

**The Book of Revelation – A Study  
For the Called and Chosen and Faithful: Come, Lord Jesus**

by Peter M. Dietsch

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To the saints at Providence Presbyterian Church,  
and for Christ's Church, the bride and wife of the Lamb.

Her enemies "will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them,  
because He is Lord of lords and King of kings,  
and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful."  
(Revelation 17:14)

#### Revelation 1:4-6

"Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne, and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood-- and He has made us *to be* a kingdom, priests to His God and Father-- to Him *be* the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

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# Introduction

## [Interpretative Principles, Overview, and Outline]

### Introductory Comments

William Hendriksen begins his commentary on the book of Revelation like this:

“In form, symbolism, purpose and meaning the book of Revelation is beautiful beyond description. Where in all literature do we find anything that excels the majestic description of the Son of man walking in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (Rev. 1:12-20), or the vivid portrayal of the Christ, the Faithful and True, going forth unto victory, seated upon a white horse, arrayed with a garment sprinkled with blood, followed by the armies of heaven (19:11-16)? Where, again, do we find a sharper contrast than that between the doom of Babylon on the one hand, and the joy of Jerusalem the Golden on the other (18:19; 21:22)? And where are the throne set in heaven and the blessedness of heavenly life depicted in a manner more serenely simple, yet beautiful in its very simplicity (4:2-5:14; 7:13-17)? What a wealth of comfort; what an insight into the future; above all, what an unveiling of the love of God are contained in the words of the prophecy of this book!”<sup>[1]</sup>

Who among us would even begin to describe anything in the book of Revelation as “serenely simple, yet beautiful in its very simplicity”? Or how many times have you been spiritually depressed and thought, “I know! I’ll go read the book of Revelation; after all it’s a wealth of comfort”? How many people do you know that consider the book of Revelation to be “an unveiling of the love of God”?

So, what’s the problem? Why don’t we read the book of Revelation? Why does it seem like such an enigma? Surely, there are many reasons for this, but generally speaking there are two sources of our confusion when it comes to understanding the book of Revelation<sup>[2]</sup>:

(1) Difficulty: The symbols and symbolic language of the prophecies and visions in the book *are* difficult to understand without at least a rudimentary understanding of Biblical imagery and the unique literary style of the book.

(2) Disharmony: There is disharmony in the Church as to how to interpret the book (the four different schools of interpretation give rise to at least four different millennial positions).

These two sources of confusion give rise, then to two resulting problems:

(1) Victimization: Because we are confused by the book, we fall victim to every so-called “prophecy expert” who says that he’s unlocked the key to understanding the book. Because of this victimization one of two things results: we either become dependent upon the “prophecy expert” *or* the “prophecy expert” is proven wrong. Either way, we end up not caring.

(2) Apathy: As a result of the difficulty of the book, the disharmony in the Church, and our being victimized by others, we finally come to the conclusion that the book has no value for us and that the study of eschatology (the doctrine of the end times) isn’t all that important – the grapes were probably sour anyway!

### I. Three Introductory Thoughts<sup>[3]</sup>

1. Revelation is the only book in the whole Bible with a blessing pronounced for reading it.

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

2. It is not necessary to understand every detail in order to profit spiritually from it.

(2 Timothy 3:16-17) <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

### 3. Revelation is a picture book, not a puzzle book.

It is intended to reveal, not conceal. Yet, if we start with – and get bogged down in – minute detail, we will miss the big picture. Inevitably, we will then shroud that which God meant to disclose and begin to think that the book can only be understood by the so called “prophecy experts.”

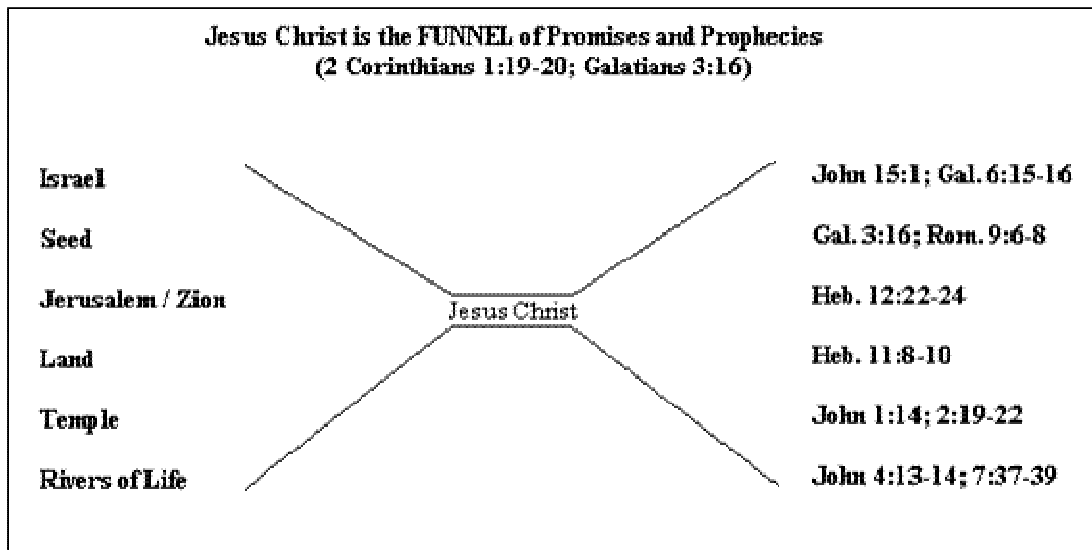
(Revelation 1:1-2) <sup>1</sup> The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw.

## II. Three Assumed Premises for understanding “Prophecy”

### 1. Jesus is the funnel (or center) of all God’s promises and prophecies.

(2 Corinthians 1:19-20) <sup>19</sup> For the Son of God, Christ Jesus, who was preached among you by us-- by me and Silvanus and Timothy-- was not yes and no, but is yes in Him. <sup>20</sup> For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes; therefore also through Him is our Amen to the glory of God through us.

(Galatians 3:16) <sup>16</sup> Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ.



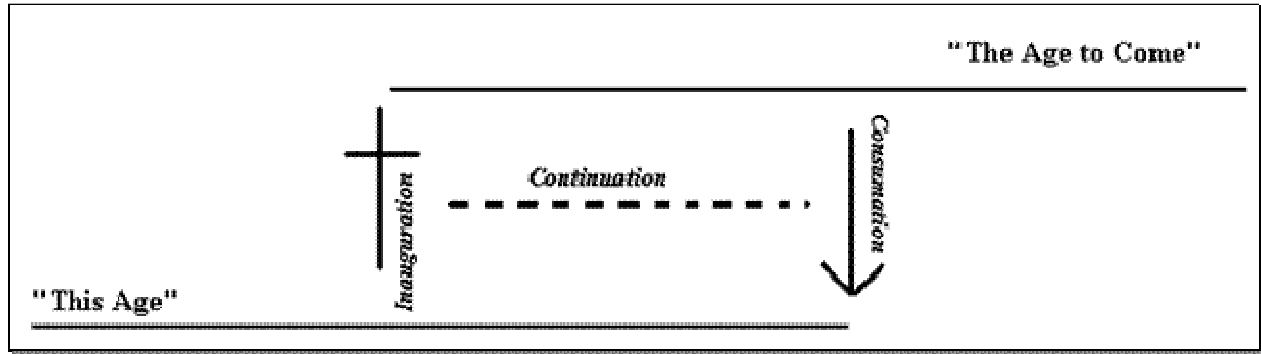
### 2. Jesus brought and inaugurated the Kingdom of God on earth in His first coming and will complete or consummate the Kingdom of God on earth at His second coming. (Luke 17:20-21; parables of Matthew 13)

(Mark 1:14-15) <sup>14</sup> Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, <sup>15</sup> and saying, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”

(Matthew 25:31) <sup>31</sup> “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.

(Hebrews 2:8) <sup>8</sup> YOU HAVE PUT ALL THINGS IN SUBJECTION UNDER HIS FEET.” For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.

(1 John 3:2) <sup>2</sup> Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.

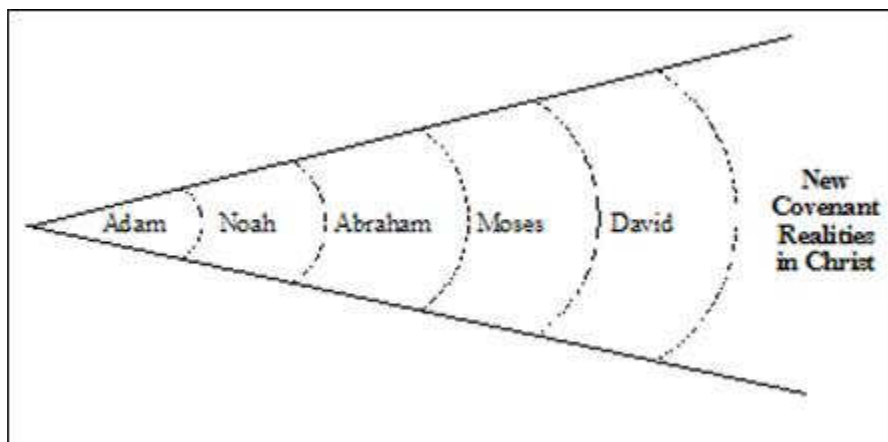


3. Since the coming of Christ, the covenant of grace is not tied to any political, geographic, or ethnic people or nation-state (including Israel). There are not two different covenants (or plans of salvation) for Jews and Gentiles.

(Romans 9:8) <sup>8</sup> That is, it is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.

(John 8:42-44) <sup>42</sup> Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God, for I have not even come on My own initiative, but He sent Me. <sup>43</sup> “Why do you not understand what I am saying? *It is* because you cannot hear My word. <sup>44</sup> “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

(Galatians 3:26-29) <sup>26</sup> For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>27</sup> For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.



#### IV. Four Methods (Schools) of Interpretation<sup>[4]</sup>

##### 1. Preterist

In this method of interpretation, the book of Revelation is concerned only with the events of the first century. The Roman Empire dominates the scene. The Seer was wholly preoccupied with the church of his day.

## 2. Historicist

In this method of interpretation, the book of Revelation is an inspired forecast of the whole of human history. The symbols set out in broad outline the history of western Europe, stretching right on until the second coming of Christ.

## 3. Futurist

In this method of interpretation, apart from the first few chapters, the book is exclusively concerned with happenings at the end of the age.

## 4. Idealist

In this method of interpretation, the whole book is concerned with ideas and principles. It sets out in poetic form certain theological conceptions. The embodiment of these principles and concepts repeats throughout the church age. This is the primary method of interpretation that we will employ in this study.

## V. Four Themes in the book of Revelation<sup>[5]</sup>

### 1. Christ in the midst of His Church.

The echo of Jesus' Great Commission promise – lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age (Matthew 28:20) – runs throughout the book, especially in the first three chapters. Revelation teaches us that Christ does not abandon His Church.

### 2. The Conflict between the Church and the World.

Darkness hates the light, so the world persecutes the Church. Again, the echo of Jesus' teaching – I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you (John 15:19) – runs throughout the book. Revelation teaches us that persecution is to be expected for those who follow Christ.

### 3. The Judgments upon the Persecutors.

The judgments upon those who persecute the Church which are spoken of throughout the book serve to remind us that God will not allow the wicked to go unpunished. Also, because all of the judgments leading up to the final judgment are partial, they are also intended to warn and call men to repentance.

### 4. Victory through Christ.

The summary verse of the entire book of Revelation helps us to maintain perspective as we seek to read and understand: "These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful" (Revelation 17:14). So, the main purpose of this book is "to comfort the militant Church in its struggle against the forces of evil."<sup>[6]</sup>

## VI. Nine Propositions (or Interpretive Principles)<sup>[7]</sup>

1. The book of Revelation consists of seven sections. They are parallel and each spans the entire new dispensation, from the first to the second coming of Christ.

2. The seven sections may be grouped into two major divisions. The first major division (chapters 1-11) consists of three sections. The second major division (chapters 12-22) consists of four sections. These two major divisions reveal a progress in the depth or intensity of spiritual conflict. The first major division (chapters 1-11) reveals the Church, indwelt by Christ, persecuted by the world. But the Church is avenged, protected and victorious. The second major division (chapters 12-22) reveals the deeper spiritual background of this struggle. It is a conflict between the Christ and the dragon in which the Christ, and therefore His Church, is victorious.



3. The book is one. The principles of human conduct and divine moral government are progressively revealed; the lampstands give rise to the seals, the seals give rise to the trumpets, etc.
4. The seven sections of the Apocalypse are arranged in an ascending, climactic order. There is progress in eschatological emphasis. The final judgment is first *announced*, then *introduced* and finally *described* more fully in the final section than in those which precede it. (Progressive Parallelism)
5. The fabric of the book consists of moving pictures. The details that pertain to the picture should be interpreted in harmony with its central thought. We should ask two questions. First, what is the entire picture? Second, what is its predominant idea?
6. The seals, trumpets, bowls of wrath and similar symbols refer not to specific events, particular happenings, or details of history, but to principles – of human conduct and of divine moral government – that are operating throughout the history of the world, especially throughout the new dispensation.
7. The Apocalypse is rooted in contemporaneous events and circumstances. Its symbols should be interpreted in the light of conditions which prevailed when the book was written.
8. The Apocalypse is rooted in the sacred Scriptures. It should be interpreted in harmony with the teachings of the entire Bible.
9. The Apocalypse is rooted in the mind and revelation of God. God in Christ is the real Author, and this book contains the purpose of God concerning the history of the Church.

#### Outline

##### [1-11] *The struggle on earth.*

The Church persecuted by the world. The church is avenged, protected and victorious.

(1-3) Christ in the midst of the seven golden lampstands

(4-7) The book with seven seals

(8-11) The seven trumpets of judgment

##### [12-22] *The deeper spiritual battle.*

The Christ (and the Church) persecuted by dragon (Satan) and his helpers. Christ & His Church are victorious.

