 19). It is natural that John would assume these things would be revealed to him in the scroll. John knew he had been called by God to testify to everything he would see. He was called by God to uncover and reveal what would soon come to pass. But when John saw the scroll, he knew someone would have to open the scroll. John saw a "*mighty angel*" asking, "*Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?*" (Revelation 5:2), but no one came forward to open the scroll. John said, "*I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll and look inside*" (Revelation 5:4).

John's sorrowful response is understandable. Perhaps he thought he would not be able to learn what he had come to be shown. Perhaps he felt the scroll was associated with the Book of Life or the names of those who would be saved. Perhaps he wept because he thought the plans of God would not be put into effect. He was remorseful at the very least knowing that no one was worthy to open the book that would reveal God's future plans. Perhaps he knew that nothing could progress past this point until someone was found to open the scroll.

Revelation 5:4 would be a verse full of sorrow for anyone who did not know there was going to be an answer to the question, "*Who is worthy?*" All mankind should weep to think that no one was found worthy. John himself did not have the answer, but he received an answer from one of the elders, one

of his own. This was not an answer from God, it was not even a word from one of the angels, the answer came from one to whom John (and all men) could relate. John could identify with one of the elders, because each one of the elders represented redeemed people who had been persecuted. They were men with the same weaknesses as John, but they were men who were now victorious.

The elder used two different phrases to bring cheer to John. First he said, *“Do not weep!”* This phrase by itself might be hard to grasp as something that would bring about cheer unless there was something else like a better revelation to go with it. If there is a reason to weep, it would be hard to hear someone say, “Do not cry.” John had a reason to weep if he thought that God’s will was not going to be revealed. The elder said, *“Do not weep!”* and then he added, **“See . . .”** “See” or “Look” is the word that brings the cheering message to John. There really is a reason not to cry; he must dry his eyes so that he can see — *“Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals”* (Revelation 5:5).

The *“Lion of the tribe of Judah”* was the reason for no more weeping. The *“Lion of the tribe of Judah”* had overcome. He had triumphed! Genesis 49 records Jacob’s last words to his twelve sons. Some he blessed fully and some he could not. When he blessed Judah, Jacob said:

Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father’s sons will bow down to you. You are a lion’s cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him? The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his (Genesis 49:8–10).

Judah was compared to the lion. No one goes into a lion's den and grabs him by the beard to wake him up. No one wakes the lion. The image of the lion represents dignity, sovereignty, courage, and victory. Just the image of a lion brings to mind the fear that a lion's roar can cause. The prophet Amos said, "*Does a lion roar in the thicket when he has no prey? Does he growl in his den when he has caught nothing?*" (Amos 3:4). A lion's roar causes fear. The same image is portrayed in other Old Testament passages (cf. Numbers 24:8–9; Psalm 7:1–2; Micah 5:8–9). Judah is always seen as the lion. He is the one who is victorious and brings fear into the hearts of the people. The "*Lion of the tribe of Judah*" is the One to whom the obedience of the nations belongs.

The "*Lion of the tribe of Judah*" is also called the "*Root of David*" in this same passage. Jesus is sometimes referred to as coming from the root of Jesse, but that is not what this verse is talking about. This verse does not speak of Jesus coming from David, but instead it refers to David coming from Jesus. The humanity of Jesus is what is being stressed when passages talk about Jesus descending from David (cf. Matthew 1:1; Romans 1:3). When the phrase "*the Root of David*" is used in this passage of Revelation 5:5, it is referring to the fact that David came from Jesus. Matthew 22:41–46 relates a time when Jesus questioned the Pharisees:

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?" "The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, "The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet."' If then David calls him "Lord," how can he be his son?' No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions.

Jesus silenced His enemies by saying that this One you are calling the son of David, and rightfully so, is also the One from whom David came.

These characteristics are recorded again in the last chapter of Revelation. In Revelation 22:16 Jesus said: “*I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*” He is “*the Lion of the tribe of Judah.*” He is “*the Root and the Offspring of David.*” He is the triumphant One. He is the Victor, the Only True Winner. By dying on the cross, He won. That is what it means when Revelation 5:5 says, “*He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.*” Jesus challenged and defeated death, so He is worthy to open the scroll. What a fabulous revelation that is! What a great lesson to be learned! He is worthy!

The Worthy Lamb

Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. He had seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne (Revelation 5:6–7).

This is what John was called to see: “*the Lion from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David,*” the Triumphant One, and “*a Lamb.*” John was called to see a lion, and “***then . . . [he] saw a Lamb!***” The elder called John, telling him to quit crying and to open his eyes to see a Victorious One. John looked, expecting to see the Victor who had been described as “*the Lion,*” and instead he saw “*a Lamb,*” who looked like he had already be slaughtered. Depending on the version of the Bible being used, there are close to thirty times in the Book of Revelation when Jesus is called “*the Lamb.*” The word that

John used for “*the Lamb*” is unique only to John. He used the same word in Revelation and in the Gospel of John. The word he used refers to a slaughtered lamb. Within the Book of Revelation, there are other references to a lamb: God’s wrath is the wrath of the Lamb, people are cleansed by the blood of the Lamb, and the Church is the bride of the Lamb (cf. Revelation 6:16, 7:14, 19:7, 21:9). The **slaughtered Lamb** is the Lamb who died on Calvary’s tree.

John did not just see a slaughtered Lamb. He also saw a **living Lamb**. The Lamb had all the marks of having been the sacrificial Lamb, but He was alive. In John 20:20, 25, 27 the sacrificial Lamb showed His disciples the marks in His hands and His side. The disciples saw the nail marks in His hands and Thomas put his hand into Jesus’ side. The marks from His death were visible. There was no doubt that Jesus had died, but He was not dead. He was standing before them. John the Baptist called him, “*the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world*” (John 1:29). Jesus referred to Himself as “*the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades*” (Revelation 1:18).

Notice that John said the Lamb was “. . . *standing in the center of the throne.*” The seven spirits were **before the throne** and the twenty-four elders were **around the throne**. The Lamb was at the center of the center of the universe — at the very heart of the throne. He was an **accepted Lamb**.

The Lamb “. . . *had seven horns . . .*” which would indicate that He was very powerful. The horns are symbolic of power. The horns on a deer or a bull indicate their strength or power. The fact that He had seven horns refers to the perfection of power. The Lamb carried battle scars on His body showing that He had just come from a head to head conflict with the same powers that the persecuted saints would face. He won and so will they with the help of the **powerful Lamb**.

The Lamb also had “. . . *seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth*” (Revelation 5:6). The

seven eyes would indicate that this was an **all-knowing Lamb**. 2 Chronicles 16:9a says, *“For the eyes of the LORD range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him.”* Seven eyes gives the indication that Jesus is vigilant on behalf of those whose hearts are fully committed to Him. He was an all-knowing, all-seeing Lamb.

The Lamb *“. . . came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne”* (Revelation 5:7). There was no struggle or hesitation between the Lamb and the Father. They were united in purpose and action. The Son took the book from His Father’s hand in order to carry out the revelation of the things which were to come to pass just as it had been promised to John. There was *“no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth”* who could open the scroll. The **successful Lamb** was the only One who had a right to the scroll.

The Worship of the Lamb

And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song:

“You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”

Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang:

“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!”

Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing:

“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!”

The four living creatures said, “Amen,” and the elders fell down and worshiped (Revelation 5:8–14).

What a fabulous worship scene. Once more there is the description of the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures as they all fell down to worship the Lamb. They each have a harp and golden bowls full of incense. They are showing an attitude of reverence. All through the Old Testament, but particularly in the Book of Ezekiel, men showed their reverence to God by falling on their faces before Him. Every time Ezekiel received a vision from God he fell on his face in reverence. Ezekiel 1:28b says, *“This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.”*

Men of God like Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Joshua, and Ezekiel were known to show their reverence for God: “. . . fell facedown to the ground in reverence . . .” (Joshua 5:14; cf. Genesis 17:3; Numbers 16:22; 1 Chronicles 22:16; Ezekiel 3:23, 9:8, 11:13). Christians should never stand before the awesome God until they have first fallen before the Lamb.

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures each had a harp. This particular instrument was used all throughout the Old Testament, and particularly by David, to praise God (cf. Psalm 33:2, 43:4, 71:22, 150:3).

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures each carried a golden bowl full of incense, “*which are the prayers of the saints.*” The elders and the living creatures were coming to offer their reverence, praise, and the prayers of the saints. This showed their dependence on the Lamb. They had been looking for the One who was worthy to open the scroll. They were dependent on the Lamb who was worthy. John had been weeping until the Lamb was presented as the One who was worthy to open the scroll.

The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures “. . . *sang a new song.*” They were celebrating because the Lamb was worthy to take the scroll and open its seals. The Lamb was worthy because He had been slain. He had been slain, He had purchased men for God, and He had made men to be a Kingdom and priests to serve God. The Lamb was made worthy by His death on the cross.

Jesus purchased men for God “. . . *from every tribe and language and people and nation*” (Revelation 5:10). There is more to the cross than just the death of Jesus. When He died on that cross, He defeated all the forces of hell and was able to purchase mankind. This is an important point in His worthiness. He purchased men in such a way that He covered all creation:

- “*tribe*” refers to every ethnic group.
- “*tongue*” refers to every language group.
- “*people*” refers to every racial group.
- “*nation*” refers to every national group.

Jesus the Lamb made every tribe, tongue, people, and nation to be a Kingdom of priests. A Kingdom of priests has a two-fold purpose: to serve God and to reign on the earth. The purpose of this purchased, redeemed group of people, which makes up the Church, was to serve God and to reign. Acts 20:28 says that the Church of God was purchased with Christ’s own blood. The Church of God is still on the earth and they are

struggling. The Church of God is also in heaven and they are beyond the struggle. The Church of God is all one family located in two different places. The purpose of the family of God on earth is to rule the earth as God's Kingdom. God is in control on the throne, Jesus is in control as He holds the scroll in His hand, and Christians, the Church of God, are in control on the earth. When Jesus purchased men for God, He made them to be a Kingdom of priests to rule and to serve.

The vision of the Church ruling on earth comes from Daniel 7 and Daniel's vision about the kingdoms. The nations were going to destroy the people of God, but Daniel 7:27 says:

"Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him."

The Kingdom does not belong to the nations of the world. It did not belong to Caesar, or Hitler, or Stalin, or anyone who will ever live. The Kingdom and the rule of the world belongs to the saints. John said: *"Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand . . . In a loud voice they sang . . ."* (Revelation 5:11–12). The number of angels singing would be more than anyone could count. They used every powerful word to describe the worthiness of the Lamb: *"power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!"* What a fabulous song! The Lamb was worthy to receive all of this and more. The angels were proclaiming the worthiness of Jesus, the Lamb. As men, we may honor other men and praise them for what they have done. Paul even told the Philippians to honor Epaphroditus and men like him who have almost died for the work of the Lord (cf. Philippians 2:29–30). Jesus was worthy of the angels' praise because He was slain.

John saw twenty-four elders and four living creatures praising God. He saw thousands, and tens of thousands, and millions of angels all praising God. **And then John:**

*. . . **heard** every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!"* (Revelation 5:13).

All of creation gives praise to God the Father and Jesus Christ the Lamb. They were praising God the Creator and Christ the Redeemer. God is worthy because of creation and Jesus is worthy because of redemption. Then the four living creatures cried, "Amen," and the twenty-four elders all "*. . . fell down and worshiped*" again! The stage has now been set for the first great dramatic movement in the Book of Revelation. The Father is still on the throne. The secrets of the saints' future is known to Him and secure with Him. Jesus has been judged worthy to reveal the secrets concerning the critical situation of the brethren during John's day.

The saints no longer had to worry about what judgment was coming. The judgment could come with all the power of Hell. Rome could do whatever it had planned against the Church because God was still on His throne, Jesus was still the slain Lamb, the saints were still a part of the Kingdom serving the Father, and innumerable angels and all creation know who is in control, so they were praising God. Praise God today and find the peace that is in believing Him.

Opening The First Six Seals

Revelation 6:1–17

Introduction

Revelation 4 contains the great throne scene portraying that God is in control of all that has ever happened in heaven and on earth. Revelation 5 turns to the slain Lamb, who is the Redeemer and able to open the seven sealed scroll. He will reveal step by step what was going to happen to the Church in the immediate future. Revelation 6 contains the dramatic movements of what happened as the Lamb opened the scroll seal by seal. The opening of the first four seals followed a set pattern as each seal was opened and a voice called out, “Come,” and a horse and a rider appeared. Instead of John reading the contents of the scroll or hearing someone read it to him, he saw the contents of the scroll in a series of visions. This was certainly no ordinary scroll.

The White Horse and Its Rider: The First Seal

I watched as the Lamb opened the first of the seven seals. Then I heard one of the four living creatures say in a voice like thunder, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a white horse! Its rider held a bow, and he was given a crown, and he rode out as a conqueror bent on conquest (Revelation 6:1–2).

The Lamb opened the first seal and one of the cherubim issued a simple command — “Come!” The voice was loud and

unmistakable, “*a voice like thunder.*” The horse that appeared was white which stands for purity, holiness, and victory. There is only one other white horse in the Book of Revelation. That is the horse on which Jesus, the Word of God, rides to judge the enemy in Revelation 19:11–21. However, the word “*white*” is used sixteen times in Revelation. In the other fifteen usages, there is absolutely no dispute that the word “*white*” applies to something that is holy and pure. There is no reason to assume that the word was used in this context as a symbol of anything evil, unholy, or impure. That violates the use of the word “*white*” consistently throughout Revelation. The word may be used other ways elsewhere, but in the Book of Revelation the word “*white*” is always a symbol of holiness, purity, and victory. Knowing that “*white*” always symbolizes something or someone who is holy, pure, and victorious, then there is no doubt the rider on the “*white horse*” is Jesus.

John saw “*a white horse! Its rider held a bow . . .*” which is a symbol of His power to destroy the enemy and to win on the behalf of God. This same kind of description was used for Jesus by the writer of the Hebrew letter and the psalmist David. A good example is found in Psalm 45:2–7:

*You are the most excellent of men
and your lips have been anointed with grace,
since God has blessed you forever.
Gird your sword upon your side, O mighty one;
clothe yourself with splendor and majesty.
In your majesty ride forth victoriously
in behalf of truth, humility and righteousness;
let your right hand display awesome deeds.
Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's
enemies;
let the nations fall beneath your feet.
Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;
a scepter of justice will be the scepter of your kingdom.
(cf. Hebrews 1:9)*

David was talking about the Messiah in these verses. Notice the verses again:

Let your sharp arrows pierce the hearts of the king's enemies; let the nations fall beneath your feet. Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever . . . You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy (Psalm 45:5–7).

“Sharp arrows” would come from a bow and these verses describe the Messiah conquering His enemies in “*behalf of truth, humility and righteousness; let your right hand display awesome deeds*” (Psalm 45:4). Jesus the Messiah was going to shoot arrows from His bow with His mighty right hand (cf. Habakkuk 3:8–13; Psalm 7:10–13). There are other passages throughout the Bible that show a bow and arrow in the hand of God to bring judgment upon His enemies and to bring redemption to His people.

The Rider on the white horse was wearing a crown. This is not a crown of royalty; it is the crown of a victor and conqueror. Jesus rode as a “*conqueror bent on conquest.*” He was already a winner when He rode out, and He will be the winner in future battles. Revelation 19 paints a clear picture of a Parthian warrior who gave Rome more trouble than any of their other enemies. Parthian warriors were depicted on coins as the enemy of Rome astride a horse with a crown and a bow.

In the battle of Carrhae in A.D. 53, twenty thousand Romans died and ten thousand were taken captive by the Parthians. Rome never forgot the Parthians as an enemy nor the defeat they received at their hands.

The Red Horse and Its Rider: The Second Seal

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

When the Lamb opened the second seal, John heard the second living creature say “Come!” Then John saw a fiery red horse and its rider. The color red in Revelation is synonymous with the enemies of God’s people. The red dragon and the scarlet beast are other examples of this (cf. Revelation 12:3, 17:3). Red is a symbol of war, danger, and blood. There is no doubt about who the rider on the red horse is because of the three things he was “given.” Revelation 6:4 says, “*Its rider was given power to take peace from the earth and to make men slay each other. To him was given a large sword.*” This rider was a warrior going to war against the people of God. He did not have power of his own, but he was given power to take away peace, power to make men slay each other, and he was given a sword.

The Rider on the white horse came forth as a conqueror with plans to conquer even more. He had His own power. The second rider on the red horse had to be **given** the power to do what he was going to do. At this time period, the enemy of the people of God was Rome. Rome did not have any power except the power God allowed them to have. When Jesus was before Pilate, the two men had the following conversation:

. . . Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. . . .” (John 19:11).

When Satan or the world offers something to man, it is not theirs to give because everything belongs to God. Pilate did not really have any power over Jesus. Caesar did not have power over the Christians. The rider on the red horse was given the power to take peace from the earth. The opposite of peace is war. The rider was given power to make men slay one another. That is wanton bloodshed; it is war, men killing one another. War has been a part of man’s existence since the time Cain killed Abel. The rider on the red horse was given a large sword. Mankind needs to remember that God is ultimately in control even of man’s war-like nature and the actions it brings.

The Black Horse and Its Rider: The Third Seal

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

When the Lamb opened the third seal, a black horse appeared. The color black usually speaks of mourning that follows death. The first rider was Jesus as He warred against the enemies. The second rider was the enemy himself as he warred against mankind causing all men to war against each other. Death follows war, followed by mourning and distress.

The rider on the black horse is simple; it is famine. If the rider is not famine itself, then it is the economic hardship that follows famine. This rider has a balance, “*pair of scales*,” in his hand to weigh the food. He weighed “*a quart of wheat for a day’s wages, and three quarts of barley for a day’s wages*.” Ezekiel 4:9–16 talks about people having to weigh their food during a time of famine. It was so bad in this seal that a day’s support for one man of moderate appetite cost him a whole day’s wage. If he had a family he had to feed them on barley because that is all he could buy with a day’s wage. The barley of that day was a much coarser grain than the barley people use today. Barley was usually reserved for only animals to eat. This seal lowered mankind to the place of an animal. Man was forced to eat what the animals would eat. He had reached the despair of the prodigal son, who while he was in the far country would have filled his belly with the husks that the swine ate (cf. Luke 15:11–32). The poor were not allowed to touch the oil and the wine because these were available only for the rich. The rich people were the ones who were following the rider on the second horse. They could have the oil and wine, but those following the rider on the first horse could not. The work of this black horse was very limited. He could not totally take away the sustenance of life. This was just a seal, the simple opening and revealing of something. Later in Revelation 15–16, there would be a bowl of wrath which would have the power of total destruction.

The Pale Horse and Its Rider: The Fourth Seal

When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, “Come!” I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a

fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth
(Revelation 6:7–8).

Notice that the command is the same each time. One of the four living creatures, who were cherubim and high creations of God, said, “*Come!*” John looked and there before him was “*a pale horse.*” The Greek word for this color denotes that the color of the horse was yellowish-green. This color is sometimes known as the cover of death. It is the color of one stricken with a disease that will soon cause the death of the person. It is the pale color of death when there is no hope. The rider on this horse was named, “*Death.*”

Jesus came on His white horse to give comfort. The devil came on a red horse to fight his war. Economic oppression came on the third horse to bring despair. Then death followed. The future truly looked bleak: become a Christian, be persecuted, be discriminated against, and then killed. Then Hades, the footman of death, usually follows closely behind. Hades is the abode of the disembodied spirits. Both death and Hades are regarded as defeated enemies in the Book of Revelation. In Revelation Jesus is the conqueror of both death and Hades. Death and Hades must submit to any service the Lamb would give them. They must serve Him.

The riders, death and Hades, were given the power to kill using God’s four sore judgments: “*sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.*” These four are the same judgments used by God upon the wicked in Ezekiel 14:12–23. These judgments may be able to kill some Christians physically, but they cannot harm any because God is still on the throne and these are His judgments, not the judgments of the enemy.

Sword, famine, plague, and wild beasts are the judgments from our Father, our Brother, and the Spirit. These are the judgments coming upon the earth for man. Conquering tyrants who bring war to the world, or famine, or pestilence are nothing new. There were suffering people in the days of the Roman empire just as there are suffering people in all ages.

Suffering people in all ages can be encouraged by the following two facts: first, remember that it is the Lamb who opens the seals. Second, remember that the fourth seal is the seal of death and there are three more seals to come after death. Death occurs in the middle of the Christian experience. There is life beyond death for the children of God.

The first seal revealed Jesus Christ, the Conqueror. The second seal revealed an enemy, the devil, as he would fight the wars upon the earth. The third seal revealed the economic hardship that would come with famine. And finally, the fourth seal revealed that the persecuted saints of God die just as the wicked die. There is judgment for the wicked and the righteous. Is death a defeat for the righteous? The answer to that question is found in the fifth seal.

The Souls Under the Altar: The Fifth Seal

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

and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed (Revelation 6:9–11).

There is life beyond death for the children of God. The fifth seal reveals an altar that was before the throne of God. Under the altar were the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained. Are these people alive? Are they dead? They had been slain, but “*they called out in a loud voice . . .*” They were dead, but they are alive! They want to know how long it will be until God avenges their blood. They were not told and it really was none of their business how long. They were each given a white robe and told to wait a little longer.

This seal was the one that really began to bring comfort to the persecuted people of God. There was some comfort in the first seal since Jesus was the first rider. There is comfort in knowing that He is going to make everything fine. This seal reveals the altar that is also mentioned in Revelation 8:5, 14:18, and 16:7. This is the altar before the throne of God upon which the prayers of the saints are laid. This is the altar from which the judgments of God come. Under this altar were the souls of the saints who had been slain.

When the Old Testament priests presented animal sacrifices, the blood was poured out at the base of the brazen altar (cf. Leviticus 4:7–8, 25, 30). In Old Testament imagery, blood represented life (cf. Leviticus 17:11). The souls of the martyrs “*under the altar*” indicate that their lives had been given sacrificially to the Glory of God. Paul told the Philippians that his life was “*being poured out like a drink offering*” (Philippians 2:17). In 2 Timothy 4:6 he said, “*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering . . .*” His life was seen as a sacrifice to God. The Romans thought they were harming God and His Kingdom by killing Christians. They were actually

doing all that they did for the benefit of Christians. Christians need to long for the day that their lives can be poured out as Jesus' was in His total sacrifice to God.

The basis for the saints' sacrificial death was the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus to which they held fast. The word "testimony" is a Greek word that is translated into the English as "martyr" or "witness." The word "martyr" simply means "witness." Since these saints had died for witness sake, that is why the word "martyr" usually refers to one who has died for the Kingdom of Christ. That is not what it originally meant. Before the first century the word "martyr" simply meant one who stood for Jesus Christ and gave a testimony with his lips as he lived the Word of God in his life.

The saints under the altar are alive even though they have been slain. They were given white robes to show their victory and honor. They cried out, "How long?" They were not calling for retribution or vengeance. They wanted God's honor to be vindicated. They were not asking "if" the enemy would be judged. They knew that time would come and they wanted to know when. This has been the cry of God's suffering people throughout all the ages. God's children want to know when He is going to do something (cf. Psalm 74, 79, 94; Habakkuk 1, and Jeremiah 12). For these saints, the answer was "Wait." That is hard to do when someone wants an answer. God told the saints they had to wait until all their brothers had died as they had died. The saints were given the reward of a white robe and rest, and they were told vindication is coming.

They are told the persecution is not over, others will also be slain. The enemy was given a position of power over the saints until God was through with him and then the enemy will be judged himself. The servants of Jesus Christ, I am told, have a course to fulfill. There are two important days in your life. They day you are born and the day you find out why you were

born. Christians have a course to fulfill. It is almost too good to be true. God has made clear to these martyrs that their sacrifice was an appointment, not an accident, and that others would join them. Even in the death of His people, God is in control. Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints and there is absolutely nothing to fear by the enemy, even if that enemy is death itself.

The Day of Jehovah: The Sixth Seal

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (Revelation 6:12–17).

This portion of scripture has been interpreted by many to be the day of final judgment at the end of time. That is definitely a possibility, but that is not what the Book of Revelation is about. Revelation is about the things which must shortly come to pass, which are soon to be fulfilled.

This same kind of language is found over and over again in the Old Testament to describe the coming judgment of God. There are six different descriptions of God's judgment seen when this seal is opened. First, there was a great earthquake. In Isaiah 29:6 God announced that His judgement on Jerusalem would come in the form of an earth quake.

Second, the sun turned black. Isaiah 13:10 describes the coming judgment of God upon Babylon by making their sun turn black. The same kind of description is used in Isaiah 34:4 with God's judgment upon Edom.

Third, the moon turned blood red. Joel 2:31 describes the coming judgment upon the northern nation of Israel and their moon was turned to blood.

Fourth, the stars in the sky fell to the earth just as late figs will drop from a fig tree that has been shaken by a strong wind. This same kind of judgment is described in Isaiah 34:4 for the coming judgment on Edom. Fifth, the sky receded like a scroll rolling up. This same description is found in Isaiah 34:4.

Sixth, the mountains and islands were removed from their places. Jeremiah 4:24 speaks of the coming judgment upon Judah with this same language. Ezekiel 38:20 uses this description to describe the coming judgment upon Gog. Nahum 1:5 talks about the coming judgment upon Ninevah in this way.

This kind of biblical language denotes in God's mind the certainty of coming judgment upon those who have opposed Him and His people. This is not a picture of the end of time for all mankind. This is simply an announcement of the coming judgment upon the enemy of God and the wicked nations who would defeat and afflict the people of God.

Revelation 6:15–16 actually describes the fear of those who are about to be judged by God:

Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the

rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?”

Notice that every class of mankind is involved in trying to hide themselves from the coming wrath of God. No judgment had come. The opening of this seal was just an announcement of how bad it was going to be so everyone was trying to hide. The people believed that being buried beneath the mountains of rocks would be preferable to facing God and the wrath of His Lamb. When judgment is announced wicked men want to get as far away from the coming judgment as they can because they do not want to face God. They know they are guilty. Notice the same reactions happening in Isaiah 2:10–11, 19–22 and throughout the Book of Hosea.

The people have a final question to ask, “*Who can stand?*” Since this judgment was going to be so bad, so severe, who would be able to stand? The same questions was asked in Joel 2:22, Nahum 1:6, and Malachi 3:2. Since this judgment was going to be so bad, what about the people of God? Are they going to be judged also? Will they fall with the wicked? Revelation 7 answers these questions with one simple phrase: **the people of God will be delivered!** It will not matter if they live through the judgment or if they die with the wicked — the people of God will be delivered.

The people of God will be sealed by God and they will go where the twenty-four elders are, before the very throne of God. This is what comforts the saints of God and gives them patience during the hard, difficult, and wicked times.

The Church

Militant and Triumphant

Revelation 7:1–14

Review and Introduction

Revelation 6 ends with a question: “*For the great day of **their wrath** has come, and **who can stand?***” (Revelation 6:17). Revelation 7 seems to be an interlude to answer that question. The wrath that has come is God’s and the Lamb’s. Who can abide in “*their wrath?*” What caused that question? The reason for the question may be revealed by looking at what John saw in Revelation 4–6. John saw God on the throne at the very center of the universe. God was not only aware of all that was going on and taking place on the earth, but He was taking active control of the ultimate destiny of everything that happened. God held the book of the future in His right hand, the book of destiny. The slain Lamb, Jesus Christ, took the book of destiny in His hand. He will be the One to loose the seals. He will reveal the outcome of the persecuted Church’s struggle with the seemingly invincible enemy, who was Rome in John’s day. Jesus, the slain Lamb, was declared worthy to open the seals. He was worthy by virtue of His death and resurrection and the purchase of the Kingdom of God.

The redeemed, the cherubim, innumerable angels, and all created beings sang songs of praise to Him who was sitting on the throne and unto Jesus, the Lamb. Jesus opened the first six seals, and as He opened these seals, He was seen as the conquering warrior, Rome's worst enemy. In quick succession, war and famine and death invade the Christian experience. In heaven before the throne of God, there were martyred saints underneath the altar crying to God for Him to vindicate His name by bringing retribution on those who had killed them. The martyred saints were told to wait and to enjoy their rest until more of their brethren had gone through the severe trials they had already gone through and died as they had died.

When the sixth seal was opened, it revealed that the day of the Lord was at hand. This would be the day of His judgment. This day was going to be the kind of day for Rome that had already happened for Assyria, Babylon, Edom, Israel, Judah, and many other nations. It would be a day of total blackness, a day of dismay, disorder, and destruction. Wicked men would rather face any other alternative in comparison to what awaited them on this day. Riches, military might, social position, political power, and all the alliances they had formed would be unable to deliver them. Judgment was coming and it would be severe and total upon all the earth.

Therefore, **the question** now demands an answer: "*For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?*" Who can stand before this judgment? What will become of the Christians while this dreadful, inescapable, and inevitable judgment is going on? What will happen to the people of God? Will they escape the judgment or will they be destroyed also? Revelation 7, the interlude chapter, will answer that question. It will show that the forces of destruction will be held under restraint until the saints have been sealed for future glory and protected against destruction.

The Sealed 144,000**Revelation 7:1–8**

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.” Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.

John saw “. . . four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth . . .” Notice that angels in the Book of Revelation are always associated with the forces of nature. In this passage it is the wind; in Revelation 14:18 an angel “. . . had charge of the fire . . .”; and in Revelation 16:5 an angel was “. . . in charge of the waters . . .” Through His angels, God is in control of nature itself along with all that nature does and all that men do. The wind or winds in the Bible are often used to indicate the activity of God. Look up the word “wind” in a concordance and see how many times

it refers to God's activity upon the earth. Notice where God used the wind as a symbol of His action against His enemies, who were the nations who afflicted His righteous people (cf. Isaiah 57:13; Jeremiah 18:17). Consider Psalm 104:4 which is quoted in Hebrew 1:7: *"In speaking of the angels he says, 'He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire.'"* God speaks of His angels and uses them to bring the judgment of God upon the earth. The Book of Daniel has examples of God using angels to bring judgment upon the enemy. The angels Michael and Gabriel are two angels who are named when they come in judgment.

Jesus told Nicodemus:

"You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:7–8).

Man does not see the wind. He only sees the effect of the wind. Man does not see the birth of the Spirit of God. God's activity in saving men is compared to the wind. Wind was used to refer to the activity of God on behalf of His people. The angels who were holding back the wind from the four corners of the earth indicate that the judgment that was to come would be a universal judgment just as it was announced in Revelation 6.

Sometimes the skeptics say the phrase *"four corners of the earth"* (Revelation 7:1) proves the Bible is not true. This phrase (and similar phrases used in Ezekiel 7:2, Isaiah 11:12, and Revelation 20:8) was not meant to be a scientific term any more than it is a scientific term when it is used today. It was simply a term meant to convey that this judgment was going to affect the whole world when it occurred.

The “*four angels*” represent the judgment which was about to fall on the earth. They were holding back “. . . *any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree.*” Without the restraining influence of God upon these four messengers, the judgment upon all the earth would have already been accomplished. This simply emphasizes that God is in control. Judgment would come only when He was ready for it to come. God did not plan for anyone to harm the earth or the sea or the trees until He had put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of God.

These passages in Revelation 7 clearly indicate that God is in control of worldly affairs. Since that is true, people have absolutely nothing to fear. Whenever judgment comes, it will come by the will of God, not by the will of man. It will come for the benefit of His people as well as for the judgment of His enemies. These passages also show beyond a doubt that this judgment and the 144,000, who will be sealed, are on the earth. They are not in heaven because these angels are going to hurt the land and the sea. The angels were told not to hurt the land, the sea, or the trees “. . . *until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.*” This indicates that the people were still on the earth.

John also saw a fifth “. . . *angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God.*” This angel was coming with the sunrise. Sun in the Bible symbolizes the attributes and the goodness of God. Read Psalms 84:11 which says God is a sun and a shield to those who follow Him. Read Malachi 4:2 where Jesus is called the “*sun of righteousness.*” He is the Son of God, but in this verse He is the “*sun of righteousness.*” In Revelation 22:16 Jesus said, “*I, Jesus . . . am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star.*” The morning star declares that the sun is about to arrive bringing light to a world that has been darkened by the night. Light is

always a good thing. The chaos and disorder of the original creation became an ordered universe with these words, “*Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky . . .*” (Genesis 1:14). Literally, God said, “Light, be!” and light was. God commanded something to exist and it became so. Jesus is the “*true light*” (John 1:9). Jesus Himself said, “*I am the light of the world . . .*” (John 8:12). 1 John 1:5 says, “*God is light; and in him there is no darkness at all.*”

The angel from the sun rising was bringing good news. The judgment in Revelation 6 promised: “. . . *the sun turned black like sackcloth . . .*” (Revelation 6:12). This angel, which came from where light originates in the East, was the bearer of a glad message for those who will go through the gloom. His message is that after the night, the morning comes. No matter how dark the night or how gloomy the circumstance, morning brings light with it and Jesus is the dawning of a new day.

This angel from the East also called for a delay, telling the other four angels to wait. Judgment was about to come on all the earth, but he said, “*Do not harm the land . . . until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God*” (Revelation 7:3). In one of Ezekiel’s visions he saw six angels of God with destroying weapons in their hands and yet another angel standing with a writer’s ink horn by his side. God told that angel to go throughout the land and put a mark on the forehead of all those who sigh and cry over the evils done in Israel. As soon as the angel with the ink horn left, God told the other six angels to follow him and “*Slaughter old men, young men and maidens, women and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary*” (Ezekiel 9:6). The vision is very specific. Tribulation cannot come until all the servants of God are “*sealed,*” until they are marked.

The angel in Revelation 7:2 had the “. . . *seal of the living God.*” This is not referring to the “*seal*” of the Holy Spirit as

Paul mentioned those who were “*marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit*” (Ephesians 1:13). All the servants of God already have the Holy Spirit within them. Galatians 4:6 says, “*Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’*” Romans 8:9a says, “*You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you.*” There are many passages like these. The “*servants of our God,*” who were being sealed, already possessed the Spirit of God and are being sealed because of that fact. Those who have the Spirit of God are those who are faithful to Jesus and they are the ones being sealed in this text.

The seal was not something tangible; it was not something a person could see with the human eye. Remember this is a symbolic book. John was seeing these things as a part of a vision. In ancient days just as in present times, people mark the things that belong exclusively to them. People brand their cattle to say these are mine; they belong to me. By marking His servants God was saying, “These are My people and they will be protected. They are exempt from any harm in this coming judgment. Do not touch them.” Read Ezekiel 9. The righteous were marked to escape judgment. They were not literally marked. That was just a symbol of the fact that God would protect them when judgment did come. This “*seal*” was just a token of the assurance given in this vision. This “*seal*” does not mean that the saints will escape physical judgment or harm.