(12-14) The woman & man-child persecuted by dragon & his helpers (the beasts & the harlot)

(15-16) The seven bowls of wrath

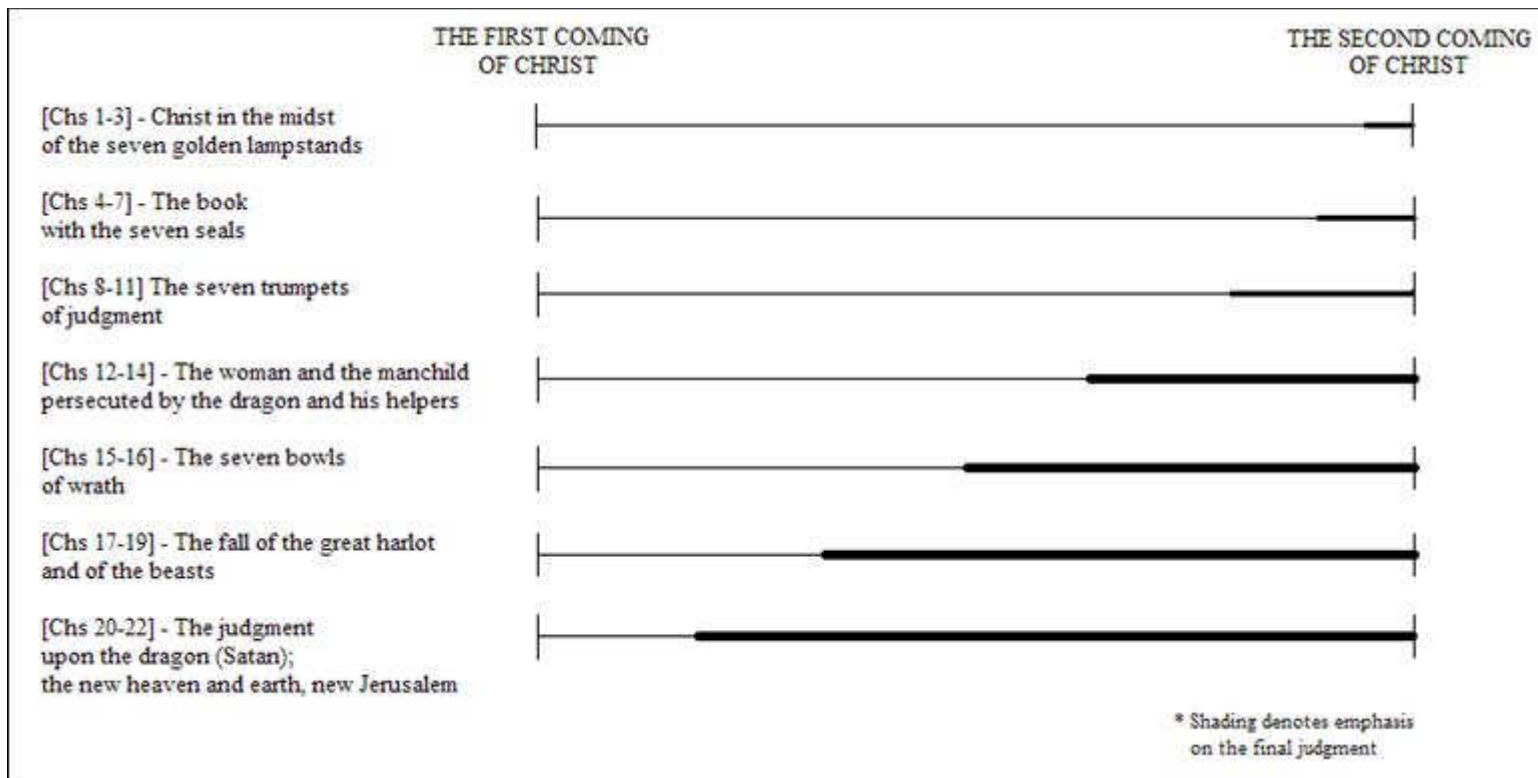
(17-19) The fall of the great harlot and of the beasts

(20-22) The judgment upon the dragon (Satan) followed by the new heaven and earth, new Jerusalem

#### Progressive Parallelism

A. The seven divisions of the book of Revelation are “parallel” in that each one spans the time frame from the first coming of Christ to the second coming of Christ.

B. The seven divisions of the book of Revelation are “progressive” in that in each subsequent section, there is a greater and greater emphasis (less veiled description) on the final judgment.



## VII. Progressive Parallelism

### 1. Progressive Parallelism<sup>[8]</sup>

In the opening chapter, the Apostle John is given a vision of Jesus Christ standing in the midst of the seven lampstands (the seven churches). As the number of perfection, the seven churches represent the whole church throughout the age. John is told to write to these seven churches, “the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things” (Revelation 1:19). That is, John’s visions are comprised of past, present, and future events – his visions span the time between Jesus’ first and second comings. As we progress through each of these seven sections, hopefully this will become more obvious.

In addition to the overarching parallel themes that run throughout the seven sections, there are several other reasons to understand the sections as being parallel to one another:

- (1) Different sections ascribe the same duration to the period described. Forty-two months (11:2; 13:5), twelve hundred and sixty days (11:3), “a time and times and half a time” (12:14) all describe a time span of 3 ½ years, showing that the trumpets (chs 8-11) and the battle between Christ and the dragon (chs 12-14) are parallel.
- (2) Chapter 20 describes a period of time which is synchronous with chapter 12 (The first coming of Christ).
- (3) Each section gives us a description of the entire gospel age, from the first to the second coming of Christ, and is rooted in the Israel’s history.
- (4) The seven trumpets (chs 8-11) and the seven bowls of wrath (chs 15-16) sequentially parallel one another (the first trumpet and the first bowl affect the earth, the second the sea, the third the rivers, etc.).
- (5) Each of the seven sections includes and usually ends with the Lord coming in judgment.

### 2. Progressive Parallelism<sup>[9]</sup>

“The final sections of the Apocalypse, though synchronous with the other sections and applicable to the entire course of history, describe especially what will happen in connection with the final judgment. So although all the sections of the Apocalypse run parallel and span the period between the first and second comings of Christ and are rooted in the soil of the old dispensation, yet there is also a degree of progress. The closer we approach the end of the book the more our attention is directed to the final judgment and that which lies beyond it. The seven sections are arranged, as it were, in an ascending, climactic order. The book reveals a gradual progress in eschatological emphasis.”<sup>[10]</sup>

In the first half of the book (chs 1-11), Christ’s coming in judgment is only announced and briefly described. However, in the second half of the book (chs 12-22), Christ’s coming in judgment is more fully developed until finally in the last section, there is much less symbolism than before.

Section #1 [chs 1-3] – Near the beginning of the first section, Christ’s second coming is only announced (1:7)

Section #2 [chs 4-7] – Near the end of the second section, Christ’s second coming is introduced and some of the horrors are described (6:12-17)

Section #3 [chs 8-11] – At the end of the third section, Christ’s second coming is introduced with an emphasis on the joy of the redeemed (11:15-19)

Section #4 [chs 12-14] – At the end of the fourth section, we have a very real description of the final judgment of God (14:14-20)

Section #5 [chs 15-16] – Though still synchronous and parallel to the other sections, almost the entirety of this section is devoted to describing the pouring out of God’s final wrath (chs 15-16)

Section #6 [chs 17-19] – The sixth section describes the fall of Babylon and Christ’s second coming in judgment, along with it’s meaning for the church militant and church triumphant (see especially 19:11-12).

Section #7 [chs 20-22] – Here, again, in the final section of the book, we have a description of the final judgment and much of the symbolism from earlier is dropped (20:11-15). The joy of the redeemed in the new heaven and new earth, and the glory of the new Jerusalem (the perfected people of God) following the final judgment occupies much of this final section.

### The Four Methods of Interpretation Using Revelation 13 as an Example <sup>[11]</sup>

Revelation 13:1-10 – “The First Beast”

*<sup>1</sup> And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names. <sup>2</sup> And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority. <sup>3</sup> I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast; <sup>4</sup> they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?” <sup>5</sup> There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him. <sup>6</sup> And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven. <sup>7</sup> It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. <sup>8</sup> All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain. <sup>9</sup> If anyone has an ear, let him hear. <sup>10</sup> If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.*

## 1. Preterist

According to the preterist model of interpretation, the entire book of Revelation is to be interpreted as events having occurred in the first century AD, and mostly before 70 AD – at the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, “the beast” (according to preterists) is the persecuting power of the Roman Empire, particular Emperor Nero who reigned from 54-68 AD.

- Proponents of Preterism: William Barclay, F.F. Bruce, Bruce Metzger, Leon Morris (Partial Preterists: R.C. Sproul, Gary DeMar, Kenneth Gentry, Hank Hanegraaff). Some other views that are *sometimes* tied to preterism: amillennialism or postmillennialism, theonomy. (Held by many modern scholars)

- Preterism has merit in that it makes the book of Revelation particularly meaningful for the original audience. However, preterism also makes the book of Revelation meaningless for subsequent readers (except for the general historical lessons that are learned from it).

## 2. Historicist

According to the historicist model of interpretation, the entire book of Revelation is to be interpreted as events that occur throughout the “Christian era” from the coming of Christ until His return. Thus, “the beast” (according to historicists) is usually interpreted as the persecuting power of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the Pope.

- Proponents of Historicism: Martin Luther, John Calvin (?), Jonathan Edwards, Matthew Henry, John Knox, John Wesley, George Whitefield, Seventh-Day Adventists (this view is not very popular today).

- Historicism has merit in that it makes the book of Revelation meaningful for all believers throughout history. However, historicism also limits the application for the original audience. It also provides few rails or guides for interpretation, thus leading sometimes to speculation or progressive guess work.

## 3. Futurist

According to the futurist model of interpretation, the entire book of Revelation (apart from perhaps the first few chapters (the letters to the seven churches)) is to be interpreted as events that will occur in the future – at the end of the age, immediately prior to Jesus’ second coming. Thus, “the beast” (according to futurists) is usually held to be synonymous with “the antichrist” and is often interpreted (and then, re-interpreted) as a particular person or persons, now or in the future (Mussolini, Hitler, the United Nations, the European Union, Sadam Hussein, etc.)

- Proponents of futurism: Donald Barnhouse, Norman Geisler, George E. Ladd, Hal Lindsey, John MacArthur, J. Vernon McGee, Charles Ryrie, C.I. Scofield, Ray Stedman, John Walvoord, Warren W. Wiersby (“futurism” seems to be the most commonly held view among Western Protestants today).

- Futurism has merit in that it attempts to take seriously the book of Revelation’s emphasis on Christ’s second coming. However, futurism has very little significance for anyone until the time immediately preceding Jesus’ return, other than to provide the hope that it will occur. Also, futurism lends itself to overly-complicated scenarios, speculation, and unwarranted fear.

## 4. Idealist

According to the idealist model of interpretation, the entire book of Revelation is to be interpreted as being concerned with ideas and principles that are played out in history throughout the Church age. Thus, “the beast” (according to idealists) is the pictorial representation in John’s vision of all the persecuting power of Satan against Christ’s Church through various nations and governments throughout history (Roman, English, French, German, Iraqi, Zimbabwean, American, etc.).

- Proponents of idealism: Karl Auberlen, William Hendriksen, Chuck Colclasure, William Milligan, Michael Wilcock (Partial idealists: Beasley-Murray, Hoeksema). (Idealism – or some form of “modified idealism” provides natural, organic, internal and external consistency for interpretation).

- Idealism has merit in that it seeks to make sense of the pictorial visions of John as teaching ideas and principles; and it seeks to ground these interpretations in light of the use of these images in other parts of Scripture. Thus, the book of Revelation is relevant for all believers of all times. However, idealists sometimes lack historical grounding for their interpretation.

### Summary

“It is vitally important to see with the preterist that the book must be interpreted in light of the immediate historical crisis in which the first-century church found itself. The author employs a literary genre that grew out of his own cultural and linguistic milieu. His figures of speech and imagery are to be interpreted in the context of his own historical setting. They are not esoteric and enigmatic references to some future culture totally foreign to first-century readers (e.g., hydrogen bombs, satellite television, and the European Common Market). With the historicist it is important to notice that the philosophy of history revealed in the Apocalypse has found specific fulfillment in all the major crises of human history up the present day. With the futurists we must agree that the central message of the book is eschatological, and to whatever extent the End has been anticipated in the course of history, it yet remains as the one great climactic point toward which all history moves. This age will come to an end. Satan and his hosts will be destroyed and the righteous will be vindicated. These are historical events that will take place in time. And they are future. With the idealist one must agree that the events of history give expression to basic underlying principles. God is at work behind the scenes to bring to pass his sovereign intention for the human race. To whatever extent the idealist rules out a consummation, it is difficult to see from history alone any cause for optimism. It is the end that gives meaning to the process.”<sup>[12]</sup>

# Revelation 1

[Christ the Warrior King]

## Introduction

The first chapter of Revelation contains a prologue that establishes the book as divine revelation in a particular historical context (vv 1-3), a typical epistolary greeting (vv 4-8), and a prophetic vision-calling similar to many of the Old Testament prophets (vv 9-20). The book combines elements from various genres of literature: apocalyptic, letter-writing, historical narrative, prophecy, visions, woes, etc. The over-arching structure is that of a single letter (1:4; 22:21) which is intended to be both a warning and a comfort for the church of Jesus Christ: “These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful” (Revelation 17:14).

## Revelation 1:1-3 (Prologue)

<sup>1</sup> *The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated it by His angel to His bond-servant John,*

<sup>2</sup> *who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, even to all that he saw.*

<sup>3</sup> *Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*

[v 1] “The Revelation of Jesus Christ” – Apocalypse (*Apokalupsis*) simply means “revelation” – not end of the world, not the destruction of all things. “...of Jesus Christ” could be understood to mean either that Jesus Christ is the *source* of the revelation or that Jesus Christ is the *content* of the revelation. Both are viable.

[v 1] “the things which must soon take place” – This phrase is a reference to the spiritual warfare between the kingdoms of God and of Satan, the spiritual war that began when Christ came preaching, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15). Verse three reiterates: “the time is near” as does Revelation 22:10, “And he said to me, ‘Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near...’”

[v 1] Means of transmission – God → Jesus Christ → His angel → His bond-servant John → His bond-servants. This helps us to understand who the “angels” of the particular churches are in chapters 2 & 3 (“to the angel of the church in \_\_\_ write...” - 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14). If the revelation and vision came through these means of transmission and John is meant to show God’s “bond-servants” this revelation of these visions, it would make most sense to understand the recipients of the letters to the seven churches as the pastors or ministers of each of these churches (Revelation 1:11).

## Revelation 1:4-8 (Trinitarian Greeting, Doxology, Christology)

<sup>4</sup> *John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace, from Him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven Spirits who are before His throne,*

<sup>5</sup> *and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To Him who loves us and released us from our sins by His blood—*

<sup>6</sup> *and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father-- to Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen.*

<sup>7</sup> *BEHOLD, HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS, and every eye will see Him, even those who pierced Him; and all the tribes of the earth will mourn over Him. So it is to be. Amen.*

<sup>8</sup> *“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”*

[vv 4-5a] Trinitarian Greeting – Grace and peace from *God the Father* (He who is and was and is coming), *God the Holy Spirit* (the seven Spirits who are before His throne), and *God the Son* (Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth). For other references in the book of Revelation to the Holy Spirit as “the seven Spirits” see Revelation 3:1; 4:5; and 5:6.

[vv 5b-6] Doxology – Christ is worthy of eternal glory and dominion because He loves us, released us from our sins by His blood, and He has made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father. All that we are and ever will be is due to His love and work. We are blessed and related to the Father only in that we are “in Christ.”

[vv 7-8] Christology – Jesus Christ is declared to be the one who will return in judgment, as those who are not “in Him” will mourn over Him. At Christ’s second coming those who are disobedient will not mourn in repentance, but they will mourn in hopelessness (Zechariah 12:10; Hebrews 9:27-28).

#### Revelation 1:9-11 (Command to write)

<sup>9</sup> *I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus.*

<sup>10</sup> *I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like the sound of a trumpet,*

<sup>11</sup> *saying, “Write in a book what you see, and send it to the seven churches: to Ephesus and to Smyrna and to Pergamum and to Thyatira and to Sardis and to Philadelphia and to Laodicea.”*

[v 9] Tribulation, Kingdom, Perseverance – Those who are “in Jesus” are fellow-partakers of these three things: *tribulation* (persecution for the name of Christ), *kingdom* (reigning power through the sovereignty of Christ), *perseverance* (patient endurance according to the continuing work of Christ). These three self-descriptive terms of John – which he applies to all his brothers in the Lord – give a snapshot of what the entire book of Revelation is about. Taken together with verse 19, we might summarize the point of the book of Revelation as showing us how believers in Christ have been, are, and will be fellow partakers in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance in Jesus.

[v 10] “in the Spirit on the Lord’s day” – “In the Spirit” seems to refer to the Divinely induced trance-like state in which John is able to see the visions which God has for him (1:10; 4:2; 17:3; 21:10). Even while in exile on the island of Patmos, John set apart the first day of the week to worship and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ (even though there is no evidence that others were with him).

#### Revelation 1:12-16 (Vision of the Son of Man)

<sup>12</sup> *Then I turned to see the voice that was speaking with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands;*

<sup>13</sup> *and in the middle of the lampstands I saw one like a son of man, clothed in a robe reaching to the feet, and girded across His chest with a golden sash.*

<sup>14</sup> *His head and His hair were white like white wool, like snow; and His eyes were like a flame of fire.*

<sup>15</sup> *His feet were like burnished bronze, when it has been made to glow in a furnace, and His voice was like the sound of many waters.*

<sup>16</sup> *In His right hand He held seven stars, and out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword; and His face was like the sun shining in its strength.*

[v 12] Seven Golden Lampstands – As interpreted in verse 20, these represent the seven churches mentioned in v 11 (as well as the whole, complete, perfect church – the invisible church). The churches are the light of the world, united around one Redeemer and King.

[vv 13-16] The Son of Man – This is a picture of Jesus Christ symbolically portrayed as a Mighty Warrior – “the entire picture, taken as a whole, is symbolical of Christ, the Holy One, coming to purge His churches (2:16, 18, 23), and to punish those who are persecuting His elect (8:5 ff.).”<sup>[13]</sup> Compare John’s vision of the Son of Man

with the visions of both Ezekiel (1:24-28) and Daniel (7:9-10, 13-14; 10:4-7) who were both, like John, in exile and suffering tribulation and persecution (see below).

Ezekiel 1:24-28 <sup>24</sup> I also heard the sound of their wings like the sound of abundant waters as they went, like the voice of the Almighty, a sound of tumult like the sound of an army camp; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. <sup>25</sup> And there came a voice from above the expanse that was over their heads; whenever they stood still, they dropped their wings. <sup>26</sup> Now above the expanse that was over their heads there was something resembling a throne, like lapis lazuli in appearance; and on that which resembled a throne, high up, *was* a figure with the appearance of a man. <sup>27</sup> Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and *there was* a radiance around Him. <sup>28</sup> As the appearance of the rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the surrounding radiance. Such *was* the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw *it*, I fell on my face and heard a voice speaking.

Daniel 7:9-10 <sup>9</sup> “I kept looking Until thrones were set up, And the Ancient of Days took *His* seat; His vesture was like white snow And the hair of His head like pure wool. His throne *was* ablaze with flames, Its wheels *were* a burning fire. <sup>10</sup> “A river of fire was flowing And coming out from before Him; Thousands upon thousands were attending Him, And myriads upon myriads were standing before Him; The court sat, And the books were opened.

Daniel 7:13-14 <sup>13</sup> “I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him. <sup>14</sup> “And to Him was given dominion, Glory and a kingdom, That all the peoples, nations and *men of every* language Might serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion Which will not pass away; And His kingdom is one Which will not be destroyed.

Daniel 10:4-7 <sup>4</sup> On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris, <sup>5</sup> I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz. <sup>6</sup> His body also *was* like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult. <sup>7</sup> Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves.

[v 16] Seven Stars – As interpreted in verse 20, these represent the angels of the seven churches, which most likely refer to the pastors or ministers of these seven churches. This is obviously symbolic language representing the authority as well as the protection of the ministers and churches. It is not to be understood literally since in the very next verse (v 17) the same hand which holds the seven stars is employed to console John.

#### Revelation 1:17-20 (John's Response)

<sup>17</sup> *When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last,*

<sup>18</sup> *and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.*

<sup>19</sup> *“Therefore write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things.*

<sup>20</sup> *“As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches.*

[v 18] The keys of death and of Hades – In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek word ‘Hades’ (a[|dhj) is usually employed to translate the Hebrew word ‘Sheol’ (lAaV.). Both terms refer to a place or time which one enters after death. In the New Testament, there are ten occurrences of the word ‘Hades’ (Matt. 11:23; 16:18; Lk.



10:15; 16:23; Acts 2:27, 31; Rev. 1:18; 6:8; 20:13, 14). 'Gehenna' (ge,enna) is distinct from Hades in that Hades is typically employed as a general term for the place of the dead, while Gehenna is almost always translated as 'hell' – a place of torment and punishment. Hendriksen argues that in Revelation 1:18, Hades refers to the intermediate state: "It is evident that the term 'Hades' as used here cannot mean hell or the grave. It signifies the state of disembodied existence. It refers to the state of death which results when life ceases and when body and soul separate. Thus Hades always follows death (Rev. 6:8). But Hades was not able to hold the Son of man. He arose gloriously and now has authority over death and Hades, and from their terrors He is able to deliver believers, through the power of His resurrection (cf. 20:13, 14). Does not the Son of Man reveal that He has the keys of death whenever He welcomes the soul of a believer into heaven? And does He not prove that He has the keys of Hades when at His second coming He reunites the soul and body of the believer, a body now gloriously transformed? What a wonderful comfort for the persecuted believers, some of whom were soon to lay down their lives for the cause of the gospel."<sup>[14]</sup>

[19] – The things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after these things – This understanding of John's visions as being comprised of things that are past, present, and future, is one of the reasons for interpreting the rest of the book at parallel descriptions of the church age. Thus, the visions of the book of Revelation describe the *past* coming of the kingdom of God with power (Isaiah 9:6; Mark 9:1; Revelation 12:1-12), the *present* increase of His kingdom (Isaiah 9:7; Matthew 13:33; Revelation 12:13-17), as well as the *future* coming of the fullness of God's kingdom at Christ's return (Matthew 13:47-50; Revelation 14:14-20).

## Conclusion

The opening chapter of the book of Revelation is deliberately Trinitarian in its emphasis. At the same time, there is a great emphasis also on the person, work, and power of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ. The four main themes that we studied in the introduction to this book are all introduced right here in the very first chapter:

1. Christ in the midst of His Church (vv 12-20)
2. The Conflict between the Church and the World (v 9)
3. The Judgments upon the Persecutors (v 7)
4. Victory through Christ (vv 4-6, 9)

## Excursus: “Hades”

1. Gehenna (or hell), always refers to “the place of eternal punishment.”

- “The best known biblical image for hell derives from a deep, narrow gorge southeast of Jerusalem called *ge ben hinnom*, “the Valley of Ben Hinnom,” in which idolatrous Israelites offered up child sacrifices to the gods of Molech and Baal (2 Chron 28:3; 33:6; Jer 7:31-32; 19:2-6). Josiah defiled the valley to make it unacceptable as a holy site (2 Kings 23:10), after which it was used as a garbage dump by the inhabitants of Jerusalem. As a result, the Valley of Ben Hinnom became known as the dump heap, the place of destruction by fire in Jewish tradition. The Greek word *gehenna*, “hell,” commonly used in the NT for the place of final punishment, is derived from the Hebrew name for this valley.”<sup>[15]</sup>

2. Hades, like Sheol, sometimes refers to hell (the place of eternal punishment), but usually refers to “the place of the dead.”<sup>[16]</sup>

- “The grave conjures up many kinds of images, most of them negative. In its most concrete expression the grave is simply a tomb or place of burial (Gen 35:20; Mk 16:3). Often, however, imagery of the grave as the abode of the dead is evoked. Sheol (Heb) and Hades (Gk) represent the lowest place imaginable in contrast to the highest heavens (Is 7:11; Mt 11:23). The grave does not simply represent a termination of life but points beyond it to a place where two irreconcilable destinies coexist.”<sup>[17]</sup>

As examples, note the parallelism of Psalms & Proverbs, as well as the use of Psalm 16:10 in Acts 2:27...

Psalm 6:5 <sup>5</sup> For there is no mention of You in death; In Sheol who will give You thanks?

Psalm 89:48 <sup>48</sup> What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?

Proverbs 7:27 Her house is the way to Sheol, Descending to the chambers of death.

Acts 2:27 <sup>27</sup> BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.

Psalm 16:10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay.

3. “Hades” is used four times in the book of Revelation and is always used in conjunction with “death” (the word “Gehenna” is never used, but many other images are employed to speak of hell)

(Revelation 1:17-18) <sup>17</sup> When I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man. And He placed His right hand on me, saying, “Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, <sup>18</sup> and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

(Revelation 6:8) <sup>8</sup> I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.

(Revelation 20:12-15) <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one *of them* according to their deeds. <sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

4. Why is understanding this usual distinction important?

- a. It helps us to understand that in distinction from hell or gehenna, death and Hades are closely linked enemies (of God and of humanity) and that these two enemies are not just spoken of as 'states of existence' but actually personified 'entities.'
- b. It helps us to understand that the intermediate state of both Old and New Covenant believers (the disembodied position of those who die before Christ's second coming) while in the presence of Christ and better (Luke 23:43; Phil 1:23) it is not the end nor the way it is supposed to be – the state of final glorification.
- c. It gives us hope knowing that Christ has defeated death and Hades (He holds the keys, Rev 1:18), and that these two enemies will be completely destroyed at His second coming (Rev 20:15).
- d. It makes us more grateful for the work of Christ in His humiliation as expressed in the phrase "He descended into hell" from the Apostles' Creed. Consider the two different ways in which the Heidelberg Catechism (HC) and the Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) understand the phrase 'descended into hell.'<sup>1181</sup>

The Westminster Larger Catechism seems to interpret "He descended into hell" as referring to 'hades':

WLC 50. Wherein consisted Christ's humiliation after his death?

A. Christ's humiliation after his death consisted in his being buried, and continuing in the state of the dead, and under the power of death till the third day; which hath been otherwise expressed in these words, He descended into hell.

The Heidelberg Catechism seems to interpret "He descended into hell" as referring to 'gehenna':

HC 44. Why is there added, "he descended into hell?"

A. That in my greatest temptations, I may be assured, and wholly comfort myself in this, that my Lord Jesus Christ, by his inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies, in which he was plunged during all his sufferings, but especially on the cross, hath delivered me from the anguish and torments of hell.

## Revelation 2-3

[Christ Disciplining and Protecting His Church]

### Introduction

Chapter one of the book of Revelation recounts the divine call of the Apostle John and his initial encounter with Jesus Christ. The Redeemer and ruler of all the kings of the earth is symbolically portrayed as a Mighty Warrior—“the entire picture, taken as a whole, is symbolical of Christ, the Holy One, coming to purge His churches (2:16, 18, 23), and to punish those who are persecuting His elect (8:5 ff.).”<sup>[19]</sup> As we come to study chapters 2 & 3 (the individual letters to the seven churches), it is important to remember that these two elements (purging and punishing – or, disciplining and protecting) run throughout most all of these letters.

As the Warrior-King, Christ stands in the midst of His Church, wielding His power and authority to both purify and defend His people. One is reminded of Lewis’ Aslan from the Chronicles of Narnia: “But as for Aslan himself, the Beavers and the children didn’t know what to do or say when they saw him. People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time. If the children had ever thought so, they were cured of it now. For when they tried to look at Aslan’s face they just caught a glimpse of the golden mane and the great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes; and then they found they couldn’t look at him and went all trembly.”<sup>[20]</sup> As Mr. Beaver notes, “‘Course he isn’t safe. But he’s good. He’s the King, I tell you.”<sup>[21]</sup>

“...the churches mentioned in Revelation 2-3 number exactly seven, the number that symbolizes completeness. They stand for all the churches of that time and ours. In fact, the triumphs, failures, and struggles of these churches are a kind of miniature catalogue of the sorts of things that we can expect to find in other churches throughout history...According to God’s point of view, not all churches are equally healthy. Their faithfulness or laziness or complacency or tolerance of false doctrine is important to him, and makes a difference both in how they should respond and how they are judged. We likewise need Christlike discernment, illumined by the Spirit and by these examples, if we are to evaluate our own church situation accurately and respond faithfully.”<sup>[22]</sup>

Finally, as we examine each of these seven letters, we must remember to ground our interpretation and application in both a biblical and historical context (a.k.a. the grammatico-historical method of interpretation). And, it is interesting and helpful to note that each letter follows the same basic form (see last page).

### [1] Revelation 2:1-7 (The Letter to the Church in Ephesus)

<sup>1</sup> *“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this:*

<sup>2</sup> *I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate evil men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;*

<sup>3</sup> *and you have perseverance and have endured for My name’s sake, and have not grown weary.*

<sup>4</sup> *‘But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.*

<sup>5</sup> *‘Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; or else I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place-- unless you repent.*

<sup>6</sup> *‘Yet this you do have, that you hate the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.*

<sup>7</sup> *‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.’*

The orthodox, but loveless church

From the Scriptures, we know more about the church in Ephesus than about any other of the seven. Paul visited the church in Ephesus during his second journey (Acts 18:19-28), and met with the elders of the church on the return of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:16-38). And, we have Paul's letter to the church at Ephesus.