Many of the saints during the first century died during God’s judgment, but they were sealed and would go home to their Owner. Sometimes there are people who judge wrong and kill indiscriminately. Sometimes the people who are killed are saints, God’s children. I see these people laying face down in the mud. When the devil comes along to gather those he is going to carry off to Hell, he flips a brother over and there on

his forehead is *“the seal of the living God.”* That seal declares, “This one is no longer here. Do whatever you wish with his body. His soul is already in the presence of God.”

The *“sealing”* of the servants of God was accomplished in Revelation 7:4–8: *“. . . the number of those who were sealed; 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.”* The number twelve is always associated with the people of God. There were twelve patriarchs, twelve tribes, twelve apostles, and in Revelation 21:14, there is a description of the wall of the Holy City, which had *“. . . twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.”* Revelation 21:12, 21 also mentions *“twelve gates,” “twelve angels,” “the twelve tribes of Israel,”* and *“the twelve gates were twelve pearls.”* All of these things were symbols stating the fact that these things and people belonged to God. Raising a number to a higher power by multiplying it by itself emphasizes its inner quality. *“Twelve”* speaks to the completeness of God’s people. Twelve times twelve times one thousand would indicate that all of God’s saints who undergo this period of trial are assured of God’s protection. The number 144,000 simply underscores the assurance that **all of God’s people** are under His protection and care. God through Amos said, *“For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach the ground”* (Amos 9:9).

The *“144,000”* and the *“seal”* that was placed upon them represented all God’s servants on the earth. Every single servant of God was to be *“sealed”* before the judgment began. Some commentators and scholars view this group as restrictive to only Jewish Christians. There are several reasons why this cannot be true. Number one, no where in the Book of Revelation is that distinction made. Number two, it is the custom of the Apostle John to use Old Testament names with

New Testament meanings. The temple becomes the Church. The Lamb becomes Jesus. The altar becomes worship. Incense becomes prayer. The tribes of Israel would then become the members of the New Testament Kingdom of God.

Number three, the listing for the *“tribes of Israel”* in this passage is different than is found anywhere else in all the Bible. Number four, in Revelation 7:4 the *“servants of our God”* who are those *“who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel”* are sealed on their foreheads. In Revelation 22:3–4 the *“servants [who] will serve him”* are also the ones who will *“. . . see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.”* This is how all the believers of God are marked.

Number five, the 144,000 found in Revelation 7:4 as those sealed from the tribes of Israel are the same number and the same people found in Revelation 14:1, who are *“with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads.”* These people are undoubtedly God’s servants. That does not mean that whenever the word *“Israel”* is used in other areas of the New Testament that it cannot refer to the fleshly Israelites. Sometimes it does. In this figurative Book of Revelation, it should not surprise anyone that the word *“Israel”* is used figuratively. This simply means that before the judgment began, John saw all the redeemed and protected saints in this picture.

The Innumerable Multitude **Revelation 7:9–17**

After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their

hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying: "Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!" Then one of the elders asked me, "These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?" I answered, "Sir, you know." And he said, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Therefore, "they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe every tear away from their eyes.'"

The "multitude" in Revelation 7:9–11 is the same as the "144,000" who were sealed; the same number, the same people: all "*a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language . . .*" (Revelation 7:9). This entire vision is based on the Old Testament Feast of Tabernacles (cf. Exodus 23; Numbers 29; Deuteronomy 16). The Feast of Tabernacles had the following characteristics: it was the last feast, the highest feast, and the most joyous feast of the year. All the labors of the year were past; the crops of grain, wine, and oil had been gathered. This feast was preceded

by the Day of Atonement. Sin had been carried away from the nation out into the wilderness. The emotions of Israel during this feast were triumphant. All the nation left their houses to live in tents or booths which represented their freedom from Egyptian bondage. The booths were made of branches of the most prized, fruit-bearing trees. The people sang songs of thanksgiving. The Feast lasted for seven days and on the eighth day after a week of celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles, a priest would draw water from the Pool of Siloam and in the presence of all the people, pour it on the altar. The people would wave palm branches and fill the temple with joyful singing. The temple would glow all night long with the lights from many lamps. Deuteronomy says that it was a day of joy (cf. Deuteronomy 16:15).

With the background of the Feast of Tabernacles, John saw “*a great multitude that no one could count.*” The multitude was beyond numbering. They came “*from every nation, tribe, people and language.*” Revelation 5:9 uses the same description for the Kingdom of men purchased with Jesus’ blood. This multitude was God’s Kingdom. They were standing before the throne in front of the Lamb wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. These people were the “overcomers” from Revelation 3:4–5, 18. Their work was finished. They had endured the tribulation and now they could eat the feast at the end of the year. They were joyful. They were singing the song of salvation. Salvation belongs to God and the Lamb. This was a hallelujah chorus. They were so happy that everything was finally over and they could sit down at the Feast of God.

Notice the response from heaven. The angels around the throne fell down and worshiped God saying, “*Amen.*” The angels, who know worship as it ought to be, said this is absolutely right. One of the elders asked who this multitude of

people were. John told him that he knew. They were those who had come out of the great tribulation. On the other side of tribulation, whether they were living or dead, they found victory. In the Gospel of John, Jesus said, *“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33b). The multitude was standing before the throne of God to serve in the temple of God. They would serve night and day. Unceasing service was just beyond the tribulation.

Beyond tribulation there would be no discomfort and no needs. The saints would be led by the Lamb into fountains of waters of life. Notice the word *“Therefore”* in Revelation 7:15. It is a word that draws a conclusion: *“Therefore, ‘they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple . . .’”* There were *“144,000”* who had been sealed so they could stand before the throne of God. There was *“a great multitude that no one could count,”* and they were before the throne of God to serve Him day and night in His temple. The picture here is the joy that is found in serving the Lord day and night, 24 hours a day. If a person does not find any joy in serving the Lord in the daytime, then he will not find any joy in serving Him at night.

Revelation 7 is all about the joy of the people of God as they serve the One who sits upon the throne. Revelation 7:15 also says, *“he . . . will spread his tent over them.”* The people of God will live and serve in the house of God. They will not feel hungry or thirsty. There will not be any discomfort there because Jesus, the Lamb, will leave His place of honor at the center of the throne and He will walk among them. He will be their Shepherd. What a marvelous picture for the children of God beyond tribulation! It does not matter whether they are alive or dead because God is with them. Paul had this same attitude when he was writing from a prison cell. He wrote to the brethren in Philippi about his chains. He talked about the critics

who were trying to stir up trouble for him. He did not know if he was going to live or die (cf. Philippians 1:20–25). Paul said it very simply, “*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain*” (Philippians 1:21). The only thing that mattered was that Christ should be exalted.

If the innumerable multitude and the 144,000 lived, they would glorify Jesus. If they died, that would be even better because they would get to go to be with Jesus. He would be their Shepherd and “*He will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes*” (Revelation 7:17). This chapter of Revelation presents a message of comfort to the servants of God in the face of the coming storm. God’s people are sealed against punishment and will be ultimately victorious and joyful. Delivered from tribulation, they will be joyful worshipers at the great Feast of Tabernacles and then become a flock of well-kept sheep. The key thought throughout this chapter is assurance. What a comfort:

“Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!
O what a fore-taste of glory divine!
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,
Born of His Spirit, washed in His blood.
This is my story, this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long;
This is my story this is my song,
Praising my Savior all the day long.”¹

1. Words by Fanny J. Crosby, Songs of Faith and Praise (West Monroe, LA: Howard Publishing Company, Inc. 1994), 480.

The First Four Trumpets

Revelation 8:1–13

Introduction

Revelation 8 is the chapter in which the seventh seal will be opened. The seventh seal is important because the seven trumpets, which affected one third of all creation, and the seven bowls of wrath, which affected all creation, are both part of this seventh seal. The seventh seal contained seven trumpets. Seals were for concealing things. Opening the seals revealed things. The seven trumpets will speak of warning judgments. The judgments, being only partial, call for the ungodly to pay attention and repent of their wickedness.

To link all the seals together, read the sixth seal in Revelation 6:12–17 as a review, then skip Revelation 7 which is an interlude between the seals, and read Revelation 8:

Revelation 6:12–17; 8:1

I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings

of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" . . . When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets.

At the opening of the sixth seal, John saw an earthquake and the sun turned black. This seal announced that judgment was coming. The seventh seal announced the nature of the judgment to come by revealing seven angels who stood before God. They were given seven trumpets. These trumpets bring to mind the ten plagues that God used in Egypt to punish the oppressor and bring Israel out of Egyptian bondage. The plagues caused the Egyptian pharaoh to consider releasing the Israelites from bondage. He summoned Moses and Aaron during the night and said, "*Up! Leave my people, you and the Israelites! Go . . . The Egyptians urged the people to hurry and leave the country . . .*" (Exodus 12:31). Just as it was in the days of Moses, so it will be in the days of John — the ungodly will be those who are badly hurt. In the case of Pharaoh, the plagues did not hurt him sufficiently enough to turn him from iniquity. Remember that Pharaoh reconsidered his decision to let his slaves go and chased them to the shores of the Red Sea. When Pharaoh and his army attempted to follow the Israelites across the Red Sea, he and all his army died in the waters. Not one of them survived (cf. Exodus 14:23–28).

Revelation 8 and 9 convey the news of ultimate victory for the saints. It may appear as if their enemy is invincible and that he will be the victor, but things are hardly ever as they seem. It appeared as if Israel was in bondage to Egypt, but God told Egypt they were in bondage to Him. It would appear as if the devil won at Calvary, but God made it plain in the resurrection that Calvary was simply the death of death and the prediction of Satan's death himself.

Preparation — Opening the Seventh Seal

Revelation 8:1–5

*When he opened the seventh seal, there was **silence** in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and to them were given seven trumpets. Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of the saints, went up before God from the angel's hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.*

The world and heaven itself are filled with sounds. The Book of Revelation is full of the sounds of trumpets blowing, rivers running, thunder, voices, and music. The sound of silence for about half an hour would be remarkable. Elijah experienced the same kind of silence on Mount Sinai. God brought him to the mountain to hear the Word of God. There

was a powerful wind, but Elijah did not find God in the wind. There was an earthquake and a fire, but Elijah did not find God in either one. After the fire, Elijah heard a gentle whisper, he wrapped his cloak over his face, and he heard the LORD speak to him telling him to go back the way he had come (cf. 1 Kings 19:10–15).

Silence marks the opening of the seventh seal and the trumpets from Revelation 8 and 9. The silence says, “God is here.” There are many passages that refer to the purpose of silence. Psalm 37:7 says, “*Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.*” Zeephaniah 1:7, 14 says:

Be silent before the Sovereign LORD, for the day of the LORD is near. The LORD has prepared a sacrifice; he has consecrated those he has invited. . . . The great day of the LORD is near — near and coming quickly. Listen! The cry on the day of the LORD will be bitter, the shouting of the warrior there.

Zechariah 2:13 says, “*Be still before the LORD, all mankind, because he has roused himself from his holy dwelling.*” And one final verse that speaks about silence comes from Habakkuk 2:20 which says, “*But the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.*”

These verses on being silent before God speak to the world about judgment that is about to take place. God urged His children not to fret about the world’s success. He wanted them to see that the success of the world would end. They needed to listen to Him. The LORD who had appeared to be asleep was waking. God called for His people to listen and be still so they could hear His words and see His works. In the Old Testament

God's children depended on idols, money, their own numbers, and their own success instead of looking to Him.

The silence in Revelation 8:1 had more than one purpose. **First**, God wanted His children to pay attention to Him. One of the most powerful ways to get someone's attention in the midst of a lecture is to pause and say nothing. **Second**, silence is usually the calm that comes before the storm. During violent storms or tornadoes, there is usually a terrible quietness right before the storm hits. **Third**, silence indicated that any delay was almost over and judgment had arrived.

Fourth, this silence in Revelation 8:1 may indicate that the angels realized that God's great trumpets were going to blow. They saw the terror of God that was going to happen in judgment. The angels were awestruck to the point of silence. God did not speak. The angels did not speak. The earth dared not speak because judgment was about to occur. **Fifth**, silence could indicate the condition of the saints. They could finally be at rest. They no longer needed to be disturbed. The child of God does not need to be in a frenzy, running about, and crying out with all the same woes that the wicked are worried about. When judgment comes, the child of God will rest secure because he is safe in the arms of Jesus.

John saw seven angels standing before God and they were given seven trumpets. He saw *"another angel, who had a golden censer"* standing before the altar. This angel was given *"... much incense to offer, with the prayers of all the saints, on the golden altar before the throne"* (Revelation 8:3). The awesome silence of heaven and earth was followed by the actions of an angel who offered up incense with the prayers of all the saints. There were supplication, cries, and prayers ascending from under the altar. This is the altar that is seen over and over again throughout the Book of Revelation (cf. Revelation 6:9, 8:3–5, 9:13, 11:1, 14:18, 16:7). There were

souls under the altar, prayers upon the altar, a voice and fire coming from the altar, and finally there will be judgment.

In the tabernacle, in the wilderness, and in the temple that Solomon built “*the golden altar*” stood just outside the veil and was used for burning incense. Exodus 30:1–10 records the institution of the “*altar of acacia wood for burning incense*”:

“Make an altar of acacia wood for burning incense. It is to be square, a cubit long and a cubit wide, and two cubits high — its horns of one piece with it. Overlay the top and all the sides and the horns with pure gold, and make a gold molding around it. Make two gold rings for the altar below the molding — two on opposite sides — to hold the poles used to carry it. Make the poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Put the altar in front of the curtain that is before the ark of the Testimony — before the atonement cover that is over the Testimony — where I will meet with you. “Aaron must burn fragrant incense on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come. Do not offer on this altar any other incense or any burnt offering or grain offering, and do not pour a drink offering on it. Once a year Aaron shall make atonement on its horns. This annual atonement must be made with the blood of the atoning sin offering for the generations to come. It is most holy to the LORD.”

This altar was to be a square of about 18–24 inches (about 0.5 meters) long and wide. It would stand about 36–48 inches (about 0.9 meters) high. Notice the word “*gold*” is used over

and over to describe the altar. This altar stood in the very presence of God just outside the Holy of Holies. The only reason the altar was not inside the Holy Place was because the priests were to burn incense on the altar forever. This was the altar where the High Priest made the atonement. He carried the atonement into the Holy Place, but he made the atonement on this altar of incense. The “*golden altar*” was most holy to the LORD.

Burning incense on this altar is a picture of prayer and the atonement offered in that prayer ascending to God. Psalm 141:1–2 talks about prayers that are like incense: “*O LORD, I call to you; come quickly to me. Hear my voice when I call to you. May my prayer be set before you like incense; may the lifting up of my hands be like the evening sacrifice.*” John saw an angel with a golden censer who was given incense to offer with the prayers of the saints. Surely these were intercessory prayers. Intercession from other people, from Jesus and the Holy Spirit, intercession from those who were in trial; intercessory prayer going up unto the throne of God. The prayers of the saints were not just the prayers of a special group in heaven. They were the prayers of all God’s people. God’s people are the saints who have been set apart for God through faith in Jesus Christ.

When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he addressed it “. . . *To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia*” (2 Corinthians 1:1). Then in 2 Corinthians 13:13 he said, “*All the saints send their greetings.*” He was not just talking about the saints in Corinth, he was referring to all the saints throughout all the world. Saints all over the world are meant to benefit from what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. The prayers and incense offered in the Book of Revelation represent the prayers of all the people for God’s judgement to come.

On the Day of Atonement in the Old Testament, the High Priest would put incense on the fire before the LORD and he would sprinkle some of the bull's and the goat's blood on the front of the atonement cover. Only after these rituals was he allowed to enter the Most Holy Place (cf. Leviticus 16:3–34). He did this as a “. . . *lasting ordinance . . . Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites.*” The fire, the incense, and the blood was all offered to God so that He would atone for their sins.

Atonement is not the focus in Revelation 8. The focus was a little different because judgment was in view. The angel represented the priest of God who put the incense on the altar and let it ascend to the Holy Place. After he had placed the incense on the altar, he took the censer that was filled with fire from the altar and hurled it upon the earth. In Ezekiel 10 an angel did the same thing with the fire that was among the four living creatures. Coals of fire symbolized God's judgment upon the earth. It is easy to picture a storm coming in Revelation 8. It will be a storm from which the saints on earth will be protected and one that they have prayed to come.

True prayer is serious business. Paul told Timothy Christians are to pray for kings, rulers, and all who are in high places (cf. 1 Timothy 2:1–2). The result of this kind of prayer will be “*that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*”

With each announcement of judgment coming from the throne a little more is added. This is probably for emphasis. In Revelation 8:5 there was lightning, rumbling, thunder, and an earthquake. In Revelation 11:19 a hailstorm was added and in Revelation 16 the hailstorm is described: “*From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men*” (Revelation 16:21a). Each time judgment was announced it was bad and it got worse as time went by.

Desolation — The First Four Trumpets

Revelation 8:6–13

Then the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared to sound them. The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down upon the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up. The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed. The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water — the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter. The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”

The second point in the discussion of Revelation 8 is the desolation brought by the first four trumpets. The first four trumpets were judgments that were natural in their existence.

For a biblical background of trumpets, you might want to read Numbers 10 where the LORD spoke to Moses about the trumpets to be used in Israel. These trumpets represented many things. They represented a call for the gathering of the people. They represented a sound to march on to another place. They represented a joyful feast about to take place. They represented the warning of an approaching enemy who would be a form of judgment. This was the use of the trumpet throughout the Bible. Read Joel 2:1, 15. He said, “Sound the trumpet.” Why? The Day of the Lord was at hand. “Sound the trumpet!” Why? Judgment was about to occur.

When Nehemiah re-built the walls around Jerusalem, he used a trumpet to sound the alarm:

From that day on, half of my men did the work, while the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armor. . . . Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other, and each of the builders wore his sword at his side as he worked. But the man who sounded the trumpet stayed with me. . . . Whenever you hear the sound of the trumpet, join us there. Our God will fight for us! (Nehemiah 4:16–20).

In Amos 3:6, Amos asked: “*When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble?*” Biblically, trumpets were used to warn of impending destruction (cf. Jeremiah 4:5, 19, 6:1–5; Hosea 5:8–9, 8:1).

The judgments seen in Revelation 8 were not total destruction. They would only cover one-third of the world. One-third is a big number, but it is not the majority. This was not total destruction. Very quickly four trumpets were blown to announce that judgment was coming from God. The

background for these trumpets are the plagues of Egypt. Keep in mind Exodus 7–10. This judgment is more severe than the plagues because this is the judgment of God on the earth. The natural calamities that will occur in the lives of the Roman enemies on earth are meant to call them to repentance.

When the first angel sounded his trumpet, one-third of the trees and the green things were devoured. This trumpet attacked the food supply which would bring great distress upon the wicked nations. The gods of the oppressor were being exposed in these seals just as they were in Egypt's plagues.

In Revelation 8:8–9 another judgment came upon the earth which affected the seas. One-third of the sea water became blood (cf. Exodus 7:14–18). Notice the second trumpet was more severe than the first. In His warning process God made each judgment a little bit more severe than the one that preceded it, trying to call the wicked to repentance. One-third of the sea was gone. One-third of the sea creatures died. When one-third of the ships were destroyed, many sailors, captains, and merchant men would have died. People died at this second trumpet sound.

When the third trumpet blew, judgment came upon the fresh waters of the land. A great star fell into the rivers and into the fountains of living water. A star is sometimes used to denote individuals as in Isaiah 14:12 when referring to the king of Babylon. Sometimes a star refers to the people of God as in Daniel 8:10 and 12:3. In Genesis 15:5 God Himself referred to the offspring of Abram who would be as many as the stars in the heavens.

A star was sometimes used as a part of the picture to represent divine visitation as in Matthew 24:29: *"Immediately after the distress of those days . . . the stars will fall from the sky . . ."* That is what the star in Revelation 8:10 represented. It was a *"great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky . . ."*

This “*star*” was a mark of the fact that this was divine judgement. Men may order other men to go to certain places, but God can order the stars of the heaven to do His will. He calls for them to come out and they appear. This “*great star*” was used in service to God. It was a “*bitter*” star whose name was “*Wormwood*.” The word “*bitter*” when used in the Bible is often associated with something that is undrinkable and even poisonous (cf. Deuteronomy 29:18; Proverbs 5:4; Jeremiah 9:15, 23:15; Lamentations 3:15, 19). In Amos 5:7 God said, “*You who turn justice into bitterness and cast righteousness to the ground . . .*” when He was talking about Israel’s judges who had turned justice to “*wormwood*.” Others versions of the Bible like the King James and the American Standard versions translate the word “*bitter*” as “*wormwood*” in these verses. This star was a bitter, poisonous star.

It was also a destructive star. One-third of the water became bitterly poisonous and many people died. Other than air, water is the most essential thing to life. People can go without food much longer than they can go without water. When people, who have been deprived of water for a long time, find water they usually do not test it to see if it is poisonous. They tend to just fall into it and drink. If the water proves to be poisonous, many times that drink leads to their death. Once again God used a natural calamity to bring judgment upon His enemy.

When the fourth angel sounded his trumpet, the heavens — “*a third of the sun . . . a third of the moon, and a third of the stars*” — themselves were effected. That means that all the universe was effected by this fourth trumpet. Compare this to the events in Exodus 10:21–23 when the same thing happened throughout Egypt. If this were to literally happen today, all the world would be in major trouble. If one-third of the heavenly bodies were destroyed, the entire universe would cease to exist.

One-third sunlight would mean one-third less energy available as a life support for man and nature. For some Old Testament background in this area read Isaiah 34:4–5 when God spoke of judgment descending upon Edom:

All the stars of the heavens will be dissolved and the sky rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shriveled figs from the fig tree. My sword has drunk its fill in the heavens; see, it descends in judgment on Edom, the people I have totally destroyed.

The heavenly bodies were used by God to bring judgment upon the wicked people. Remember that the Book of Revelation is a symbolic book, but even taken symbolically, this trumpet will bring unthinkable disasters upon the entire universe.

Revelation 8:13 is an interesting verse:

*As I watched, I heard an **eagle** that was flying in midair call out in a loud voice: “Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!”*

An “eagle” is an evil bird of prey. The same word is used in Matthew 24:28: “For wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together” (KJV). This one flies in the mid-heaven calling out to the inhabitants of the earth crying out, “Woe! Woe! Woe!” This eagle is a lone, swift predator waiting to swoop down upon its victims. In the Book of Revelation the phrase “the inhabitants of the earth” is used to refer to the wicked people (cf. Revelation 6:10, 8:13, 11:10, 13:8, 14; 17:2, 8). They stand in opposition to those who dwell in heaven (cf. Revelation 11:6). The saints, even though they live on the

earth, are seen as residents of heaven (cf. Revelation 12:12, 13:6).

Revelation 8 presents the seventh seal, the golden censor, and the first four trumpets. There is a picture of judgment falling on an ungodly world to draw them to repentance. The saints are being reminded that God has all authority. He is the One in control. Christians need to believe that fact and find peace.

The remaining three trumpets that are going to sound are much more severe than the first four. These trumpets were announced by the eagle who called out, “*Woe! Woe! Woe!*”

Trumpets Five and Six

Revelation 9:1–19

Review

The seventh seal contained seven trumpets. These trumpets represented the judgments God would use to try to call Rome to repentance. Revelation 8 revealed the first four trumpets that God used as natural calamities. The first trumpet used land disasters, the second used maritime disasters, the third used land-water disasters, and the fourth used cosmic disorder. All of these disasters were used to call Rome to repentance, but they did not repent. At the close of Revelation 8 there was an “eagle” flying in mid-heaven crying out with a loud voice, “Woe! Woe! Woe!” warning the “inhabitants of the earth” about the three angels that still have not sounded their trumpets.

The Hellish Locusts — Fifth Trumpet — Internal Decay

Revelation 9:1–11

The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke

from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not given power to kill them, but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes a man. During those days men will seek death, but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women's hair, and their teeth were like lions' teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails and stings like scorpions, and in their tails they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon.

The locusts that came from the smoke in this vision do not represent death nor destruction, but judgment in the form of torment. This vision is a picture of the internal decay that came upon the nation of Rome as an incentive to bring them to repentance.

First, John saw a star that “*had fallen from the sky to the earth.*” In the last verse of this passage of Scripture the star is named “*Abaddon*” and “*Apollyon,*” which means the

destroyer. This is Satan. John did not see the star “falling” from the sky; he saw “*a star that **had** fallen from the sky.*” In other words, Satan had already fallen at the time of John’s vision. Satan fell at the cross of Christ. His number was not divine. He is like man, even though he is more powerful than man. He was doomed to destruction. His destruction was forecast when the seventy-two disciples of Jesus came back from their tour through the Galilean villages. They talked about the miracles they had performed and the demons they had cast out. In Luke 10:18 Jesus said, “*I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.*” The saints in their victory with Jesus are a symbol of Satan’s fallen position and a prediction of the fact that he will ultimately fall forever.

Notice that the “*star*” was given the “*key to the shaft of the Abyss.*” Satan does not have anything that belongs to him. If Satan says he can give a man something, it is important to know that he can only give what God has given to him. Satan has nothing of his own. When Jesus cast the legion of demons out of the madman in the region of Gerasenes, the demons cried out and “*begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss*” (Luke 8:31). The “*Abyss*” is the abode of wicked demons and Satan. The key to the pit of the abyss belongs to Satan. That is where Satan and all his people will dwell eternally (cf. Revelation 11:7, 17:8, 20:1–3). But remember Jesus said, “*I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades*” (Revelation 1:18). He has control over all things. Satan was only given temporary control so that he could benefit God by doing His will for the benefit of the people of God.

When Satan, “*the star . . . opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss*” (Revelation 9:2).

This smoke represents false doctrine, the deceptive power of Satan. Contrast the darkness from Satan to what Jesus said in Revelation 22:16, “*I, Jesus, . . . am . . . the bright Morning Star.*” The work of the devil darkens the sky. In contrast, the work of Jesus brings light to the sky. Those who follow the devil will live in darkness. Those who follow Jesus live in light. Jesus told Nicodemus:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed. But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what he has done has been done through God” (John 3:16–21).

The smoke and everything that came from the abyss represent Satan’s forces, his power, and his influence upon the earth. The locust are a reminder of the plagues in Egypt (cf. Exodus 10:1–20) where there were so many locust that the earth was black with them. Every green thing that the hail had left was devoured. In Joel, locusts were such a terrible judgment that they were called God’s “*great army*” (cf. Joel 2:25). These locust and those in Revelation all marched with God as the source of their power. A locust plague has never

destroyed a nation, but it can greatly weaken it. History says it takes seven years to overcome the force of a locust plague. They eat every green thing; they strip the bark from the trees. The destruction they cause is worse than anything an enemy can do to a nation, men will still have money in the bank and their businesses to run. A nation can survive this kind of destruction.

The locust in Revelation 9 came from hell itself as they came from the smoke which came from the abyss. The smoke represents the deception of Satan through his evil doctrines. The deception of Satan causes the weakening influence of internal corruption. These locust *“were given power like that of scorpions of the earth,”* but they were also limited in what they could do: *“They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the **seal of God** on their foreheads”* (Revelation 9:4). The seal of God protected His people from the torment of the locust. These locust could not kill as serpents or war can. They were limited to a five month period to torture.

Have you ever been stung by a scorpion? When I was five years old I went to visit my granddad. My granddad only had one leg. The other was a peg leg, so when he bought his boots he always had a right boot left over. I loved to play like I was big like my granddad so I would put his boots on. One day I put on my granddad's boot and two scorpions were in the right boot. They both bit my foot. I quickly got my foot out of the boot because I knew if I didn't it would soon be swollen too much to get it out. I don't remember anything hurting me any worse than that did. I was tormented all day long by that scorpion bite. That is the nature of scorpions. They torment people. The locust in Revelation tormented those who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads to the point that the people longed to die, but death eluded them. There was no death nor destruction from this angel, there was only torment.

The description of the locusts in Revelation 9:7–9 is comparable to the locusts in Joel. They are described as *“horses prepared for battle.”* They marched in order. They were organized and armed for battle. They had crowns of gold probably because it seemed they had been victorious over everything in their path. They had *“human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth.”* These things denote their intelligence, their glorious beauty, their power, and their strength. They had breastplates of iron showing that they were well protected and would be hard to kill. John said, *“The sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle”* (Revelation 9:9b). They were loud because of their great numbers and the sound would have been frightening to hear. They had tails like scorpions and in the tail was their power to torment.

The locust in this vision gain their power from the *“star”* who was the *“king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is **Abaddon**, and in Greek, **Apollyon**”* (Revelation 9:11). Both of these words mean “destroyer.” Job used the word **abaddon** in Job 26–31 in his discourse with Bildad talking about the fact that there is one who is behind the evil of the world. He is one who destroys. Further into this study, the destroyer will hurt the people of God, but he and his helpers will be destroyed by Jesus Himself and cast into the lake of fire.

Review

John saw the star, the angel king, who is Satan himself. Satan opened the abyss releasing smoke which was his false doctrine that held man in darkness. Satan is the god of this world who blinds the eyes of unbelievers (cf. 2 Corinthians 4:4). He is also known as the prince of the powers of the air (cf. Ephesians 2:1–4). The devil controls the world by the doctrines

that he is able to make them believe. The locust represent the lies of false doctrine that men believe. Man is made weak when he does not have the protecting seal of God. Rome fell for the devil's lies causing that nation to fall into internal decay.

Remember this is one of God's trumpets. He used these trumpets (the work of Satan) to warn and punish the wicked. God wanted the people of the world to repent. He used natural calamity and internal decay as instruments to harm His enemies. Most nations are weakened internally, and then an external force can easily bring about their final destruction.

Revelation 9:12: *"The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come."*

The Hellish Army — Sixth Trumpet — External Enemies

Revelation 9:13–19

The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, "Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates." And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was two hundred million. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur. A third of mankind was killed by the three

plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury.

The sixth trumpet was not internal decay, it was external enemies in the form of a hellish army coming against the Roman Empire. Moral and spiritual blindness may tear a nation down, but wars will exhaust it. Some have said that war is what made Rome, but the Roman people in general had absolutely no love for war. When Augustus closed the temple of Janus in 29 B.C. signaling the return of peace after three severe civil wars, the people of Rome were ecstatic with joy. War torments the souls of men.

Remember this is the sounding of the sixth trumpet. As a trumpet it will not bring total destruction, only one-third of man-kind will be destroyed. This did not represent the fall of Rome. This was not the war that ended the Roman empire. These were the wars that Rome would fight, some of which would bring them great victories, some of which would bring them defeat, but all of which would torment the sensitive souls of her people and surely should have caused them to repent. However, that did not happen.

Revelation 9:13–14 warns that it is time for war. John heard a voice come from the **horns** of the golden altar. This is the altar that was before the throne of God. It is the altar where “. . . *the prayers of the saints, went up before God* . . .” (Revelation 8:4). It is also the altar under which the souls of the martyrs were when they cried out to God (cf. Revelation 6:9). This judgment came on behalf of the saints both living and dead. This judgment came from the heart of God, from His throne in answer to the prayers of His persecuted people.

The voice came from the horns of the altar representing the strength of this judgment. The horns of anything are the strongest part. The voice cried out for the release of the four angels who had been bound at the great river Euphrates. This refers back to Revelation 7:1–3:

*After this I saw **four angels** standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: “Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.”*

These four angels, who stand for all the armies who were appointed to attack Rome and the enemies of God, were released to bring judgment. God called them to do His bidding. The Euphrates River stands for the threat of military might. Read Isaiah 8:7–8 where God says the Euphrates is the king of Assyria.

The “*mounted troops*” represented by the “*four angels*” were appointed to attack the enemies of God: “. . . *who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind*” (Revelation 9:15). It is interesting to note that God has such a specific calendar. All God’s children, then and now, can be assured that these armies are totally under His control. These angels, who stand for the armies used by God, move only when He says to move and have a place in the divine program down to the very hour that He wants them to move. The Lord is LORD of all and no one can do anything at any time in any place beyond His will.

There is a specific assignment given to the horsemen in Revelation 9: “*kill a third of mankind.*” This would have been a third of the men who did not have the seal of the living God on their foreheads. The number of the horsemen was two hundred million. There has never been an army that big. The large number was meant to scare the life out of the enemy. They needed to know that a great judgment was waiting for them. Another possible reason for this large number was to give the saints a reason to rejoice in the fact that their Father had such an army at His disposal. The large number would also stress the staggering control possessed by God.

Revelation 9:17–19 contains the description of this amazing army. They wore “*breastplates . . . fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulfur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulfur.*” This a picture of something that can bring about total destruction: “*A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulfur that came out of their mouths.*” Once again this presents a picture seen in the Old Testament. Sodom and Gomorrah were completely destroyed with fire, smoke, and sulfur: “*rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah . . . dense smoke rising from the land, like smoke from a furnace . . . God destroyed the cities of the plain . . .*” (Genesis 19:24–25, 28–29). Sodom and Gomorrah were totally destroyed. These horsemen killed one-third of mankind. This army was armored, devouring, destructive, effective, and powerful. They had mouths to destroy and tails to kill — the mouth of a lion and the tail of a snake. This is the picture of a war machine.

The Incurrigible Rest

Revelation 9:20–21 reveals the tragedy of Rome’s incurrigible rest. They had seen the intent of God trying to get them to repent through all of these trumpets, **BUT** —

*The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still **did not repent** of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood-idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor **did they repent** of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.*

They did not, or rather maybe they could not repent. Such hardness of heart is awe-inspiring. Be forewarned, the opponents of Christianity are bent on evil. Notice the list of sins in this passage:

- *“the work of their hands”*
- *“worshiping demons and idols”*
- *“murders”*
- *“magic acts”*
- *“sexual immorality”*
- *“thefts”*

This is a list of the kind of wickedness men can become entrapped in. Many times they are so trapped, they cannot repent.