Compliment: The church in Ephesus is praised for its courageous stand for the truth, good works, church discipline, and theological rigor – they have been a tireless beacon and defender of the name of Christ (vv 2-3). The Christians in Ephesus hate that which Christ hates, as well: the deeds of the Nicolaitans (v 6). We know little about the Nicolaitans and they are only mentioned twice in Scripture (Revelation 2:6, 15). Their sinful deeds seem to be connected with the justification of idolatrous and sexually immoral pagan practices (we'll see more of this in the letter to the church in Pergamum who, unlike the church in Ephesus, tolerated the teaching of the Nicolaitans). The church in Ephesus is commended, however, for being intolerant of these practices.

Charge: Christ's indictment against the church in Ephesus is simply: "you have left your first love" (v 4). We should not think of this *only* in terms of 'love for Christ,' or 'love for God.' First love ought to be taken as referring to *both* love for God *and* love for one's brother. They are necessarily interconnected: (1 John 4:20-21) "If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also."

And, just as love for God and neighbor are necessarily interconnected, so is the practice of righteousness and the practice of love: (1 John 3:10) "By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother." The Ephesians had divorced orthodoxy from orthopraxy – they were living solely by the habit of duty, rather than also by the zeal of love. If they continue down this road of "dead orthodoxy," Christ warns that he will "remove your lampstand out of its place" (v 5) – that is, Christ will not allow them to continue to exist as a church.

Command: *Remember* from where you have fallen, *Repent and do* the deeds you did at first (v 5). In practical application, this command is for the church in Ephesus to take the zeal for the truth which they already possess and apply that same zeal to their love for the brethren.

The tree of life: In Genesis, because of the fall, mankind is cut off from the tree of life by the cherubim and the flaming sword (Genesis 2:9; 3:22, 24). In Proverbs, the tree of life symbolizes wisdom and blessing (Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4). In Revelation, the tree of life is the healing balm of eternal fellowship with God and blessedness in the Paradise of God, the New Jerusalem (Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

## [2] Revelation 2:8-11 (The Letter to the Church in Smyrna)

<sup>8</sup> *"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: The first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life, says this:*

<sup>9</sup> *'I know your tribulation and your poverty (but you are rich), and the blasphemy by those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan.*

<sup>10</sup> *'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.*

<sup>11</sup> *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt by the second death.'*

## The persecuted, poverty-stricken church

Smyrna was a socio-economic rival city of Ephesus. The church in Smyrna is only one of two churches for which Christ had no rebuke or condemnation (the other being the church in Philadelphia). Jesus' self-designation as "the first and the last, who was dead, and has come to life" (v 8) provides the persecuted church with the

comfort of knowing that tribulation and martyrdom are not the end, but in fact those who persevere in the faith will be rewarded.

Persecution: In the early church, persecution usually came from pagans and the Roman authorities. In the letter to the church in Smyrna, the Jewish community joined together with these forces of evil to persecute God's people. Christ reveals those who persecute His church to be sons of the Devil (John 8:42-44) – a synagogue of Satan (v 9). Hendriksen writes, "How anyone can say that the Jews of today are still, in a very special and glorious and preeminent sense, God's people, is more than we can understand. God Himself calls those who reject the Saviour and persecute true believers 'the synagogue of Satan'. They are no longer His people."<sup>[23]</sup> Poythress also points out, "The Jews who rejected Jesus professed to worship God, but their opposition to Christ showed that they were in fact under the control of satanic darkness (2 Cor. 4:4)."<sup>[24]</sup>

Protection: Christ declares that the devil is very real and very powerful – about to cast some into prison so that they will be tested. Yet, there is the admonition, "Do not fear what you are about to suffer... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life" (v 10). This is not just a command to be faithful until you die, but be faithful even though it will probably cost you your life. "Ten days" of tribulation most likely has as its reference Daniel 1:11-21 where Daniel requested to be tested for ten days, consuming only vegetables and water. During those ten days, God gave Daniel and his companions knowledge and intelligence, insight and wisdom, which surpassed those who were not tested (Daniel 1:17). The point here in Revelation seems to be that God will limit and reward the testing and tribulation of His people. Elsewhere, Scripture speaks to the limited nature or 'shortened season' of trials and testing in order to encourage perseverance among believers (Isaiah 26:20; 54:8; Matthew 24:22; 2 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Peter 1:6).

'The second death': This phrase is employed four times in the book of Revelation (2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8) and refers the final judgment of being sentenced to death and cast into the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. The 'first death' then would be a reference to physical death, while the 'second death' a reference to spiritual death.

### [3] Revelation 2:12-17 (The Letter to the Church in Pergamum)

<sup>12</sup> *"And to the angel of the church in Pergamum write: The One who has the sharp two-edged sword says this:*

<sup>13</sup> *I know where you dwell, where Satan's throne is; and you hold fast My name, and did not deny My faith even in the days of Antipas, My witness, My faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan dwells.*

<sup>14</sup> *'But I have a few things against you, because you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit acts of immorality.*

<sup>15</sup> *'So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.*

<sup>16</sup> *'Therefore repent; or else I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*

<sup>17</sup> *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it.'*

### The non-disciplining church

Pergamum was the seat of the Roman government for the province of Asia and the center of the imperial cult (emperor-worship). Thus, Christ calls Pergamum the place where "Satan's throne is" and where "Satan dwells" (v 2). In Pergamum citizens were asked to offer incense to the image of the emperors and confess Caesar as Lord. Refusal to worship Caesar, or even to participate in the feasts and festivals of the day, would most likely result in the loss of jobs and becoming outcast. If one wanted to succeed and avoid social, economic, and political persecution, he would have to acquiesce. Apparently, there was one named Antipas who was martyred for his faithfulness to Christ; he was an example to the Christian church in Pergamum.

Lack of Discipline: While the church in Pergamum did not deny the faith for the most part with their words (v 13), there were some among them who practically denied the faith with their lives (v 14). While the church in Pergamum has borne obvious persecution well (Antipas and those like him), they have given in to the subtler temptation of cultural accommodation (Nicolaitans). The allusion to Balaam's teaching Balak (the king of Moab) to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel helps to explain the particular problems with the Nicolaitans. During the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites, the prophet Balaam gave counsel to Balak that he would cause the sons of Israel to trespass against the Lord by going along with the daughters of Moab, sacrificing to the Moabite gods, eating and drinking with them (Numbers 31:16; 25:1-3). So, Christ's charge is that the church in Pergamum is accommodating those who acquiesced – they did not discipline or deal with these who “eat things sacrificed to idols” and committed acts of immorality in these pagan festivals.

Command: So, when Christ commands, “Repent” (v 16), he is calling upon the church in Pergamum to exercise discipline and excise the culturally accommodating members of the congregation. He is calling Pergamum to not tolerate the sin, but to act more like the church in Ephesus with regard to the those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans (Revelation 2:6). If they do not, Christ promises that His judgment will begin with His corrupted people (v 16).

'Hidden manna': Refers to the personal relationship with Jesus that is hidden from the world, but revealed to those who are His: (John 6:33-35) “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.”

'White stone, and a new name written on it': The white stone represents holiness and purity (Revelation 3:4; 6:2), and the stone itself is durable and imperishable. The new name refers to the individual's new name which he received from Christ (Isaiah 62:2; 65:15). It is the believer's new identity in Christ (Galatians 6:15).

#### [4] Revelation 2:18-29 (The Letter to the Church in Thyatira)

<sup>18</sup> *“And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write: The Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet are like burnished bronze, says this:*

<sup>19</sup> *‘I know your deeds, and your love and faith and service and perseverance, and that your deeds of late are greater than at first.*

<sup>20</sup> *‘But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.*

<sup>21</sup> *‘I gave her time to repent, and she does not want to repent of her immorality.*

<sup>22</sup> *‘Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds.*

<sup>23</sup> *‘And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.*

<sup>24</sup> *‘But I say to you, the rest who are in Thyatira, who do not hold this teaching, who have not known the deep things of Satan, as they call them-- I place no other burden on you.*

<sup>25</sup> *‘Nevertheless what you have, hold fast until I come.*

<sup>26</sup> *‘He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, TO HIM I WILL GIVE AUTHORITY OVER THE NATIONS;*

<sup>27</sup> *AND HE SHALL RULE THEM WITH A ROD OF IRON, AS THE VESSELS OF THE POTTER ARE BROKEN TO PIECES, as I also have received authority from My Father;*

<sup>28</sup> *and I will give him the morning star.*

<sup>29</sup> *‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.’*

The loving, but culturally-accommodating church



Thyatira was known as a city with a large number of trade guilds and craftsmen. The situation in Thyatira is similar to that in Pergamum in that in both places the desire to 'get ahead in the world' led to the temptation to acquiesce to the political, economic, and social pressures of those around them. In His letter to the church in Pergamum, however, Christ addressed the lack of church discipline; here in His letter to the church in Thyatira, Christ addresses the actual sin. Unlike the church in Ephesus, the church in Thyatira has deeds of love (v 19). The problem is that though they are loving, they have become tolerant of immoral behavior (sexual licentiousness) and eating things sacrificed to idols.

Economic conundrum: The problem for the believers in Thyatira was that at least once a month, the trade guilds would hold feasts which included emperor worship and sexually immoral practices. However, if one did not participate in these civic, pagan practices, he would most likely suffer significant economic risk, lose business, or go out of business entirely. The faithful abstained from these festivals, but there were those among the church in Thyatira who believed that one could participate in such sinful, wicked practices and still be a follower of Christ. Christ refers to these as "the woman Jezebel" who leads His bond-servants away (v 20). These hypocrites actually believe that it is not inconsistent to know the "deep things of Satan, as they call them" (v 24) and still worship Christ. Indeed, the argument of "Jezebel" seems to be that one becomes a better Christian and can conquer sin better by becoming more acquainted with the deep things of Satan.

Jezebel's name "is a synonym for seduction to idolatry and immorality (1 Kings 16:31; 18:4, 13, 19; 19:1, 2). If this Jezebel of a woman remains impenitent – how gracious of the Lord that He gave her time to repent! – she is going to be cast upon a bed, that is, stricken with sickness; her natural children are going to die a violent death and her spiritual followers will also suffer punishment. Thus all the church shall know that Christ is He who searches the reins and hearts. His penetrating eyes see the hidden motive that makes people follow Jezebel, namely, unwillingness to suffer persecution for the sake of Christ."<sup>[25]</sup>

Promised Inversion: Like the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31), in the day of judgment, the roles will be reversed. Christ promises the church in Thyatira that those who remain faithful to Him by not trading their integrity (keeping Christ's deeds) for economic gain and social standing will be given authority over the nations, and those who were persecuting them will be broken to pieces (vv 26-27). The morning star (v 28) is Christ Himself (2 Peter 1:19; Revelation 22:16). The star is almost always the symbol of royalty in Scripture (Numbers 24:17; Matthew 2:2), and so Jesus is promising Himself – the Royal King – to those who overcome and remain steadfast.

One is reminded of King Henry's speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*: "This story shall the good man teach his son; And Crispin Crispian shall ne'er go by, From this day to the ending of the world, But we in it shall be remember'd; We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; For he to-day that sheds his blood with me Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile, This day shall gentle his condition: And gentlemen in England now a-bed Shall think themselves accursed they were not here, And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

#### [5] Revelation 3:1-6 (The Letter to the Church in Sardis)

<sup>1</sup> *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: He who has the seven Spirits of God and the seven stars, says this: I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead.*

<sup>2</sup> *'Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die; for I have not found your deeds completed in the sight of My God.*

<sup>3</sup> *'So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.*

<sup>4</sup> *'But you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments; and they will walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.*

<sup>5</sup> *'He who overcomes will thus be clothed in white garments; and I will not erase his name from the book of life,*



*and I will confess his name before My Father and before His angels.*

<sup>6</sup> *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

### The peaceful, but dead church

The city of Sardis thought highly of itself. The people of Sardis were arrogant and over-confident in the defenses of their city. They thought that they were impregnable, sitting up on a nearly inaccessible hill. The city was beginning to wane and decay and was being deserted. The city of Sardis had "a golden past and a misplaced security." The church of Sardis was in a spiritual stupor: the church had an undeserved good reputation: "you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead" (v 1). Unlike the churches in Pergamum and Thyatira in which some were acquiescing to the social and economic pressures around them, Christ says, "you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments" (v 4). The majority of the church in Sardis have soiled their garments.

The deceitfulness of peace: Yet, there is no mention in this letter to the church in Sardis about persecution or particular sins that are plaguing the church. It seems that Sardis is enjoying much peace, but it is the peace that one finds in a cemetery. They have all the forms, ceremonies, religious customs, and traditions, but no life. Their light is dying and will soon be extinguished and they don't seem to even recognize what is happening. The church in Sardis seems to be fulfilling the sentiment expressed in the closing stanza of T.S. Eliot's *The Hollow Men*: "This is the way the world ends - This is the way the world ends - This is the way the world ends - Not with a bang but a whimper."

The glimmer of hope: But, all hope is not completely gone. If only the few people in Sardis who have not soiled their garments and completely abandoned the faith (v 4) would wake up, and strengthen the things that remain (v 2). If they prove themselves to be faithful and true, worthy of the name of Christ, Jesus promises to dress them in white robes of holiness and be remembered by Him before His Father and His angels. The one who is clothed in the white garments from Christ will have His name indelibly written in the book of life (vv 4-5). They must remember what they have received and heard, keep it, and repent (v 3).

The threat of judgment: If those who are left in the church in Sardis do not wake up, Christ promises to come like a thief – His judgment will be an unannounced surprise (v 3). No doubt, the church in Sardis would have recalled the similar words of Jesus which He spoke during His earthly ministry, (Matthew 24:43-44) "But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think *He will.*"

Application: "Perhaps the American church's greatest challenge is not outright wickedness or rank perversion, but a comatose state that renders us numb and lifeless. Perhaps amid our ambivalence and self-satisfaction we have forgotten the one who 'will come like a thief' at an hour we think not (3:3). Perhaps we need to stop patting ourselves on the back, saying 'Peace! Peace!' when there is no peace, and start seeking to be like those 'few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments,' who will walk with Jesus in white, 'for they are worthy' (3:4)."<sup>[26]</sup>

### [6] Revelation 3:7-13 (The Letter to the Church in Philadelphia)

<sup>7</sup> *"And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens, says this:*

<sup>8</sup> *'I know your deeds. Behold, I have put before you an open door which no one can shut, because you have a little power, and have kept My word, and have not denied My name.*

<sup>9</sup> *'Behold, I will cause those of the synagogue of Satan, who say that they are Jews and are not, but lie-- I will make them come and bow down at your feet, and make them know that I have loved you.*

<sup>10</sup> *'Because you have kept the word of My perseverance, I also will keep you from the hour of testing, that hour*

*which is about to come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth.*

<sup>11</sup> *'I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown.*

<sup>12</sup> *'He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he will not go out from it anymore; and I will write on him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God, and My new name.*

<sup>13</sup> *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*

### The powerfully weak church

Like the church in Smyrna, the church in Philadelphia is not condemned or judged, but is praised and encouraged by Christ. And like we saw in the letter to the church in Smyrna (Revelation 2:9), Christ mentions the 'synagogue of Satan' – those who say they are Jews and are not, but lie (v 9). Christ declares that *He* is the one who has the key of David who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens (v 7), where the 'key of David' refers to the highest power and authority in the kingdom of God. One day, those Jews who have rejected Christ will bow down at the feet of the followers of Christ and be made to know that Christ has loved His Church (Jew and Gentile alike who believe in Jesus Christ) (v 9).

The weak church: Though the church in Philadelphia has 'little power,' yet because they have kept Christ's word and not denied His name, He has put before them an open door which no one can shut (v 8). The open door is the keys to the kingdom of God by which the church in Philadelphia may preach the gospel and welcome repentant sinners into God's kingdom. For "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). The weakness of a church is of no importance to the Lord of life who said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness" (2 Corinthians 12:9).

Four Promises: There are basically four promises which Christ makes to the church in Philadelphia, and all churches that keep the word of His perseverance: [1] Those who hold fast to the word of Christ and remain faithful to Him even in the midst of persecution, Christ will make them the victors over those who persecuted them (v 9); [2] The faithful will be kept safe through the hour of testing (v 10); [3] The overcomers will be made pillars in the temple of God – they will be permanently established (v 12a); [4] Christ will write on him the name of His God, the name of the city of His God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from God, and Christ's new name (v 12b). The inscription of these names provides assurance to those who trust in Christ they will abide in Christ through trials and persecutions.

### [7] Revelation 3:14-22 (The Letter to the Church in Laodicea)

<sup>14</sup> *"To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:*

<sup>15</sup> *'I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.*

<sup>16</sup> *'So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.*

<sup>17</sup> *'Because you say, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing," and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,*

<sup>18</sup> *I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.*

<sup>19</sup> *'Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent.*

<sup>20</sup> *'Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me.*

<sup>21</sup> *'He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down*

*with My Father on His throne.*

<sup>22</sup> *'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'*"

### The Mammon church

The city of Laodicea was known for its wealth. It was located at the confluence of three great highways and was a great commercial and economic center of the region. The citizens of Laodicea were arrogantly rich, trusting in their wealth for their security. Unfortunately, the church in Laodicea had likewise come to trust in their riches, saying, "I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing" (v 17). They had forgotten Christ's admonition that "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24). Of all the churches in these seven letters, Laodicea is the only one for which Christ has no commendation or praise whatsoever!

Lukewarm people: Laodicea was situated near hot springs, and so the image of spitting out lukewarm water from one's mouth would have been easily understood to the citizens. "Lukewarm, tepid, flabby, half-hearted, limp, always ready to compromise, indifferent, listless: that 'we're-all-good-people-here-in-Laodicea' attitude."<sup>1271</sup> Christ seems to be saying that lukewarm is the worst condition of all. On-fire believers are zealous for the work of Christ. Cold-hearted heathens who have never heard of Christ can be evangelized. But, for the lukewarm, Christ has nothing but disgust: "I will spit you out of My mouth" (v 16).

Only one transaction will help: For those who trust in their money and their wealth, but are actually wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked, Christ has some financial advice: "buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and *that* the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see" (v 18). The rich must confess their true poverty and buy wine and milk without money and without cost (Isaiah 55:1-3).

Hope for the spiritually impoverished: The only hope for those who trust in the god of mammon is complete and utter conversion. To these in Laodicea, though their taste is disgusting to Him (v 16), Christ offers the glorious blessing of conversion and new life: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will dine with him, and he with Me." Those who are impoverished will dine with the King, and sit with Him on His throne! (vv 20-21). Now, they are spewed out. Then, they will be loved, reproved, and disciplined (v 19a). "Be zealous and repent" (v 19b): become new creatures with new hearts. Turn to Me, says Christ, open the door, and you will be saved.

# Revelation 4

[God and Creation]

## Introduction

In the first cycle of the book of Revelation (chapters 1-3), we get a heavenly view of both Christ and His Church. In chapter 1, the Apostle John first describes his vision of one like the son of man standing as a warrior in the midst of the seven lampstands (representing the complete church). John's initial response is one of awe and fear ("when I saw Him, I fell at His feet like a dead man" – v 17a), but then he is comforted by the victorious Savior ("Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades" – v 17b).

In chapters 2 & 3, John sets forth the letters to the seven churches, dictated to him by Christ, their King. In these letters, we as Christ's church receive both His discipline, as well as His comfort. Thus, as we look at the letters to the seven churches, we ought to examine ourselves with respect to our faithfulness or laziness in the Christian life, and our complacency or tolerance of false doctrine. Thus concludes the first of the seven cycles of the book of Revelation.

In this lesson, we come to the second cycle of the book of Revelation, chapters 4-7 – "The book of the seven seals." Again, as a reminder, we are following the progressive and parallel nature of these cycles. Thus, chapters 4-7 contain a description of past, present, and future events which span the time between Jesus' first and second comings, with only a short mention of the final judgment (6:12-17).

Chapters 4-7 may be broadly outlined in the following manner:

Chapter 4 – God and Creation (a description of the universe with God's throne at the center)

Chapter 5 – The Lamb and Redemption (a coronation ceremony of Jesus)

Chapter 6 – The Six Seals (the four horsemen and a description of the final judgment)

Chapter 7 – The Church Militant and Triumphant (the 144,000 redeemed and then worshipping)

In its description of God and creation, chapter 4 may be divided into basically two sections:

4:1-6 – The Throne of God

4:7-11 – The Worship of God

## [1] Revelation 4:1-6 (The Throne of God)

<sup>1</sup> *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."*

<sup>2</sup> *Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne.*

<sup>3</sup> *And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a sardius in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance.*

<sup>4</sup> *Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads.*

<sup>5</sup> *Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder. And there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God;*

<sup>6</sup> *and before the throne there was something like a sea of glass, like crystal; and in the center and around the throne, four living creatures full of eyes in front and behind.*

Few people in history are afforded a true vision of the heavenly throne room. Moses, Isaiah, Stephen, and Paul are a few of the others in Scripture who were granted such a privilege:

**Exodus 24:9-11** <sup>9</sup> Then Moses went up with Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel, <sup>10</sup> and they saw the God of Israel; and under His feet there appeared to be a pavement of sapphire, as clear as the sky itself. <sup>11</sup> Yet He did not stretch out His hand against the nobles of the sons of Israel; and they saw God, and they ate and drank.

**Isaiah 6:1-4** <sup>1</sup> In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. <sup>2</sup> Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory." <sup>4</sup> And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke.

**Acts 7:55-56** <sup>55</sup> But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; <sup>56</sup> and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

**2 Corinthians 12:1-4** <sup>1</sup> Boasting is necessary, though it is not profitable; but I will go on to visions and revelations of the Lord. <sup>2</sup> I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago-- whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows-- such a man was caught up to the third heaven. <sup>3</sup> And I know how such a man-- whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows-- <sup>4</sup> was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

[4:1] At the same time, we ought to take note that John's vision is not just a vision of heaven, but is a vision of all creation from heaven's perspective as is made evident by the words of the voice which John hears in verse 1: "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things."

Hendriksen writes: "These chapters [chapters 4 & 5]...do not give us a picture of heaven. They describe the entire universe from the aspect of heaven. The purpose of this vision is to show us, in beautiful symbolism, that all things are governed by the Lord on the throne."<sup>[28]</sup> Therefore, let us not forget this overarching teaching of these chapters: *God is sovereign.*

[4:2] Verse two mentions "Immediately I was in the Spirit" which marks the beginning of another vision. Apparently, John was in the Spirit on the Lord's day (1:10) and he received the vision which is recorded in the first 3 chapters. He was 'not in the Spirit' for a time, but is now again "in the Spirit." And, it is while John is in this ecstatic state of being in the Spirit, that he gets a vision of the center of the universe: *the throne of God.*

God ruling over all creation from His throne is an important theme in the book of Revelation. The word throne (qro,noj – "thronos") is used 62 times in the New Testament, 47 of which are in the book of Revelation. The Gospel According to Matthew is the second highest use of the word with only 5 occurrences. John will not let us forget that Jesus Christ is the "ruler of the kings of the earth" (1:5) and that we serve the One who is sovereign over all creation.

[4:3] The One sitting on the throne at the center of the universe is said to have the appearance of two stones: jasper and a sardius. The jasper stone was crystal clear (Rev. 21:11) symbolizing God's holiness (in the Old Testament this word is sometimes translated as a "diamond"). The sardius is blood-red representing God's judgment against sin, His wrath (in the Old Testament this word is sometimes translated as "ruby"). Interestingly, the jasper and sardius stones are the first and last of the twelve stones in the breastplate of the high priest (Exodus 28:17-21).

The emerald rainbow around God's throne represents the eternal nature of God's covenant as symbolized in the sign of the covenant with all creation through Noah (Genesis 9:16). For God's children – for believers – the

wrath of God's storm is over and now we approach Him only in blessing and promise. Those who trust in Christ will never taste of His wrath or anger because Christ has borne the curse (the flood), that we might inherit the blessing (the rainbow).

[4:4] The twenty-four elders on their thrones that surround the throne of God represent the complete number of all God's people from both dispensations of the old covenant and the new covenant. Thus, the twenty-four elders represent the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve apostles as one people ruling creation and worshiping the Christ. In Revelation 21, verse 12 & 14, we see a similar unification of these 24. But, we also must remember that this is a vision which contains symbols, not necessarily individual people. So, elders are perhaps best seen as angelic beings who are the heavenly representatives of the whole body of the faithful. Their white garments show that they are pure and holy; and their golden crowns are symbolic of their reigning with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 20:6). Bottom line: the twenty-four elders represent the entire church throughout redemptive history.

[4:5] The lightning flashes and peals of thunder are reminiscent of the experience of the people of Israel on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16; 20:18) and represent again God's majesty, power, and holiness. The seven lamps of fire burning before the throne are said to be "the seven Spirits of God." The phrase "seven Spirits" is employed four times in the book of Revelation (1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) and speaks of the perfection (symbolically, seven) of the Holy Spirit – the third person of the Trinity.

[4:6] The throne of God is surrounded by "a sea of glass, like crystal" representing God's separateness. He is inapproachable because of His worthiness and glory. The four living creatures with eyes in front and behind and who are close to the throne are cherubim (or perhaps, seraphim?) – angels of one of the highest orders.

## [2] Revelation 4:7-11 (The Worship of God)

<sup>7</sup> *The first creature was like a lion, and the second creature like a calf, and the third creature had a face like that of a man, and the fourth creature was like a flying eagle.*

<sup>8</sup> *And the four living creatures, each one of them having six wings, are full of eyes around and within; and day and night they do not cease to say, "HOLY, HOLY, HOLY is THE LORD GOD, THE ALMIGHTY, WHO WAS AND WHO IS AND WHO IS TO COME."*

<sup>9</sup> *And when the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, to Him who lives forever and ever,*

<sup>10</sup> *the twenty-four elders will fall down before Him who sits on the throne, and will worship Him who lives forever and ever, and will cast their crowns before the throne, saying,*

<sup>11</sup> *"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created."*

[4:7-8a] Commentators debate as to whether these creatures are cherubim, seraphim, or simply representative of "all creatures" (like the 24 elders are representative of all God's people). Some argue that they are not angels at all, but other special creatures of some kind. It's hard to tell. Seraphim are only mentioned in Isaiah's call (Isaiah 6) and there, like here in Revelation 4:8, they have six wings. At the same time, however, these "four living creatures" in John's vision perform many of the functions that are usually attributed to cherubim. These four living creatures do basically three things: (1) they guard the holy things of God (Genesis 3:24; Exodus 25:20); (2) they pour out the wrath of God (Rev. 6:1-7; 15:7); (3) they constantly praise God (Rev. 4:8; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 19:4). In the first half of chapter 4, we see the cherubim guarding the holiness of God. Later, we will see their participation in the outpouring of God's wrath. Here, however, we see they are praising God in worship.

But what of the four-fold symbolism: a lion, a calf (or a young bull), a man, and a flying eagle? Leon Morris notes, "There is a rabbinic saying in its present form dating from c. AD 300, but possibly much older: 'The mightiest among the birds is the eagle, the mightiest among the domestic animals is the bull, the mightiest among the wild beasts is the lion, and the mightiest among all is man' (S Bk). This may give us the clue. As

Swete puts it: ‘The four forms suggest whatever is noblest, strongest, wisest, and swiftest before the Throne, taking its part in the fulfillment of the Divine Will, and the worship of the Divine Majesty.’”<sup>[29]</sup> Bottom line: It is perhaps best to understand these four living creatures in a similar way that we think of the twenty-four elders. They are angelic beings who represent all creatures in the created order.

[4:8b-11] Interestingly, it would seem that whenever the four living creatures worship, the twenty-four elders either follow or join together with them (4:9-11; 5:14; 7:10-12; 14:3; 19:4). The song which the four living creatures sing is reminiscent of the song of the seraphim in Isaiah 6:3. It also seems to draw upon two places in redemptive history where God reveals His name: Exodus 3:14 (God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM”; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”) & Revelation 1:8 (“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, “who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”)

The praise song of the twenty-four elders (4:11) is significant in that it reminds us that God is worthy of our worship – to receive glory and honor and power – precisely because He has created all things, and therefore He is above all things. Paul reminds the people in Athens that in Him we live and move and exist (Acts 17:28). This is the main point of this chapter: “God has not abandoned the world, and it is indeed his world. He made all things and made them for his own purpose. John’s readers must not think that evil is in control. Evil is real. But the divine purpose still stands.”<sup>[30]</sup>

# Revelation 5

[The Lamb and Redemption]

## Introduction

In this second cycle of the book of Revelation, chapters 4-7, we are reading a description of all creation from the vantage point of the heavenly throne room. The main action of this section revolves around “The book of the seven seals.”