Review

God used two instruments of punishment in Revelation 9: internal corruption and external invasion. These were used against the oppressors of God, but the enemy did not repent. The enemy continued to war against the people of God. How can these people be stopped? That would be the question in the minds of the awe-struck saints. What is going to be able to destroy such a force against God’s children? There is an answer to be found in the seventh trumpet (cf. Revelation 11), but first God provides an interlude before the final judgment. In this

interlude God spoke to His people to tell them that He was and still is in control. He will not allow His children to be harmed and they should not be dismayed. Everything will be all right if they will simply believe on Him and cling to Him. Their enemy will ultimately be destroyed and they will be victorious. Believe in Him and enjoy peace.

No More Warning

Revelation 10:1–11:2

Review of Revelation 4–9

Revelation 4 contains the great throne scene. God wanted His children to know He was in control of everything everywhere all the time. Revelation 5 shows the slain Lamb who comes to serve and worship the One who sits upon the throne. He takes the book of destiny out of the hands of the One sitting on the throne, and all at once, all the angels, all the redeemed, all the cherubim, and all of the creation give the Lamb equal honor with the One who sits upon the throne.

Revelation 6 shows the opening of the first six seals. These seals depict the destiny the Church is about to face and also the destiny set for the enemy, Rome. The first seal was Jesus, the conquering warrior. The second seal, on the red horse, was war or perhaps Rome personified as a warrior. The third seal was famine and economic oppression that would come upon the people of God. The fourth seal was “*Death.*” And yet all of this was not final for it was only the fourth of seven seals. The fifth seal was opened and under the altar before the throne of God John saw those who have been slain for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus. These martyrs cried out to God, “How long will it be before you bring judgment upon those that have oppressed us?”

When the sixth seal was opened, God revealed that judgment would soon come by using the Old Testament figures

of the Day of the Lord. He depicted all kinds of judgment that He was going to bring upon Rome and all the people He was going to judge. Finally it was so severe that all the people cried out with a loud question, “*Who can stand?*” During that great and terrible judgment, what will happen to the children of God? His children were told even before the judgment began that they were going to be sealed. No judgment would come until the servants of God were sealed with the seal of the living God on their foreheads. This seal does not depict the Holy Spirit, but it depicts the fact that those who have the Holy Spirit will be protected in the midst of the judgment.

In the latter portion of Revelation 7 the great multitude which no man could number is shown. This is the same group, the Church, but now they are represented not as sealed for the judgment but victorious over the judgment. Whether they live or whether they die, they will be in the temple of God. God will spread his tent over them. They will not hunger. They will not thirst. They will not weep. The Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will lead them to springs of living water where they will serve God day and night.

Revelation 8–9 depicts the warning judgment on the oppressor. Though they were warnings, the trumpets were severe. The oppressors should have repented but they did not. They only hardened their hearts further and blasphemed. Their actions are reminiscent of the times Pharaoh would change his mind about letting the Israelites leave Egypt. When he finally told Moses and Aaron to take their people and get out of Egypt, it was because his hard heart was broken by the death of his first born son. Even then his heart was not completely broken because he and his army pursued the Israelites into the Red Sea where God swept them away and not one of them survived (cf. Exodus 12:31–14:28). That kind of wickedness is a fearful thing to behold. It will produce fear in the heart of the timid to see incarnate hatred and spite clawing for victory even when

defeat is plainly seen. Christians need assurance in the face of this kind of malice.

Preview of Chapters 10–13

Revelation 13 gives a better understanding of the reason for this kind of horrifying strength of purpose and wickedness. Two beasts will be empowered with the dragon's authority. They will be a fierce pair along with the horrifying sight of the fiery dragon. Revelation 10–12 will act as a buffer of comfort between the ungodly brute strength of Satan seen in Revelation 4–9 and the terrible trio of the dragon and his two beasts. This trio represent Roman power, Roman religion, and Roman seduction. The strong angels in Revelation 10 assure the saints a victory. In Revelation 11 a city will be besieged and yet protected. Witnesses in sack cloth will still be victorious. In Revelation 12 a brand new baby will win over the devil and the woman will be protected and the rest of her seed is assured the victory. The message to the saints is that they have a strong power on their side. Their city will be besieged, but the enemy will not take their sanctuary.

The witness of the saints will be victorious even though it may appear to be dead. God will come in final judgment over whatever enemy opposes His children. Jesus will win even when He is pictured as a helpless baby. A pregnant woman and a delivered woman representing the Church of Jesus Christ will be protected in the wilderness during the great trial that is to come upon all the earth. Best of all the woman's seed — those who have kept the commandments and the testimony of Jesus, those who have accepted the blood of Christ, those who give their testimony faithfully about Christ, and those who do not love the things of the world — will be victorious in the end.

The Strong Angel and the Seven Thunders

Revelation 10:1–7

*Then I saw another **mighty angel** coming down from heaven. He was robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars. He was holding a little scroll, which lay open in his hand. He planted his right foot on the sea and his left foot on the land, and he gave a loud shout like the roar of a lion. When he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke. And when the seven thunders spoke, I was about to write [John had been commissioned to write whatever he heard]; but I heard a voice from heaven say, “Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.” Then the angel I had seen standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it, and said, “There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets.”*

In Revelation 10 and 11 there are four significant messages given to John. The first message, found in this passage of Scripture, concerns the “*mighty angel*” and the seven thunders. Their message is that the enemy will get **no more warnings**. The “*mighty angel*” said, “*There will be no more delay!*” Literally, he was saying that there was no more time. The enemy had received all the warnings they needed. One more

trumpet will be blown and that trumpet will be the final, total, and complete destruction of the enemy. The saints did not have to worry any more.

Notice the description of the “*mighty angel*” in Revelation 10:1. He was “. . . *coming down from heaven . . . robed in a cloud, with a rainbow above his head; his face was like the sun, and his legs were like fiery pillars.*” The angel’s clothing was a cloud and his crown was a rainbow. He had a face like the sun and feet like pillars of fire. One foot was on the sea and the other foot was on the land. He had a voice like the roar of a lion. When he spoke, it was the voices of seven thunders. Review Revelation 1–3 and notice that this seems to be a description of the Son of Man, Jesus Christ Himself. However, many times in the Old Testament, when an angel came from God, he was given the description of God Himself. Revelation 10:1 and 5 says, “*Then I saw another **mighty angel** . . .*” and “*Then the **angel** I had seen . . .*” In the Book of Revelation, Jesus is called many things, but He is never called an angel. He is called “*the Lamb,*” “*a warrior,*” “*judge,*” “*Son of God,*” and “*Son of Man.*” He is never called an angel, so I believe this is a personal representative of Jesus. He comes in Jesus’ armor, in Jesus’ clothes, and most importantly, he comes with Jesus’ concern and His power. When he spoke, “*the voices of seven thunders spoke.*”

Thunder issues a warning. When thunder is heard in West Texas, it starts in the distance and comes closer as a warning that a storm is coming. The seven thunders spoke and John was about to write, but he heard a “*voice from heaven say, ‘Seal up what the seven thunders have said and do not write it down.’*” The thunders may have thought in response to this “*mighty angel*” that God wanted more warnings and judgments. But God told John to seal up what the seven thunders had said. There were going to be no more warning. It is possible that

whenever these thunders do speak, it will be the end of Rome. These seven thunders are going to be what the seventh trumpet will contain: the final, total, and irrevocable fall of the enemy. God's judgment is constant revealing the character of God.

Heaven's prohibition (to forbid something, Ed.) in Revelation 10:5–7 is very interesting. It is uttered by a “*voice from heaven.*” And once this “*voice*” speaks, the “*angel . . . raised his right hand to heaven. And he swore . . .*” The source of the great angel's authority is clearly seen in these verses. The angel “*. . . swore by him who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it . . .*” (Revelation 10:5–6). What a marvelous description of God Himself. God is the authority for this mighty angel. He said, “*There will be no more delay! But in the days when the seventh angel is about to sound his trumpet, the mystery of God will be accomplished, just as he announced to his servants the prophets*” (Revelation 10:6b–7).

The “Mighty Angel” and John — Second Vision

Revelation 10:8–11

Then the voice that I had heard from heaven spoke to me once more: “Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” I took the little scroll from the angel's hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must

prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings.”

This section of Scripture contains a second vision for John as the “voice spoke” to him. This is an important message telling John that although the end is near at hand, the Word must still be preached: “Go, take the scroll . . . eat it . . .” It is significant that John is told to go and take the scroll. The angel did not give it to John. John had to take the scroll. Every servant of God must volunteer for service. Many times God’s children wait for God to give them a mission, when He has already stated His will:

“Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:18b–20b). And “. . . Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation” (Mark 16:15).

These were John’s instructions: “You must prophesy again about many people, nations, languages and kings” (Revelation 10:11). John was told to, “Go, take the scroll, and prophesy.”

Notice the nature of the “little scroll.” This book was open in the hand of the angel rather than sealed as the book was in Revelation 5–6. It is not a big book, it is a “little scroll” that John was able to understand; but when he ate it, it tasted as sweet as honey, but it turned his stomach sour. Read Ezekiel 2:8–3:14 to see Ezekiel’s experience with a little book. It was sweet in his mouth, but after he ate it there was the bitterness of his spirit to tell the people what it had said. The Word of God is sweet to the taste of those who love Him, but that sweet Word must sometimes be proclaimed in the midst of the bitter persecution of the people of God. When that happens, the

stomach becomes bitter as a consequence of what is being said. The Gospel is only “good news” to those who accept it. It is bad news to those who will not accept it. The Gospel is sweet to those who love Jesus even if it is proclaimed among those who feel bad and are suffering. Christians are not required to feel good, they are only required to “eat the book” and tell others about it. The key word in the passage from Ezekiel is the word “*tell*.” It is the same for John in this passage. He must preach a message that is sorrowful and will make his stomach bitter. It is a message that is universal: “*about many people, nations, languages and kings*.” John’s work is to digest the Word of God and preach it. It is a good message because it is God’s message even though it will be about judgment to come. This is the significance of this second vision in Revelation 10.

The Temple and the City — Third Vision

Revelation 11:1–2

*I was given a reed like a measuring rod and was told, “Go and measure the **temple of God** and the altar, and count the worshipers there. But exclude the outer court; do not measure it, because it has been given to the Gentiles. They will trample on the holy city for 42 months.”*

Revelation 11 says judgment is coming. This is the third of four visions in this section. John was told to measure the temple and the altar and to count the people. He will not measure the outer court because it had been given to the Gentiles. Look at Ezekiel 40:1–4:

In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the

fourteenth year after the fall of the city — on that very day the hand of the LORD was upon me and he took me there. In visions of God he took me to the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain, on whose south side were some buildings that looked like a city. He took me there, and I saw a man whose appearance was like bronze; he was standing in the gateway with a linen cord and a measuring rod in his hand. The man said to me, “Son of man, look with your eyes and hear with your ears and pay attention to everything I am going to show you, for that is why you have been brought here. Tell the house of Israel everything you see.”

These two passages, one from Ezekiel and the one from Revelation, are strongly tied together. Remember first that Ezekiel was not in the promised land. The house of Israel was in exile and the time was fourteen years after Jerusalem had fallen. Ezekiel had a vision that took him to the city of Jerusalem, where he sat on a very high mountain. He saw a man who told him to look, hear, pay attention, and “*tell the house of Israel everything you see.*” The key word is “*tell.*” The key word for John is also “*tell.*” Ezekiel measured the city he saw and Ezekiel 42:20 gives the reason for this measuring: “*So he measured the area on all four sides. It had a wall around it, five hundred cubits long and five hundred cubits wide, to separate the holy from the common.*” The measurement was made to make a distinction between what belonged to God and what did not. The measurement in Ezekiel and the measurement in Revelation was to set apart whatever is measured for God. Whatever was measure was sanctified and made holy. That was what it meant “*to separate the holy from the common.*” There is also the idea of protection, because

whatever is set apart God regards as belonging to Him. Whatever God measures is protected, it is sanctified, and it is holy. The things that God does not measure are profane and unholy.

Notice the things that John was told to measure: *“the temple of God and the altar, and count the worshipers there”* (Revelation 11:1). At this time in history, there was only one *“temple.”* *“The temple of God”* in Revelation is the Church. In 1 Corinthians 3:16 Paul said, *“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?”* The *“you”* in this verse is plural meaning that the verse could be translated to read: *“All of you are the temple of God.”* *“God’s temple”* in this verse is singular. Later in 1 Corinthians 6:19 Paul does use the singular phrase *“your body”* to say that *“your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit.”* Every Christian singularly is a temple of God, but taken together as it is used in 1 Corinthians 3 and here in Revelation 11 the *“temple of God”* is the Church. In Ephesians 2:19–22 all the saints are built up to be:

. . . members of God’s household built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

John measured the Church, the inner sanctuary. There are two words used for *“temple.”* The word ***hieron*** is used to refer to all the temple complex. However, John used the word ***naos*** which refers to only the Holy Place including the Holy of Holies. These are the inner sanctuary of God. God wants

everyone to know that this is the Holy Place. At the heart of God's holy heart is the holy ***“temple of God,”*** the Church.

Next John measured the *“altar.”* This would be the worship. Compare 1 Peter 2:5 and 9 to what John was doing:

you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. . . . But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Christians are *“a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ . . . that you may declare the praises of him.”* Compare Hebrews 13:15–16: *“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise — the fruit of lips that confess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”* Christians offer up *“the fruit of [their] lips that confess his name. . . . for with such sacrifices God is pleased.”* This is the worship that a Christian offers to God.

John was told to *“count the worshipers.”* This would mean counting the worshipers who were in the Holy Place. The only ones who could go into the Holy Place were the priests of God. John was told to measure them as he measured the Church and the worship. John did not measure the *“outer court.”* By telling John not to measure the outer court, God was saying that He was going to give the outer court to the Gentiles and they would abuse the Holy City. Even though the enemy was going to trample this Holy City, they would not be able to abuse her heart because the sanctuary would be protected. God was going

to permit suffering, but He would not allow annihilation. The inner sanctuary would be set apart and kept by Him.

John was told, *“They will trample on the holy city for 42 months”* (Revelation 11:2b). This time period of 42 months comes up time and time again: *“42 months,” “1,260 days,”* and *“times, time and half a time”* (cf. Revelation 11:2, 3; 12:6, 14; 13:5; Daniel 7:25). Forty-two months times thirty would be 1,260 days. The Hebrew calendar has 360 days in a year, so 1,260 days would be three and a half years meaning each one of these is the same amount of time. In Revelation that is the period of the beast, the time of persecution of Roman power and authority over the saints. It is not an unending period of time, it is a broken period of time. Seven is a perfect number, so three and a half would be imperfect. It is the period of time that the Holy City was trodden underfoot in Revelation 11:2; it is the period of time during which the two witnesses are prophesying in sack cloth in Revelation 11:3. The Gospel was being preached by the witnesses. That is good, but they were prophesying in sack cloth meaning the city was being trodden underfoot. In Revelation 12:6 and 14 this was also the period of time that the woman, who represented the covenant people of God, the redeemed, was in the wilderness. The wilderness was a sad place giving the impression of sorrow or trouble also. And yet the woman was protected and nourished by God which shows that it was also a period of victory.

Daniel 7:25 is the Old Testament passage that all of these periods of time come from: *“He will speak against the Most High and oppress his saints and try to change the set times and the laws. The saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time.”* Daniel 7 records Daniel’s dream of the four beasts that arise. John was living in the time period of the fourth and last beast — *“terrifying and frightening and very powerful. It had large iron teeth; it crushed and devoured its*

victims and trampled underfoot whatever was left. It was different from all the former beasts, and it had ten horns" (Revelation 7:7–9). Each beast represented a kingdom (cf. Daniel 7:17). The fourth beast is different than the former:

... with its iron teeth and bronze claws ... ten horns on its head and about the other horn that came up, before which three of them fell — the horn that looked more imposing than the other and that had eyes and a mouth that spoke boastfully. As I [Daniel] watched, this horn was waging war against the saints and defeating them, until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the saints of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom"

It is this fourth beast about which Daniel 7:25 says, "*the saints will be handed over to him for a time, times and half a time*" which many scholars agree is three and a half years. There is nothing that proves that this is three and a half years, but there is the idea that this is a broken period of time. It is not complete as seven years would be considered. The thought is that this time period of "*time, times, and a half*" will come to an end. There will be more about the "*ten horns*" and three and a half years and their meaning later.

The basic overview for the first verses in Revelation 11 is that the city of God will undergo persecution from Rome, but despite all this the Church will be sustained by God. And in the end the Church will be victorious.

Conclusion

There is a "*little scroll*" laying open in the hands of a "*mighty angel ... and he gave a loud shout ... when he shouted, the voices of the seven thunders spoke.*" John heard

a voice from heaven that called for the voices of the seven thunders to be sealed. Rome was going to be given no more warnings. This same voice told him to take the scroll. When he took the scroll from the angel, the angel said, *“Take it and eat it.”* And then John was told to tell the message he had eaten. John was to prophesy so the people of God would know that they will be preserved during the conflict that is to come. John measured the inner temple, the altar, and the worshipers. He did not measure the outer courts of the temple because that had been given to the Gentiles who would attack the Church of the living God. The Church needs to know that the Gentiles will not win because God has already preserved the inner sanctuary. The heart of the Church of Jesus Christ cannot be attacked by any enemy because it is spiritual; the heart of the Church is in the hand of God — it has been sealed and measured. It is protected by God.

Fourth Vision: Two Witnesses

Revelation 11:3–19

Review

The study of Revelation 10 and 11 is actually four pictures presented in visions meant to comfort John and the Christians of his day before the seventh trumpet was blown. The first picture was the vision of the little book and the seven thunders. John did not record what the thunders said because he heard a voice from heaven commanding him not to write their words down. This first vision said judgment would come without any further warnings. The second vision was of the little book that was open in the hand of an angel. John was told to take the book and eat it. The book was sweet in his mouth but bitter in his stomach. The Word of God is always sweet in the reception, but if it deals with judgment it can make the stomach bitter.

The third vision was specifically to comfort the Church. It was a measuring of the inner sanctuary, the altar, and the people who had come to worship. The process of measuring was not only to separate the holy from the common, but also to protect. The thought here is one of protection and holiness. An unholy force could not attack the inner sanctuary because it had been declared holy. The unholy force cannot attack the worship of the saints because they had also been declared holy by the measuring. The unholy force could not destroy the worshipers because they were also holy. The outer court of the temple was

not measured because it had been given to the Gentiles to tread underfoot for 42 months. The Gentiles would attack the Church of the Lord, but they would not be able to attack her heart. They could not attack the core of His church. God would permit judgment, but He would not permit annihilation. The Gentiles would not be able to touch the people of God.

The Fourth Vision — Two Strong and Powerful Witnesses

Revelation 11:3–6

“And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want.

The fourth vision was about two strong and powerful witnesses and the conflict. Note the “**And I will give power to *my* two witnesses . . .**” These two witnesses had amazing power and their primary work was to prophesy. The work of a prophet was not simply to predict the future. It was primarily to say what God wanted to say to the people of that day. A prophet did not tell what was going to happen in the far distant future; he told what was going to happen in the immediate future. That

is the nature of the Book of Revelation. The two witnesses would prophesy for 1,260 days which is 42 months. This is the same time period that the Holy City was going to be trodden underfoot. That was the reason the witnesses were prophesying in sack cloth. Sack cloth was an expression of sorrow and mourning. The witnesses were mourning the problems their brothers were going to have to endure as the enemy destroyed the outer courts of their Holy City. Remember this trial was not going to last forever. It was only for 1,260 days, 42 months, or three and a half years. This was for a limited time and then the sack cloth would be gone and the witnesses would prophesy with joy.

The identity of the two witnesses is revealed in Revelation 11:4: *“These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.”* Zechariah also had a vision about a gold lampstand and two olive trees (cf. Zechariah 4:1–14). A candlestick usually had seven lampstands and those lampstands were fed by two olive oil vessels. At the end of Zechariah’s vision the following discourse took place between him and the angel of the Lord:

Then I asked the angel, “What are these two olive trees on the right and the left of the lampstand?” Again I asked him, “What are these two olive branches beside the two gold pipes that pour out golden oil?” He replied, “Do you not know what these are?” “No, my lord,” I said. So he said, “These are the two who are anointed to serve the Lord of all the earth.”

During the time of Zechariah, the “two who are anointed to serve the Lord” would have been Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. The two olive trees and the

lampstand stood for the priest whom God had anointed to bring the message of man to God and the prophet whom God had anointed to bring His message to man. These figures represented the priests and prophets of God who made up the Church of God. It is the Church of God who is God's priests and prophets today (cf. 1 Peter 2:5, 9; Revelation 1:5). The Church of God takes the message of man to God. The Church also takes the message of God to mankind. The identity of both the witnesses is the Church. It is possible that the vision in Revelation has two lampstands to confirm how powerful the Church of Jesus Christ is. Every Word of God or of man was confirmed by two or three witnesses in the Old and New Testaments (cf. Deuteronomy 17:6, 19:15; Matthew 18:16; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19). These two witnesses confirmed the Church of God.

The ability of these two witnesses is impressive:

If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want (Revelation 11:5–6).

The power of the two witnesses can be compared to the powers of Elijah and Moses. The two witnesses had the power to devour their enemies with fire as Elijah did from Mount Carmel (cf. 1 Kings 18:16–39). These men had the power to shut up the sky so that it would not rain as Elijah did (cf. 1 Kings 17:1–6). They had the power to turn water into blood as Moses did when he was in Egypt and to strike the earth with

every kind of plague (cf. Exodus 7:14–12:36). Remember it was on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Jesus was manifested to be the single Prophet, that Elijah and Moses came to visit with Him (cf. Matthew 17:1–3).

The power of the Church was manifested in fire, shutting up the sky, turning water to blood, and striking the earth with plagues. These verses confirm that whatever the Church needed to be victorious in any circumstance would be supplied. Whatever they needed, they would get. God would supply.

The two witnesses were unstoppable. They “*finished their testimony*” before anything else could happen. They were able to do all they had come to do before they could be attacked by the beast from the abyss. As this picture was viewed by the human eye during the first century, it must have seemed that the Church of Jesus Christ had lost. Note the human response from the inhabitants of the earth:

Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth (Revelation 11:7–10).

Remember that man does not have the ability to see things as they really are. This appeared to be a defeat when the beast, who was the devil himself, came up out of the abyss and

attacked the Church. He overpowered the two witnesses and killed them. Then he did not allow anyone to bury them. Their bodies laid in the streets so that the inhabitants of the earth could ridicule them for three and a half days. Their bodies were exposed in a city that had three names: Sodom, Egypt, and Jerusalem. Sodom would refer to the world's seduction power. Egypt would refer to the world's persecution. And Jerusalem would refer to the world's religion. These are the same three enemies that were introduced earlier. The devil uses these same tools over and over again to try to destroy the Church of God. He uses worldliness with all its seductive power and lust. In the case of John's visions, the nation of Rome was the power, the persecution, and the religion of the world seen in emperor worship.

The inhabitants of the earth were so glad these witnesses were dead they engaged in ridicule and mockery. They were so joyful they celebrated by giving each other gifts. The inhabitants of the earth gloated over the bodies of the witnesses "*... because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth.*" It is important to remember that in the Book of Revelation, the phrases "*those who live on the earth*" and "*the inhabitants of the earth*" refer to all those who are wicked. The wicked had been tormented by the preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. That was their reason for rejoicing — the witnesses of God were dead.

The Church of Jesus Christ today needs to arise and so live and proclaim God's Word that the wicked folk of the world are tormented by their godly lives and His Word. Often times the power of churches and congregations is not a tormenting power among the wicked. Churches sometimes turn down or even hide their witnessing power to the point that it does not offend anyone. A witness who does not offend can not be a true witness for God. God's witnesses should call all wicked

lifestyles into judgment. God's witness brings light into an area that the wicked want to be kept dark. The wicked do not want to be exposed for what they are by the light of God.

Remember the devil has nothing good to offer! When he hands anything good to a man or woman, it is not his; it is God's because all that is good belongs to God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The devil has nothing good to give anyone. That is what the two witnesses had exposed in their testimony — the devil had nothing to offer whether it be Roman power, Roman religion, or the worldly seduction of a Roman city. It might appear that Rome and the devil had won. It might appear that they had power since the two witnesses were dead, but this was definitely not the case. There was going to be a divine vindication from God:

*But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. At that very hour there was a severe earthquake and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven. **The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon** (Revelation 11:11–14).*

The second woe had already passed and the third woe would be coming soon. The witnesses were divinely vindicated — they were raised from the dead and were able to terrify the enemy. This is where victory has always been for the people of God. They are victorious in life even when it does not look like

a victory. When the witnesses of God were raised from the dead, when the cause for which they died was triumphant again, when they had been vindicated and proven to be victorious, that terrified the enemies of God. Not only were these two witnesses raised from the dead as Jesus had been, they were carried into heaven as Jesus had been. When Jesus was raised from the dead, He only appeared to His disciples. When He was carried into heaven, only the Apostles were watching. This vision is different. The enemies of God watched as God's witnesses were raised to be with Him. This is not a literal picture of witnesses being raised from the dead. This was a picture of the Church of God and the victory that awaits her. It was a picture of defeat for the enemies of God. The enemy was not only terrified, they were judged by an earthquake which killed seven thousand people and left the survivors terrified.

What is the lesson of the two witnesses? Keep on preaching! Keep on telling! Keep on witnessing the power of God! One day, even though it may take a while, one day God will make it known that the Kingdom belongs to His children. Even though His children may have to wear sack cloth for a period of time, one day the enemy will be defeated. When the children of God know that God is in control, then they can be ready for anything. In the first century, they were ready for the seventh trumpet no matter what it would bring. They knew that the seven thunders were going to come in judgment upon Rome. When the seventh trumpet sounded and the seven thunders proclaimed the final judgment from God, God's children knew that there was a little book that contained what was going to happen to the saints of God. No matter how bad the future might appear, and even though the Holy City had been trodden underfoot by the enemy, the enemy could not destroy the sanctuary or the people of God. No matter how

defeated the Gospel looked, it would win in the end. The witnesses of God will ultimately be triumphant. Now the children of God were prepared and protected!

The Seventh Trumpet

Revelation 11:15–19

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was [He does not say "and who is to come" this time maybe because He has already come], because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great — and for destroying those who destroy the earth." Then God's temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen the ark of his covenant. And there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.

The seventh trumpet was a loud judgment which will be depicted later as seven bowls of wrath. The seventh seal contained seven trumpets. The seventh trumpet will contain

seven bowls. It is seven seals, seven trumpets, and seven bowls. God's judgment is absolute, total, and irrevocable.

Just as Revelation 9:12 prepared the people for the sixth trumpet, there is preparation for this seventh trumpet. Revelation 11:14 is the preparatory verse for the seventh trumpet: "*The second woe has passed; the third woe is coming soon.*" These woes had been so bad that they had caused every person who was not sealed with the seal of the living God upon their forehead to cry out, "*Woe, Woe, Woe!*"

Before the seventh trumpet was blown in Revelation 11:15, the people had **seen** that God was ruling. Notice the evidence of His power again in Revelation 11:13. There was an earthquake and part of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed and those who survived were terrified. These survivors "*gave glory to the God of heaven*" because they had **seen** God's power. Then in Revelation 11:15–18:

*The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which **said**: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." And the twenty-four elders . . . fell on their faces and worshiped God, saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty . . . because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. The nations were angry; and your watch has come. The time has come for judging . . .*

The people saw God's ruling power and then the "*. . . loud voices . . . said . . . 'The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ . . .'*" Did the Kingdom already belong to God? It did. In Daniel 7 where one of Daniel's visions is recorded, there is a huge throne scene. On

that throne sits the God of the universe. He was already ruling. Around the throne are His people, who are also already ruling. At the end of Daniel's vision, he asked for an explanation to his dream:

I approached one of those standing there and asked him the true meaning of all this. So he told me and gave me the interpretation of these things: "The four great beasts are four kingdoms that will rise from the earth. But the saints of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever — yes, for ever and ever." . . . "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be handed over to the saints, the people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (Daniel 7:16–18, 27).

The kingdom had been “*handed over*” to the saints, but this was only a judicial giving. It was a judgment that had been made by God. The saints in the first century stood before the court and listened to Rome crying out that they were ruling the world. Rome thought they were all powerful and had conquered the world. Picture an aged saint, who has been battered and beaten, who thought that the saints had been given all the kingdoms under heaven. And yet Rome was still proclaiming that Caesar was Lord. Once the seventh trumpet had sounded, the children of God realized that the old saint was right. The saints who continued to preach in sack cloth and the saints who remained faithful to Jesus did indeed rule the world.

Revelation 11:16–18 actually tell how God ruled. He ruled over the nations who were angry. Not only did He rule over the nations to destroy all the enemies of God's people, He also

ruled over His own people. The time of judgment had come and God was going to judge the dead and reward His servants. He destroyed those who had destroyed the earth and He rewarded those who gave reverence to His name.

Isaiah 26:9 is one of my favorite verses. It says: *“My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.”* God has always been righteous, but when His judgments come, the enemy will be destroyed, the Church will be victorious, and all the people of the world will learn righteousness. Only then will the world know God is righteous. There is normally a great turn toward God and a great number of conversions whenever God shakes the earth with His judgment. God rules on behalf of His people. His people are the prophets, the servants of God, the saints, and all those who give reverence to His name. These people speak for God. They have been separated and they hold God in reverence. This is the three-fold description of God’s people: they speak for God, they hold God in reverence, and they are honored by God for doing that.

In Revelation 11:19 there is one last picture of the temple in heaven: *“Then God’s temple in heaven was opened, and within his temple was seen **the ark of his covenant**.”* It is important to note that this was not just *“the ark of **the** covenant”*; it was *“the ark of **his** covenant.”* Just as soon as John saw the open temple of God in heaven, John found out that God is faithful. John immediately saw *“the ark of **his** covenant.”* God is the faithful One. It is **His covenant**. In the Old Testament, the Israelites had the *“ark of **the** covenant”* to show that the Law was faithful. In the real temple of God, *“the ark of the covenant”* is really *“the ark of **his** covenant.”* God is faithful. Christians can see that throughout the Book of Revelation.

The temple was also opened so that God's children could see that His judgments are holy and righteous. There were “. . . *flashes of lightening, rumblings, peals of thunder, an earthquake and a great hailstorm.*” God is the Holy One of heaven. His judgments have begun. In Revelation 5 lightening, voices, and thunder came from the throne of God. In Revelation 8 fire was taken from the altar and cast down to the earth and there was lightening, voices, thunder, and a great earthquake. Each time judgment was introduced God was seen more powerful than before. Revelation 11 adds a great hailstorm to God's judgment figures. God is seen to be more powerful in each judgment.

At the end of Revelation 11 there is a breathing space. This is not a stop because the same story is continuing to flow, but God has finally said He is going to judge the enemy! Revelation 12 gives the basis for that judgment. It is a simple:

- God sent His Son to be born on the earth.
- The Son is seen even as a baby to be victorious.
- In victory the Son is carried to God and His throne.
- This victory infuriated the devil, who is truly the enemy of all enemies, to the point that in his fury he attacked everything around him.

In Revelation 12 alone, the devil will be defeated four times indicating that whoever serves the devil is serving a four-time loser. This is in contrast to the fact that whoever serves God is a four-time winner. Who would you prefer to trust in judgment? A four-time loser or a four-time winner? Trust God and He will give you peace.

The Great Battle

Revelation 12:1–13

Introduction and Review

The section of Scripture beginning with Revelation 12 was anticipated in Revelation 10 when John was told by a voice from heaven:

“Go, take the scroll that lies open in the hand of the angel who is standing on the sea and on the land.” So I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, “Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.” I took the little scroll from the angel’s hand and ate it. It tasted as sweet as honey in my mouth, but when I had eaten it, my stomach turned sour. Then I was told, “You must prophesy again about many peoples, nations, languages and kings” (Revelation 10:8–11).

The dramatic events in Revelation 12–22 contain the message of severe judgment which John was told to preach to the nations. The final and complete desolation of the oppressor signified by the seventh trumpet was about to be revealed.

The outward struggle of the Church with anti-Christian forces has already been revealed. That struggle resulted in

victory for Christ and His followers. This same theme continues, but with greater clarity showing that the conflict between the Church and the world really was only an outward manifestation of the war between Christ, the man-child, and Satan, the red dragon. John, the seer, was able to see what was going on behind the scenes. He was able to see causes and results that man can only guess. Despite the battles against other powers, despite hardships and losses, God in Christ and the people of God will win in the end. “The Great Battle” is the theme of Revelation 12:1–22:5. Try looking at Revelation 12:1–13:1 as a divine, dramatic play with three acts.

The First Act of the Drama — On Earth

Revelation 12:1–6

*A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a **woman** clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous **red dragon** with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the **woman** who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a son, a **male child**, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her **child** was snatched up to God and to his throne. The woman fled into the desert to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*

There are three major characters in this first act: “*a woman, an enormous red dragon,*” and “*a male child.*” The woman was clothed with light from her head to her feet. She was clothed with the sun as a dress. On her head was a crown of twelve stars and at her feet was the moon. She was clothed with heaven itself as Heaven’s bride. In the New Testament the saints are often seen as the bride of Christ (cf. Matthew 9:15, 25:1–10, Mark 2:19–20, Luke 5:34–35; John 3:27–30). These verses in Revelation show the radiance of God manifested in His bride. Old Testament Israel and Judah were also often described as God’s bride (cf. Isaiah 49:18, 61:10, 62:5; Jeremiah 2:32, 7:34, 16:9, 25:10, 33:11). In Micah 4 and 5 God’s bride was told to labor and bring forth the One who would come from Bethlehem: “*But you, Bethlehem . . . out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times*” (Micah 5:2). This woman represented God’s covenant people. She labored to bring forth the Messiah from the people of God. This was part of the Old Testament vision when the people of God would labor to bring forth the One who would bless all the world and bruise the devil’s head (cf. Genesis 3:15). In Revelation 12 this woman represented the people of God. She represented the people who would be victorious. That is why she wore a victory wreath of twelve stars. She is mentioned first and last in Revelation 12. She played a prominent part in this vision, but she was not the central figure.

The “*woman . . . was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth.*” This woman has been pregnant since the Garden of Eden when God said, “*And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel*” (Genesis 3:15). The devil has known since that time that One from the woman’s seed would bring an end to his

power on the earth. In Revelation 12 the long awaited and greatly anticipated moment occurred: *She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne*" (Revelation 12:5).

In Revelation 12:3–4 the "*enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads*" is introduced. He is described as a powerful enemy. When he wagged his tail, he swept a third of the stars out of the sky. He was the color of blood which speaks of the ferocity with which he could destroy men. In John 8:44 Jesus described "*the devil*" as one who "*. . . was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*" He had seven heads to signify that he possessed all the authority he needed to execute his plans. Each head had a crown and ten horns. Ten is the number for worldly completion signifying that he ruled over all the worldly kingdoms.