Chapters 4-7 may be broadly outlined in the following manner:

Chapter 4 – God and Creation (a description of the universe with God’s throne at the center)

Chapter 5 – The Lamb and Redemption (a coronation ceremony of Jesus)

Chapter 6 – The Six Seals (the four horsemen and a description of the final judgment)

Chapter 7 – The Church Militant and Triumphant (the 144,000 redeemed and then worshipping)

In our last lesson, in chapter 4, we saw the *Throne of God* (Revelation 4:1-6) and the *Worship of God* (Revelation 4:7-11). In our lesson today, we come to chapter 5 which contains a description of the coronation ceremony of Jesus, the Lamb who was slain for the redemption of a kingdom and priests.

In its description of the coronation ceremony, chapter 5 may be divided as follows:

5:1-5 – The Lion of Judah

5:6-7 – The Lamb of God

5:8-14 – Worshipping the Lamb

In chapter 4, John describes His vision of the throne of God and the Creator. In chapter 5, John describes His vision of the throne of God and the Redeemer. Before we dive into chapter 5, it would be good for us to reread chapter 4 which sets the scene.

## [1] Revelation 5:1-5 (The Lion of Judah)

<sup>1</sup> *I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a book written inside and on the back, sealed up with seven seals.*

<sup>2</sup> *And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?”*

<sup>3</sup> *And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it.*

<sup>4</sup> *Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it;*

<sup>5</sup> *and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals.”*

The Scroll – the scroll or book, which lay on the right hand of “Him who sat on the throne” (that is, God the Father), contains the destiny of the world and human history. It is written on both sides which indicates that it is full – nothing may be added. It is sealed with seven seals which indicates that it is secret, and also that the destiny of the world cannot be effected or changed without the power of the one who can open the seals. No one can force God’s hand.



A mighty angel gives a proclamation – a challenge – questioning if one could be found who is worthy (righteous enough) to open the seals of the scroll. John tells us that no one “in heaven or on the earth or under the earth” was found to be able to open the book or look into it. The phrasing of verse 3 is reminiscent of the language of the second commandment, Paul’s hymn to Christ from Philippians, as well as the worship described at the end of this chapter:

**Exodus 20:4** <sup>4</sup> “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.

**Philippians 2:9-11** <sup>9</sup> For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

**Revelation 5:13** <sup>13</sup> And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”

John’s weeping in verse 4 is a result of his understanding that without one who is worthy to open the seals of the scroll, there will be no redemption for mankind, no protection for God’s people, no hope whatsoever. Like God’s parading the animals before Adam for him to name them in order to show him his need of a suitable helper (Eve), this heavenly vision shows John (and us) our need for a worthy Redeemer who is not part of creation.

Yet, one of the elders (who knows redemption and therefore knows the Redeemer) consoles John: “There is One – the Lion of Judah.”

In the description of the Redeemer in verse 5, the elder gives a three-fold reason why the Redeemer is worthy to open the scroll of history: (1) He is the Lion from the tribe of Judah; (2) He is the Root of David; (3) He has overcome. Thus, the Redeemer is worthy because of *who* He is and *what* He has done.

As the Lion of Judah, He is the fulfillment of Jacob’s blessing of his sons:

(Genesis 49:9-10) <sup>9</sup> “Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? <sup>10</sup> “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.

The designation “root of Jesse” is used in Scripture (Isaiah 11:10; Romans 5:12), but other than in the book of Revelation (5:5; 22:16), Christ is not referred to as “the root of David.” In this designation, we are reminded of Jesus’ royal line of descent and the promises made to David concerning the eternity of his throne (2 Samuel 7).

As the one who has overcome, we are reminded of Christ’s redeeming work on the cross in which He rendered powerless the devil and his work:

(Hebrews 2:14-16) <sup>14</sup> Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, <sup>15</sup> and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives. <sup>16</sup> For assuredly He does not give help to angels, but He gives help to the descendant of Abraham.

## [2] Revelation 5:6-7 (The Lamb of God)

<sup>6</sup> *And I saw between the throne (with the four living creatures) and the elders a Lamb standing, as if slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God, sent out into all the earth.*

<sup>7</sup> *And He came and took the book out of the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.*

The Slain Lamb – The elder tells John to not weep because there is One who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll – the Lion of Judah. When John looks, however, He sees that the Lion of Judah is represented as a slain Lamb! In this image, we are reminded that “power is perfected in weakness” (2 Corinthians 12:9) and that reconciliation with God was accomplished through the necessary suffering and death of the Son of Man (Mark 8:31).

Seven horns – In the Old Testament, the horn, is usually a symbol of strength and power (Psalm 18:2 – “The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” See also Zechariah’s song (Luke 1:69)) Seven is the number of completion. Thus, the slain Lamb is perfect in power.

Seven eyes – The seven eyes are said to be the “seven Spirits of God” which is again (Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5) a reference to the perfection of the Holy Spirit. The slain Lamb is filled or anointed by the Holy Spirit (e.g., Luke 3:22) to serve as the only Redeemer of mankind.

Taking the scroll – In the solemn act of coronation, the slain Lamb takes the scroll from the right hand of the One of the throne (remember, this is a symbolic vision!). Here, we see the perfect harmony of the will of the Father and the will of the Son. The Son voluntarily and obediently takes upon Himself the role of Redeemer.

### [3] Revelation 5:8-14 (Worshipping the Lamb)

<sup>8</sup> *When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.*

<sup>9</sup> *And they sang a new song, saying, “Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation.*

<sup>10</sup> *“You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth.”*

<sup>11</sup> *Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands,*

<sup>12</sup> *saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.”*

<sup>13</sup> *And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, “To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever.”*

<sup>14</sup> *And the four living creatures kept saying, “Amen.” And the elders fell down and worshiped.*

Upon His taking of the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fall down in worship. Of note, they hold two instruments of worship: a harp and “golden bowls full of incense” (the prayers of the saints). Thus, we are shown that our worship on earth is joined with the worship of heaven; our worship and prayers are cherished before the heavenly throne of God! What follows are three acts of worship on the part of three different groups: (1) the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders (5:9-10); (2) the angels (5:11-12); and (3) every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them (5:13). Finally, the four living creatures and the elders join in agreement with the worship of the angels and all creation (5:14).

(5:9-10) – The four living creatures and the twenty four elders

New song – the “new song” or “renewed ode” (Greek: *wv|dh.n kainh.n* (oden kainen)) of the living creatures and the elders praises the Redeemer for His work.

Tribe, tongue, people, nation – In being slain, He purchased people from every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. These four words are used to describe the number of the elect in five different places in the book of Revelation

(5:9; 7:9; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6). Interestingly, in each instance, the order is different – thus, we should understand this designation as a *general* one that describes the varied multitude of God’s redeemed people.

Kingdom and priests who will reign – God’s people are a kingdom of rulers and a priesthood of worshippers. We should not miss the point that God’s people are described as a kingdom and priests “to our God.” The end of redemption is the worship of God!

(5:11-12) – the rest of the angels join in...

The voice – Though there are “myriads of myriads” (ten thousands of ten thousands) and thousands of thousands, John hears *one* voice, singing in unison.

Seven descriptors – the song of the angels, et. al. contains seven expressions of Christ’s worthiness: power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing.

(5:13-14) – every created thing...

Creator and Redeemer – The Father (Creator) and the Son (Redeemer) are worshipped together, as having everlasting dominion. The four living creatures add their “Amen” to the worship of creation.

### Conclusion

The importance of this heavenly perspective of the created order and history cannot be overstated. We would do well to meditate upon the vision of Revelation 4 & 5 and have it under-gird our general perspective of life. While the world persecutes believers – while God’s people undergo various trials of faith – too often we are told that the Christian perspective is one of overcoming *in this world*. “Your Best Life Now” is not only the title of a best selling book, it is also the mantra of many believers.

With merely an earthly perspective on life, we necessarily will come to believe that the rewards of the Christian life are merely earthly and earthly. But with the divine perspective of life (Revelation 4 & 5), we will come to see that though we may undergo many persecutions and suffering in this world, God the Father through Christ the Redeemer “works all things after the counsel of His will” (Ephesians 1:11).

“Thus the entire universe is governed by the throne, that is, by God through the Lamb. When the Lamb ascended to heaven, He sat down at the right hand of God, ‘far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and he (God, the Father) put all things in subjection under his (Christ’s) feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church which is his body, the fulness of him that fills all in all’ (Eph. 1:22, 23). All things ultimately must glorify God: His will is carried out in the universe. The throne rules. The Lamb reigns. As a result, believers need not fear in times of tribulation, persecution, and anguish.”<sup>[31]</sup>

God does have a wonderful plan for our lives, but His plan is much more (and much different) than what we often assume it to be.

# Revelation 6

[The Six Seals]

## Introduction

Chapter 4 – God and Creation (a description of the universe with God’s throne at the center)

Chapter 5 – The Lamb and Redemption (a coronation ceremony of Jesus)

Chapter 6 – The Six Seals (the four horsemen and a description of the final judgment)

Chapter 7 – The Church Militant and Triumphant (the 144,000 redeemed and then worshipping)

In chapter 5, the Lion of Judah and Lamb who was slain takes the book (or scroll) with seven seals from Him who sat on the throne (Rev. 5:1, 7). This book “represents God’s eternal plan. It symbolizes God’s purpose with respect to the entire universe throughout history, and concerning all creatures in all ages and to all eternity.”<sup>[32]</sup> Chapter 6 is John’s vision of the breaking of six of the seven seals. The seventh seal is not broken until chapter 8, following a brief interlude describing the people of God – the Church – in chapter 7. For our purposes in this lesson, we will divide the description of the breaking of these seals, as follows:

6:1-8 – The four horsemen on earth (seals 1-4)

6:9-11 – The souls of the martyrs in heaven (seal 5)

6:12-17 – God’s judgment upon the unrighteous (seal 6)

It is very important that we remember the symbolic nature of these visions, as well as our main principle of interpretation that has been guiding our study: ‘progressive parallelism.’ Many see the coming out of these four horsemen as a future event. As we will see as we go along, however, the opening of the seals are symbols of past, present, and future events – covering the time between Christ’s first coming and His second coming. Poythress writes, “The horsemen of 6:1-8 represent conquest, war, famine, and death. These calamities characterize an indefinite period before the Second Coming (Mark 13:6-8). Such things occurred during the tumults of the Roman Empire, are occurring now, and may be expected to occur just before the Second Coming.”<sup>[33]</sup>

The Lamb (Jesus Christ) opens all seven of the seals. At the opening of the first four seals, each of the four living creatures take turns calling out one of the four horsemen. The colors of the four horses are the same as those of the four chariots in Zechariah 6:1-3.

## [1] Revelation 6:1-8 – The four horsemen on the earth (seals 1-4)

The War-Maker on a White Horse (6:1-2)

*<sup>1</sup> Then I saw when the Lamb broke one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, “Come.”*

*<sup>2</sup> I looked, and behold, a white horse, and he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.*

The first rider symbolizes “wars.” Some see this first rider as a symbol of Christ. Some see him as a symbol for the victorious conquest of the gospel. However, when the four horsemen are taken as a whole, it is apparent that they all indicate destructive terrors. So, the rider of the white horse symbolizes all of the destruction and horrors of war throughout the ages. Jesus predicted the ravishments of war: “You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for those things must take place, but that is not yet the end.” (Matt. 24:6)

In saying that he went out ‘conquering and to conquer’ speaks to how this rider “went forth not only conquering but *bent on conquest*. The expression indicates purpose. Conquest was his whole aim. We should not miss the point that the crown *was given* to him. He doubtless thought that his own might produced his victory. But John is sure of the sovereignty of God. The conqueror has only what God allows him to have.”<sup>[34]</sup>

#### The Peace-Taker on a Red Horse (6:3-4)

<sup>3</sup> *When He broke the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, “Come.”*

<sup>4</sup> *And another, a red horse, went out; and to him who sat on it, it was granted to take peace from the earth, and that men would slay one another; and a great sword was given to him.*

The second rider symbolizes “civil wars.” He takes peace away from the earth, that people would slay one another. While this rider is given a ‘great sword’ it is not said (as it is with the first rider) that he is the one who is doing the slaying. Here, men slay one another.

#### The Famine-Maker on a Black Horse (6:5-6)

<sup>5</sup> *When He broke the third seal, I heard the third living creature saying, “Come.” I looked, and behold, a black horse; and he who sat on it had a pair of scales in his hand.*

<sup>6</sup> *And I heard something like a voice in the center of the four living creatures saying, “A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not damage the oil and the wine.”*

The third rider symbolizes “famine,” but not starvation. There is food, but it is scarce and therefore very expensive. A quart of wheat was the daily ration of a man and a denarius was the daily wage of a laborer. Thus, one cannot support his family, nor have money for anything else. This is a mere existence and bare survival.

The command from the voice in the center of the four living creatures to ‘not damage (or hurt) the oil and the wine’ is curious. Only the wealthy have provisions for oil and wine. Perhaps the fact that the rider is carrying a pair of scales in his hand provides a clue. The scales may be not only a reference to the weighing out of bread, but may also symbolize justice (or injustice) as the case may be. Thus, one way of understanding the last phrase of verse 6 is as a symbol of the economic disparity between the wealthy and the poor: the poor barely eke out survival (a day’s wages for a day’s supply of food), while the wealthy are unaffected (their oil and wine are undamaged).

#### The Life-Taker on an Ashen Horse (6:7-8)

<sup>7</sup> *When the Lamb broke the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature saying, “Come.”*

<sup>8</sup> *I looked, and behold, an ashen horse; and he who sat on it had the name Death; and Hades was following with him. Authority was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword and with famine and with pestilence and by the wild beasts of the earth.*

The fourth rider symbolizes “death” of various kinds. The word translated as ‘ashen’ or ‘pale’ in the Greek is the word ‘chloros’ (clwro,j) from which we get the word ‘chlorine’ and literally means ‘yellow-green.’ The color represents that of a corpse. A quarter of the earth’s population is said to be killed by means of sword, famine, pestilence, and wild beasts. Again, notice that Death and Hades have only the authority which was given to them by God.

Interestingly, these four are all mentioned also in Ezekiel 14:21 – “For thus says the Lord GOD, “How much more when I send My four severe judgments against Jerusalem: sword, famine, wild beasts and plague to cut off man and beast from it!” In Ezekiel these judgments come against Jerusalem, in John’s vision these judgments come against the entire earth.