Satan was called the "*prince of this world*" by Jesus in John 12:31 as He spoke to His disciples about the kind of death He was going to die. Jesus also used this phrase to describe Satan in John 14:30 and John 16:11. The devil was never able to gain any power over Jesus because Jesus never sinned. The Apostle Paul called Satan "*the god of this age*" when he wrote to the Corinthians saying: "*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ*" (2 Corinthians 4:3–4). The devil is a deceiver. He does not want mankind to see the glory of the Gospel. He has worldly power as "*the god of this age.*"

Satan had "*seven crowns.*" It is interesting to note that there are two different Greek words used for "*crown.*" The

“crowns” that were on Satan’s heads are the word **diadem**, which is the word for a ruling crown. In Revelation 12:1 the “*crown of twelve stars*” on the woman’s head is the word **stephanos**, which is the victory crown. Hers was the crown of victory that would never know disgrace. His crowns were only a sign of royalty within the Book of Revelation. The **stephanos**, the victory crown, will never know defeat. The devil’s **diadem**, the ruling crown, will go down in total and absolute defeat.

Take note of the dragon’s tail. He wagged his tail and destroyed a third of the stars in the heavens. His tail could be compared to the tails of the locusts and the tails of the horses in the fifth and sixth trumpets. It was an instrument used for destruction. In one of Daniel’s visions, he saw a ram and a goat and “*out of one of them came another horn which started small but grew in power . . . It grew until it reached the host of the heavens, and it threw some of the starry host down to the earth and trampled on them*” (Daniel 8:9–10). This was not literal destruction. It is all part of the picture that says this was an extremely powerful enemy.

Notice the position of this dragon: “*The dragon stood in front of the woman . . . so that he might devour her child the moment it was born*” (Revelation 12:4b). Once again, this refers back to Genesis 3:15 and forward from that time in history. Satan has always been trying to destroy the woman’s seed. What a coward this devil/dragon is. He was ready to attack a very pregnant woman and waiting to devour a defenseless baby the moment he was born. He has no mercy and no concern for anything except his own selfish desire to rule the world.

Throughout Old Testament history, Satan tried to prevent the birth of the Redeemer. He always had another “*dragon/monster/serpent*” standing by. Pharaoh is called a “*great monster*” in Ezekiel 29:3. Nebuchadnezzar is called a

“serpent” in Jeremiah 51:34. In one critical moment, the seed line was reduced to a little boy only one year old, named Joash (cf. 2 Kings 11:1–3). In the New Testament, when Jesus was born, Satan used King Herod to try to destroy Him (cf. Matthew 2). Satan thought he had succeeded when he used Judas to betray the Lord (cf. Matthew 26:14–16, 47–68). Jesus was handed over to be crucified (cf. Matthew 27:26), but the cross was actually Satan’s defeat (cf. Revelation 12:11). However, Satan was not the central figure of this vision either.

The central figure of the vision in Revelation 12 is introduced in verse 5: *“She gave birth to a son, a male child, who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter. And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne.”* The fact that John says, *“a son, a male child”* is not repetitious, it is simply emphatic. Jesus spoke of a woman who was in labor and felt sorrow at the pain she was going through, but once she had delivered the child, she forgot the anguish because a child had been born into the world. In the original language, she forgot her anguish *“for joy that a man is born into the world”* (cf. John 16:21). This *“male child”* was born as a baby, but He is going to grow to be a Man who will one day exercise great power. This Child is truly God. He will be the One who rules the nations with a rod of iron (cf. Revelation 2:27, 12:5, 19:15; Psalm 2:6–9; Numbers 24:17; Hebrews 1:18).

Jesus came upon a white charger of victory (cf. Revelation 19:11–16). He had *“. . . a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron scepter.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty”* (Revelation 19:15). The baby Boy born to the woman in Revelation 12 is God, the judge. He was *“snatched up to God and to his throne.”*

The woman was protected and cared for by God in the desert for 1,260 days. This woman was not the first woman

God had cared for in the desert. He also cared for Hagar in the desert (cf. Genesis 21:8–20). God has cared for many of His persecuted people in the “desert times” of their lives. Note that this is the first battle lost by the devil in Revelation 12. He was not able to devour the man child and the woman fled to a place that had been prepared for her by God.

Act Two of the Drama — War in Heaven

Revelation 12:7–12

And there was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down — that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: “Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

At this point the scene in Revelation changes to a “war in heaven.” The war was between Michael and his angels and the

dragon and his angels. Michael is the archangel who serves as the great prince who protects God's children (cf. Jude 9; Daniel 10:12–21, 12:1). The war was between heaven's forces and hell's forces, everything that was good fought against all that was evil (cf. Matthew 25:41; 2 Peter 2:4). Victory was so sure in the Book of Revelation that this battle was never recorded. The battle was announced, and then victory was declared: ". . . *he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. The great dragon was hurled down . . . to the earth, and his angels with him.*" Satan was totally defeated. He was not strong enough even with all his heads, horns, crowns, tail, and angels. Michael and his angels were more powerful than the devil. They took the dragon and his angels and hurled them to the earth.

Note the five-fold description of the enemy. First, he was called a "*dragon*" which indicated that he devoured his enemies. He was called a "*serpent*" to indicate that he was a trickster. He was called the "*devil*" which says that he was an accuser. He was called "*Satan*" which says that he was an adversary. He was called a deceiver, because he is a "*liar*." He stood for everything that is evil and difficult to overcome. Michael and his angels were able to cast the devil and all his angels down to the earth. That is defeat number two making the devil a two-time loser.

Revelation 12:10–12 records "*a loud voice in heaven.*" Earlier in Revelation 11:15–18, the "*loud voices in heaven*" had declared "*the kingdom of the world **has become** the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ.*" This was not the beginning of God's Kingdom, His salvation, or His power. It was simply a judicial announcement. Satan's activity continually attacks and accuses the children of God. He can accuse, but he does not have a kingdom or any power of his own. He cannot offer salvation to anyone. All of these things

belong to God. The “loud voice” proclaimed: “*Now have come the **salvation** and the **power** and the **kingdom of our God**, and the authority of his Christ. . . .*” (Revelation 12:10). The accuser has been hurled down. He has been defeated.

Next John heard a description of the victory over the devil. Remember Jesus speaking about the “**overcomers**” in Revelation 2 and 3:

“ . . . to him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life . . . He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death . . . To him who overcomes, I will give some of the hidden manna . . . To him who overcomes . . . I will give authority over the nations . . . He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white . . . To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

The Son of man defeated the devil, then the angels defeated him. What about the saints who were being attacked by his forces? What was necessary for the saints to be able to overcome the devil? Revelation 12:11 is the description of God’s victorious forces over the devil: “*They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*” First, the saints needed “*the blood of the Lamb*” to overcome. Jesus was dead — His finished work on the cross enabled the saints to overcome. The saints were redeemed “*. . . with the precious blood of Christ . . .*” (1 Peter 1:18). Revelation 1:5 says, “*. . . To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.*” Ananias told Saul, who later became Paul the

Apostle, that he needed to wash away his sins (cf. Acts 22:16). Later Paul told the Roman brethren:

. . . all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death . . . buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life (Romans 6:3–5).

When someone is immersed into the death of Christ, he is then raised into the life of Christ. John said, *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin”* (1 John 1:7). Nothing can wash away the sins of man except the blood of Jesus. The saints were able to be victorious over the devil because they were redeemed and purified by the blood of the Lamb.

Second, the saints were able to be victorious over the devil *“by the word of their testimony.”* They did not shrink from death and were not afraid to tell others about the Lamb. Paul urged Timothy, *“And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”* (2 Timothy 2:2). He also told the Romans, *“I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile”* (Romans 1:16). Paul was eager to preach the Gospel to all mankind. Telling others about Jesus is one of the things that enables man to overcome the devil. The Gospel is a sweet story, but it is only good news when it is told to others.

The saints who were able to overcome were the ones who did not love life. They were victorious over Satan. A person who wants to be victorious over the devil must not love his

own life. He must choose to follow Jesus. Jesus told his disciples: *“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me”* (Luke 9:23). Jesus told the large crowds who were following Him the same thing: *“And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple”* (Luke 14:27). Paul admonished the Romans:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1–2).

Christians need to present their bodies as living sacrifices so they can overcome the devil by approving what is right.

Revelation 12:1–12 is a great section of Scripture that tells how Jesus won. It tells how the angels of heaven will always win. It tells the saints how they will win by remaining faithful to Christ. The *“loud voice in heaven”* demanded a response: *“Therefore, rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them!”* (Revelation 12:12a). The *“heaven-dwellers,”* those who had overcome *“. . . by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony . . .”* had a reason to rejoice. They were those who had chosen to follow Jesus and those who did not love their own lives. They rejoiced because the devil had lost another battle. His third defeat was to the saints around the throne.

The response from the *“earth-dwellers”* was very different. They did not rejoice. The *“voice”* said, *“. . . But woe to the*

earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short (Revelation 12:12b). The “earth-dwellers” had three reasons to mourn: first, the devil had come to live among them. Anywhere Satan lives there will be trouble. Second, he was “*filled with fury.*” The devil was filled with wrath. Third, the devil knew his time was short. His head had been bruised and his power had been taken away by Jesus on the cross. The devil was unable to defeat the saints. He was a three-time loser.

Act Three of the Drama — Renewed Conflict on Earth

Revelation 12:13–13:1

When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the desert, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent’s reach. Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus. And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.

This is a description of yet another conflict on earth. First, there was an attempt on the woman. The dragon pursued the woman trying to destroy her. For her protection she was given “*two wings of a great eagle.*” In the Old Testament God spoke

to Moses on Mount Sinai giving instructions for the people of Israel as they were in the desert, *"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"* (Exodus 19:4). God told Isaiah: *"... those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint"* (Isaiah 40:31). The wings of an eagle are simply a descriptive way to represent God's strength. The woman was given the strength of God.

The woman was carried to a place that had been prepared for her in the desert. God prepared a place for her with nourishment and protection. She was there for three and a half years. This was the same amount of time that Elijah was persecuted and protected (cf. 1 Kings 12:1–19:21). The *"serpent"* tried to overtake the woman by spewing water like a river from his mouth. Once again there are parallel passages in the Old Testament in which water is a symbol of ungodliness. In Psalm 18:4 *"torrents"* of water are seen as ungodliness. In Psalm 124: 4–5 flood waters are a symbol of the destruction of ungodly men. In Isaiah 8:5–8 *"the mighty floodwaters of the River"* are a symbol of the destruction brought by Assyria. In Isaiah 57:19–20 *"the tossing sea"* represented *"the wicked."* Water was used as a symbol of the devil's wicked power.

However, there was help for the woman, *"... the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon has spewed out of his mouth"* (Revelation 12:16). Notice here that the devil failed in his attack upon the woman. That was defeat number four. He was a four-time loser in Revelation 12. Why would anyone fear or serve a four-time loser? That is ridiculous. The devil had plans for a future attack. He was furious about losing. The Scripture says, *"Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to war"*

against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Revelation 12:17).

The woman’s first child was Jesus. Who were “*the rest of her offspring*”? This passage says the woman’s “*offspring*” were those who had been obedient to God and those who held to the testimony of Jesus. These “*offspring*” were the overcomers from Revelation 2 and 3. The “*offspring*” were the overcomers from Revelation 12:11. The devil “. . . *went off to war against . . .*” those who had already been declared victorious over him.

Notice Revelation 13:1, “*And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea.*” The sea is going to be a source of help for Satan. He was a four-time loser, but he is not a quitter. Even though he knew he had been defeated, he still continued to war against the people of God. Even when he knew there was no hope, he warred on. All Christians should refuse to serve him because he has been declared a loser by God. The Christian must pledge to obey God and to hold to the testimony of Jesus. In that pledge and testimony, Christians are more than conquerors through Him who loves His children:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose . . . in all things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:28, 37).

There is peace and hope in believing in this promise and believing in Jesus, who sustains the promise.

The Forces of Evil

Review of Revelation 4–12

Revelation is such an unusual book of pictures that it is important to keep a running summary in mind of the series of visions and how they fit into the book as a whole. A short review of Revelation 4–12 will help set the picture for Revelation 13.

Revelation 4 is the great throne scene with the Eternal One sitting on the throne. The lesson from this chapter is simple: God rules all things whether that fact is evident or not.

Revelation 5 is the chapter where the slain Lamb came to serve the One who was sitting on the throne. The slain Lamb took the scroll and the twenty-four elders fell down before Him. The lesson is that the Lamb is worthy and the future of the Church is in His hands.

Revelation 6 is the opening of the first six seals. They reveal:

- Jesus is the Conqueror.
- The devil will empower the rider on the red horse to attack the people of God.
- There will be economic discrimination and famine afflicting the people of God with hunger.
- Physical death will be used against the people of God, but death and hades cannot affect those who have been sealed.
- Souls of the saints who had been slain for the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus were underneath the altar

crying out to God, *“How long . . . until you judge the inhabitants of the earth . . .”* (Revelation 6:10a).

- An announcement was made using the language of the Old Testament Day of the LORD telling the people of God that judgment would come quickly. It would be severe and all the people of the world would try to hide from the Lamb and the One who sat on the throne. They would beg to be buried by the mountains as they cried out, *“For the great day of their wrath has come, and **who can stand?**”* (Revelation 6:17).

Revelation 7 answers the question, *“**Who can stand?**”* Only the saints can stand in the day of God’s judgment. Before judgment begins all the saints will be sealed with the seal of the living God upon their foreheads. Saints/Christians belong to God. Nothing that belongs to God can be harmed. Through all the trials and judgments, the saints will stand victoriously before the throne of God. They will have all their needs met and have no sorrows as they are led by Jesus.

Revelation 8–9 is the sounding of the seven trumpets as the seventh seal is broken. The seven trumpets will bring the downfall of the Roman Empire through natural calamity and internal and external forces.

Revelation 10 reveals that the sealed servants of God will continue to preach the Word of God. The message will bring sorrow to those who hate and refuse it.

Revelation 11 is the measuring of the temple. Although the Holy City was going to be trampled and the people of God persecuted, they would not be annihilated because the enemy cannot get to the heart of the Church. Satan could not attack the sanctuary because it was protected by God. God gave power to His two witnesses to be able to preach in sackcloth for 1,260 days. Their message was victorious and successful, but when they had finished preaching, the two witnesses were attacked and killed. No one was allowed to bury them and they lay in the

streets of the city figuratively called, “*Sodom and Egypt*” (Revelation 11:8). These names represent persecution, immorality, and false religions. In Revelation 11:15 the seventh trumpet was blown and God said, “The end is coming. I am going to destroy the Roman Empire. “

Revelation 12 is the vision of Satan as “*an enormous red dragon*” standing right in front of a pregnant woman who is about to give birth. He stood directly in front of her so that he could devour her child as soon as He was born. This is in fulfillment of the prophesy from Genesis 3:15: “*And I will put enmity between you [Satan/dragon/serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head and you will strike his heel.*”

The parallel story of John’s vision was fulfilled in the New Testament Gospel accounts when the child Jesus was born. He lived a miraculous life that began to bruise the devil’s head. Jesus died and was caught up to God and His throne. That was the ascension of Christ. The devil could no longer attack Him, so he turned to attack the Church as a whole represented by the woman. She was carried away into the wilderness, protected by God. That was fulfilled in the Book of Acts and the Epistles in the New Testament.

The devil was furious that he could not destroy the woman, so he turned to make war against the rest of her seed. Her firstborn was Jesus. The “*rest of her offspring —[are] those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus*” (Revelation 12:17). The “*rest of her offspring*” are individual Christians from every age to follow.

That is a quick overview of chapters 6–14 in this study book. Revelation 12 presents a picture from creation until this present day. The picture covers the time period from the sin of Adam and Eve and the announcement of the Seed in Genesis 3 to the attacks of Satan upon New Testament Christians in Revelation and forward to this present day.

The Sea Beast

Revelation 13:1–10

And the dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. He had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on his horns, and on each head a blasphemous name. The beast I saw resembled a leopard, but had feet like those of a bear and a mouth like that of a lion. The dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority. One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed. The whole world was astonished and followed the beast. Men worshiped the dragon because he had given authority to the beast, and they also worshiped the beast and asked, "Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?" The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months. He opened his mouth to blaspheme God, and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. He was given power to make war against the saints and to conquer them. And he was given authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world. He who has an ear, let him hear. If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

John saw a beast coming out of the sea. This was the first helper of Satan, the civil persecuting power of Rome. In present day it would be any civil power that tries to harm or hinder the work of the Lord or anyone who tries to kill the people of God. In this context the sea represents the place where the wicked people live (cf. Isaiah 17:12; Revelation 17:1, 15). This beast was rising up out of the wickedness of the world. The word “*beast*” defines his nature as a brutal, savage, ferocious beast in Thayer’s Dictionary. He would be something that would cause fear when a person saw it.

The beast had “*ten horns*” which conveys the fact that he had amazing power (cf. Deuteronomy 33:17). The number ten is a symbol of worldly completion meaning that all worldly power belonged to him. He had “*seven heads with ten crowns on his horns*” which is a symbol of his authority. Looking at Genesis 3:15, it is evident that the head is superior to the heel. Jesus “. . . *will crush your [Satan’s] head, and you will strike his heel.*” A person can live without his foot, but he cannot live without his head, which is the center of life. This is also evident knowing that Christ is the head of the Church and has all authority over the Church (cf. Ephesians 5:23). The beast had total worldly power that had been given to him (cf. Revelation 13:5, 7 — “. . . *was given power to make war*”). Remember Jesus’ response to Pilate in John 19:8–11:

When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid . . . “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer. “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?” Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin.”

Satan has no power except the power that has been given to him by God. That is an important lesson from the Book of Revelation for the Christian to remember. Satan really has nothing to offer. If he holds anything in his hand, it is because it was given to him by God. Christians need to remember the true source of all things.

Again one of Satan's helpers had "*ten crowns*." The Greek word used here is *diadem* signifying a kingly nature. Satan and his beasts have never been given the *stephanos* or victory crown. They only wear the crown that says they are temporary royalty until the day comes when their crowns will turn to dust and their reigns will end in shame. Satan and his beasts do reign, but it is a worldly reign, not divine.

Satan is God's opposition. He is the enemy. The "*beast coming out of the sea . . . had . . . seven heads . . . and on each head a blasphemous name*" (Revelation 13:1). Satan was openly opposing God by speaking out against Him. This was a fearsome beast who was like a leopard, but had the feet of a bear and the mouth of a lion. A leopard is swift and cruel. A bear might be slow, but he would be relentless and crushing. A lion is symbolically the strongest of the beasts and considered to be the king of the jungle.

The "*dragon gave the beast his power and his throne and great authority*" (Revelation 13:2b). This means that all the devil's power was centered in the "*beast*." This is an important point — if the "*dragon*" was defeated, then the devil would be defeated also. However, this "*beast*" was hard to kill: "*One of the heads of the beast seemed to have had a fatal wound, but the fatal wound had been healed . . .*" (Revelation 13:3). Think about the Roman Empire during John's time. The fatal wound could refer to the death of Nero at which time persecution ceased. The fact that the wound was healed could then apply to the fact that persecution began again in the reign of Domitian.

Whether or not this vision applies to Nero and Domitian is not important here. It is important to remember that this beast was hard to kill. He may have once looked defeated, but he had been healed and was able to return to the battle.

This beast was world-wide: *“The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.”* Revelation 13:1–3 gives a very detailed description of the beast. There are ten different points made in these three verses:

- He came *“out of the sea.”*
- His nature was that of *“a beast”* — brutal, savage, ferocious.
- He had total power as shown by his *“ten horns.”*
- He had complete authority as shown by his *“seven heads.”*
- He was temporarily royal as shown by his *“seven crowns.”*
- He openly opposed God with *“blasphemous names.”*
- He was fearsome: *“leopard, bear, lion.”*
- He had been given the devil’s power, throne, and authority.
- He had *“a fatal wound . . . had healed.”*
- *“The whole world was astonished and followed the beast.”*

The true power of the beast is portrayed in Revelation 13:4–8. The whole world worshiped the *“beast”* equally with the *“dragon.”* This is another important point to remember. Satan did not have any power except that which had been given to him by God. Satan and the dragon were the same, but the dragon had given his power, throne, and authority to the *“beast coming out of the sea.”* Not only did the whole world recognize the dragon and the beast as equals, but so did God since He was the source of their power. The dragon treated the beast from the sea as his equal. If the beast was destroyed, then the dragon would be destroyed, Satan would be defeated. The beast from

the sea appeared to be unique and indestructible. Mankind saw the beast as superior even to God. They “. . . asked, ‘Who is like the beast? Who can make war against him?’” (Revelation 13:4).

The beast only appeared to be superior and unique and indestructible. He “. . . was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies and to exercise his authority for forty-two months” (Revelation 13:5). God had given him the mouth and the power for a limited time. God gave him:

. . . authority over every tribe, people, language and nation. All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast — all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world” (Revelation 13:7–8).

Notice who is worshiping the beast. It is all the inhabitants of the earth. They are the ones whose names have **not** been written in the book of life. Christians **will not** be the ones who submit to the earth beast, because they are those whose names have been written in the Lamb’s book of life. Christians are those who belong to the Lamb.

Christians need to continue to listen to God. He says: “*He who has an ear, let him hear.*” It is important to know the destiny of the sea beast. Remember whatever happens to this beast would also happen to the dragon. Revelation 13:10 says:

If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints.

This is like what Jesus told Peter: “*Put your sword back in its place . . . for all who draw the sword will die by the sword*” (Matthew 26:52). This enemy, with its world-wide civil power

and the intent to wipe out anyone with God's name on their foreheads and kill anyone who was following the Lamb, would die as they had fought — in captivity and by the sword. The saints of the first century needed to have *“patient endurance and faithfulness.”*

Revelation 13:1–10 is a parallel vision to the one that Daniel had concerning the four beasts in Daniel 7:1–28. That passage of Scripture makes it plain that the beast in Revelation 13 is the fourth beast seen in Daniel 7:7–14, 23–28. The four great beasts were four kingdoms that would rise from the earth. The Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek, and Roman Empires were these four kingdoms. They all had one purpose — to destroy the people of God. The sea beast in Revelation 13:1 and the fourth beast from Daniel were the same. They represented the Roman Empire, *“... different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth, trampling it down and crushing it”* (Daniel 7:23). This beast was going to devour the whole earth. Reading Daniel 7:26–28 the vision says that this beast would have his power taken away and be completely destroyed forever. The saints knew that the time of power for the sea beast was limited. He would be destroyed along with the devil.

The Earth Beast

Revelation 13:11–18

Then I saw another beast, coming out of the earth. He had two horns like a lamb, but he spoke like a dragon. He exercised all the authority of the first beast on his behalf, and made the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose fatal wound had been healed. And he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he was given power to do on behalf of the first beast, he deceived

the inhabitants of the earth. He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. He also forced everyone, small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead, so that no one could buy or sell unless he had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of his name. This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is man's number. His number is 666.

The origin of this second beast was the earth. He was not divine. He came from the earth which meant he had a human origin. The devil's second helper represented the anti-Christian religion of the Roman Empire. The "heaven-dwellers" had nothing to fear from this beast.

The nature of the beast can be seen in the fact that he had two horns like a lamb. He had an innocent, perhaps even religious look, but he was a hypocrite. He claimed to be the religion of gods, but he spoke like a dragon. He was a religious liar who threatened those who did not believe his lies with death. He talked religion, but his character was such that he was ready to devour those who refused to worship the image of the first beast.

The key phrase in this passage of Scripture is:

He ordered them to set up an image in honor of the beast who was wounded by the sword and yet lived. He was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that it could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed (Revelation 13:14b–15).

The function of the second beast was to make everyone on the earth worship the first beast. The first beast was the military civil power of Rome, parallel to Egypt in Revelation 11:8. The second beast was the religious hypocrite who perverted religion parallel to Jerusalem, the great city in Revelation 11:8. His function was not just in the city of Rome. He was to be the religion for all the world. He wanted all the world to bow down to his religion.

Notice the powers of this beast: *“he performed great and miraculous signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to earth in full view of men . . . he deceived the inhabitants of the earth . . .”* (Revelation 13:13–14). This beast had the power to do miraculous signs which enabled him to deceive the whole world. If his miracles were actual miracles, they would have been:

. . . the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved” (2 Thessalonians 2:9–10).

Paul wrote about the *“coming of the lawless one”* in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Men did not love the truth, but loved error. God sent a powerful delusion so they would believe a lie and be condemned. People were condemned because they believed lying wonders. Historical records about some of the Roman priests during the first century make it clear they were professional con men. They could perform all kinds of tricks that looked miraculous. They were experts of ventriloquism and appeared to make dead people talk. Whether the miracles of the second beast were real or just part of the symbolism in Revelation is not important. It is important to remember that this beast had great powers to deceive.

The earth beast also had the power to enforce: *“he ordered them to set up an image . . . he also forced everyone . . . to*

receive a mark on his right hand or on his forehead . . .” (Revelation 13:14b, 16). His power was used to force all the world to bow down before Caesar. Emperor worship was not intended originally to be a test of religious fidelity because most of the Caesars were smart enough to know they were not God. However, a few of the perverts actually did believe they were gods and seriously expected the people to worship them. Normally, this was just a test of political loyalty. A person could sprinkle a little incense and agree that Caesar was Lord to indicate that he was loyal to the Roman Empire. The Christians during this time refused to participate in that kind of ceremony. Christians pledged their allegiance to only one Lord and refused to bow before Caesar.

The earth beast used his power to force everyone to wear a mark enrolling them in a system that allowed only the people who had “*the mark*” to buy and sell. They probably could not hold a job unless they had a mark on their right hand symbolizing their power and a mark on their forehead symbolizing their intellect. “The mark of the beast” said they served the Roman Empire and believed the emperor was divine.

The true nature of the earth beast is seen Revelation 13:18: “*This calls for wisdom. If anyone has insight, let him calculate the number of the beast, for it is **man’s number**. His number is 666.*” Seven is God’s number. The number six (6) is only one away from seven. Sixty-six (66) is eleven away and six hundred sixty-six (666) is one hundred eleven away. The harder man tried to become God, the further away he got from God. Remember that anyone who served the devil was serving a four-time loser. Anyone who bowed down to the earth beast was bowing before a three-time loser — “666” is the number of man trying to be God and moving steadily further and further away from Him.

Conclusion

The enemies of the Lord and the Church were very, very powerful. The “*dragon*,” Satan, had the help of two very powerful beasts. The sea beast represented Rome and all of its military armor. The earth beast represented Rome and its false religions. Is the slain Lamb any match for this unholy trio? The world would have said there was no way the Lamb could win against these invincible powers. It must have seemed as if their powers would be impossible for anyone to endure. That is the way Christians look at the world sometimes. The people of the world with all their power, money, control, and political thrust sometimes appear to be unreachable. Sometimes Christians look at the world and think there is nothing they can do to make a difference.

In the first century as the saints faced the sea beast with his power to persecute and the earth beast with his false religions, some of the Christians died. There was economic pressure, temptations, and deception, but through it all the Lamb expected His followers to remain faithful. They would have been tempted to give into the pressure of worshiping Caesar. They probably wondered whether or not it mattered if they were faithful to Jesus or not.

Christians have faced the same problems throughout the ages. It is still a problem for people today. The temptation is not in fully denying God; it is in compromising His place in the Christian’s life. God does not want to be the first among many. He wants to be THE ONLY ONE. He must be the One God. His power should be the only power a Christian fears. If Christ is truly Lord, then He is the only Lord.

The Roman Empire ceased to exist a long time ago. All that was once Rome is now dead in the dust. However, the sea beast and the earth beast are still a part of this world. There are still civil powers and anti-Christian religions that wage war against the saints. The saints today need the comfort of knowing that God is more powerful than any civil nation. He is the only God. They need the comfort of knowing that the Lamb

will be victorious. That is what Revelation 14 is about. That chapter discusses the 144,000 who stand with the Lamb victorious over the devil's forces and the devil himself. God is going to give His children peace and comfort.

The Lamb and the 144,000

Review and Introduction

In Revelation 11 the two strong witnesses of God were killed in the streets. Satan attacked the woman and her offspring in Revelation 12. Two beasts, one from the sea and one from the land, came to aid the dragon in his assault on the people of God in Revelation 13. How could any of these events encourage the people of God to follow the Lamb? It is important to look on the other side of each event. The two witnesses were killed, but then they were resurrected, ascended to heaven, and received glory as their enemies looked on. Satan attacked the woman and her child, but the woman and the child were saved. Heaven was secure. The sea beast, the civil persecuting power of Rome, and the earth beast, the false religion of Rome, threatened to kill anyone who would not worship the image of the beasts. What can a Christian do when he seems to be all alone and evil is running rampant? Look on the other side! The other side of Revelation 13 with the sea beast and the earth beast is Revelation 14.

John looked and he saw the Lamb. The Lamb was not being overwhelmed by the beasts. He was not defeated. He was standing on Mount Zion with 144,000 who had His name and the Father's name written on their foreheads. The 144,000 who were the redeemed were not defeated. They were the ones who had been sealed in Revelation 7. They were singing a new song of victory. In Revelation 14 there will be three angels who will proclaim the Gospel, the fall of Babylon, and the fate of emperor worship. Another angel will compare this coming judgment with the blessings of those who will die in the Lord.

The coming judgment is pictured as a harvest; the earth is going to be harvested. Revelation 14 tells all Christians that any suffering is going to be small in light of the coming glory with God. It is as Paul told the Roman brethren: *“I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed”* (Romans 8:18–19).

The Lamb and the 144,000

Revelation 14:1–5

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

John saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion. Standing with Him were 144,000. Where are the 144,000? They were **with the Lamb!** He was introduced in Revelation 5. He is the victorious One. He has never been defeated. He has conquered again and again and He will go forth to conquer yet again.

The Lamb and the 144,000 were standing on Mount Zion. What a powerful history that mountain has in God’s word. In

its origin, it was a little hill within the city of Jerusalem. Think about all the history. Think about what the people of God would picture when they heard the words “*Mount Zion*.” Look at 2 Samuel 5:6–10:

The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.” They thought, “David cannot get in here.” Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David. On that day, David said, “Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those ‘lame and blind’ who are David’s enemies.” That is why they say, “The ‘blind and lame’ will not enter the palace.” David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward. And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.

Mount Zion started out as a little dirt hill where the Jebusites built a fortress they thought was impregnable. They thought there was no way David could capture their fortress. However, David and Joab conquered it, took up residence in the fortress, and called it the City of David. Solomon also made it his dwelling place (cf. 1 Kings 8:1). The Temple was built on Mount Moriah, but Solomon lived where his father David had lived on Mount Zion. In the beginning Mount Zion was simply a place where the king of God lived, but very quickly it began to symbolically represent the entire city of Jerusalem: “*The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, ‘I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill.’*” (Psalm 2:4–6). David wrote about the holy hill of Zion in Psalms 15:1: “*LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who*

may live on your holy hill?” In Psalm 48 David wrote about Zion as the city where God lives:

Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in the city of our God, his holy mountain. It is beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth. Like the utmost heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the Great King. God is in her citadels; he has shown himself to be her fortress (Psalm 48:1–3).

At this time in Israelite history, Mount Zion was not only symbolic of the city of Jerusalem, it was also symbolic of the fact that God dwelt in the city of Jerusalem. In Psalm 132:13–14 David wrote: “*For the LORD has chosen Zion, he has desired it for his dwelling: ‘This is my resting place for ever and ever; here I will sit enthroned, for I have desired it.’*”

Isaiah saw the Law going forth from Zion:

In the last days the mountain of the LORD’s temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths.” The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore (Isaiah 2:2–4).

The prophet Zechariah also spoke about Zion:

Again the word of the LORD Almighty came to me. This is what the LORD Almighty says: “I am very

jealous for Zion; I am burning with jealousy for her.” This is what the LORD says: “I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD Almighty will be called the Holy Mountain” (Zechariah 8:1–3).

“Zion” within the Old Testament progressed from being a dirt hill, then the City of David, the City of God, the place where God dwelt, and finally the place where God would come and dwell eternally with His people. In the New Testament the writer of Hebrews wrote:

But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel (Hebrews 12:22–24).

Notice that the writer of Hebrews talked about the fact that God had come down upon Mount Sinai with thunder and lightening upon a mountain that could not be touched. Now He has come to “Mount Zion” and the people have come to “Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God.” There are thousands and thousands of angels. The Church of the firstborn is there. God is there. “Zion” is where the righteous men of all time will dwell. Jesus the mediator is there. There is the sprinkled blood and a better Word. This is prophetic of the Church. It is where God and all His people live. Paul told the Corinthian church even with their imperfections: “Don’t **you** know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you?” (1 Corinthians

3:16). Paul used the plural word for “you” referring to the Church. The word he used for “*temple*” means the Holy of Holies. He was saying “*You*,” the church in Corinth, are the Holy of Holies where God Himself lives. Paul told the Ephesians: “*In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a **holy temple** in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a **dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit***” (Ephesians 2:21–22).

The 144,000 standing with the Lamb on Mount Zion were with Jesus in the Holy City that God protects. They were standing in the city where God lives. They were the ones who had the name of the Lamb, Jesus, and the name of the Father, Jehovah, written on their foreheads. This was not like the “mark of the beast” because the 144,000 were not property, they were sons. They wore the name of their Father because they belonged to God as children of God.

The 144,000 were singing a “*new song*.” It had the sound of rushing waters and the peal of thunder. It was a sound like harpists playing. The song they were singing had never been sung before. It was a heavenly song of victory. They sang before God and the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn this spiritual song except those who had been redeemed. They were singing an eternal song that only those who had been sealed by God could sing. What a beautiful scene!

Who were these 144,000? If they were on Mount Zion, then they are the Church. If they were with the Lamb, they are followers of the Lamb. If they were named by Jesus and Jehovah, they belong to God. If they are singing, they are joyous servants of God.

Describing the 144,000

Notice the detailed description of the 144,000. There has been a lot of controversy about exactly who these 144,000

really are. Some believe they are only an elite few who had been marked to be specially blessed among all the people of God. Some believe these were the heavenly group and not the earthly group. Some believe they represent all the redeemed. Revelation 14:3b–5:

. . . the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless.