[2] Revelation 6:9-11 – The souls of the martyrs in heaven (seal 5)

<sup>9</sup> *When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;*

<sup>10</sup> *and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*

<sup>11</sup> *And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also.*

From the vision of the torments on earth through the four horsemen, we now turn to a vision of the souls of martyrs in heaven. They are 'underneath the altar in heaven' symbolizing their privileged status and being under the protection of the One who sits on the throne. Each of these was slain because of the word of God and their testimony. The Greek word for 'testimony' (marturi,a – marturia) is that from which we get the word 'martyr.'

The phrase 'those who dwell on the earth' in verse 10 is used throughout the book of Revelation in reference to unregenerate mankind as a whole (Rev. 3:10; 6:10; 8:13; 11:10; 13:14; 17:2, 8). This is a prayer for vengeance. Leon Morris says, "It is not a plea against individuals but a call for the reversal of the world's judgment on God's people. The cry is intelligible only on the basis that the supreme power in the world is God's power and that he exercises it in a moral way."<sup>[3]</sup>

The white robe which is given to each of them could symbolize either the righteousness of Christ which comes through justification by faith or the color of victory (the same color of the first rider's horse). In answer to their cry for vengeance, the souls of the martyrs are told that it will come when the number of martyrs is complete. We should not think of this as a magic number that when reached, will usher in the final judgment of God and the return of Christ. Rather, the idea is that in God's plan there is a place for more martyrs and His plan will not be shortened, lengthened, or averted, regardless.

### [3] Revelation 6:12-17 – God's judgment upon the unrighteous (seal 6)

<sup>12</sup> *I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood;*

<sup>13</sup> *and the stars of the sky fell to the earth, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind.*

<sup>14</sup> *The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.*

<sup>15</sup> *Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains;*

<sup>16</sup> *and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb;*

<sup>17</sup> *for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"*

The sixth seal unveils a variety of cosmic images. Too often, many look at these symbolic images and think of them as merely future physical events. But, again, we need to remember that these symbolic visions describe past, present, and future events. Thus, we ought to understand this language in a similar way that the Apostle Peter interpreted the prophecy of Joel on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-21). There, Peter interprets the cosmic imagery of Joel 2 as being fulfilled in the work of Christ and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit.

So too, these images are meant to call to our minds the great and universal acts of God in judgment and redemption. Also, we ought not to forget that there were very real and physical cosmic signs on the day of Jesus' crucifixion. As Jesus hung on the cross, there was three hours of darkness that fell upon all the land (Matthew 27:45) and at His death and resurrection "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." (Matthew 27:51-53)

These cosmic images of the sixth seal, then, are symbolic of God's judgment and redemption. If literally 'every mountain and island were moved out of their places' (v14), then those who run in fear of God's judgment could not hide themselves 'in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains' (v 15) – which is also symbolic. The point is that the judgment of God apart from Christ brings great fear and causes people to seek solace even in calling upon the mountains and the rocks to fall upon them (v 16). The effects of God's redemption are described in the next chapter (Rev. 7); in the final verses of chapter 6, we see the effects of His judgment. Those upon whom the judgment of God comes (past, present, and especially future) have no place to hide.

In verse 15, there are seven classes of men which points to the complete nature of God's judgment and the fact that power and wealth cannot save – "Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, But righteousness delivers from death" (Proverbs 11:4). None who are apart from Christ are exempt. We ought to note also that those who experience the judgment are afraid of the 'presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb.' God's holy presence apart from faith in the redeeming work of Christ is terrifying, as is Jesus' wrath which comes upon those who have not served Him as their own.

Leon Morris comments, "In no place in this section is John trying to terrify the saints. He is using familiar apocalyptic imagery to reassure them, and to give them the certainty that their God is over all. God is bringing his purposes to pass, and he will do so though it means that this world order, and indeed this whole mighty universe, pass away."<sup>136</sup> As believers in Christ, we would do well to remember the words of Isaiah 54:10: "For the mountains may be removed and the hills may shake, But My lovingkindness will not be removed from you, And My covenant of peace will not be shaken,' Says the LORD who has compassion on you."



# Revelation 7

[The Church Militant and Triumphant]

## Review

Chapter 4 contains John's vision of the throne of God and the worship which takes place there. In chapter 5, the Lion of Judah and Lamb who was slain takes the book (or scroll) with seven seals from Him who sat on the throne (Rev. 5:1, 7). This book "represents God's eternal plan. It symbolizes God's purpose with respect to the entire universe throughout history, and concerning all creatures in all ages and to all eternity."<sup>[37]</sup> Chapter 6 is John's vision of the breaking of six of the seven seals.

## Introduction

Poythress writes, "The announcement of the seventh seal is dramatically delayed while the saints receive assurance that God knows them and protects them (v. 3) in the midst of the calamities depicted in chapter 6. They are sealed from harm as in Ezekiel 9:4. The focus is on protection from *spiritual* harm, since it is clear in Revelation that they may suffer persecution and sometimes death for the sake of their faith."<sup>[38]</sup> In this lesson, we come to the final chapter in this second cycle, chapter 7. Here we have two complementary pictures where the same group of people – God's servants – is viewed from two different perspectives:

7:1-8 – The 144,000 (the Church Militant)

7:9-17 – The Great Multitude (the Church Triumphant)

The dispensationalist interpretation of chapter 7 draws a sharp divide between Israel and the Church, and thus interprets chapter seven as describing two different groups of people. As we go along, however, it will become apparent that the same group of people is described, first as the Church militant (7:1-8) and second as the Church triumphant (7:9-17).

## [1] Revelation 7:1-8 – The 144,000 (The Church Militant)

<sup>1</sup> *After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow on the earth or on the sea or on any tree.*

<sup>2</sup> *And I saw another angel ascending from the rising of the sun, having the seal of the living God; and he cried out with a loud voice to the four angels to whom it was granted to harm the earth and the sea,*

<sup>3</sup> *saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads."*

<sup>4</sup> *And I heard the number of those who were sealed, one hundred and forty-four thousand sealed from every tribe of the sons of Israel:*

<sup>5</sup> *from the tribe of Judah, twelve thousand were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand, from the tribe of Gad twelve thousand,*

<sup>6</sup> *from the tribe of Asher twelve thousand, from the tribe of Naphtali twelve thousand, from the tribe of Manasseh twelve thousand,*

<sup>7</sup> *from the tribe of Simeon twelve thousand, from the tribe of Levi twelve thousand, from the tribe of Issachar twelve thousand,*

<sup>8</sup> *from the tribe of Zebulun twelve thousand, from the tribe of Joseph twelve thousand, from the tribe of Benjamin, twelve thousand were sealed.*

Chapter 7 answers the question: What happens to God's people during the judgments and calamities which are described in chapter 6? Answer: the bond-servants of God are protected from spiritual harm because they have



been sealed with the seal of the living God (7:1-8), and they will one day worship and sing the victory in glory (vv 9-17).

The four angels (v 1) who are holding back the four winds could be symbolic of the four horsemen of chapter 6 or they could simply symbolize the restraining of God's judgment. Either way, this image is reminiscent of Jesus' promise from the Olivet Discourse concerning God's sovereignty over even tribulation and persecution: "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short" (Matthew 24:22).

The sealing (vv 2-3) of the bond-servants of God may be understood in a threefold sense of protection, ownership, and certification: "The Father has sealed him [the Christian], for the believer enjoys the Father's protection throughout life. The Son has sealed him, for He had bought and redeemed the believer with His own precious blood. He owns us. The Spirit had sealed him (Eph. 1:13), for He certifies that we are sons of God (Rom. 8:15)."<sup>[39]</sup> The "seal" that is placed on the bond-servants (here and in Rev. 9:4) is to be understood in light of a similar vision in Ezekiel 9:1-6.

Taking all of these passages together shows us that God's people are spiritually sealed with His protection, ownership, and certification. The mark or seal is not a physical stamp. Also, as we understand this seal, it will help us then to interpret and understand the later reference to the 'mark of the beast' which refers to those who worship and follow the spirit of the antichrist, those who persecute God's people. There are then, only two options: sealed by God or marked by the beast.

The bond-servants (v 3) are the same as the "bond-servants" to whom the book of Revelation is given (Rev. 1:2). The enumeration of the 144,000 symbolizes the totality of God's people. This is in keeping with the description of the bride of the Lamb in Revelation 21:16-17 where the totality of God's people is described as a city that is a perfect cube (12,000 stadia in length, width, and height), the walls of which are 144 cubits thick. There (in Rev. 21), the 12 tribes and the 12 apostles comprise the symbolic gates and foundation stones.

The listing of these twelve tribes in Revelation 7 is interesting because it does not seem to even attempt to be inclusive of every tribe. The tribe of Dan is omitted, probably because of its association with idolatry (Judges 18:30; 1 Kings 12:29-30). And, though the half-tribe of Manasseh is mentioned, the other half-tribe of Ephraim is left out. We can only speculate as to the reasons for these omissions. However, the fact that Judah is listed first points to the priority of the tribe from which Christ, the Lion of Judah, descended.

More significant than the actual names of the tribes who are sealed is the other mention of the 144,000 later in the book of Revelation which tells us that these are the ones who "had been purchased from the earth" (Revelation 14:3). Thus, we are to understand these 144,000 as being the elect who, though they may endure temporary afflictions, are protected from permanent harm. Again, the symbolic sealing of the 144,000 is a pictorial illustration of Jesus' promise: "And then He will send forth the angels, and will gather together His elect from the four winds, from the farthest end of the earth to the farthest end of heaven" (Mark 13:27).

## [2] Revelation 7:9-17 – The Great Multitude (The Church Triumphant)

<sup>9</sup> *After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches were in their hands;*

<sup>10</sup> *and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."*

<sup>11</sup> *And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures; and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God,*

<sup>12</sup> *saying, "Amen, blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might, be to our God forever and ever. Amen."*

<sup>13</sup> *Then one of the elders answered, saying to me, "These who are clothed in the white robes, who are they, and*

*where have they come from?"*

*<sup>14</sup> I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

*<sup>15</sup> "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them.*

*<sup>16</sup> "They will hunger no longer, nor thirst anymore; nor will the sun beat down on them, nor any heat;*

*<sup>17</sup> for the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."*

Again, the symbolic picture of the 144,000 (Rev. 7:1-8) and the picture of the great multitude (Rev. 7:9-17) are two perspectives of the same people – the church of Jesus Christ which He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28). In the first picture, the Israelite heritage of the New Testament people of God is emphasized; in the second picture, their international character is emphasized (they are from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues (v 9)).

The great multitude is clothed in white robes and they have palm branches in their hands signifying a victorious celebration. Thus, they triumphantly stand before the throne and before the Lamb, declaring their reason for celebration, "Salvation to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb." The angels and the (twenty-four) elders and the four living creatures join in worship adding their "Amen" as well as a seven-fold praise: blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might to our God forever and ever (v 12).

In chapter 5, when John wept greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it, one of the elders comforted him by pointing to the One who was worthy (Rev. 5:4-5). Here, one of the elders asks John about the identity and the place of origin of the great multitude (v 13). Without a hint of speculation, John merely says, "My lord, you know."

The elder's answer describes the great multitude in terms of redemption – "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (v14). "The great tribulation" is most likely all-inclusive of all the trials and persecutions which were mentioned in chapter 6 with the breaking of the first six seals, and gives unity to this entire section (chs 4-7).

Because they have been redeemed, they 'serve' (or worship) Him day and night in His temple. In the second half of verse 15, we are told that, "He who sits on the throne will spread His tabernacle over them." With the use of the tabernacle language, we are intended to call to mind God's tabernacling presence – the Shekina glory of God (Exodus 40:34-35).

In the final two verses of chapter 7, we have some of the most beautiful and eloquent descriptions of God's care and protection – no more hunger, no more thirst, no more weariness or oppression by the heat of the sun (v 16). And, in a striking paradox, just as the Lion of Judah is also the Lamb that was slain (Rev. 5:5-6), here we are told that the Lamb is also the shepherd of the great multitude (v 17). In verse 17, the elder speaks to John using language that brings together several passages of Scripture. In verse 17, he says:

"the Lamb in the center of the throne will be their shepherd, and will guide them to springs of the water of life; and God will wipe every tear from their eyes."

Psalm 23: <sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures; He leads me beside quiet waters.

John 10: <sup>11</sup> "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep.

Isaiah 55: <sup>1</sup> "Ho! Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk Without money and without cost.

John 7: <sup>38</sup> “He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, ‘From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.’”

### Concluding Application – “May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering”

Here, in chapter 7, we have a clear picture of the reward that is due to the Lamb who was slain: the sacrificial worship of those whom He has redeemed. It was no doubt the theology of Revelation, chapters 4-7 that inspired the missionary movement of the Moravian church. The following is from “Count Zinzendorf and the Moravians” by David Smithers<sup>[40]</sup>:

The Moravians beautifully explain their motivation for missions in the following 1791 evangelical report. “The simple motive of the brethren for sending missionaries to distant nations was and is an ardent desire to promote the salvation of their fellow men, by making known to them the gospel of our Savior Jesus Christ. It grieved them to hear of so many thousands and millions of the human race sitting in darkness and groaning beneath the yoke of sin and the tyranny of Satan; and remembering the glorious promises given in the Word of God, that the heathen also should be the reward of the sufferings and death of Jesus; and considering His commandment to His followers, to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, they were filled with confident hopes that if they went forth in obedience unto, and believing in His word, their labor would not be in vain in the Lord. They were not dismayed in reflecting on the smallness of their means and abilities, and that they hardly knew their way to the heathen whose salvation they so ardently longed for, nor by the prospect of enduring hardships of every kind and even perhaps the loss of their lives in the attempt. Yet their love to their Savior and their fellow sinners for whom He shed His blood, far outweighed all these considerations. They went forth in the strength of their God and He has wrought wonders in their behalf.”