Most importantly remember that this group was numbered “144,000” in a very symbolic book. There is no reason to take the 144,000 literally in the midst of all the other symbols. There is a picture of 144,000 people standing with the Lamb. The “Lamb” is symbolic of Jesus, so who do the “144,000” represent?

The Redeemed

The group standing with the Lamb had been redeemed from the earth. They had been purchased. Look at 1 Peter. Peter was writing this book “*To God’s elect, strangers in the world scattered throughout . . . who have been chosen . . .*” (1 Peter 1:1–2). The chosen, the elect ones had been scattered throughout the earth in Peter’s day. Peter said:

*For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were **redeemed** from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect (1 Peter 1:18–19).*

Peter said those who are redeemed have been redeemed by the “*precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*” He referred to Jesus as a Lamb just as Revelation has.

In Acts 20 Paul spoke to the Ephesian elders for the last time. He said, “*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made your overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood*” (Acts 20:28). The Ephesian elders were instructed to “. . . watch over . . . all the flock . . . the church of God, which he bought with his own blood.” Paul was telling the Ephesian elders how precious the Church of God was. It had been purchased with Christ’s blood.

Who are the people who were purchased in Revelation 14:3–4? John said:

*. . . the 144,000 who had been **redeemed** from the earth. These are those who did not defile themselves . . . for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb . . . **They were purchased** from among men.”*

It would be logical to believe that the “144,000 . . . who were purchased from among men” in Revelation 14 would be the same group who were “redeemed” in 1 Peter and the ones who were “bought with his own blood” in Acts 20. It is logical to believe that the “144,000” are “the church of God.”

Look at Revelation 5:9–10 again. This is the vision in which Jesus, the Lamb received the worship that was due Him. The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders:

*. . . sang a new song: “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you **purchased men** for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. **You have made them** to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.”*

The pronoun “*them*” refers to the “. . . *purchased men for God from every tribe . . .*” The men who were purchased are the same men God made to be a Kingdom. They are the same people who will reign upon the earth. Every one who has been purchased by the blood of Jesus has been made to be the Church of God, the Kingdom of God, and the 144,000.

The Pure

John said the 144,000 did not defile themselves with women. They kept themselves pure. The original language says they kept themselves as “*virgins.*” When Paul wrote one of his letters to the church in Corinth, he said:

I hope you will put up with a little of my foolishness; but you are already doing that. I am jealous for you with a godly jealousy. I promised you to one husband, to Christ, so that I might present you as a pure virgin to him. But I am afraid that just as Eve was deceived by the serpent’s cunning, your minds may somehow be lead astray from your sincere and pure devotion to Christ (2 Corinthians 11:1–3).

Remember Paul was writing to one of the most troubled churches in New Testament times. Even knowing how troubled they were, he said they were pure virgins. If they were not deceived by Satan, they would be presented to Christ as pure. In Revelation 13 Satan was given the power to deceive. He tried to deceive Christians into saying that Caesar was Lord. The Christians in the first century knew Caesar was not their Lord. They knew they had already been promised to Christ. He was the “husband-to-be.” They were to be kept as pure virgins.

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he talked about the Church as the bride of Christ: “*to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemishes, but holy and blameless*” (Ephesians 5:27). The 144,000 were the pure virgins of Christ just as the Church in

Ephesus and the Church in Corinth. They all represent pure virgins as the bride of Christ, the Church of Jesus Christ.

The Followers of the Lamb

The original language describes the 144,000 as “. . . *these are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth.*” That is an important point. They do not just follow the Lamb when He is going where they want to go. They follow the Lamb wherever He goes. Look at what Peter said about following the Lamb:

But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:20–21).

Sometimes following in Christ’s footsteps is not an enjoyable way to go. He committed no sin and no deceit was found in His mouth (cf. Isaiah 53:9). The people of God are called to be followers of Christ. They are “. . . *a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God . . . who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light*” (1 Peter 2:9). Who are the 144,000? The 144,000 are anyone who has been called by God; everyone who follows the Lamb to the point of suffering. A Christian cannot be a part of this group unless he is willing to suffer for Christ. It is not enough to be in Him. The Christian must also be with Him. That is who the 144,000 are — they are standing with Christ.

The Firstfruits for God

The 144,000 had been “. . . *purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb.*” The Apostle James wrote to the twelve tribes scattered throughout the world and apparently to Jewish Christians. He said, “*He chose to give*

us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created” (James 1:18). The firstfruits who were offered to God in Revelation 14 were the 144,000. The firstfruits James was writing to are “*the twelve tribes scattered among the nations*” (James 1:1). Think back to Hebrews 12:22–23: “*But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God . . . to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God. . .*” The Church of the firstborn are those who have their names written in heaven. The term “*firstfruits*” is an agricultural term. The firstfruits are born in the field. The “*firstborn*” is a human figure referring to the first child born. The “*firstfruits*” and the “*firstborn*” are the Church. They represent the 144,000.

The Blameless

The “*firstfruits*” and the 144,000 were without any blemishes: “*No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless*” (Revelation 14:5). When Paul wrote to the Ephesians and talked about the Church as the bride of Christ, he said the Church was “*holy and blameless*” (Ephesians 5:27). That is exactly how God views the Church. However, man does not view the Church that way. He looks at his fellow man and sees problems and sin. God looks at the Church and does not see a single blemish or wrinkle. The Church is His bride. Those who are holy and blameless in Revelation 14 were the 144,000.

Paul wrote about the Church in Colossians 1:21–23:

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds in your unbelief, but now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, free from accusation — and if you continue in your faith established and firm, not moved away from the hope of the gospel.

The Church has been washed clean by the blood of Christ and kept clean by their faithful commitment to Him.

Sealed Servants

There is a sixth description of the 144,000 that is found in Revelation 7 where John first mentioned hearing the number of those who were sealed by God: *“144,000 from all the tribes of Israel.”* An angel ordered the four angels from the corners of the earth not to harm anything on earth *“... until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God”* (Revelation 7:3–4). This is another point of identification for the 144,000.

Conclusion

Who are the 144,000?

- They are the Church.
- They are the bride of Christ.
- They are the body of Jesus.
- They are the redeemed.
- They are pure Virgins.
- They are the Lamb’s followers no matter where He goes.
- They are the firstfruits offered to God.
- They are those who are without blemish.
- They are those who believe in Jesus, are sorrowful for their sins, and have by their immersion in water been added to the body of Christ.
- They are those who are walking in the light of God’s Word.
- They are the sealed, protected, and holy servants of God on the earth. All the redeemed on the earth at this very moment in time are represented by the 144,000.
- They are those who are faithful to Jesus, those who are standing with Him on Mount Zion.
- They are ready, able, and willing to be victorious. Ready and eager to go to war and to fight with Jesus against any enemy.

Four Headline Banners

Introduction and Review

Revelation 14:6–20

Revelation 14:1–5 talks about the 144,000. They are the redeemed of God on earth who have kept themselves pure virgins by following the Lamb wherever He went. They are those who will be offered as firstfruits to God, those without blemish. They are the sealed servants of God who are serving Him on earth. All the servants of God on the earth at any time are part of the 144,000 who stand with the Lamb on Mount Zion in total victory, joy, and honor.

Revelation 14 contains four announcements. They are headline banners that will declare things that are to come.

Revelation 14:6–13

Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.” A second angel followed and said, “Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries.” A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: “If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the

hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."

This is an unusual text without much discussion. John saw an angel who had the *"eternal gospel to proclaim."* These proclamations were like headline banners on a newspaper. On the front page sometimes there will be big, bold statements with added smaller print which say, "See page 8 for more details" or something like that. That is the kind of statements being made here by the angels.

The headline banner for Revelation 14:6–7 would read: "Judgment Is Come!" The angel said, *"Fear God and give him glory because the hour of his judgment has come."* Judgment is here. The story will be told later in Revelation 15–16.

The second headline banner is in Revelation 14:8. The second angel followed the first and said, *"Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great, which made all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."* The headline banner would simply read, "Babylon Is Fallen!" This is the first time the name Babylon has been mentioned in the Book of Revelation. This name must refer to a dreaded enemy because the angels were proclaiming the *"gospel"* which means Good News. It would only be good news if Babylon was an enemy who had fallen. Babylon referred to a woman because the passage says *"her adulteries."* She was a "known" woman, *"all the nations drink the maddening wine of her adulteries."* She was a

destructive woman because her wine was maddening. Babylon was an evil, world-known, destructive, immoral prostitute. She was introduced without any explanation for who she was — “Babylon is fallen!” The details for this headline banner will come later in Revelation 17–18.

The third headline banner would say, “All Emperor Worshipers Judged!” An alternative headline might say, “Emperor Worshipers Fall!” or “Escape God’s Judgement! Escape God’s Wrath!” The third angel said:

“If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, he, too, will drink of the wine of God’s fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb” (Revelation 14:9–10).

The only way a person can escape the wrath of God would be to avoid being judged. The discussion of this headline banner will come later in Revelation 19–20 when the sea beast, Rome’s civil power, and the persecuting nature of Rome are judged and cast into the lake of fire. If anyone in the city is a part of the sea beast, or has the mark on his forehead or right hand, then he will be cast into the lake of fire with the beast. Christians need to know who God’s enemies are and stay away from them if they want to escape the wrath of God. Three angels in a row have announced coming trials and judgments. Judgment has come! Babylon has fallen! Emperor worshipers will be judged!

Next John heard a voice from heaven say, “*Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on*” (Revelation 14:13). The voice from heaven uttered the fourth headline banner: “Blessed Are the Dead! Dead Saints Are Blessed!” Since this voice came directly from heaven, it has to be God

speaking. The details for this headline banner are coming in Revelation 21–22.

“Blessed Are the Dead!” would be an important headline banner for the first century. This headline proclaimed the destiny of many, if not most, of the people who would read this letter from John. They were going to be a portion of the **dead saints** who would be blessed. That is why it was important for the saints to know early on that Jesus is “*the firstborn from the dead*” and he is the one who was walking”. . . *among the lampstands . . . someone ‘like a son of man’ dressed in a robe . . .*” John offered encouragement, comfort, grace, and peace to the saints who were the seven churches of Asia by telling them about Jesus in the very beginning:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come . . . and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and ruler of the kings of the earth . . . And when I turned I saw seven golden lampstands, and among the lampstands was someone “like a son of man,” dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest (Revelation 1:4–5, 12–13).

Jesus is the “*son of man*” walking in the midst of the lampstands. He has the keys of death and hades. He was dead and is alive again. He is going to live forevermore. These teachings are found throughout the Bible as comfort for God’s children in the midst of trial. Remember when David had sinned by killing Uriah because Bathsheba was pregnant? When the child was born, David was told the child was not going to live. As long as the child lay sick, David mourned and wept and no one could comfort him. Once the baby died, everyone was afraid to tell David because they were afraid of his reaction. When David heard that the child was dead, he immediately got up, took off the sack cloth, took a bath, put on

his robe, and sat down to eat and drink. David's servants asked him why he was acting this way. 2 Samuel 12:22–23 gives David's response:

He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

That is the kind of faith the saints of God have. That is patient endurance. That is the kind of comfort Christians can have. Death was not the seventh seal, it was only the fourth seal. It did not come at the end. Death is not the end for the men and women of God. Death is a blessing. To die means being able to go to a better place. Death itself is not really the blessing. Death is an enemy, but it is an enemy that has been defeated. Death as the enemy ushers every Christian into a much better place.

The Apostle Paul was faced with a dilemma because he longed to be with the Lord. He wrote:

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Philippians 1:21–24).

The day a saint dies is a day of profit, a day of honor, and a day when he can go to a place of perfect protection, fellowship, and provision. That is the end of the story that is shown in Revelation 21–22. David said, "*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints*" (Psalm 116:15). Revelation 14:13 is one of the better beatitudes found in the

Book of Revelation: “*Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.*” The saints who die in the Lord will rest from their labors and their works will follow with them.

Judgment From Both Sides

Judgment as Viewed by the Righteous

Revelation 14:14–20 is a discussion of the fact that judgment comes to both sides. Babylon was going to fall and emperor worshipers were going to be judged, but the saints were going to be blessed. Judgment has two sides. A coin always has two sides. If a person only looks at one side of the coin, he may not know how much it is worth because the value is only written on one side.

Judgment always has two sides. Revelation 14:14–16 are the verses that look at judgment from the saints’ viewpoint:

I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one “like a son of man” with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, “Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe [literally dry].” So he who was seated on the cloud swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was harvested.

The judgment from the saints’ viewpoint pictures wheat being harvested. The wheat is not harmed by the action of the sickle. Wheat is not grown so that it can wave in the field. It is planted and grown so that it can be harvested to be used for food for the animals and bread for man. The wheat that was harvested was being used as God intended. Judgment from the saints’ viewpoint meant they would move through life toward their intended end. The intended end for all saints is to be face

to face with God eternally in an eternal and immortal body. Judgment, particularly if it caused the death of a saint, enables him to be closer to his own victory.

Notice the description of the judge in this passage: “*I looked, and there before me was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one ‘like a son of man’ with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand*” (Revelation 14:14). The judge in this picture is God. The devil may be able to fly swiftly from place to place, but only God rides on the clouds. The psalmist David vividly described God in Psalm 18:6–15:

*In my distress I called to the LORD;
I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears.*

*The earth trembled and quaked,
and the foundations of the mountains shook;
they trembled because he was angry.
Smoke rose from his nostrils;
consuming fire came from his mouth,
burning coals blazed out of it.
He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.
He mounted the cherubim and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.
He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him —
the dark rain clouds of the sky.
Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.
The LORD thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded.
He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies,
great bolts of lightning and routed them.
The valleys of the sea were exposed
and the foundations of the earth laid bare*

*at your rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of breath from your nostrils.
(Psalm 18:6–15).*

The LORD came riding on a cloud. Isaiah said, “. . . See, the LORD rides on a swift cloud and is coming to Egypt . . .” (Isaiah 19:1). David also said, “. . . He makes the clouds his chariot and rides on the wings of the wind” (Psalm 104:3). God and God only rides upon the clouds. The cloud is white which indicates purity, majesty, and victory. This judgment was done by God, the One who loves His saints. He is the reaper. Jesus is the Overcomer, King, and Judge.

The text says an angel called out in a loud voice to the One who was sitting on the cloud, *“Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the earth is ripe.”* This judgement was done on time and purposefully. It was no accident. God’s judgements come at an appointed hour, day, month, and year. The nations of the earth were not involved in this judgment. God was seated on the cloud and He swung His sickle over the earth because the earth was *“ripe.”* In the Greek, the word *“ripe”* meant dry. That is the time when the wheat is harvested, when it is dry or ripe. In John 4:35 Jesus said, *“Do you not say, ‘Four months more and then the harvest’? I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.”* The King James Version translated this verse, “. . . look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” Wheat is normally a beautiful gold until it is ready to be harvested and then the head of the wheat becomes white and dry.

John’s vision is not just a figure of the judgment of the righteous. It is also a picture of gathering wheat. When John the Baptist was preaching to prepare the way for the coming Messiah, he said:

*“I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me
will come one who is more powerful than I, whose*

sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork [a tool used for harvesting] is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:11–12).

Jesus also told a parable about the wheat and the weeds. He said, “‘. . . First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.’” Harvesting is also an Old Testament symbol. Read Amos 9:8–10:

“Surely the eyes of the Sovereign LORD are on the sinful kingdom. I will destroy it from the face of the earth — yet I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,” declares the Lord. “For I will give the command, and I will shake the house of Israel among all the nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, and not a pebble will reach to the ground. All the sinners among my people will die by the sword, all those who say, ‘Disaster will not overtake or meet us.’”

The LORD sifts the wheat with a sieve so that all the chaff is separated from the wheat and destroyed. The wheat is protected by God — “*. . . not a pebble will reach the ground.*” Not a one of God’s children will be harmed in the harvesting. The righteous of God are God’s wheat and not a pebble of wheat reaches the ground. Judgment as it is viewed by the righteous is a move toward perfection.

Judgment as Viewed by the Wicked

Revelation 14:17–20 is the other side of judgment:

Another angel came out of the temple in heaven [this would be an angel from God], and he too had a sharp

sickle. Still another angel, who had charge of the fire, came from the altar and called in a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, "Take your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of grapes from the earth's vine, because its grapes are ripe." The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God's wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses' bridles [about 4–5 feet high] for a distance of 1,600 stadia [approximately 200 miles].

This is a terrible judgment from the wicked man's viewpoint. The wicked are the grapes which were trodden in the winepress of the wrath of God. This judgment was done by an angel who came from God, rather than by God Himself. He had the help of a second angel who had the power of the fire. Remember that angels had the power over nature. Fire is always a symbol of destruction. Starting with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 13 and continuing through Revelation 20, fire has been the biblical symbol of God's judgment upon the wicked.

The angel who had control over the fire did not come from heaven. He came from the altar that was located just outside the dwelling place of God. This is the same altar where John saw the souls of those who had been slain (cf. Revelation 6:9–10). It was under this altar that the souls cried for vindication. It was also this same altar at which the angel holding the golden censer filled the censer with fire and hurled it to the earth (cf. Revelation 8:3–5). This was also the altar where John heard a voice coming from the horns of the altar (cf. Revelation 9:13). John was told to measure the ". . . altar, and count the worshipers there" (Revelation 11:1).

This same altar is seen one last time in Revelation 16:7 when judgment came upon the enemy: "*And I heard the altar respond: 'Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your*

judgments. ’” The altar spoke because the prayers upon the altar had been answered. The souls of the saints under the altar had been vindicated. The angel who came from the altar came from the saints. The other angel came from God. The judgment upon the wicked is also God’s judgment on behalf of the saints.

The judgment upon the wicked came for one simple reason — the iniquity of the enemy was full. The clusters of grapes were fully ripe. When God spoke to Abraham about his children receiving the land that he was in, God spoke about a time of “*full measure*”:

Then the LORD said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (Genesis 15:13–16).

God does everything at just the right time. He does not go ahead of His schedule. He never does anything late. God does everything absolutely and totally on time. The judgment upon the wicked came because it was time. The iniquity of the people who were persecuting God’s people was full.

The judgment of the wicked was done “. . . *in the winepress outside the city.*” This winepress of God’s wrath is a graphic Old Testament figure. Genesis 49:10–12 speaks of Judah in several powerful figures. Judah was a lion’s cub, the son of a lion. He crouched like a lion and laid down like a lioness. The scepter will never depart from Judah; He will rule forever. Notice that Judah washed His garments in “*the blood of the grapes*” That would be the blood of His enemies. That is not the way to get a garment clean. The idea is that Judah’s

function was to sit in judgment and to come in judgment against God's enemies.

Isaiah spoke about the judgment that would come upon the nation of Edom. Isaiah 63 is set up as a question and answer session between Isaiah and God:

“Who is this coming from Edom, from Bozrah, with his garments stained crimson? Who is this, robed in splendor, striding forward in the greatness of his strength?”

“It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.”

“Why are your garments red, like those of one treading the winepress?”

“I have trodden the winepress alone; from the nations no one was with me. I trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath; their blood spattered my garments, and I stained all my clothing. For the day of vengeance was in my heart, and the year of my redemption has come. I looked, but there was no one to help, I was appalled that no one gave support; so my own arm worked salvation for me, and my own wrath sustained me. I trampled the nations in my anger; in my wrath I made them drunk and poured their blood on the ground” (Isaiah 63:1–6).

Isaiah saw One coming from Edom whose garments were red with blood. When he asked who it was, the answer was, *“It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save.”* Someone in garments splattered with blood would not appear to be one who could “save” anyone. When Isaiah asked about the blood stained clothes, the answer was that He had been treading the winepress alone. He said He *“trampled them in my anger and trod them down in my wrath.”*

What a picture of Jehovah Himself judging Edom. He had bloody garments because He had stomped the wicked with the fierceness of His wrath in the winepress. Jehovah did not stomp the wicked because He was mad. He did it because *“the day of vengeance was in my heart (that is the blood) and the year of my redemption has come.”* When God comes in judgment, even when it is judgment upon the enemy, He has a two-fold purpose. He comes to judge and to avenge.

When Jeremiah was sitting on the ruins of his beloved city of Jerusalem, he wept saying, “. . . *In his winepress the Lord has trampled the Virgin Daughter of Judah*” (Lamentation 1:15). This is another figure of the judgment done by God in His winepress.

Notice in Revelation 14:20, *“They were trampled in the winepress outside the city . . .”* That is where God always took wickedness to be judged. In the Old Testament on the Day of Atonement, a scapegoat was covered with blood and then set loose outside the city to bear the sins of the city into the wilderness (cf. Leviticus 16:1–28). When Jesus bore the sins of God’s children, it was done outside the city: *“And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. Let us, then, go to him outside the camp, bearing the disgrace he bore”* (Hebrews 13:12–13).

The judgment of the wicked in Revelation 14 sheds an enormous amount of blood. Blood flowed out of the winepress rising as high as a horse’s mouth. That would be the depth of at least 4–5 feet or about 1.5 meters and it flowed the length of nearly 200 miles or about 322 kilometers. Normally when a wine vat overflows, it will overflow on all sides. Imagine a river of blood 200 miles long and four to five feet deep. All the blood of all the people who have ever lived on earth could not supply such a pool of blood. This is not a literal river. It

graphically describes the judgment from God. He is not a weakling. When He judges, He does it to the maximum.

Conclusion

Rome was a vast and powerful empire during a certain time period. However, there came a time in history when their glory faded and only the ruins remain. The glory that was once Rome had perished. The walls of the Coliseum remain, but looking around one can see all that is left is ruins. Saints died within those walls, but the glory of the Roman Empire is gone. Within the city of Rome today there are brothers and sisters in Christ who worship the one true God. They represent the victory of Jesus and the Church. The glory that was once Rome is no more. Rome fell because of her horrible sins against the Church. She persecuted the Church of the living God and tried to destroy the faith of the saints. Rome set herself up to be the power that would destroy the Lord's Church and instead she was destroyed. The Lamb is still triumphant and all who stand with Him through difficult times will also stand with Him in the final day of His triumph.

Follow Christ. Maintain spiritual purity. Allow no lie or denial of the Lamb. Patient endurance and faith will bring about joy and comfort for the saints even in the midst of their trials. Judgments will come, but there is also peace when Christians believe in Jesus. Amen!

God's Judgment Announced

Revelation 15:1–16:21

Review and Introduction

The Book of Revelation has a consistent pattern. Before judgment, there is always assurance. The seals, the trumpets, and the bowls all represented the judgment of God upon the enemy. However, before the seals, before the trumpets, and before the bowls, there was a vision of heaven to reassure all the saints. Before the seals, God assured the saints that the throne of the universe was not in Rome, but in heaven. He assured them that He was working out a plan. The seals were removed and judgments were introduced to the world. The trumpets were a more severe judgment than the seals and before the trumpets were blown, there was a silent period in heaven. The angels offered the prayers of the saints with incense, a symbol of acceptable prayer. During this vision the saints learned that the judgements happening on earth were the work of God. This work was in answer to the prayers of the saints and to God's own demands for holiness. The trumpets were blown only after this reassuring scene in heaven. Such is the pattern for the Book of Revelation. The emphasis was that the heaven-dwellers were secure and judgment would come upon the inhabitants of the earth.

In Revelation 14 there was another scene in heaven of the Lamb and the 144,000. This was the heavenly comfort scene that came before the seven bowls were poured out upon the earth. So the pattern continues.

Announcement of Judgment

Revelation 15:1–8

I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues — last, because with them God's wrath is completed. And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened. Out of the temple came the seven angels with the seven plagues. They were dressed in clean, shining linen and wore golden sashes around their chests. Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls filled with the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

Judgment Is Complete and Purposeful

Revelation 15 begins: "*I saw **in heaven** another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with seven last plagues — last, because with them God's wrath is complete.*" God's wrath was going to be "*poured out*" with judgment coming from seven bowls filled with seven plagues. Notice where this all began. It

was a scene in heaven. There were seven angels with seven bowls and *“the seven last plagues — last, because with them God’s wrath is completed.”* This was not a scene from earth’s viewpoint. This was a scene from heaven’s viewpoint.

The scene from heaven is going to be God’s work. Just as the seals and the trumpets were from God, so the bowls of wrath were going to be the work of God. There was nothing accidental happening. This was not fate or a lucky situation. This was going to be deliberate and holy judgment poured out on the kingdom of Rome who was the current enemy in John’s day. There had been warnings, but the warnings were all over. All the warnings had been ignored by the enemy. The bowls were full of God’s wrath. These were going to be God’s final judgments. Once again the emphasis was that the heaven-dwellers were secure and safe, but judgment was going to come upon the inhabitants of the earth.

John looked and saw *“. . . what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire”* (Revelation 15:2). He had seen a *“sea of glass before the throne, clear as crystal”* in Revelation 4:6. This *“sea of glass mixed with fire”* in Revelation 15 represented judgment. It was going to be complete and final judgment; it was the *“last.”* It was going to be purposeful and deliberate, coming on behalf of the persecuted saints.

As John looked, he saw *“. . . standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God”* (Revelation 15:2). These were the overcomers, the persecuted saints, the redeemed. They were standing beside the sea of glass to witness the judgment poured out on the kingdom of Rome. They were the victors, ready to watch God’s judgment upon their enemies. God is still over and beyond all others. The saints were standing beside the sea, trying to draw as near to God as anyone could. The bowls of wrath represent God’s judgment coming not only because it was His will, but also as vindication for the saints. Vindication is best when it is

seen. These judgments needed to be seen and felt by the righteous.

The coming judgment was not the only thing that was seen in these verses. There was also praise from the redeemed. Each one of the victors held a harp which was given to them by God. Harps represent praise offered to God (cf. Psalm 33:2, 99:1–5, 150:1–6). The redeemed were singing “. . . *the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb.*” The “*song of Moses*” was once sung by the Israelites **after** they had been delivered from Egyptian bondage. They stood on the edge of the Red Sea. In front of them was the immoveable object of the sea and behind them was the destructive force of Pharaoh and all his army. The children of Israel were desperate. They could not go forward and could not go back. Moses fell down on his knees and begged God for deliverance. God opened the Red Sea and the people all marched through on dry land. Pharaoh and his army pursued them, but the waters flowed back and devoured the Egyptians. Not one of them survived. On the other side of that deliverance, on the other side of the Red Sea, Moses and the Israelites sang to the LORD:

*“I will sing to the LORD,
for he is highly exalted.
The horse and its rider
he has hurled into the sea.
The LORD is my strength and my song;
he has become my salvation.
He is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.
The LORD is a warrior;
the LORD is his name.
Pharaoh's chariots and his army
he has hurled into the sea.
The best of Pharaoh's officers
are drowned in the Red Sea.*

*The deep waters have covered them;
they sank to the depths like a stone.
Your right hand, O LORD,
was majestic in power.
Your right hand, O LORD,
shattered the enemy . . .*

[Notice the very end of this song]
. . . *You will bring them in and plant them
on the mountain of your inheritance —
the place, O LORD, you have made for your dwelling,
the sanctuary, O LORD, your hands have established. The
LORD will reign for ever and ever*"
(Exodus 15:1–6, 17–18).

When Moses and the children of Israel sang, they sang of God's deliverance, salvation, power, and might. At the end of the song, they sang about the city where God and all His children would dwell. In Revelation 15, when the redeemed sang the "*song of Moses . . . and the song of the Lamb,*" they sang of God's "*deeds,*" His "*ways,*" and His "*name . . . For you alone are holy.*" This song ended with "*All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed*" (Revelation 15:4). They were singing of a day to come when God's deeds would cause all nations to worship Him.

Remember the verse from Isaiah: "*My soul yearns for you in the night; in the morning my spirit longs for you. When your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness*" (Isaiah 26:9). Sometimes it takes the judgment of God to wake people up to the holiness of God. When wickedness is punished and righteousness endures, then people realize there is a power stronger than the wickedness. That stronger power serves and works on behalf of the righteous.

Judgment Is Everlasting and Without Mediation

Once again John looked and the scene was in heaven. He saw “. . . *the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony* . . .” (Revelation 15:5). This was not just the Temple that was open for John to see. It was not just the Holy Place, it was the Most Holy Place, the Holy of Holies. This was not from the earthly viewpoint, it was from heaven's eternal viewpoint.

The origin of this last judgment was going to come from the Holy of Holies. This is God's sanctuary, a place where only God lived. The judgment did not come from the altar (cf. Revelation 8:3–5); it came from the very throne of God. Seven angels with seven plagues came out of “*the temple*.” They were dressed as a priest would have been dressed in “. . . *clean, shining linen . . . golden sashes around their chests*” (Revelation 15:6). Compare this description to the one in Exodus 28. The High Priest was the only one who went into the presence of God. He wore an “*ephod*,” which represented the close relationship of the High Priest to the Holy of Holies and God. He represented the will of God, the heart of God, and the purpose of God. These angels came from God's presence to minister to His Kingdom.

The nature of this judgment brought by seven angels was going to be full. The bowls were “. . . *filled with the wrath of God*” (Revelation 15:7). That meant that there would be no mercy. “*Wrath*” is far beyond the anger-stage. Anger is just a feeling, but “*wrath*” is such a strong emotion that it must give vent to its emotion. “*Wrath*” is an action or deed. God was going to act upon His wrath.

This last judgment from God was going to be eternal. It was coming from “. . . *God, who lives for ever and ever*.” If a man carries out his wrath upon another man, when the first man dies, his wrath would die with him. This final judgment would have no escape for the wicked from God's wrath, because He will live forever.

The last description of the judgment that was to come, “*the seven last plagues*,” is seen in the last verse, Revelation 15:8:

“And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from his power, and no one could enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.” There would be no mediation for this judgment. No one was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies as long as it was filled with smoke. When God descended upon Mount Sinai, He covered the mountain with smoke because He had “. . . descended on it in fire” (Exodus 19:18). The smoke said that God was there. At the end of Exodus, when Moses had finished the work on the tabernacle, God’s glory filled the “*Tent of Meetings*” and Moses could not enter because “. . . the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle” (Exodus 40:33–35). Again, the smoke said that God was there. When Solomon finished building the Temple in the City of David, the priests carried the Ark of the LORD’s covenant into the inner sanctuary of the Temple, the Holy Place. 1 Kings 8:10–11 says:

When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple.

The Temple that John saw in heaven was filled with smoke and no one could enter. If the High Priest could not enter, he could not offer any blood for atonement. God had finally shut off His mercy toward Rome.

The smoke said that God’s glory and His power had filled the temple. In more modern times, sometimes a flag is flown over the palace of the king or the home of the governor or prime minister to say that they are in residence. The smoke in Revelation and throughout the Old Testament passages says, “The King is here.” Revelation 15 was simply the announcement of the judgment to come and no one could enter the Temple until “. . . the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed” (Revelation 15:8).

The Execution of Judgment

Revelation 16 is the execution of God's judgment. The seven bowls of wrath are parallel to the seven trumpets in Revelation 8–9 except that the trumpets were only a partial judgment. The seven bowls of wrath would be complete and total judgment.

The Command and the First and Second Bowls Revelation 16:1–3

Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go, pour out the seven bowls of God's wrath on the earth." The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly and painful sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped his image.

The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.

John heard a loud voice from the Temple. Since it has been established that smoke filled the Temple and no one could enter, this had to be the voice of God coming from the Temple. The voice commanded the angels to go and pour out their bowls of wrath. This was a direct command from God.

The **first bowl** was poured out on the land and the inhabitants of the earth developed ugly and painful sores. This judgment did not affect the people of God just like the plagues did not affect the Israelites during their Egyptian bondage (cf. Exodus 7–11). These sores lasted a long time because they are mentioned again during the darkness that came from the fifth bowl of wrath. It is possible that these bowls brought judgment from which the people could not be delivered.

The **second bowl** was poured out upon the sea and the sea turned to blood. This blood was not fresh blood: “. . . *the sea . . . turned into blood like that of a dead man, and every living thing in the sea died.*” This was definitely not partial judgment; this was not just one third of the sea and one third of the inhabitants of the sea dying. This was full and total judgment. However, this was not literal! Revelation is a symbolic book so these judgment were symbolic. This meant that the calamities that were going to come upon Rome as God's judgment would not be something that would partially destroy Roman wickedness. It would be the kind of judgment that would totally destroy.

The Third and Fourth Bowls **Revelation 16:4–9**

The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: “You are just in these judgments, you who are and who were, the Holy One, because you have so judged; for they have shed the blood of your saints and prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.”

And I heard the altar respond: “Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.”

The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was given power to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.

The **third bowl** was poured out on the rivers and springs and they all became blood. That would be the fresh water supply upon the earth. In the parallel visions with the trumpets,

the water supply only became poisonous. The reason for this difference was because after shedding the blood of the saints, the enemies' punishment was to drink blood. God's judgments are usually patterned in kind with the reason for the punishment. Saul refused to destroy the Amalekites so he was slain by an Amalekite (cf. 1 Samuel 15:3–33; 2 Samuel 1:1–10). Pharaoh had killed the baby boys of Israel, so the “*firstborn*” of all Egypt died, including the livestock. (cf. Exodus 1:15, 12:29–30). This is not strange at all. In both the Old and New Testaments, God says, “Whatever a person sows, that he will reap” (cf. Proverbs 11:8, 22:8; 2 Corinthians 9:6). Paul told the Galatians:

Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life (Galatians 6:7–8).

Rome had sown blood, so now they were going to be reaping blood.

The **fourth bowl** was poured out on the sun so that it was given the power to scorch the people with fire. It is hard enough to imagine how it would be to have to spend time in the desert knowing that there was no water to drink. All the water had turned to blood. Then imagine your body being scorched by the sun. The people were “. . . seared by the intense heat . . .” but they still did not repent. Instead they cursed the name of God.

The Fifth and Sixth Bowl **Revelation 16:10–16**

The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom was plunged into darkness. Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and

their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.

The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East. Then I saw three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon, out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet. They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty. "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed." Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.

The **fifth bowl** was poured out upon "*the throne of the beast.*" The result was that Rome and the kingdom were plunged into darkness. This would represent the complete collapse of the kingdom due to internal decay. This darkness would be parallel to the darkness in Egypt during the plagues. There was light in the homes of the righteous, but the wicked kingdom was left in darkness. The wicked endured great pain: "*Men gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done*" (Revelation 16:10b–11). These people still refused to repent.

The **sixth bowl** was poured out upon the Euphrates River. All the water dried up to prepare the way for the "*. . . kings from the East.*" This symbolized the work of God in destroying the military might and empowering the weak. This is parallel to God's destruction of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. God's work was in parting the Red Sea (cf. Exodus 14:21–22). A generation later when the Israelites and Joshua came to the

Jordan River, God parted the river so that Joshua and the people could cross over (cf. Joshua 3:15–17). God also parted the Jordan River when Elijah was about to be carried up to heaven. Elisha picked up his robe, rolled it up, and struck the river with his robe (cf. 2 Kings 2:7–14). This was all part of God's work.

After the Euphrates River dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East (who will be revealed in Revelation 19), John saw:

... three evil spirits that looked like frogs; they came out of the mouth of the dragon [this would be Satan], out of the mouth of the beast [this would be the Roman Empire] and out of the mouth of the false prophet [this would be the Roman religion] (Revelation 16:13).

These evil spirits were the spirits of demons who had been able to perform miraculous signs. The evil spirits went out to gather “... *the kings of the whole world ... for **the battle on the great day of God Almighty.***” Then a warning was given to the righteous to stay alert and remain faithful: “*Behold, I come like a thief!*” “**The battle**” was going to take place in **Armageddon**, which is Meggido. That is the place in Hebrew history where the people of God have always been greatly outnumbered and yet victorious (cf. Judges 5, 7; 2 Kings 23; 2 Chronicles 34).

The Seventh Bowl Revelation 16:17–21

The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, “It is done!” Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since man has been on earth, so tremendous was the

quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones of about a hundred pounds each fell upon men. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.

The **seventh bowl** was poured out into the air. This was the final judgment of God upon the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire was God's at last. There was lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder, and an earthquake like no other. The hailstones that fell would have had to be two feet by two feet by two feet. These people should have repented, but they did not. They continued to blaspheme God.

This judgment is unimaginable, but it should give the children of God hope. In the end when God brings His judgment upon the world, it will cause the wicked anxiety and great confusion. However, God's judgment will bring deliverance to the His children. God's children can be assured that they will be victorious!

The Great Harlot

Revelation 17:1–18:24

Review and Introduction

Revelation 16 contains John's vision of the pouring out of the seven bowls of wrath which were the divine judgment of God against Rome. The first four bowls were general ones: poured out on the land, the sea, the rivers and springs, and the sun of the earth. The final three bowls were intended to call attention to God's judgment against the capital city of Rome itself.

Revelation 17–18 are like zooming in on a scene to catch more specific details of what had already happened. These chapters in Revelation show the fall of the city of Rome using the symbolism of the great harlot being punished for her immoralities. Revelation 19:1–10 shows the rejoicing of the saints at the fall of the harlot. Revelation 19:11–20 pictures the final fall of the dragon (Satan), the beast (military and civil power), and the false prophet (anti-Christian religion). These three have stood against God throughout the entire Book of Revelation.

Remember that every symbol and every vision in the Book of Revelation was based in Old Testament scripture. There have been a lot of Old Testament references and readings in this study series. These are important in understanding the Book. It will help to become familiar with the passages that deal with the fall of the capital cities of some powerful nations from the Old Testament. Read Isaiah 1, 13, 23, 47; Jeremiah 50–51; Daniel 7; Ezekiel 27; and Nahum 3.

Description of the Harlot
Revelation 17:1–6

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and said to me, “Come, I will show you the punishment of the great prostitute, who sits on many waters. With her the kings of the earth committed adultery and the inhabitants of the earth were intoxicated with the wine of her adulteries.” Then the angel carried me away in the Spirit into a desert. There I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns. The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries. This title was written on her forehead:

MYSTERY
BABYLON THE GREAT
THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES
AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

I saw that the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus.

The description of the great harlot indicates that she was the commercial, worldly, and successful view of Rome. In this description, she was not the power of Rome or the religion of Rome, she was Rome, the seductress. She was a prostitute. The description of the “. . . woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns” referred to the civil power of Rome. Other portions of the description referred to the woman in different ways. Look at a quick introductory glance about this woman:

- She was sitting on seven hills (cf. Revelation 17:9).
- She ruled the whole earth (Revelation 17:18).
- She persecuted the saints (cf. Revelation 17:6, 18:20, 24).
- She was the leading commercial city of her day (cf. Revelation 18:3, 11–19).
- She was supported by the military might of Rome (cf. Revelation 17:3, 17).
- She was destroyed by her own military power (cf. Revelation 17:16–17).
- She was seductive, a mystery, the mother of prostitutes and abominations of the earth (cf. Revelation 17:5).

This harlot was the seductive worldly influence that the city of Rome possessed in the first century. She was also the object of the coming judgment: “. . . *Come, I will show you **the punishment** of the great prostitute . . .*” (Revelation 17:1).

First, she was described as “. . . *the great prostitute.*” That was the way Tyre was described in Isaiah’s day (cf. Isaiah 23:16–17). Second, she was one who was sitting on many waters. When Jeremiah discussed the wickedness of the world during his day, he talked about those who lived by “. . . *many waters and are rich in treasures, your end has come, the time for you to be cut off*” (Jeremiah 51:13). Third, she had already been labeled as the world’s party girl. All the nations of the earth had committed adultery with her and drunk of the wine of her wickedness (cf. Revelation 14:8).

The Queen of Wickedness

John was led into a desert to see the harlot, the queen of wickedness, and her judgment. He saw a “. . . *woman sitting on a scarlet beast that was covered with blasphemous names and had seven heads and ten horns.*” That is a description of the sea beast from Revelation 13:1, which means that the woman had the support of all Rome’s military might. She was regally robed “. . . *in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls.*” She was really dressed as a

prostitute. And she was royally drunk: *“She held a golden cup in her hand, filled with abominable things and the filth of her adulteries . . . the woman was drunk with the blood of the saints, the blood of those who bore testimony to Jesus”* (Revelation 17:4, 6). Her golden cup was filled with the blood of the saints. Note the abominable “title” written on her forehead. Not only was she a prostitute, she was *“THE MOTHER OF PROSTITUTES.”*

Explanation of the Beast

Revelation 17:7–14

Then the angel said to me: “Why are you astonished? I will explain to you the mystery of the woman and of the beast she rides, which has the seven heads and ten horns. The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come. This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction. The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. They have one purpose and will give their power and authority to the beast. They will make war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords

and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.”

Try to imagine what John saw. He said, *“When I saw her, I was greatly astonished”* (Revelation 17:6b). The angel wondered why John was astonished, but immediately said he would explain the mystery of the woman and the beast. The *“beast”* had a three-fold history: *“. . . once was, now is not and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction.”* The *“beast”* in the first century was the persecutor of the saints. The *“beast”* who *“once was”* would refer to Nero because he was known for his persecution of the saints. The *“beast”* represented by *“now is not”* would refer to Vespasian and Titus’ rules when there was no great persecution for the people of God. The *“beast”* who *“will come up out of the Abyss”* would refer to Domitian, who renewed persecution against the people of God. Remember Domitian would rise to power only so that God could make his fall more graphic. John was not the only one who was astonished; the *“inhabitants of the earth”* were going to also be astonished when they saw this beast again. The beast is described twice in this one verse and again in another as *“the beast . . . once was, now is not, and yet will come* (Revelation 17:8, 11). The saints are not awed by the beast’s resurrection. They are not frightened or terrified. They know that God’s purpose is for all these things to be accomplished on the earth.

Then the angel told John, *“This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits”* (Revelation 17:9). History reveals that the city of Rome was known as a city on seven hills. Every October there was a commemoration to the fact that seven hills enclosed Rome.² The seven hills also refer to seven kings. Daniel 7 records Daniel’s vision concerning the four beasts who represented four

2. W.B. West Jr., *Revelation through First-Century Glasses* (Nashville, TN 37210: Gospel Advocate Co., 1997), 116,

kingdoms. Daniel was especially concerned about the fourth beast who had ten horns on its head and another horn that appeared making eleven kings. In Daniel the horns represented eleven kings, but the last king subdued the three kings that were before him. That would make eight kings. In John's vision and the explanation for it, there are also eight kings:

They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction” (Revelation 17:10–11).

The first Roman emperor was Augustus (1), followed by Tiberias (2), Caligula (3), Claudius (4), Nero (5), Galba (6), Otho (7), Vitllius (8), Vespasian (9), Titus (10), and Domitian (11). The three emperors right after Nero (6–8) only reigned for six months apiece. John basically ignored those three kings, making Domitian the beast who “. . . once was, and now is not, is an eighth king . . . [who] is going to his destruction.” Domitian was the emperor who renewed the persecution of the saints after Nero died. Remember that Domitian/the beast was only able to do what God allowed him to do: “*He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.*” His fall is going to prove once and for all that God rules and not Rome.

The “ten horns . . . are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast” (Revelation 17:12). The kings who received authority with the beast would be vassal kings, like Herod who ruled over Jerusalem. They were sub-rulers who were dependent on Rome. These ten would have been Domitian's vassals who voluntarily submitted to Rome and willingly made war against the Lamb. The symbol is that the prostitute was not only empowered by the beast but also by every king in the world. They all had one purpose — to make

war against the Lamb. They were going to war against the Lamb, but they were going to lose: “. . . *the Lamb will overcome them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings — and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.*” The Lamb is always the victor!

The Destiny of the Harlot **Revelation 17:15–18**

Then the angel said to me, “The waters you saw, where the prostitute sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations and languages. The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to accomplish his purpose by agreeing to give the beast their power to rule, until God’s words are fulfilled. The woman you saw is the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.”

Remember that “*the waters*” where the woman was sitting represented “*peoples, multitudes, nations and languages.*” She was sitting on the wicked world, which would come to hate her even though they were the people and things which empowered her from the very beginning. She will be cooked and eaten by the beast, the civil military might of Rome, and by the ten horns, the vassal kings. In a final analysis, worldliness is the reason for this woman’s fall. Her judge will be God even though it appears that the reason for her death was the beast and the ten horns. All of this was part of God’s purpose in giving the beast power to rule until His Words are fulfilled. The woman is “. . . *the great city that rules over the kings of the earth.*” It was common knowledge during the first century that Rome was the wicked, immoral, ungodly city that ruled over all the kings of the earth.

The Voices

Revelation 18:1–5

After this I saw another angel coming down from heaven. He had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted:

“Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great! She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.”

Then I heard another voice from heaven say: “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues; for her sins are piled up to heaven, and God has remembered her crimes.”

John saw “another angel coming down from heaven.” This was not just another angel. He came from heaven which had been emptied of all but God. He had great authority and splendor, a mighty voice, and a powerful message. The angel did not say, “Babylon is going to fall.” He said, “*Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!*” Only God can speak of the future as if it has already occurred. Paul wrote, “. . . God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were” (Romans 4:17). What a great comfort this announcement would have been for the saints. Remember this was being announced before the “woman” had begun her push against God’s people.

Notice the description of the woman from the angel. This is actually the third time in the Book of Revelation for this description:

“... She has become a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit, a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird. For all the nations have drunk the maddening wine of her adulteries. The kings of the earth committed adultery with her, the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries” (Revelation 18:2b–3, cf. 14:8, 17:1–2).

The first voice John heard was the voice of condemnation upon the woman. All the wickedness of hell and earth resided in her. She was going to fall because of her adulteries. Ninevah and Babylon were both described as a prostitute or a harlot who ruled the world and needed to be judged (cf. Nahum 3; Isaiah 10). This woman was also going to fall because of her merchandising. She was a powerful woman whose luxuries enabled all the world to become rich. The city of Tyre was described as a luxurious woman who made all the merchants of the earth rich (cf. Ezekiel 27:9–25).

Then John heard another voice. This voice made an appeal for God’s people to separate themselves from the wicked city. The same kind of appeals were made by Isaiah and Jeremiah concerning the city of Babylon (cf. Isaiah 52; Jeremiah 50:8, 51:6–9). God does not want His children to be associated with wickedness. When Christians associate with wickedness, then they can expect to share in the judgment that will come.

Paul, in one of his letters to the Corinthians, made the same kind of appeal when he discussed the wickedness that was prevalent in the city of Corinth, especially with idolatry:

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

What harmony is there between Christ and Belial [that is the devil]? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God (2 Corinthians 6:14–7:1).

God does not want His children to have anything to do with wickedness. He does not want His children to share in the sins that go on in a wicked city like Rome. She is going to be judged for her sins. Do not be deceived. Whatever a man, a city, or a nation sows, that is what they will all reap. God is going to judge in like manner of the wickedness that is committed.

The Harlot's Judgment

Revelation 18:6–20

"Give back to her as she has given; pay her back double for what she has done. Mix her a double portion from her own cup. Give her as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury she gave herself. In her heart she boasts, 'I sit as queen; I am not a widow, and I will never mourn.' Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her: death, mourning and famine. She will be consumed by fire, for mighty is the

Lord God who judges her. When the kings of the earth who committed adultery with her and shared her luxury see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her. Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, O Babylon, city of power! In one hour your doom has come!' The merchants of the earth will weep and mourn over her because no one buys their cargoes any more— cargoes of gold, silver, precious stones and pearls; fine linen, purple, silk and scarlet cloth; every sort of citron wood, and articles of every kind made of ivory, costly wood, bronze, iron and marble; cargoes of cinnamon and spice, of incense, myrrh and frankincense, of wine and olive oil, of fine flour and wheat; cattle and sheep; horses and carriages; and bodies and souls of men. They will say, 'The fruit you longed for is gone from you. All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered.' The merchants who sold these things and gained their wealth from her will stand far off, terrified at her torment. They will weep and mourn and cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, dressed in fine linen, purple and scarlet, and glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls! In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin!' Every sea captain, and all who travel by ship, the sailors, and all who earn their living from the sea, will stand far off. When they see the smoke of her burning, they will exclaim, 'Was there ever a city like this great city?' They will throw dust on their heads, and with weeping and mourning cry out: 'Woe! Woe, O great city, where all who had ships on the sea became rich through her wealth! In one hour she has been brought to ruin! Rejoice over her, O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! God has judged her for the way she treated you.'"

Most of this long section of Scripture is *“another voice from heaven.”* The voice appealed to *“my people”* to come out of the wicked city. And then the voice proceeded to tell the judgments that were going to be reaped upon *“her.”*

The *“woman”*/ the city of Rome was going to receive a *“... double portion from her own cup.”* There will be as much torture and grief as the glory and luxury that she had given herself. Notice the reminder over and over that whatever a person, a city, or a nation sows, that is exactly what they will reap. She was going to be judged for all that she had done.

The woman was also going to be judged for her attitude of arrogance and pride. She thought she was a queen, but the plagues of death, mourning, and famine are going to destroy her. She was going to be consumed by fire. During the Old Testament times, the city of Babylon boasted, *“... ‘I am, and there is none besides me.’”* (Isaiah 47:8). The nation of Judah boasted the same thing (cf. Zephaniah 2:15). However, these cities and nations had to learn that pride goes before destruction every single time.

Rome was a city of commerce. Her merchants were going to weep and mourn because no one would buy their cargo. There is quite a list of things that were once brought to Rome for trade. These merchants had been made rich by trade in the city of Rome. They were going to stay away from her because they were terrified. The merchants, sea captains, and the sailors wept and mourned over her, but no one could help.

All of heaven rejoiced over this judgment: *“... O heaven! Rejoice, saints and apostles and prophets! ‘God has judged her for the way she treated you.’”* The wicked mourned and the righteous rejoiced. The righteous will weep over the eternal damnation of the wicked, but they can rejoice in two things: God’s honor and God’s people will have been vindicated. When the world sees God’s judgments, then the world learns righteousness (cf. Isaiah 26:9).

In Revelation 18 there is a song of condemnation (cf. Revelation 18:1–3), a song of separation (cf. Revelation

18:4–8), and a song of lamentation (cf. Revelation 18:9–19). There is a song of rejoicing from heaven (cf. Revelation 18:20). There is going to be one final song, the song of completion (cf. Revelation 18:21–24).

The Song of Completion Revelation 18:21–24

Then a mighty angel picked up a boulder the size of a large millstone and threw it into the sea, and said: “With such violence the great city of Babylon will be thrown down, never to be found again. The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and trumpeters, will never be heard in you again. No workman of any trade will ever be found in you again. The sound of a millstone will never be heard in you again. The light of a lamp will never shine in you again. The voice of bridegroom and bride will never be heard in you again. Your merchants were the world’s great men. By your magic spell all the nations were led astray. In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth.”

There is a thought that occurs over and over again in this passage: “. . . *never to be found again . . . never be heard in you again . . . no workman will ever be found in you again . . . never be heard in you again . . . never shine in you again . . . will never be heard in you again . . .*” Never again! Never! Never! Never! Jeremiah gave the following message to his staff officer concerning the fall of Babylon:

“When you finish reading this scroll, tie a stone to it and throw it into the Euphrates. Then say, ‘So will Babylon sink to rise no more because of the disaster I will bring upon her. And her people will fall’” (Jeremiah 51:6–64).

Such will be the fall of Rome. It will never be found again (cf. Revelation 18:21b). Never again will there be music heard in this city (cf. Revelation 18:22a). Music represents the joy of a city. Never again will there be workman of any trade; the sound of a millstone will not be heard again (cf. Revelation 18:22b). The sound of a millstone represents the trade of a city. There will be no lamp to shine in this city (cf. Revelation 18:23a). That is the light of a city. The voices of the bride and bridegroom will never be heard again in this city (cf. Revelation 18:23b). That is the marriage situation in a city. None of these will happen again.

The reason for the destruction of *“the great city of Babylon”* was her immorality, sorcery, and persecution of the saints and prophets. Her merchants were the world’s great men, but she teased them with the “things of this world.” Happiness cannot be found in “things.” The devil holds out the things of this world and offers them to man. Once man has all he ever wanted, he still wants more. The richest man in the world cannot be happy on his death bed if all he has is “things.” Destruction is what is found in the things of this world.

“The great city of Babylon” was deceptive. She led nations of the world astray by her magic. Deception is a road to destruction. Honesty is the only way to endure.

The main reason for the destruction of this *“great city of Babylon”* was her persecution of the saints: *“In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth”* (Revelation 18:24). Earlier she was described as being drunk on the blood of the saints (cf. Revelation 17:6). Man will be judged by whatever he gets drunk on. If he is drunk on God and God’s Word, then he will live forever. Man can be filled with the Spirit of God: *Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit* (Ephesians 5:18). If a man becomes drunk on this world’s wine, then he will die eternally.

Conclusion

Within Revelation 17–18, there was a prostitute in death throes. Heaven was responsible for her final days. She was a “*burning*” warning to all nations for all time. God’s warning is, “Leave my people alone or suffer the consequences!” Christians, as men and women of God, receive His comfort from these passages. God wars on the side of the Christian. The devil and all his forces are going to lose the final battle. The saints can know this to be true because no matter what the world has tried to do to the children of God, the world cannot ultimately harm them. Nothing eternally bad is going to happen to those who are standing with Jesus on Mount Zion. God protects His children. He protects the 144,000, who are the Church of the Lord, and the pure bride of Christ. In the end, the immoral prostitute will die. The bride of Christ will reign with Him eternally. That is what patient endurance is all about in the life of a saint. That is what is the faith of the saints. In these messages, the saints will find peace and hope.

The Bowls of Wrath

Review and Introduction

Revelation 19:1–21

“Babylon has fallen!” That is the cry from Revelation 18:2. John watched as one of the seven angels showed him the punishment of the prostitute. The kings, merchants, sea captains, and sailors of the world witnessed her fall. The saints and heavens sang and rejoiced over the fall of the wicked harlot.

Revelation 19 contains **four hallelujah** songs, and then an invitation for *“the wedding supper.”* The bride of Christ, the pure one, survived and surpassed the prostitute. The prostitute was gone, but the battle of Armageddon must be fought. This battle was going to be between two armies: the Lamb and His holy army, all the angels, the redeemed, and the 144,000 all fighting against the unholy trio of the dragon (Satan), the beast (civil power), and the false prophet (anti-godly religion). There will be allies discussed later: Gog and Magog and all the people of the world who are against God. The battle will belong to the Lamb. Rome and Satan will go down in fire, blood, and smoke.

Armageddon

A quick discussion about Armageddon will be helpful before the actual battle begins. Remember in Revelation 16 before the seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, there is the verse which says: *“Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon”* (Revelation 16:16). Armageddon is in the valley of Megiddo, a constant

battleground in the Old Testament. The judge Deborah, Barack, Deborah's general, and ten thousand men went down into the valley of Megiddo greatly out-numbered. God gave them victory when "*the river Kishon swept them [the Canaanites] away . . .* (Judges 5:21). Gideon took an army into the valley of Megiddo without a single weapon and defeated the Midianites (cf. Judges 7). Josiah, in his only rebellion against God, met a messenger of God, Pharaoh Neco, in the valley of Megiddo and died (cf. 2 Kings 23). After Saul became the enemy of God, the valley of Megiddo was where he was killed (1 Samuel 31).

In history Napoleon viewed Megiddo as the greatest natural battlefield in all the world. A past general who was writing about all the great battles of the world said, "More blood had been shed and more people killed in the valley of Megiddo than any other battlefield in the world." The valley of Megiddo is the place where God will fight one decisive battle for His people, who are greatly outnumbered and disadvantaged against a more powerful enemy. The enemy will be destroyed and God's people will be victorious. That is what Megiddo represents biblically. The enemy of God will face total and final defeat in the battle of Armageddon. The enemy will never recover after the battle in the valley of Megiddo. The biblical account of the battle of Armageddon takes place in Revelation 19:11–21.

The Songs of the Hallelujah Chorus

Revelation 19:1–10

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments. He has condemned the great prostitute who corrupted the earth by her adulteries. He has avenged on her the blood of his

*servants.” And again they shouted: “**Hallelujah!** The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”*

*The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God, who was seated on the throne. And they cried: “**Amen, Hallelujah!**”*

Then a voice came from the throne, saying: “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!”

*Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: “**Hallelujah!** For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.” At this I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers who hold to the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”*

After the great harlot had been destroyed, John heard a sound like the roar of a “*great multitude*.” Revelation 19:1 is worth reading twice: “*After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God.” All the ransomed Church of God is included in this shout. **Hallelujah** is Hebrew for “Praise the Lord!” What a song to sing: “Hallelujah! The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”*

The first song is from the “heaven-dwellers.” They are the redeemed of God (cf. Revelation 14:3, 15:). John had seen a great multitude more than once: “. . . *a great multitude that no one could count . . . they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb*” (Revelation 7:9, 14b). These are those who have been victorious over the beast (cf. Revelation 15:2). They are the ransomed, the saved, and those who were bought with the blood of the Lamb.

There is a very simple message from this first song: **“Hallelujah!”** “Praise the Lord!” Praise the Lord for all that He has done, because whatever God does, it is always right. Whatever He does is absolutely on time, correct, and holy. The great multitude was praising God for His judgment of the prostitute. The multitude sings about the reasons God should be praised. First, He is to be praised for His estate, all that belongs to Him. God lives in the realm of salvation, glory, and power, because He is the Savior.

Second, God is to be praised for His actions. His judgments are true and just. When God brings judgment upon a wicked nation, it is because that is the right thing to do. He condemned the great prostitute. Third, God is to be praised for His vengeance. He inflicted judgment upon the harlot in vengeance for the blood of His servants. Praise the Lord! The great multitude began their song with *“Hallelujah”* and ended it the same way. One *“Hallelujah”* was not enough. Praise the Lord because “. . . *the smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.*”

“Hallelujah!” The harlot was gone!! The wicked city that polluted the earth with her wickedness was gone forever. Edom was judged in this same manner (cf. Isaiah 34:10). The smoke from the harlot will forever be a reminder to every woman who even thinks about wanting to become a prostitute. The smoke will serve as a reminder to anyone who wants to oppose the pure, virgin bride of God. Anyone who attacks the people of God is attacking God. Anyone who attempts an attack on the people of God will be in serious trouble.

Next the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down to worship God. The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures were first seen in Revelation 4. Remember that these are the servants nearest the throne of God. The four living creatures are cherubim, the most powerful of all beings. The twenty-four elders represent the redeemed around the throne. Their activities involved worshipping God. Notice that every time they stood in the presence of the Almighty, they were humbled by His presence to the point that they fell down to worship Him. They cried, "*Amen, Hallelujah!*" This cry sounds like a conclusion: "Amen! Praise the Lord." They were simply saying they agreed with the great multitude. That is what "*Amen*" means, "I agree!" They agreed that it was right for God to come in judgment upon the harlot. They agreed that God should be praised for His judgment.

Then a voice came from the throne. This has to be God's voice because no one could enter the Holy Place until "*the seven angels*" were done with the seven plagues (cf. Revelation 15:8). Notice God's command as He speaks from the throne: "*Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, both small and great!*" (Revelation 19:5). God was commanding His servants to worship and praise Him. God is interested in His Word being done and His work being fulfilled. However, He is most interested in being praised because that is the love He receives. God's people are all called upon to praise Him for His Word, His work, and His judgment.

God spoke from His throne commanding His servants to praise "*our God*," and John immediately heard a response to that command. God asked for praise and the whole earth was filled with praise for Him. John heard: "*. . . what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting . . .*" Ezekiel said he saw the glory of God and "*His voice was like the roar of rushing waters, and the land was radiant with his glory*" (Ezekiel 43:2). John has used the same descriptive terms to describe the voice of God (cf. Revelation 1:15, 14:2), but now the voice of the multitude

has the same description. Their voices filled the earth with praise. It sounded like loud peals of thunder. When God spoke from Mount Sinai, there was thunder, lightning, and smoke. The people were afraid and stayed at the foot of the mountain.

John heard “. . . *what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and loud peals of thunder, shouting:*

“Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) (Revelation 19:6b–8).

The message was the same as before: “Praise the Lord!” The reason for this praise was: “*Our Lord God Almighty reigns!*” The multitude called for everyone to rejoice, be glad, and give Him the glory.

Then came a very special invitation — “*the wedding of the Lamb has come and his bride has made herself ready.*” It was time for the “*wedding of the Lamb*” and His bride. Think about what a wedding would have been like during the first century. Weddings during that time period did not last for just a few hours, they lasted for days. They would feast and prepare for the marriage ceremony. Then the bride and her husband would go into their house and the people would continue to feast and rejoice. They would dance and enjoy all kinds of festivities. The wedding day itself and the ceremony was only a small part of the total celebration.

The “*wedding for the Lamb*” and His bride was simply a **part** of the great wedding celebration for the Lamb. Christians are enjoying the wedding celebration right now. The actual wedding day will come soon, but for now Christians are in the midst of the wedding feast.

The Lamb’s bride had prepared for this day. She was dressed in “. . . *fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear. (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)*”

Remember what the harlot wore: *“The woman was dressed in purple and scarlet, and was glittering with gold, precious stones and pearls. She held a gold cup . . .”* (Revelation 17:4). That is not the description of someone who was *“bright and clean.”* Everything that the harlot wore was a symbol of her wickedness.

The bride of the Lamb was dressed as a priest would be dressed in fine linen. The fine linen stood for the righteous acts of the saints. This does not refer to *“imputed righteousness”* as in Romans 4:3 when *“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”* The saints had been credited with righteousness, but the *“fine linen”* refers to their acts of righteousness such as the sacrifice of good and benevolent deeds.

The Apostle James defined pure religion as: *“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world”* (James 1:27). The bride of Christ is one who has righteous acts and has kept herself unspotted by the world’s influence.

The great multitude sang a **Hallelujah** chorus praising God for all that He had done, for all that He was going to do, and all that He is. They praised Him for ultimately one reason: The Lord is great in power and He reigns! Again it is as Isaiah spoke in 26:9: *“. . .when your judgments come upon the earth, the people of the world learn righteousness.”* That is what all Christians should desire. The world needs desperately to know who God is. The world learns righteousness when God judges.

Finally, John heard an angel who gave John the commission: *“Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’”* This is another beatitude. Once before John heard what was probably the same voice saying, *“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on”* (Revelation 14:13). Revelation 14 is the chapter of the Lamb and 144,000 when an angel told John that these things would call for *“. . . patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus . . .”*

they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Revelation 14:12, 13b).

The angel added, *“These are the true words of God”* (Revelation 19:9b). First, he gave the blessing, and then he added an assurance — *“these are the true words of God.”* These words assure all mankind that they can believe the words in this Book. Man believes and then is blessed. One day the clouds will be dispelled, the veil will be torn asunder, and all the saints will enter the palace of the King. There will be music, festivities, and joy without sin or sorrow. There will be no burdens, no shadows to darken the rapture of that present time. The bride has made herself ready. Let the feast begin! At this point, John fell at the feet of the angel to worship him. John was in awe of the one who had delivered these words. He wanted to worship the angel. That is very understandable, but the angel urged John not to worship him. He assured John they were equals, fellow servants and brothers together with all “. . . *who hold to the **testimony of Jesus.***” The angel assured John that he worshiped God along side all the redeemed. This was a rebuke with the simple instructions: *“Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”* *“The testimony of Jesus”* is the spirit of the prophets. Fellowship with Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, and the prophets of God involves telling others what Jesus said in His Book. That is fellowship with God.

The **Hallelujah** chorus is done! The song is finished! Now it is time for the final battle!

THE BATTLE!

Revelation 19:11–16

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one

knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. "He will rule them with an iron scepter." He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:

KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

John saw "... *heaven standing open . . .*" and there before him was THE RIDER ON A WHITE HORSE! It would take a lifetime to discuss these verses. They are based on the vision of the Son of Man who stands in the midst of the lampstands in Revelation 1–3. In this description He is on a "*white horse.*" He is the One who is called "*Faithful and True.*" He is a faithful judge. He will be the eternal judge with brass feet. He will be the One who treads the winepress of the wrath of God (cf. Revelation 1:15). He is the victorious warrior. "*His eyes are like blazing fire . . .*" — eyes that can see into the heart of a man. He is the ruler of all the earth for "*. . . on his head are many crowns.*" The rider wears the unique name that no one knows but He himself. He is the eternal "*Word of God.*" He is the valiant leader of all the hosts of God: "*The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean.*" He is going to strike down the nations as the judge of all. He has a sharp sword and He will rule with an iron scepter.

He is the "***King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.***" He is the same Lord who was introduced at the beginning of the Book of Revelation, but there are more details added. Revelation 1–3 talks about His control over the destiny of the Church. Revelation 19 talks about the fact that He is going to control the destiny of all the Church's enemies. This Rider on

the white horse is more than the conquering One. He is the One who has always conquered. He is the One who has never lost a battle. He has always won! Revelation 19:13 says, “*He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood . . .*” This is not the first time He had been on His horse. That is not the blood from Calvary. It was the blood of His enemies. He had been on the battlefield before. Anyone who opposes Him will be opposing the One who has always won every single battle.

The Supper of God The Judgment of the Two Beasts

Revelation 19:17–21

And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.” Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.

John saw the Rider on the white horse and gives an extensive description of the Rider. He was the One who was going to fight the battle, the One who had never lost a battle. Then immediately after the description of the One who was to

fight, there is another invitation. This one is to “. . . *the great supper of God.*”

John saw “. . . *an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the great supper of God . . .’*” It would be hard to miss an angel standing in the sun. He invited all the birds in the air to come to a feast.

What a contrast! Compare “*Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings . . .*” with the earlier invitation, “*Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb.*” The birds were invited to eat the “. . . *flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.*”

Notice that whenever God was ready to judge His greatest enemies, He invited the birds of heaven to come and eat the flesh of those He was going to kill. They were invited to come and eat that which would be left, the dead putrefying flesh of His victims (cf. Ezekiel 39:17–20; Matthew 24:28). The “*supper of God*” is completely opposite from the kind of feast at the “*wedding supper.*” It is not only opposite in who was going to be fed; the contrast is in what was being served. At the “*wedding supper,*” it was the righteous who were to be fed. At the “*supper of God,*” the wicked were not the ones who would be fed, but they were to be the food for all the birds of the heavens. Notice the menu: “*the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people.*” These were the ones who had **not** bowed their knee to God. They were the ones who had bowed down to worship the beast. They were the earth-dwellers. Everyone has a choice: become a heaven-dweller and eat at the “*wedding supper*” or become an earth-dweller and be eaten by the birds at “*the great supper of God.*”

Now finally, it is time for the judgment of the two beasts. John saw “*the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse*

and his army.” Remember there has been an unholy trio who had an alliance to destroy the people of God. Satan, “*an enormous red dragon,*” was the great enemy of God’s people (cf. Revelation 12:3–4). The “. . . *dragon stood on the shore of the sea . . . [and he called two helpers] a beast coming out of the sea . . . [and] another beast, coming out of the earth*” (Revelation 13:1, 11). The sea beast was the civil power and the persecuting power of Rome. The earth beast was the anti-God, false religion, and emperor worship of Rome. The alliance that began in Revelation 17–18 is continuing as they gather together to make war.

It finally sounds like the battle of Armageddon is about to begin. Surely it is time to see this battle. Everyone had “*gathered together to make war.*” Revelation 19:20 says,

But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf.

Wait a minute! Where is the battle? Where are the details?

The battle of Armageddon is never seen!

It is not even described. There are no details!

There was a battle! It was fought!

Victory is so sure that the saints never see the battle.

What a marvelous lesson!

The alliance was between the beast and the false prophet, who had deluded all those who had received the mark of the beast, and all the armies of the world. The beast and the false prophet, “*the two of them, were thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.*”

This use of the “*fiery lake of burning sulfur*” is the third use of fire and smoke for punishment in the Book of Revelation. Look at Revelation 14:10–11 where God used the cup of His wrath poured out full strength to torment those who worshiped the beast with “. . . *burning sulfur . . . and the smoke*

of their torment rises for ever and ever.” The great harlot “. . . will be consumed by fire for mighty is the Lord God who judges her . . . the kings of the earth see the smoke of her burning, they will weep and mourn over her . . . The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever” (Revelation 18: 8–9, 19:3). Look at Jude 7, Isaiah 13 and 34. What is the picture? This is a picture of eternal defeat. It is age-lasting judgment by God. It is eternal judgment.

God is going to put the beast and the false prophet in a place where they cannot bother His children any more. The purpose of this picture is to tell His children that their enemies will be destroyed forever. The world will be purged of all that is evil. The world will be holy. Praise the Lord! This is what comfort is all about. The enemy is going to be ultimately and totally destroyed.

What about *“the rest of them”*? *The rest of them . . . [the armies of the world — the allies of the beast] were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.* “The *“rest of them”* are those who made up the majority of the earth. They were the ones who had bowed down to the beasts. What an end! They were eaten by the birds. Only one enemy remains. That is Satan himself.

Conclusion

This is a good time to review all that John has seen. Remember there is a purpose for all of this. God has given John these visions to be a comforting message for the saints. That is not just for the saints during the first century. It is to be comfort for Christians at all times, in all generations.

- God rules the entire world.
- The Lamb overcame death to be worthy to reveal all that will happen in the future. The Lamb opened a seven-sealed book to reveal the destiny of the people of God.

- The conquering One was seen as the One on the white horse. The red horse's rider was war, then came famine, economic discrimination, and the servants of God were killed.
- The servants of God were alive under the altar of God. They cried out, "How long before vengeance comes?"
- God told the saints under the altar that His judgment is coming (cf. Revelation 8–9). There were seven angels with seven trumpets and seven bowls of wrath to come.
- God's children must continue to preach even during times of sorrow and persecution.
- God's children are going to be safe because the temple of God, the altar, and the worshipers have been measured and counted. The preaching of the Gospel is going to be victorious.
- God is going to bring judgment upon the enemy, the dragon, who wanted to devour the pregnant woman and her Child.
- The dragon was a four-time loser: he tried to devour the Christ and lost. He tried to devour the angels and lost. He tried to kill the woman and lost. He tried to attack the saints through civil persecution, emperor worship, seductive influences, and the power of the world — and he lost!
- One day Satan will go into eternal, absolute, and total destruction. On that day all heaven and earth will shout, "Hallelujah! Praise the Lord! Amen!"
- The Rider on the white horse will appear with a sword in His mouth with which He kills. With this sword He will kill all those who have followed the beasts and worshiped the image of the dragon. He will rule with an iron scepter and trod the enemy in the winepress of the wrath of God.
- The Rider on the white horse will take the sea beast (persecution) and the earth beast (false religion) and throw them into a lake of fire where they will be judged forever.
- The Rider on the white horse will defeat the devil himself.

The Binding of Satan

Revelation 20:1–15

Review and Introduction

Rome and all of its symbolic manifestations have been defeated. The devil, because he was physically represented in Rome, has been utterly and totally defeated. He has not just been hindered by the fall of Rome, he has been thoroughly stopped. The saints will be eternally triumphant because of the fall of Rome. Christians have not merely won over Rome, they have annihilated her.

The concepts of Rome's defeat and the saint's victory are symbolized in the thousand year period found in Revelation 20. The devil is going to show himself again because even though he has been totally defeated, he has not been permanently defeated. Sometime, somewhere, before the Church goes to a better eternal place, the devil will attack again. His future attacks are symbolized by the verse: "*When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison*" (Revelation 20:7). Satan will be freed to attack Christ and the Church again. This time he will not use Rome. Rome is gone forever, but Satan has other allies he will use against the saints.

Those who belong to Christ will reign from the "*thrones*" for a thousand year period. The dead who died in service to the enemy will remain dead for a thousand years. Then they will be resurrected for a second death in the lake of fire.

Images and Phrases From Revelation 20

- "*Satan . . . bound him for a thousand years*"

- Saints “reigned with Christ a thousand years”
- “first resurrection”
- “the rest of the dead [the enemies of God, dead] . . . until the thousand years were ended”
- Satan “set free for a short time”
- “Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle”
- “surrounded the camp of God’s people” — Holy City
- Second resurrection for the wicked
- “the second death”
- “great and small standing before the throne . . . each person was judged “
- “lake of fire”
- Lots of judgment, but lots of victory also

The Binding of Satan

Revelation 20:1–3

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Remember from Revelation 9 that Satan was the star who had fallen from heaven and was given the key to the Abyss (cf. Revelation 9:1). He had been defeated, but beginning in Revelation 20, John saw an angel with the key to the Abyss in his hand coming down out of heaven. This picture indicates that John was on the earth, so this chapter has an earthly viewpoint. The angel also had “. . . in his hand a great chain.” The picture is that Satan was bound by the chain for one

thousand years upon the earth. The purpose of this picture is to let mankind know without a doubt that the devil was totally, perfectly, and flawlessly defeated and bound. He can never use his powers from the first century Rome against the saints again.

Everything in the Book of Revelation 1–19 has been a symbolic picture. There is no reason to assume that beginning in Revelation 20 all that has changed. This is still a book of symbolic pictures. So what does the picture of a thousand years mean? The term of “*years*” is used to convey the idea of totality or perfection. The figure of “*seven years*” was used to symbolize the period of time when God’s people would have victory over Gog and Magog. The figure of “*seven months*” was also used in that way (cf. Ezekiel 39:9, 12). Periods of time were used even though they did not mean exactly that amount of time. “*A thousand years*” does not mean that specific amount of time; it was used to signify a total or perfect amount of time.

The psalmist sang about “. . . *the cattle on a thousand hills*” (cf. Psalm 50:10) referring to all cattle and all creatures belonging to the Creator. The picture is not to limit the number of cattle to just the ones on one thousand hills. Then who would the cattle on hill number one thousand and one belong to? The picture is that all creatures on every hill belong to God. God said, “*I am the LORD your God . . . showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commands*” (cf. Exodus 20:6; Revelation 7:9; 1 Chronicles 16:15; Psalm 105:8). God does not count the generations. He is simply saying I will keep My covenant for all time.

The devil was bound for all time, totally and completely in his ability to deceive the saints. He has been “*locked and sealed*” in the Abyss for a thousand years. Those who wanted to see realized that the God of the saints had defeated Rome and Satan. After Rome’s defeat, she was no longer a threat to be feared. That was a marvelous revelation and comfort for the children of God. The devil no longer had the power to deceive and the Roman Empire had been destroyed.

The Thrones of the Righteous

Revelation 20:4–6

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

Revelation 20:1–3 paints a bad picture for Satan and his followers. As bad as that picture is, that is how good things are going to be for the saints. John saw “. . . *thrones on which were seated those who had been given the authority to judge.*” These are saints who were the “overcomers” from Revelation 2–3. They are the one who won the battle. They were not just saints, they were martyred saints; the ones who were beheaded because of their message and faithfulness. They did not “. . . *worship the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands.*” Daniel’s vision shows many thrones around the throne of God (cf. Daniel 7:9). In Revelation 4:4 John saw twenty-four other thrones surrounding the throne of God with twenty-four elders sitting upon the thrones. John saw those who had not worshiped the beast come to life. The saints who were once dead “*came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years* (Revelation 20:4). When Jesus gave John the message to the angel of the church in

Laodicea, He said: *“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne”* (Revelation 3:21). One of the last things said about the saints in the Book of Revelation is — *“And they will reign for ever and ever”* (Revelation 22:5).

There is a parenthesis in the first part of Revelation 20:5 which tells the condition of *“the rest of the dead.”* *“The rest of the dead”* refers to those who did worship the beast; they did receive his number and mark. The contrast is that the saints *“came to life and reigned with Christ,”* but *“the rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.”* They were going to be dead for the thousand years. They died with the beast they had been worshiping — *“The rest of them were killed with the sword . . .”* (Revelation 19:21). The beast and the false prophet and *“the rest of them”* are dead. This symbolizes the fact that they had absolutely no power and no activity during this time period.

What were the saints doing? They were benefitting from the *“first resurrection”* — *“Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years”* (Revelation 20:6). Notice how the saints were blessed by the first resurrection. First, the second death would have no power over them. Revelation 20:14 says, *“ . . . The lake of fire is the second death.”* Second, the saints were blessed because they were holy. They served as priests in the Holy Place. Remember that all Christians are priests. God *“has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve . . .”* (Revelation 1:6, 5:10). Third, the saints were blessed because not only did they serve, they were going to reign with God for the thousand years. The main lesson in this passage is simple. The dead in Christ share in His victory. The saints who were once dead came to life to reign with Christ — *“they will be priests of God and Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.”*

The Devil's Future Attack

Revelation 20:7–10

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth — Gog and Magog — to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

The devil was completely bound when Rome fell, but he was not permanently bound. He is going to return to his work again; *“he must be set free for a short time”* (Revelation 20:3b). He *“will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations . . .”* **That is the work of Satan.** He is a deceiver. He has been doing the same thing since the very beginning in the Garden of Eden. He wants people to believe his lies. It is impossible for him to speak the truth even when he is quoting scripture. He quotes it in such a way so that he lies to anyone who will listen.

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will not only go out to deceive the nations, he will go out to gather new helpers in his attacks against the saints. The helpers are called *“Gog and Magog.”* *“Gog and Magog”* are talked about in the Book of Ezekiel. To understand all that these names mean, do a survey of the entire Book of Ezekiel focusing on chapters 38–39. Ezekiel has a single message in the first twenty-four chapters: Jerusalem must fall. The nation thought they could not fall just like Babylon in the Book of Revelation. Jerusalem was not

faithful to God. She trusted in her own resources instead of trusting in God.

Not only was Jerusalem destined to fall, all the foreign nations were going to be defeated as well. Ezekiel prophesied against Moab, Egypt, Edom, Philistia, and Tyre. The Book of Ezekiel does not end without giving comfort to Israel. They were in bondage, but they will be comforted. They will have a new king with an old name, David, who will be a prince forever. They will have a new country and dignity. They will be united and they will defeat their enemy, Babylon. God raised up an army against Gog, of the land of Magog. The number of the soldiers of Gog and all his hordes was so large that it took the house of Israel seven months to bury them all. That number is estimated to be 400–800 million men. If all of those old enough to go to war in the world today were gathered into one army, the army might number about that many. No army has ever been that big.

What is the message from the Book of Ezekiel? The devil can never gather an army big enough to threaten the city of God. That is a reoccurring message in the Bible. Think about the story of David and Goliath. Think about the story of Gideon and his army of only three hundred men (cf. Judges 7:7). David was a little runt of a lad who could not move when he put on King Saul's armor. He went out to meet Goliath who was a giant nearly ten feet tall. He carried a spear that was ten feet long. David challenged Goliath. David knew that Goliath was a man who trusted in his own power and might, while David had the power of God on his side. David did not beat Goliath with a sword or spear, but with one smooth stone (1 Samuel 17).

The same kind of battle was going to happen to Satan in Revelation. Satan planned to invade the city of God with an army too many to number: “. . . *In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves . . .*” (Revelation 20:8–9). Imagine the Holy City

surrounded by Satan and his army. An army of 500 million people and more.

There should be a battle scene at this point. Once again there is no battle, no swords, and no shots fired: “***But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.***” There was no battle scene because in an instant the enemy was defeated. There was only victory! When God’s people are threatened, that is the way it always ends. God comes from heaven and destroys the enemy.

The army of Satan was devoured by fire from heaven. Satan, the one who had deceived his own army, “. . . was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10). The “lake of burning sulfur” and the “lake of fire” (cf. Revelation 20:14–15) is a symbol of total, irrevocable, absolute, and complete defeat.

The last picture of Satan’s attacks against the people of God summarizes all the battles that will come. Satan will come again and again against God’s people, but he will lose again and again. He has been defeated by God forever. No one comes out of the lake of fire: “*They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*” That is eternal destruction.

The Great White Throne

Revelation 20:11–15

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to

There is another description found in Revelation 4:2–6, 9:

At once I was in the Spirit, and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and carnelian. A rainbow, resembling an emerald, encircled the throne. Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads. From the throne came flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder. Before the throne, seven lamps were blazing. These are the seven spirits of God. Also before the throne there was what looked like a sea of glass, clear as crystal. . . .who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever.

The same symbolism is used in Isaiah 6:1 and Ezekiel 1:25–28. The Lord God is sitting on a throne, high and exalted. This is always the picture of God when He is ready to come in judgment. In Revelation 20:11 He is the One on “*the great white throne*.” John saw all creation, “*earth and sky*,” fleeing from God’s presence. God sat there all alone. Remember when the temple was filled with smoke, no one could enter the Holy of Holies. God alone is going to tread the winepress (cf. Isaiah 63:3). When He is ready to judge, all creation flees from His presence (cf. Jeremiah 4:24; Ezekiel 38:20; Nahum 1:5). God is going to sit in judgment of any wicked nation who has hurt His people.

John saw “. . . *the dead, great and small, standing before the throne . . .*” These were the ones who were going to be judged. They were the dead from the sea and from death and Hades. Anyone whose name was not found in the book of life was called to stand before the throne. These were the people who followed the devil. They had been raised from the dead to

be judged. That was the second resurrection. They were raised to endure the second death in the lake of fire.

John saw “books” that were opened, and then another book was opened, which was the “book of life.” An educated guess concerning the “books” that were opened would be that these “books” were the Bible. John recorded a time when Jesus was talking to unbelievers about judgment:

“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day. For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it” (John 12:48–49).

God’s Word is the standard that men must live by, but the primary book to be used in judging the dead was “*the book of life.*”

Moses spoke of a book in which God had recorded the people who had followed Moses honestly and faithfully (cf. Exodus 32:32). He also spoke about a book in which the LORD blotted out the names of those whom His wrath burned against (cf. Deuteronomy 29:20). Daniel 12:1 speaks of a time when everyone who has his name written in “*the book*” will be delivered. Malachi talked about a “*. . . scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name*” (Malachi 3:16). Jesus told the seventy-two disciples He sent out to “*. . . rejoice that your names are written in heaven*” (Luke 10:20).

This is not the first time the Book of Revelation mentions the “book of life” either. Jesus spoke these words to the church in Sardis, “*I will never blot out his name from the book of life if they acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels*” (Revelation 3:5). Those who worshiped the beast were described as “*. . . all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the*

creation of the world” (Revelation 13:8; cf. Revelation 17:8). Revelation 21 talks about:

*. . . a new heaven and a new earth . . . where [John] did not see a temple in the city . . . nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose **names are written in the Lamb’s book of life** (Revelation 21:1, 22, 27).*

People are called “*blessed*” because their names had been written in the “*book of life*.” In the final analysis, the most important question for anyone when judgment comes will be: “Is your name written in the book of life?” If a person’s name is in the book of life, then no judgment can threaten him.

For those who would face judgment because their names were not written in the book of life, they would be cast into the “*lake of fire*.” Notice one more time who was going to be swimming in that lake. The “*beast*” was there. The “*false prophet*” was there. The “*dragon*” was there. The “*mother of prostitutes*” was there. All who had chosen to follow Satan were there. Everyone whose name was not written in God’s family book was there.

Conclusion

The devil had been bound for a thousand years to indicate that he had been perfectly and totally defeated in his use of Rome against the Lamb and His saints. He was going to be set free for a short amount of time so that the saints would know that even after Rome had fallen there would be others who would oppose the Church. The saints needed to be prepared for the opposition so that when it occurred, they would not fall. Revelation has the same message for saints today.

The authority to judge had been given to those who were sitting on the thrones surrounding the throne of God. These were representatives of the saints who had lived to see the fall

of Rome. They were the ones who had died in faith to Jesus. They had been resurrected to reign with all their brethren who were still on the earth. The time of this reign is said to be “*a thousand years*” simply to indicate the perfect completeness of this reign. They were a part of the “*first resurrection*” because theirs was a resurrection to life.

The second resurrection is seen in Revelation 20:12–13 where John saw “*the dead . . . standing before the throne.*” These were “*the rest of the dead [who] did not come to life until the thousand years were ended*” (Revelation 20:5). These were those who had died in service to the beast. They would endure a thousand years of death while the saints would be living and reigning. They would also have to endure a second resurrection which would take them to a “*second death.*” The “*second death*” symbolizes utter, total, irrevocable defeat for those who had followed Satan.

The final destiny revealed in the Book of Revelation is for those who follow the Lamb. There are two resurrections. The first resurrection is being raised to live and reign with Jesus in an abundant and complete life. The second resurrection is to death, but it is going to be an abundant and complete death. There is a choice to be made. Follow the world and receive the second death of an eternal fire or follow Jesus and receive the first resurrection into an abundant life. It is a life of perfect provision, perfect protection, and perfect fellowship where there will be no sorrow and every need will be supplied.

The Heavenly Jerusalem

Revelation 21:1–22:21

Introduction

The Church has come through a major crisis. She has defeated her enemy. Revelation 21–22 is a description of the triumphant and vindicated Family of God. There is going to be a lot about “**new**”-ness in this chapter. The Church will be in a new environment. John is going to write about her beauty and purity. He will speak about her stability and strength. He will especially speak about her holiness.

The Citizens of the City

Revelation 21:1–8

*Then I saw a **new** heaven and a **new** earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the **new** Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything **new**!” Then*

he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son. But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."

First, think about who the people are in Revelation 21. These are God's people — ". . . *They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God*" (Revelation 21:3). These people are living in ". . . *a new heaven and a new earth . . .*" John saw ". . . *a new heaven and a new earth . . . the new Jerusalem . . . He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'*" (Revelation 21:1–2, 5a). John said, ". . . *the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.*"

God said, "*I am making everything new!*" but this is not a new picture. Read Isaiah 13:6–22; 34:1–17; 65:17–25; Nahum 1:1–5; Micah 1:3–6. Then compare those verses with 2 Peter 2:1–5, 3:6–7:

But there were also false prophets among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. They will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the sovereign Lord who bought them — bringing swift destruction on themselves. Many will follow their shameful ways and will bring the way of truth into disrepute. In their greed these teachers will exploit you with stories they have made up. Their condemnation has long been hanging over them, and their destruction has not been sleeping. For if God

did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others . . . By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men.

These verses all talk about an oppressor who is no longer going to exist. The “*present heavens and earth*” are going to be destroyed by fire. These passages show very clearly that the “*new heaven and a new earth*” is a new atmosphere, a new environment with a new state of affairs. The “*present heavens and earth*” belonged to the oppressor. Satan thought he ruled. He thought he was in control, but his heaven and earth were destroyed. In the “*new heaven and a new earth*,” the oppressor does not exist. There has been the removal of a specific oppressor and a radical change of circumstances. This is all a “**new**” beginning for the children of God. 2 Peter 3:11–13 says:

*Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a **new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.***

These verses make it clear that the “*new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness*” is not the Church. The “*new heaven and a new earth*” is what the Church is looking for. The

Church is looking forward to a change where everything will be “new” including the Church. It will have a new, glorified state.

The Book of Revelation pictures the Church looking for redemption, vengeance, and their own reward. They want to be avenged for their blood that was shed. They want to be rewarded for their faithfulness. Revelation 19–20 talks about vindication for the saints. Revelation 21 is about redemption.

The writer of Hebrews wrote about a new situation that was going to occur. In the past there was an old heaven and an old earth. There was Mount Sinai and all that the Law represented, but in Hebrews 12:22–24, the writer said:

. . . you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant . . .

John saw “*the Holy City coming down out of heaven from God.*” This is not only the “*Holy City,*” it is God’s city. It is “*the new Jerusalem.*” The “*Holy City*” of God has been “*prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*” Remember there has already been an invitation to the “*wedding supper*” (cf. Revelation 19:9). Read Ephesians 5:22–33 to be reminded that “*Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior.*”

God is going to dwell in the “*Holy City*” with His saints. This is a common thought throughout the New Testament. Paul told the Corinthians: “*Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you*” (1 Corinthians 3:16). He also told the Ephesians that the Church was built on a foundation of Jesus, the Apostles, and prophets with the whole building joined together to become a holy temple in the Lord. God’s Spirit lives in His children, the Church (cf.

Ephesians 2:20–22). In another letter to the Corinthians, Paul told them that God was living among them (cf. 2 Corinthians 6:16–17).

The voice from the throne told John that God would be among His people to be their God. There is going to be only happiness in the “*Holy City*”: *He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away*” (Revelation 21:4). This is the way the coming Kingdom of God has been described before. Isaiah gave the children of Israel that kind of encouraging picture when they were still in captivity (cf. Isaiah 65:17–25).

God is going to make everything “*new*.” No matter what the future holds, the saints have security. They are God’s people. They can trust His Words and believe that everything He says is true. God said, “*It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End.*” He is the First and Last letters in the Greek alphabet. He is the eternal One.

The people of God are going to be taken care of by Him. They are satisfied in God’s provisions. They can drink without cost of the “*spring of the water of life*.” The people of God are going to be provided for and protected by Him. They are the “overcomers.” The phrase “*he who overcomes*” and the idea of overcoming is used often in the Book of Revelation. Overcoming is a key thought. It is seen at the end of every letter to the seven churches in Revelation 2–3. The saints “*overcame . . . by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death*” (Revelation 12:11). In the end, “*he who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son*” (Revelation 21:7).

John is shown both sides and writes so that his readers can see both sides. The opposite side of inheriting all that God has given His children will be taking a place in the lake of fire. This is the second death. Look at the list of those who will endure the “*second death*” in Revelation 21:8:

- *the cowardly* — those who cannot be trusted.
- *the unbelieving* — those who do not trust.
- *the vile* — those who are polluted.
- *the murderers* — those who desire evil for others.
- *the sexually immoral* — those who look in lust.
- *those who practice magic arts* — those who follow the occult
- *the idolaters* — those who are covetous.
- *all liars* — those who live by deceit.

The Characteristics of the City

One of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and said to me, "Come, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb." And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (Revelation 21:9–10).

One of the angels carried John away to a high mountain to show him the Holy City. Revelation 21:11–22:5 gives a detailed description of "*the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.*" Read these verses and notice all the details given. It is hard to know exactly what all these details mean with the symbolic language John used, but there are some things that are very clear.

Notice the **origin** of this city which John saw "... *coming down out of heaven from God* ..." (Revelation 21:2). This was not an earthly city. John saw it "... *coming down out of heaven from God* ..." This is a spiritual city, a heavenly city. It is a city "*from God.*" Paul assured the Philippians:

... Our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything

under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20–21).

The “*Holy City*” shines with the “*glory of God*” and the brilliance of a precious jewel. It is a **beautiful, glorious city** which: “. . . *shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal*” (Revelation 21:11). Remember that the “*glory of God*” filled the temple in Revelation 15:8, but in Revelation 21:22–24 John said:

*I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the **glory of God** gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.*

Isaiah talked about the glory of the LORD rising among His people (cf. Isaiah 60:1–2). Revelation 22:5 says: “*They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light.*”

The Holy City is **secured** with a “. . . *great, high wall with twelve gates, and with twelve angels at the gates*” (Revelation 21:12). The wall makes the City secure and the gates make it accessible. The angels are posted to keep out anyone who does not belong inside the Holy City.

The wall of the Holy City has “. . . *twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*” (Revelation 21:14). The foundations speak of the permanence of the City. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul talked to them about the foundation he had laid: “*By the grace God has given, I laid a foundation as an expert builder*” (1 Corinthians 3:10–15). He told the Ephesians: “. . . *you are . . . members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the **apostles** and*

prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Ephesians 2:19–20).

The Holy City is a **“measured”** city. An angel measured the City, its gates, and its walls with a *“measuring rod of gold.”* The City measures fifteen hundred miles (2,414 kilometers) long, fifteen hundred miles wide, and fifteen hundred miles high. The Holy City has room for everyone who has ever lived on the earth or ever will live. There is going to be enough room for everyone in Jesus’ house.

The walls around the Holy City measure 216 feet wide (65.84 meters — the thickness of the walls), making it more than 70 yards wide. It would be impossible for an army to tear down or even rush against a wall that wide. The City is going to have total protection for all who reside inside.

The Holy City is a **precious, costly** city. Revelation 21:18–21 talks about the precious stones and metals used to describe God’s City: *“The wall was made of jasper and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone”* (Revelation 21:18–19). *“Jasper”* is a precious stone that is described as pure and clear. It is probably comparable to a diamond. Each one of the foundations is a different precious jewel. Each of the twelve gates is made of a single pearl. There is no way to imagine how large a single pearl would have to be to symmetrically fit in a wall that is 1500 miles high. The pearl was the most precious stone in the world in the day that John wrote. The streets of the City are made of pure, transparent gold. Rather than focusing on all the details in this chapter, it is more important to focus on the total picture.

The Holy City is a glorious, precious city. The background for this comes from Isaiah 60 where Isaiah described the glory of Zion. It would be good to read that whole chapter and see the splendor of God’s City. No one has exclusive access to God. Nations will come from all directions: north, south, east, and west to enter gates that will never be shut. There are three gates on each side of the city ready for the saints to enter. The glory

of God is the Light for this City and the Lamb is the Lamp. This is **God's Holy City**. Nothing impure and no unholy person will ever be allowed to enter its gates. The angels will guard the gates of the City so that “. . . *only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life*” (Revelation 21:27) may enter in.

The Holy City John was describing is an eternal **Eden**, a city of paradise:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever (Revelation 22:1–5).

The Holy City is a city of paradise just as the Garden of Eden had been. It will have all the provisions that anyone would need. Ezekiel talked about a river flowing from the throne of God that got deeper as it flowed without a single tributary (cf. Ezekiel 47:1–12). That would be impossible if these descriptions were speaking literally. However, with God nothing is impossible. Everyday a person lives as His child, he goes deeper into His presence and deeper into His provisions.

There is “. . . *the river of the water of life . . . flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb*” After the air he breaths, water is the most essential thing in a man's life. This “*water*” is flowing from the throne of God. The “*tree of life*” stood on

each side of the river bearing a crop of fruit every month. The fruit satisfies all the needs of man and the leaves from the trees heal the nations. The nations need healing because of man's sins. The sickness of man is sin.

This description of the Holy City is not a description of the way the Church will be in heaven. There is no way to describe the Church as it will be in heaven. It will be too glorious for human ears to hear and for human hearts to understand. This is a picture of the Church as it is on earth. This is a picture of the times when people are being healed. Sins are being forgiven. The Gospel is being preached. Time is still going on. This is a picture of the victorious city of God on earth. It is a picture of the Holy City on the other side of the trouble as the Church is being cared for by God. It is a picture of the Church as they share what they have from the tree of life. The Church carries the leaves from the tree of life to the nations bringing healing to mankind.

Those who live within the Holy City have privileges (cf. Revelation 22:3–5). First, there is *“no longer . . . any curse.”* One of the privileges in the Holy City is living in fellowship with God comparable to the time before Adam and Eve ate from the accursed tree (cf. Genesis 3:1–19; Isaiah 52:11; Ezekiel 20:34, 41; Leviticus 26:12; Jeremiah 32:28; 2 Samuel 7:14). Paul, in one of his letters to the Corinthians, wrote about Christians coming out of the wicked world and being separate from it. When God's children live according to His will, God said: *“I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people”* (2 Corinthians 6:16–18). Not only is the curse of the world taken away, there is fellowship with God and service rendered to Him. What a privilege God's children have to be able to draw nearer to Him in close communion. They will see Him face to face and wear His name on their foreheads (cf. Revelation 9:4, 14; Ezekiel 9:4). The people of God will enjoy reigning forever with Him as the Light. Whether they lived or died in the first century, the

saints will reign forever and ever. Christians today reign because He reigns.

The Challenges for the City

Keep God's Word Revelation 22:6–11, 18–19

The angel said to me, "These words are trustworthy and true. The Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent his angel to show his servants the things that must soon take place."

"Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book."

I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I had heard and seen them, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who had been showing them to me. But he said to me, "Do not do it! I am a fellow servant with you and with your brothers the prophets and of all who keep the words of this book. Worship God!" Then he told me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, because the time is near. Let him who does wrong continue to do wrong; let him who is vile continue to be vile; let him who does right continue to do right; and let him who is holy continue to be holy." . . . I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

Revelation 22:6–21 contains some challenges for the saints of the first century. Notice that the angel told John that God had sent His angel to show His servant “. . . *the things that must soon take place*” (Revelation 22:6). There are five different verses in Revelation 22 which indicate that the things in this Book are going to have immediate fulfillment:

- Revelation 22:6 — “. . . *must soon take place.*”
- Revelation 22:7 — “*Behold, I am coming soon!*”
- Revelation 22:10 — “. . . *the time is near.*”
- Revelation 22:12 — “*Behold, I am coming soon!*”
- Revelation 22:20 — “. . . *Yes, I am coming soon.*”

Revelation 22:6–21 contains four separate challenges. The first challenge is found in the words of Jesus when He said: “*Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy in this book*” (Revelation 22:7). The saints are challenged to **keep God’s Word** primarily because His words are “. . . *trustworthy and true*” (Revelation 22:6). If God’s children keep His Word, they will be blessed. God’s Word calls for His children to continue to do what they have been doing. It calls for endurance. There is to be no tampering with the Word of God:

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Revelation 22:18–19).

The second challenge is found in the words of Jesus in Revelation 22:12–14:

“Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the End. Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.”

These verses challenge the saints to **serve God**. There is going to be a reward for being “*with*” Jesus. He is coming soon: “*My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.*” This is about serving God. When He comes, He is going to reward the faithful. The faithful are assured of their reward. Jesus is coming to do everything He has said He will do in the Book of Revelation.

Jesus spoke about His eternal nature in Revelation 22:13. Because God is eternal, every Christian needs to faithfully serve. The outcome of this service is seen in: “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city*” (Revelation 22:14). Those who abide in Jesus and remain faithful until the end will get to eat from the “*tree of life*” and live within the Holy City.

The third challenge comes when Jesus said:

“Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star” (Revelation 22:15–16).

Christians need to **keep their lives clean**. They need to be separated from those who live outside the gates of the City. Jesus is the Key to clean living. He is the Root and the

Offspring of David. He is both God and Man. He is the Morning Star.

The fourth challenge to the saints is to **keep trusting Jesus**. Revelation 22:17, 20–21 says:

The Spirit and the bride say, “Come!” And let him who hears say, “Come!” Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life. . . . He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen.

There is a continual invitation to those who are thirsty to come and drink. The only requirement to be allowed to come to Jesus is thirst. In John 4:10 Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: *“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you **living water**.”* Later as He was teaching in the temple courts in Jerusalem, Jesus said, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him”* (John 7: 37–38). Those who hear this invitation and want to drink simply need to believe in Jesus, **trust in Him**.

Christians need to trust that Jesus is always near. He is coming soon. That was His promise to John. John responded by saying: *“Amen. Come, Lord Jesus”* (Revelation 22:20). In other words, John was asking Jesus to hurry. John made one final request: *“The grace of the Lord Jesus be with God’s people. Amen”* (Revelation 22:21).

This is an amazing book! God wrote this Book for one single purpose. He wants the people of God to enjoy His grace. May God be glorified. May mankind find peace in the study of the Book of Revelation. There is peace in believing in the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

A Final Look and the Songs of Revelation

Introduction

The final two chapters in this study series over the Book of Revelation focus on a quick look at the Book as a whole. Chapter twenty-three will divide the Book of Revelation into three portions to look at the final thrust. The last part of chapter twenty-three is going to focus on the nineteen songs found in the Book of Revelation. Chapter twenty-four of this study series will cover the Beatitudes from the Book of Revelation, a discussion of Genesis 3:15: The Eternal Struggle, and The Conflict in Historical Perspective.

Final Thrust in the Book of Revelation

Once again this is going to be a different focus on the Book of Revelation as a whole. These different looks throughout this study series may seem to be repetitive, but they give a different focus to help the student remember points within the Book.

The Fortunes of the Church Revelation 1–3

Revelation 1–3 talks about the blessings of the Church in Asia Minor during the first century. Revelation 1:3 says: *“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near.”* John saw *“... someone ‘like a son of man’ ... among the lampstands ...”* (Revelation 1:13).

He fell down to worship the Son of Man who said: “. . . ‘*Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades*’” (Revelation 1:17–18). The seven churches of Asia Minor were blessed by their acceptance of the Book of Revelation as being from God. They were blessed because the Son of Man walked among them. They were blessed by the fact that God was able to see their inner nature and judged them accordingly. They looked one way on the outside, but God looks on the inside to see everyone as they really are. The seven churches of Asia and the Church today are blessed based upon who they really are.

The Outer Struggle Between the Church and Rome Revelation 4–11

The outer struggle for the saints in the first century was between the Church and the Roman Empire. Revelation 4 assured the saints that, in spite of the struggle, God was ruling the universe. Revelation 5 assured the saints the slain Lamb was going to control the future. Revelation 6 assured the saints that persecution, famine, death, and even God’s judgment would not be able to harm the Church. Revelation 7 assured the saints they were protected and would be victorious over all their troubles and enemies. Revelation 8–11 assured the saints God uses natural calamity, internal decay, and external forces as tools to judge the enemy and deliver His servants.

The Deeper Struggle Between Christ and Satan Revelation 12–22

The deeper struggle between Christ and Satan is really an inner struggle. The outer struggle was between the Church and the world of the first century. The inner struggle is the struggle going on continually between Christ and Satan. Revelation 12 tells about an ages-long battle in which Satan was the four-time loser and God was the four-time winner. Revelation 13–14 could be summarized with the statement: persecution and false

religion cannot touch Jesus and His followers, the 144,000. Revelation 15–19 portrays the picture of complete destruction for the persecutors. The Roman Empire was judged as a whole, and then the city of Rome itself was judged as a seducer. The beast (persecutor) and the false prophet were cast into the “*lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:14a) as all the saints rejoiced.

Revelation 19–20 reveals the outcome of the struggle for Satan and his followers. It can be summarized with these words: “*The lake of fire is the second death*” (Revelation 20:14b). Revelation 21–22 reveals a wonderful outcome of the struggle for the Church. There is fellowship with God, protection from God, provision from God, and the assurance that the Church belongs to Him.

The Book of Revelation says God is in control of the Church yesterday, today, and forever. God will judge the enemy eternally. He will also reward His children eternally.

Revelation’s Song Book

Throughout the study of the Book of Revelation, there are songs recorded. Singing expresses the soul’s response to the world around mankind. Singing is an important way to express emotions. The **first song** is recorded in Revelation 1:7:

*Look, he is coming with the clouds,
and every eye will see him,
even those who pierced him;
and all the peoples of the earth
will mourn because of him.
So shall it be! Amen.*

This song proclaims that Jesus is coming with the clouds. He is going to be seen by everyone, but His coming will be dreaded by His enemies. The primary lesson of this song is that His coming is something that should be desired by the saints. Revelation 22:7, 12, and 20 convey the fact that Jesus is “. . .

coming soon.” The King James Version translates these verses as: “*And behold, I come quickly.*” and “*Surely I come quickly.*” And the saints, along with John say: “*Amen. Even so, come Lord Jesus.*” They are waiting and longing for His coming.

The **second song** is found in Revelation 4:8 where the four living creatures never stopped singing:

*“Holy, holy, holy
is the Lord God Almighty,
who was, and is, and is to come.”*

This song is part of the throne scene in Revelation 4. The four living creatures were cherubim, the creatures closest to God, the highest form of His creation. They each had six wings and were covered with eyes all around. Surely those who are closest to God know what to sing. The first recorded song from the cherubim in this Book was not about God’s judgment, His awesome power, or His vindictiveness. They sang about God’s character. They sang, “*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!*” He is the One who has always been. He is the One who is part of the here and now. He is the One who will be there eternally. The cherubim sang about the eternal nature of God. They sang about this truth day and night.

The **third song** is found in Revelation 4:11:

*“You are worthy, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they were created and have their
being.”*

This song was sung by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders as they worshiped the One who sits on the throne. This is a picture of the praise given by the redeemed and the cherubim. Together they praised God for more than just His character. They praised God for His worthiness. They sang

about the reasons He is worthy. Think about being able to worship with these saints as they laid their crowns before the throne. Christians need to sing this same song today.

God is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power because He is the One who created all things. By His will all things were created and in Him all things have their being. Numerous people claim glory, honor, or power; and for a moment they may even possess portions of those things. The demon had power for a little while. The beast also had power for a while. The dragon had power for a little while. God has glory, honor, and power for eternity. He not only possesses these things, but He is also worthy to receive them. He is worthy because He created all things and sustains all things.

The **fourth song** in the Book of Revelation is found in Revelation 5:9–10. This is the first song to be called “*a new song*”:

*“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you purchased men for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve
our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”*

Once again this song was sung by those who were the redeemed: “. . . *the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb.*” This song says, “*You are worthy . . .*” just as the song before it, but this time the song was sung about the Lamb. Not only is God worthy to receive glory, honor, and praise, but so is the Lamb. The Lamb is worthy to control the future. He is worthy to open the scroll. The Lamb is worthy because He was slain. He proved His worthiness when He purchased men for God from every tribe, language, people, and nation. He purchased men to make them

into a Kingdom to serve God and rule the world. His death and His redeeming power make Him worthy to be praised.

The **fifth song** was sung by “. . . many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand . . . the living creatures and the elders” (Revelation 5:11. Look in Revelation 5:12:

*“Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain,
to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength
and honor and glory and praise!”*

This song was sung by over a hundred million angels. They sang in a loud voice giving praise to the Lamb who was slain. The Lamb is worthy to be praised because He had been slain. He is worthy to receive power, wealth, wisdom, strength, honor, glory, and praise. It sounds like this choir tried to think of every possible good thing and created a list of all that the Lamb was worthy to receive. The Lamb once had every good thing as His own, and He gave it all up to become man. After the cross and His crucifixion, He is worthy to possess every good thing all over again.

The **sixth song** was sung by “. . . every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea,” and they sang with “. . . all that is in them.” Revelation 5:13–14 says:

*“To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb
be praise and honor and glory and power,
for ever and ever! . . . Amen”*

This song was sung to both the One who “. . . sits on the throne and to the Lamb.” The eternal God and the Lamb, Jesus, are both worthy of praise, honor, glory, and power. The four living creatures said, “Amen!” and then the elders fell down and worshiped.

The **seventh song** was sung by “. . . a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language” in Revelation 7:10:

*“Salvation belongs to our God,
who sits on the throne,
and to the Lamb.”*

Remember in Revelation 7, the “*great multitude*” referred to those who had been redeemed. This multitude consisted of those who were standing in front of the throne and the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and carrying palm branches. They were the saints who had been victorious over the troubles of the first century. It is possible that this is their first time before the throne of God to see His glory and power and the full significance of that scene. Notice they cried in a loud voice — “*Salvation belongs to our God . . . and to the Lamb.*” This song says God and the Lamb are able to save souls. This is a song about salvation from God. Songs about salvation and assurance are encouraging songs for the redeemed of every day and time.

The **eighth song** is recorded in Revelation 7:12:

*“Amen!
Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor
and power and strength
be to our God for ever and ever.
Amen!”*

This song was sung by all the angels who had gathered with the elders and the four living creatures. The angels fell down and worshiped God in agreement with the song of salvation sung by the multitude gathered around the throne. They were singing in agreement to the fact that, “*Salvation belongs to our God . . . and to the Lamb.*” Once again it is as if the angels searched their entire vocabulary for just the right words to describe God,

the Father of salvation. God is to be praised for His glory and wisdom. He is to be thanked and honored because of His power and strength. All these things belong to God forever and ever.

The **ninth song** is about the saints who had overcome. It is recorded in Revelation 7:15–17:

*“ . . . they are before the throne of God
and serve him day and night in his temple;
and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over
them.
Never again will they hunger;
never again will they thirst.
The sun will not beat upon them,
nor any scorching heat.
For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their
shepherd;
he will lead them to springs of living water.
And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.”*

This song is about the condition of the redeemed saints. They were before the throne continually serving Him. They would never be hungry again. They would never have to face any kind of discomfort again. They were being totally cared for and led by Jesus, the Lamb. All the redeemed need to sing this song.

The **tenth song** is a song about the Judge who is going to reign forever and ever. This song is recorded in Revelation 11:15:

*“The kingdom of the world has become
the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ,
and he will reign for ever and ever.”*

The ones who were singing this song were in heaven:

*“The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there
were **loud voices in heaven** which said . . . [This was*

heaven's choir singing. They were singing about the fact that —] *The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever*" (Revelation 11:15).

The first verse of the song assured the saints that the Kingdom did indeed belong to their God. The second verse of the song assured the saints that God's rule is going to last forever and ever. If a person is in God's Kingdom, then he is where God is. If a person is in God's Kingdom, then he is where God is going to rule forever. The angels in heaven were announcing that God has always ruled and He will continue His reign forever and ever.

The **eleventh song** is recorded in Revelation 11:17–18:

*"We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty,
the One who is and who was,
because you have taken your great power
and have begun to reign.
The nations were angry;
and your wrath has come.
The time has come for judging the dead,
and for rewarding your servants the prophets
and your saints and those who reverence your name,
both small and great —
and for destroying those who destroy the earth."*

This song was a song of thanksgiving to the Judge. The Judge is identified as the ". . . Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was . . ." The twenty-four elders representing the redeemed fell on their faces to worship and sing. They offered their thankfulness because of God's powerful rule and His awesome judgment. They were also thankful because they were going to be rewarded as His servants, prophets, and saints. These were those who gave reverence to God for destroying the enemies who had been destroying the earth.

The **twelfth song** is recorded in Revelation 12:10–12. It was a single loud voice coming from heaven:

“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”

This was a song of celebration because the devil had fallen. There was joy at his fall and also because salvation and the Kingdom belong to God. The one who had been constantly accusing the saints had been cast down to the earth. The devil had been defeated. Those who had overcome had won a victory through the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their own testimonies. These were the ones who did not love their lives more than His Word. These were the men and women who had already given their lives for Him. These were those who no longer had to fear death. They had not been afraid to tell others about Jesus. The heavens rejoiced, but the earth was going to mourn and weep. The devil was among those who were on the earth. Those in the heavens could rejoice because the devil was no longer there. Anywhere the devil lives is going to be a place for crying, weeping, and mourning rather than rejoicing. Those on the earth along with the devil will also mourn because they know that their time is short.

The **thirteenth song** is found in Revelation 15:3–4:

*“Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.
Just and true are your ways,
King of the ages.
Who will not fear you, O Lord,
and bring glory to your name?
For you alone are holy.
All nations will come
and worship before you,
for your righteous acts have been revealed.”*

This is the song that was called “. . . the Song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb” in Revelation 15:3. It was not sung by Moses or the Lamb. It was sung by seven angels with seven plagues as they stood beside the sea. They were joined by a multitude who had been victorious over the beast. They held harps that had been given to them by God. This is a beautiful song much like the one sung by Moses and the children of Israel after they had crossed the Red Sea. It is also like the sermon on the mountain given by Jesus because He prayed about the same three things mentioned in both of these songs. God’s deeds were praised because they are great and marvelous. God’s ways were praised because they are just and true. God’s name was praised because it is fearsome and glorious. God is to be praised because He is holy and righteous before all nations. This needs to be a song sung by all ages and in all generations. It is important to remember that the activities of God are always righteous. His “*righteous acts*” should never be questioned. Sometimes it may appear that He is harming the world. That is never His purpose. His judgments are always righteous and holy.

The **fourteenth song** is found in Revelation 16:5–6:

*“You are just in these judgments,
you who are and who were, the Holy One,
because you have so judged;
for they have shed the blood of
your saints and prophets,
and you have given them
blood to drink as they deserve.”*

This is the song that was sung by the angel who was in charge of the water. This angel was simply agreeing with what has happened. He agreed that it was right that God should judge Rome because they had shed the blood of the saints. Even the angels in heaven believe that people should reap what they sow.

The **fifteenth song** is recorded in Revelation 16:7. This song was the altar’s response to the water angel’s song. This was the altar where the souls of God’s people and their prayers were. This is an excellent response when someone is really praising the Lord for what He is. All men could utter the same words John heard the altar say:

*“Yes, Lord God Almighty,
true and just are your judgments.”*

The **sixteenth song** is found in Revelation 18:1–3. This is the song that John heard from the “. . . angel coming down from heaven [who] had great authority, and the earth was illuminated by his splendor. With a mighty voice he shouted:

*‘Fallen! Fallen is Babylon the Great!
She has become a home for demons
and a haunt for every evil spirit,
a haunt for every unclean and detestable bird.
For all the nations have drunk
the maddening wine of her adulteries.
The kings of the earth committed adultery with her,*

and the merchants of the earth grew rich from her excessive luxuries.’”

This is one of the few solo songs in the Book of Revelation that is sung by anyone besides God. It was sung by an angel with great authority as heaven’s song in answer to the fall of Babylon. This song has three verses. First, there was the good news that Babylon had fallen. When the wicked fall, the righteous have no reason to mourn. They mourn for the individuals who are lost, but when the wicked nations who have been God’s enemy falls, that is a time for joyful singing. Second, there was the reason given for the fall of Babylon. She fell because she had become a place for the wicked. Anyone living in the city of Rome was living in the midst of wickedness. Third, this city of wickedness fell because she was a rich prostitute. She enticed all the kings of the earth to commit adultery with her and all the merchants of the earth grew rich from her luxuries.

The **seventeenth song** came from “. . . *another voice from heaven.*” This song is recorded in Revelation 18:4–8. This was a voice from heaven speaking to God’s people who were living in Babylon telling them that Babylon deserved to fall:

*“Come out of her, my people,
so that you will not share in her sins,
so that you will not receive any of her plagues;
for her sins are piled up to heaven,
and God has remembered her crimes.
Give back to her as she has given;
pay her back double for what she has done.
Mix her a double portion from her own cup.
Give her as much torture and grief
as the glory and luxury she gave herself.
In her heart she boasts,
‘I sit as queen; I am not a widow,
and I will never mourn.’*

*Therefore in one day her plagues will overtake her:
death, mourning and famine.
She will be consumed by fire,
for mighty is the Lord God who judges her."*

The **eighteenth song** is the description of the fall of Babylon as it came from "a mighty angel." The theme of this song could be: "Never Again!" Look at the list of all the events that will **never happen again** in the "great city of Babylon" in Revelation 18:21–24:

*"With such violence the great city of Babylon
will be thrown down, **never** to be found **again**.
The music of harpists and musicians, flute players and
trumpeters, will **never** be heard in you **again**.
No workman of any trade
will **ever** be found in you **again**.
The sound of a millstone
will **never** be heard in you **again**.
The light of a lamp
will **never** shine in you **again**.
The voice of bridegroom and bride
will **never** be heard in you **again**.
Your merchants were the world's great men.
By your magic spell all the nations were led astray.
In her was found the blood of prophets and of the saints,
and of all who have been killed on the earth."*

The last song in the Book of Revelation is the **nineteenth song, The Hallelujah Choruses** found in Revelation 19:1–8:

*"Hallelujah!
Salvation and glory and power belong to our God,
for true and just are his judgments.
He has condemned the great prostitute
who corrupted the earth by her adulteries.
He has avenged on her the blood of his servants."*

“Hallelujah!

The smoke from her goes up for ever and ever.”

“Amen, Hallelujah!”

“Praise our God,

all you his servants,

you who fear him,

both small and great!”

“Hallelujah!

For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

Let us rejoice and be glad

and give him glory!

For the wedding of the Lamb has come,

and his bride has made herself ready.

Fine linen, bright and clean,

was given her to wear.”

John “. . . heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting . . .” over and over again using the word, **“Hallelujah!”** The multitude, the four living creatures, and the twenty-four elders joined together to celebrate. They celebrated the fact that the prostitute had been judged. She was finally gone. They celebrated the fact that this judgment was final. She would never return. They were also rejoicing in the fact that “*. . . the wedding of the Lamb has come and his **bride** has made herself ready.*” The Church of Christ is the bride of Christ. The Church needs to rejoice in the wedding feast: **“Hallelujah!”**

Doctrine is not the only important thing for the Christian. Doctrine is necessary, but praise is also important. When praise is needed, that message should be given — **“Hallelujah! Praise the Lord for all that He has done.”** These songs send a unified message: God is in control. Jesus has destiny in His hands. The saints have absolutely nothing to fear. Look in any song book that is used for worship in churches around the world. Many worship songs are taken from these songs found in the Book of Revelation.

The Eternal Battle

Introduction

Three separate topics will be covered in this last lesson in the Sunset Bible Study series on the Book of Revelation. The first topic will be a look at the “beatitudes” found throughout Revelation. The second topic will be the eternal struggle that was introduced in Revelation 12 as it relates to Genesis 3:15. Revelation 12 is really the conclusion of all the Bible and not simply the middle of the Book of Revelation. The third topic will be a look at the conflict between God and Satan as it can be seen in a historical perspective through the Bible.

The Beatitudes of the Book of Revelation

There are several beatitudes in the Book of Revelation. That simply means there are several passages that start out with the word, “*Blessed.*” Jesus made that particular word very famous by using it frequently. The most famous is found in Matthew at the beginning of His sermon on the mount (cf. Matthew 5:1–12). Almost every book in the Bible has at least one beatitude.

The first beatitude in the Book of Revelation is found in Revelation 1:3. The same principle is repeated in Revelation 22:7. It is interesting that the Book begins and ends with almost the same beatitude:

“Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is

near” (Revelation 1:3). “Behold, I am coming soon! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophesy in this book” (Revelation 22:7).

This blessing was given to “. . . *the one who **reads** the words of this prophesy . . .*” The word for “reads” literally means “to read aloud.” This would surely apply to anyone reading on their own, but the person who reads aloud is blessing himself and others by his reading. It is important for Christians to bless others by bringing the Word of God to them. God blesses the hearer and the reader and the one who brings God’s Word to other men.

Not only is the reader blessed, but also “. . . *those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it . . .*” Literally the word “hear” means “hears with understanding.” It is important not only to hear the Word, but also to understand it in such a way that the hearer takes it into his heart. The beatitude in Revelation 22:7 says, “*Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophesy in this book.*” The Christian will be blessed when he reads these words, when he understands and takes to heart these words, and when he keeps the words of this Book.

The second beatitude is found in Revelation 14 in the midst of all the bad news for God’s enemies and the good news for the saints of God. John “. . . *heard a voice from heaven say, ‘Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ‘Yes . . . they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them’*” (Revelation 14:13). That is a beatitude for the dead who die in Christ.

The dead in Christ will be blessed for two reasons. First, they are in a state of rest. From the moment they die, they will rest for all time. This is not talking about resting from work for there is no curse in work. There is a difference between work and labor. The saints will have work to do in heaven, but they will rest from the painful labor they had while they were upon the earth. Second, they are also going to be blessed because

their “*deeds*” will follow them. They will have rest and honor.

The third beatitude is found in Revelation 16:15 when Jesus said: “*Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.*” This beatitude was given as John watched the angels pouring out the six bowls of wrath and before the final and seventh bowl with the judgments announcing the destruction of the enemy.

This beatitude is similar to the parable of the foolish and wise virgins found in Matthew 25:1–13. Five foolish virgins were not prepared for the coming of the bride and bridegroom, so they were left outside. They missed the wedding feast inside because they were not watchful and prepared. Those who are watchful and alert will always have their garments ready. Those who are prepared for the coming of God in judgment will not be dressed in unrighteousness. Those who are prepared for the coming of God will not know shame. They will be those who enter with their Master into the Holy Place.

The fourth beatitude is found in Revelation 19:9, but it is important to read 19:7–9:

“Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear.” (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) Then the angel said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!’” And he added, “These are the true words of God.”

This passage of Scripture concerns the wedding feast: those who were invited and why they received an invitation. First, there is going to be rejoicing at this feast. It is a blessing to be around people who are happy and celebrating. Those who have been invited to the feast will be blessed because they are

accepted. Being accepted by significant people brings joy, while being part of those who are unacceptable and left on the outside brings sorrow and envy. It is good to be around people who are rejoicing, but it is better to be accepted by people who are rejoicing. This is “. . . *the wedding of the Lamb . . . and his bride . . .*” It is an invitation to a significant event. Not only is every saint invited to the wedding feast, but every saint is also the honored guest, the bride! The bride has made herself ready. She is the honored guest clothed in “. . . *fine linen, bright and clean.*”

The fifth beatitude is found in Revelation 20:6:

Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

This beatitude is about those who have been raised “. . . *in the first resurrection.*” They are blessed because death has no power over them. They are going to reign with Christ and serve as “*priests of God.*”

The sixth and last beatitude is found in Revelation 22:14: “*Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city.*” This beatitude is about “. . . *those who wash their robes.*” They are blessed because they have the “*right*” to the tree of life and the “*right*” to enter the City. God wants His children to know they are “. . . *more than conquerors . . .*” (Romans 8:37). As He wrote the Book of Revelation, God wanted His children to know that they have the “*right*” to sing, to be blessed, to be provided for, and to know whose children they are. They belong to Him. Only those who belong to God may enter the gates of the City.

The Eternal Struggle

Genesis 3:15

Review Revelation 12 one more time by thinking back to all that John saw:

*A great and wondrous sign appeared in heaven: a **woman** clothed with the sun . . . she was pregnant . . . about to give birth. Then another sign appeared in heaven: an **enormous red dragon** . . . [he] stood in front of the woman . . . so that he might devour her child the moment it was born. She gave birth to a **son** . . . And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne . . . that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray . . . The great dragon was hurled to the earth . . . and went to make war against the rest of her **offspring** — those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus (Revelation 12:1–17).*

There are three main characters in this chapter: a pregnant woman, an enormous red dragon, and a male child. The dragon stood immediately in front of the woman, not to hurt her but to devour her child. When the baby was born, He was caught up to the throne room. The dragon was furious and began to wage war against the woman’s offspring who were reigning on the earth.

There is one verse in the Bible which tells the story behind the majority of what happens in the Bible. After creation, when Satan tempted Adam and Eve and they sinned, God cursed the devil with the following words:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Genesis 3:15, NIV). “And I will put enmity between thee and

the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (KJV).

From that moment on, “*The dragon [the devil] stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that he might devour her child the moment it was born*” (Revelation 12:4b). The “*woman*” represents the covenant people of God. The devil was trying to destroy the “*Seed*” (cf. Galatians 3:16). And so a story began that might be titled, “**BUT GOD . . .**”

The Conflict Seen in a Historical Perspective **“But God . . .”**

Adam and Eve had two sons named Cain and Abel. Cain was a profane man. Abel was a godly man. They both offered sacrifices to God. God accepted Abel’s sacrifice but rejected Cain’s. Through the wickedness of Cain, Satan destroyed the righteous Abel and Satan appeared to be victorious (cf. Genesis 4:1–8). “**But God . . . saved mankind by one.**” God appointed another “*seed*” so that instead of Abel being the “*seed*,” Seth was born and the lineage continued (cf. Genesis 4:25). God saved one individual after another by appointing another “*seed*.”

The “*seed*” of woman survived and continued. Ten generations later the world was so full of wickedness the sons of God were marrying the daughters of men and having children by them. The righteous were marrying the unrighteous and wickedness was produced. The story continued:

The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man . . . So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind . . . from the face of

the earth . . .” **But Noah** found favor in the eyes of the LORD (Genesis 6:5–8).

God sent a universal flood in which “*Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out . . .*” (Genesis 7:22–23a). Every living thing on the face of the earth died, “**But God** remembered Noah . . .” (Genesis 8:1). There is still a story to tell. This verse is a “**But God . . .**” verse because Genesis 7:23b says, “*Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark.*” Everything died, “**but God**” saved Noah and his family in the ark. Look at Genesis 6:8 again, “*But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.*” Just as it appeared that the devil was going to win, he did not. God saved the “seed” line through one family. The “seed” was preserved and the story continued.

Approximately ten generations later, God made a promise to Abram telling him: “*I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing*” (Genesis 12:2). This is interesting because Abram was married to a barren woman and, even if she had not been barren, both Abram and Sarai were beyond childbearing years (cf. Genesis 11:30, 17:17). God reaffirmed His promise, even changed their names, and told Abraham that Sarah would bear him a son who was to be called Isaac (cf. Genesis 17:9–19). Genesis 18:11 says, “*Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing.*” The story continued . . . God’s purpose could not be defeated by a barren womb or old age. “**But God . . .**”

. . . was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him (Genesis 21:1–2).

The “*seed*” continued! Isaac was born, either miraculously or supernaturally, but definitely on purpose.

Generations later there was a great famine on the earth. It was so great that it looked like the entire family of Jacob was doomed to starvation (cf. Genesis 42–43). Jacob was the grandson of Abraham and part of the “*seed*” to whom the descendant line would come through to bruise Satan’s head. The story still continued as **“But God. . .”** God had already taken care of the “*seed*” line.

Before the famine began the sons of Jacob sold their brother Joseph to some Midianite merchants because they were jealous of him. The merchants took Joseph to Egypt and sold him to Potiphar, the captain of Pharaoh’s guards (cf. Genesis 37:19–36). If Joseph had not been in Egypt, the “*seed*” line would not have been preserved. At the end of his story Joseph told his brothers:

“But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God . . . You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives . . . Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob’” (Genesis 45:7–8; 50:20, 24).

God’s purpose to destroy the devil’s power and bless all mankind could not be defeated by a barren earth or the enslavement of Joseph. And so the **“But God . . .”** story continued and so did the “*seed*” line.

Joseph and all his father’s family stayed in Egypt for many generations. The land of Egypt was filled with the Israelites. A new king, who did not know Joseph, came to power and the “*seed*” line was once again doomed. Pharaoh made a decree to

have all the male children destroyed (cf. Genesis 50:23; Exodus 1:7–8, 22). **“But God . . .”** was still in control and His purpose could not be defeated by a heathen nation. Moses was born and hidden in the Nile River so that Pharaoh’s daughter would find him and he would be raised as an Egyptian to preserve the *“seed”* line.

The ten plagues defeated Satan. The *“seed”* line continued along with the **“But God . . .”** story. The story will be told over and over again throughout the Bible. The *“seed”* promise started with one woman, but it includes the whole world for everyone came from Eve. God chose a **nation** through Abraham. He chose a **tribe** through Judah.

And finally, God chose a **family** through David. Through David God’s chosen people became a **royal family**. Satan tried to take David’s life more than once to destroy the *“seed”* line. Satan used animals to try to kill David. Then he used Goliath, the beast, but David won that battle with one smooth stone (cf. 1 Samuel 17:1–51). Satan used the wickedness of King Saul, who wanted David killed: *“David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands”* (1 Samuel 23:14; cf. 1 Samuel 18:8–11, 19:1, 8–12). David was even attacked by his own son, Absalom, and had to flee from him (cf. 2 Samuel 15). God killed Goliath through David and Absalom through Joab and his armor-bearers (cf. 2 Samuel 18:14–15). Each time Satan tried to use evil to destroy the *“seed”* line with David, he was trying to win the battle that had started in Genesis 3:15. He did not want to face the pregnant woman’s child.

In the Book of 2 Kings, a wicked queen came to the throne of Israel in Judah. Her name was Athaliah, Jezebel’s daughter. She attempted *“. . . to destroy the whole royal family”* (2 Kings 11:1). The story continued! **“But God . . . saved one”** through one of the queen’s handmaidens named Jehosheba: ***“But Jehosheba . . . took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be***

murdered” (2 Kings 11:2). Through Athaliah Satan tried to destroy all David’s royal family. If Athaliah could have succeeded, then the devil would have won and all mankind would have lost. Athaliah was able to kill every member of the royal family except a one year old boy named, Joash. Again the “*seed*” was snatched from the adversary. The wicked plot of a wicked woman could not defeat God’s purpose.

The story continued from Joash through numerous kings until the time of Hezekiah, King of Judah (cf. 2 Kings 18:1–20:1). Hezekiah had no children and was terminally ill. Isaiah came with a message from God to tell him: “. . . *‘Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover’*” (2 Kings 20:1). Satan surely thought his victory was imminent knowing that if Hezekiah died without a son there would be no “*seed*” to bring forth the Messiah who would bruise the devil’s head. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall, prayed to God, and wept bitterly. Before the messenger Isaiah could leave the courtyard, God came to him with another message for Hezekiah: “*I will add fifteen years to your life . . .*” (2 Kings 20:6). The story continued! **“But God . . .”** was in control and Manasseh, King of Judah, was twelve years old when his father died and he began to reign in Jerusalem. Three years into Hezekiah’s extended reign a “*seed*” was born to Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kings 21:1). God’s purpose could not be defeated by an illness.

The Book of Esther is a very interesting book. The name of God is not found anywhere in it, but the theme of the Book is the providence of God. King Ahasuerus, King of Persia, had a right hand man named Haman. He was the number two man in the empire, but he was a very wicked and proud man. Haman was honored by the King so that all the royal officials were required to kneel before Haman and pay homage to him. King Ahasuerus also had a man named Mordecai in his royal house as his trusted counselor. Mordecai was a Jew and refused to kneel down and honor anyone besides his God. Haman’s envy and pride led him to trick the King into making a decree that all

Israel, every single Jew within his empire, was to be destroyed. At that time Persia ruled the entire world. If Haman's plan and the King's decree worked, Satan would surely win. Every Jew, every man, woman, and child was scheduled to be killed. There would have been no "*seed*" line from the Jewish nation.

The story continued! Remember it is called, "**But God . . . saved by one.**" Mordecai learned of Haman's plan to destroy all the Jews. Mordecai went to talk to Esther, who was his niece (or cousin). By the providence of God, Esther had won a beauty contest to become the Queen of all Persia. She was an honored bride for Ahasuerus. Mordecai pleaded with Esther to go to the King and beg for her people's preservation. Esther knew that anyone who came before the King without being summoned could be put to death unless he extended the golden scepter to spare their lives. Mordecai sent the following message to Esther:

*"Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position **for such a time as this?**" (Esther 4:13–14).*

Esther went before the King, and by the providence of God, he spared her life, and she exposed Haman's plot. Haman was hung on a gallows that he had built especially for Mordecai. The story continues. "**But God . . . saved the "*seed*" line**" by saving one Jewish maiden named, Esther. Read the Book of Esther. She was the means by which God again preserved the "*seed*" and His people.

In the period between the Testaments there was a foul king named Antiochus Epiphanes, who tried again to wipe out all the people of God. A man named Judah Maccabees, the hammer, defeated a rebellion that would have destroyed the

Jews and preserved the “seed.” The struggle for the Jews continued throughout history. **“But God . . .”** continued to work and His story continued!

In the beginning of the New Testament it is evident the struggle has continued. God announced through angels that His Son was to be born. His Son is the only One who is worthy to bruise the devil’s head. Jesus, God’s Son, was born during the reign of King Herod. When Herod heard that the “*king of the Jews*” had been born, he was disturbed (cf. Matthew 2:1–3). He planned to search for the child and kill Him. When that did not work, Herod gave the order to have “. . . *all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under . . .*” (Matthew 2:16) killed. Herod was a foul king being used by Satan to destroy the One who was destined to defeat him. If that had happened, all mankind would have lost and the devil would have won.

“But God . . .” The story continued! Even before Herod issued his decree for all the baby boys to be killed, God sent an angel to Joseph, Jesus’ legal father, telling him to take “*the child*” and his mother to Egypt (cf. Matthew 2:13–15). If Jesus had been in the city of Bethlehem when all the baby boys were being killed, Satan could have won. **“But God . . .”** God was in control. His purpose could not be defeated by an evil king’s wicked plot. Joseph carried Mary and the baby Jesus away to safety in Egypt.

In Matthew 4 there is a record of the beginning of Jesus’ personal struggle with the devil. It began in the desert where Satan planned a frontal attack against Jesus tempting Him three separate times with three different temptations. If Jesus had given in to those temptations, He would have lost His battle with Satan. Mankind would have lost. God’s plan would have been defeated! Did He lose? He did not!! Jesus overcame Satan by using the Word of God. Read the story as it continued:

Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty

*nights, he was hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "**It is written:** 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"* . . . *"If you are the Son of God . . . throw yourself down. For it is written: . . ."* . . . *Jesus answered him, "**It is also written:** 'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'"* . . . *Again the devil took him to a very high mountain . . . "All this I will give you . . . if you will bow down and worship me." Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! **For it is written:** 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'"* Then the devil left him, and angels came and attended him (Matthew 4:1–11).

"But God . . ." God's purpose continued because His Son trusted in Him and His Word. Throughout the Gospels and the rest of Jesus' life, it is recorded again and again how He faced temptations to lie, boast, or do something that would have been wrong. The Jews, and particularly the Pharisees, watched His every move. They watched closely with their prejudices trying to find a single flaw in His life. They followed Him and challenged Him (cf. John 8:13). At one point Jesus said to the Pharisees, *"Can any of you prove me guilty of sin?"* (John 8:46a). Suppose someone did prove that Jesus had sinned. Suppose one of the Pharisees could have found something wrong with Jesus. That would have been the end of the story. The devil would have won. Man would have lost. God's purpose would have been defeated.

"But God . . ." The story did not end. Jesus did not sin. The Pharisees did not prove anything against Him. **But then** Satan carried Jesus to the tree. It was at the cross that Satan, through the nations, did the worst against Jesus. Just as it happened in the Book of Revelation, the devil worked through the nations against the Lamb's people. The nation of the Jews rejected Jesus and the Roman nation crucified Him. The

crucifixion of Jesus, by the Jews and Romans combined, created Satan's grand finale against the "*Seed*."

Jesus endured the tragedy of betrayal by Judas and the rest of the Apostles as they left Him (cf. John 13:18, 27; Matthew 26:14–16, 49, 55–56). He endured the trials before the Jews and the Romans and being treated as the object of their scorn (cf. Matthew 26:59). He endured their beatings as they turned His back into a bloody mass. They placed a crown of thorns upon His head and spit upon Him. Then they took Him to the cross (cf. Matthew 27:27–31).

The Roman cross was a humiliating way for anyone to die. Jesus did not hang before the crowd with a loin cloth to cover His nakedness as many medieval artists have painted that scene. Jesus hung absolutely naked, stripped of all His honor. He was rejected by men and forsaken by God: "*And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, 'Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?'— which means, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?'*" (Mark 15:34). Even rejected by His own and forsaken by God was not the end for Jesus. The Romans put Him in a tomb, which was sealed and guarded. At that point in time, Satan was probably celebrating in hell with all his demons, perhaps even shouting, "I have won!"

"But God . . ." The story continued in a most excellent way. On the day of Pentecost the Apostle Peter told the story in this manner:

*"This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **But God** raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him" (Acts 2:23–24).*

As Jesus died, Satan surely found out that he had suffered a loss because at His death, Jesus unlocked the "canyon of the damned." No one would ever be thrown into "*the lake of fire*"

without their voluntary submission because it is by choice that a person experiences “*the second death*” and enters hell. God vindicated Jesus when He raised Him from the dead:

. . .the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son, who as to his human nature was a descendant of David, and who through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord. Through him and for his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people from among all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith. And you also are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ (Romans 1:2–6).

Jesus was the son of David according to the flesh, but He was “. . . declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.” The devil’s head was bruised when Jesus died. Once again God declared Jesus as His Son when Jesus was raised from the dead:

Since the children have flesh and blood, he, too, shared in their humanity so that by death he might destroy him who holds the power of death — that is, the devil — and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham’s descendants” (Hebrews 2:14–16).

Jesus took upon Himself flesh and blood so that He might destroy the works of the devil and deliver those who fear death from a lifetime of bondage to death. God defeated Satan and the power of death through the resurrection of His Son.

Is the struggle between Satan and God over? Has Satan given up? Is he a quitter? Paul told the Romans: “. . . *I want*

you to be wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet” (Romans 16:19–20). The devil is still trying to win the battle. If he can get just one Christian to renounce their faith in Christ, he can win a battle. What a privilege every Christian has. Every Christian serves as a representative of Jesus. Paul said, *“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (Galatians 2:20). He also told the Philippians: *“For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain”* (Philippians 1:21). He told the Colossians: *“... I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I **fill up** in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church”* (Colossians 1:24).

God wants the devil to be defeated. He wants Satan’s head bruised and stomped so badly that He stomped Satan by placing His only Son on Calvary’s cross. God has left the finishing work for His children, the Church. Christians *“... **fill up** ... what is lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.”* To “fill up” is to complete or finish it. Christians complete the work Jesus began. Each time the devil comes with a temptation and the child of God resists, then the devil’s head is bruised. The devil’s head is stomped over and over again every time a child of God reaches the moment of death victoriously believing in Christ.

The devil loses over and over again every time a Christian dies. That is the message from the Book of Revelation. That is the picture of Revelation 12 when the dragon stood in front of the woman to devour her child. The child was caught up into heaven. Satan chased the woman, but she escaped also. Satan was hurled to the earth and all his angels with him. Then the devil *“... was enraged at the woman and went off to make war against the rest of her offspring — those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus”* (Revelation 12:17).

The Church must keep God's commandments. They must hold to His testimony. The struggle continues, but so does the story. **"But God . . ."** The Book of Revelation's message continues through the Church. God's children are *". . . more than conquerors through him who loved us"* (Romans 8:37). Fight the good fight! Lay hold on life eternal! Find the peace everlasting that is only found in Christ Jesus.

Richard Rogers



Richard Rogers was born in 1936 in Dallas, Texas. He was educated at Abilene Christian University, and Florida Christian College. He was an avid reader, a diligent student of the Bible, and authored some twenty teaching workbooks and published outlines.

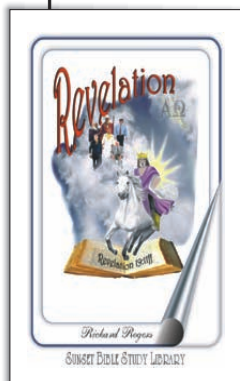
Richard was well known and recognized as a gifted evangelist, teacher, and lectureship speaker. Until his death he was in great demand as a missionary encourager and world evangelist. He taught for more than three decades at Sunset International Bible Institute, assisting in the training of thousands of preachers and missionaries. Richard mentored church planting teams in California, Mexico, Thailand, and the Philippines.

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