The Moravians had learned that the secret of loving the souls of men was found in loving the Savior of men. On October 8, 1732, a Dutch ship left the Copenhagen harbor bound for the Danish West Indies. On board were the two first Moravian missionaries; John Leonard Dober, a potter, and David Nitschman, a carpenter. Both were skilled speakers and ready to sell themselves into slavery to reach the slaves of the West Indies. As the ship slipped away, they lifted up a cry that would one day become the rallying call for all Moravian missionaries, “May the Lamb that was slain receive the reward of His suffering.” The Moravian’s passion for souls was surpassed only by their passion for the Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

# Revelation 8

[The Seventh Seal & the First Four Trumpets]

## Outline

Chapter 8 – The Seventh Seal & the First Four Trumpets (Silence & God’s judgment upon the earth)

Chapter 9 – The Fifth and Six Trumpets (God’s judgment upon mankind)

Chapter 10 – Interlude (The little book and the Seven Thunders)

Chapter 11 – The Seventh Trumpet (The Temple, the Two Witnesses, and the Final Trumpet)

The seven seals (chs 4-7), seven trumpets (chs 8-11), and seven bowls (chs 15-16) are all **parallel** to one another. The seals, trumpets, and bowls all describe the same period of time between Jesus’ first coming and His second coming. As with the seven seals, the trumpets are grouped as four, two, and one – with an interlude between the sixth and the seventh trumpets (as we also saw with the seals).

At the same time, there is also a **progressive** nature to the development of the visions of the seals, trumpets, and bowls. “The seven seals began with announcements of riders commissioned to bring calamities (6:1-8). The seven trumpets, by contrast, contain vivid descriptions of the calamities themselves. The intensity of the judgment has increased.”<sup>[41]</sup> Also, in the seven trumpets the judgment is only partial – a third of creation (ch 8) and a third of mankind (ch 9) is affected. In the seven bowls (chs 15-16), the judgment is total, affecting all creation and every living thing.

In addition to the parallel and progressive nature of the seals, trumpets, and bowls, we must also keep in mind the **intent** of these visions: to comfort, not terrorize God’s people and to warn unbelievers of God’s wrath. Leon Morris writes, “The trumpet judgments do not concern the church as such. They are God’s judgments on the world. A good deal of Revelation is taken up with judgment. Human wickedness does not go unnoticed in heaven. God has his own way and time for dealing with it. John uses a good deal of conventional apocalyptic in this section to emphasize that God is really in control and that he does what he wills. Whereas the seals drew attention to judgment as following more or less inevitably on sin, the trumpets emphasize God’s activity. God takes action against sin. We should also bear in mind that these are not the final judgments. In each case a third only is affected, and this serves as a warning. Indeed the sound of the trumpet is essentially to give warning (Ezk. 33:3).<sup>[42]</sup>

## [1] Revelation 8:1-5 – The Seventh Seal (The Power of Prayer)

<sup>1</sup> *When the Lamb broke the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour.*

<sup>2</sup> *And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.*

<sup>3</sup> *Another angel came and stood at the altar, holding a golden censer; and much incense was given to him, so that he might add it to the prayers of all the saints on the golden altar which was before the throne.*

<sup>4</sup> *And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.*

<sup>5</sup> *Then the angel took the censer and filled it with the fire of the altar, and threw it to the earth; and there followed peals of thunder and sounds and flashes of lightning and an earthquake.*

The silence in heaven is the holy fear that comes when God goes forth in judgment. In several passages from the Old Testament prophets, silence is a precursor to God’s holy judgment (Hab. 2:20; Zeph. 1:7; Zech. 2:13). And, again, we notice that God is sovereign over the judgments that follow in that the angels do not have trumpets of their own, but the trumpets ‘were given to them’ (Rev. 8:2). In addition to the seven angels who are given seven trumpets, there is another angel who stands at the altar in heaven, holding a golden censer – he too has incense

‘given to him’ (Rev. 8:3). The prayers of the saints and the incense of the angel go ‘up before God out of the angel’s hand’ (Rev. 8:4).

The most amazing imagery of this first section comes in verse 5 as the angel takes fire from the altar and throws it to the earth, signifying the initiation of God’s judgments. This points to two things about the prayers of the saints. One – the prayers of the saints are imperfect. “These saints in persecution and tribulation are praying. But their prayer life is imperfect. It needs to be incensed with the intercession of Christ.”<sup>[43]</sup> Two – the prayers of the saints are powerful. “The fire came from the very altar on which the prayers of the saints have been offered. This surely means that the prayers of God’s people play a necessary part in ushering in the judgments of God.”<sup>[44]</sup>

For believers, the application of this image ought to be obvious. As ones who have been bought at the price of Christ’s blood on the altar in heaven, our prayers – though imperfect and sometimes off the mark – are powerful and ‘sanctified’ through the altar-fire of heaven. God works – in blessing and in judgments – through the prayers of the righteous. “*God has heard the prayers of the saints, and the judgments upon earth are His answer to them.*”<sup>[45]</sup>

## [2] Revelation 8:6-13 – The First Four Trumpets

In the same way as with the first four seals, the first four trumpets of judgment are grouped together.

Revelation 8:6-7 (Judgment through the earth and vegetation)

<sup>6</sup> *And the seven angels who had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound them.*

<sup>7</sup> *The first sounded, and there came hail and fire, mixed with blood, and they were thrown to the earth; and a third of the earth was burned up, and a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.*

“Hail and fire” or “hail and lightning” is said to be mixed with blood and thrown down to the earth. Perhaps the blood is simply a reference to the apocalyptic nature of judgment (as in Joel 2:30-31), or blood symbolizes the destructive nature of the natural calamities. Hendriksen comments, “In all probability this first trumpet indicates that throughout the period extending from the first to the second coming, our Lord, who now reigns in heaven, will afflict the persecutors of the Church with various disasters that will take place on earth, that is, on the land.”<sup>[46]</sup>

Again, it is helpful to remember that these visions are symbolic, and also that the succession of trumpets does not necessarily follow a chronological order. This is made evident when we consider that here in the first trumpet we are told that ‘all the green grass was burned up’ – yet, in the fifth trumpet the locusts are told ‘not to hurt the grass of the earth’ (Rev. 9:4). So, the first trumpet refers to God’s judgments through various disasters *upon the earth*.

Revelation 8:8-9 – The Second Trumpet (Judgment through the sea (maritime calamities))

<sup>8</sup> *The second angel sounded, and something like a great mountain burning with fire was thrown into the sea; and a third of the sea became blood,*

<sup>9</sup> *and a third of the creatures which were in the sea and had life, died; and a third of the ships were destroyed.*

In the second trumpet, we are given a vision of how God’s judgment extends from the land into the sea. With the image of a third of the sea which becomes blood, we are intended to recall one of the plagues upon Egypt: “So Moses and Aaron did even as the LORD had commanded. And he lifted up the staff and struck the water that *was* in the Nile, in the sight of Pharaoh and in the sight of his servants, and all the water that *was* in the Nile was turned to blood. The fish that *were* in the Nile died, and the Nile became foul, so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile. And the blood was through all the land of Egypt.” (Exodus 7:20-21).

This second trumpet extends beyond the scope of the first in that not only is vegetation destroyed, but also a third of sea life and third of the ships. Leon Morris comments, “Whatever it was that happened in the waters destroyed a third of all marine life. This is not pollution of water on a grand scale because a third of the ships were destroyed. John is not describing natural happenings but a divine intervention.”<sup>1471</sup> From judgments upon the earth, to the sea, the third trumpet takes us to judgments upon inland and fresh waters.

#### Revelation 8:10-11 – The Third Trumpet (Judgment through inland and fresh water)

<sup>10</sup> *The third angel sounded, and a great star fell from heaven, burning like a torch, and it fell on a third of the rivers and on the springs of waters.*

<sup>11</sup> *The name of the star is called Wormwood; and a third of the waters became wormwood, and many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.*

God is Lord over all creation: hail, fire, burning mountains, the sea, and now the springs of fresh water. The great star which fell from heaven, burning like a torch to corrupt the springs of water, could be a symbolic representation of the river deities that many peoples have worshipped.

“Wormwood” refers to a bitter plant, but it was not necessarily poisonous. It is most likely meant to symbolize bitter sorrow, as in Lamentations 3:15: “He has filled me with bitterness, He has made me drunk with wormwood.” Wormwood is illustratively used in Scripture as the opposite of things which are sweet and soothing like honey and oil (Proverbs 5:3-4). Some sort of lethal plague (or many various plagues) are indicated here as ‘many men died from the waters, because they were made bitter.’

The vision of the first four trumpets continues to build and extend with the intention of teaching the all-pervasive nature of God’s sovereignty. Having traversed God’s judgments upon the earth, the sea, the springs of water, the last trumpet includes the symbolic vision of the luminaries in the sky – the sun, moon, and stars.

#### Revelation 8:12 – The Fourth Trumpet (Judgment through the heavenly bodies)

<sup>12</sup> *The fourth angel sounded, and a third of the sun and a third of the moon and a third of the stars were struck, so that a third of them would be darkened and the day would not shine for a third of it, and the night in the same way.*

Verse 12 is particularly difficult to understand because the first half of the verse seems to indicate that a third of the actual sun, moon, and stars are struck (or put out), while the second half of the verse seems to indicate that a third of the day and night are darkened. It’s unclear if, in describing this vision, John means to symbolical speak to quantity or to time. Again, we must remember, though, that John is describing a symbolic vision and not a scientific textbook. He’s painting pictures.

#### [3] Revelation 8:13 – Transition (The three woes to come...)

<sup>13</sup> *Then I looked, and I heard an eagle flying in midheaven, saying with a loud voice, “Woe, woe, woe to those who dwell on the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three angels who are about to sound!”*

The last verse of chapter 8 is a transition, a brief introduction to the remaining three trumpets which come in chapters 9 (two trumpets) and 11 (one trumpet). The eagle is flying in ‘midheaven’ between the source of judgment and the manifestation of God’s judgment. This bird of prey is an omen of evil destruction yet to come; this is made evident by its three-fold “woe.”

#### Conclusion

Without special revelation (God speaking in the Scriptures), it is very difficult for us to equate particular judgments of God through nature with particular sins of humanity. When we attempt such speculations, we are

on dangerous ground – as it is just that: speculation. However, even though we may have a difficult time tying particular natural disasters with particular sins, Revelation chapter 8 is a reminder that all natural disasters are within the realm of God’s providence; they are all a part of God’s judgments against sin and a fallen world. As such, whenever calamity strikes, we ought to be reminded to repent of our own sins and call upon others to repent, as well.

The Westminster Confession of Faith speaks to God’s providence working through secondary causes this way:

WCF 5:2 Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.

“Necessarily” refers to what we may call ‘logical consequences.’ For example, in the normal way of things, if you plant a seed God will cause it to grow using necessary secondary causes that He has established in creation. (Genesis 8:22; Jeremiah 31:35)

“Feely” refers to what we have been talking about here: acts of nature or so-called accidents that may seem random, but are within God’s realm of providence. For example, the tornado that strikes some but does not strike others, or the axe head that slips off its handle and kills a man. (Deuteronomy 19:5)

“Contingently” refers to the contingency of repentance or lack of repentance. For example, God relented from bringing calamity upon Nineveh when the people repented (Joel 3:9-10).

The point is this: As Romans 8:20-21 reminds us, as a result of the fall and sin in the world, God has subjected creation to futility. Disasters, calamities, and plagues would not exist if it were not for sin. They are God’s judgments and are reminders of our corruption and our need of repentance.

[See also Luke 13:1-9]



# Revelation 9

[The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets]

## Review

As we saw in the last lesson, the **intent** of the vision of the trumpets (chs 8-11) is to comfort, not terrorize God's people and to warn unbelievers of God's wrath. Leon Morris writes, "The trumpet judgments do not concern the church as such. They are God's judgments on the world. A good deal of Revelation is taken up with judgment. Human wickedness does not go unnoticed in heaven. God has his own way and time for dealing with it. John uses a good deal of conventional apocalyptic in this section to emphasize that God is really in control and that he does what he wills. Whereas the seals drew attention to judgment as following more or less inevitably on sin, the trumpets emphasize God's activity. God takes action against sin. We should also bear in mind that these are not the final judgments. In each case a third only is affected, and this serves as a warning. Indeed the sound of the trumpet is essentially to give warning (Ezk. 33:3)." <sup>[48]</sup>

In the first four trumpets, we saw God's judgment being unleashed upon unrepentant humanity through creation: the earth and vegetation (8:6-7), the sea (8:8-9), inland and fresh water (8:10-11), and heavenly bodies (8:12). The symbolic theme of one-third destruction is intended to show us that the judgment is not final, but designed to bring about repentance. The main over-arching theme of the first four trumpets is to give assurance to God's people that He is sovereign over all creation (WCF 5:1-2)

## Introduction

In chapter 9, we come now to the fifth and sixth trumpets wherein we move from the realm of creation to the realm of the spirit. As such, the fifth and sixth trumpets describe the awful destruction that comes upon those who do not repent. The images that are employed are two: hordes of tormenting locusts and armies of murdering horsemen. The visions and imagery of judgment are intensifying.

### [1] Revelation 9:1-12 – The Fifth Trumpet (Hordes of Tormenting Locusts)

<sup>1</sup> *Then the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star from heaven which had fallen to the earth; and the key of the bottomless pit was given to him.*

<sup>2</sup> *He opened the bottomless pit, and smoke went up out of the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by the smoke of the pit.*

<sup>3</sup> *Then out of the smoke came locusts upon the earth, and power was given them, as the scorpions of the earth have power.*

<sup>4</sup> *They were told not to hurt the grass of the earth, nor any green thing, nor any tree, but only the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads.*

<sup>5</sup> *And they were not permitted to kill anyone, but to torment for five months; and their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it stings a man.*

<sup>6</sup> *And in those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will long to die, and death flees from them.*

<sup>7</sup> *The appearance of the locusts was like horses prepared for battle; and on their heads appeared to be crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men.*

<sup>8</sup> *They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions.*

<sup>9</sup> *They had breastplates like breastplates of iron; and the sound of their wings was like the sound of chariots, of many horses rushing to battle.*

<sup>10</sup> *They have tails like scorpions, and stings; and in their tails is their power to hurt men for five months.*

<sup>11</sup> *They have as king over them, the angel of the abyss; his name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in the Greek he has the name Apollyon.*

<sup>12</sup> *The first woe is past; behold, two woes are still coming after these things.*



In verse 1, theologians and commentators are divided over two questions: (1) Who is given the key of the bottomless pit? and, (2) What is the identity of the “star from heaven”?

*(1) Who is given the key of the bottomless pit?*

In considering this question, it helps to examine the grammar, as well as the theological context of verse 1. Grammatically, the pronoun “him” at the end of verse 1 (to whom the key of the bottomless bit was given) could refer to either the fifth angel or the star from heaven which had fallen to earth; however, the other trumpeting angels in this vision only blow trumpets and nothing else, so the one who is given the key to the bottomless pit is most likely “the star from heaven which had fallen to earth.

Contextually, a “key” is always a symbol of power. There are three other uses of the word “key” in the book or Revelation: (1) Jesus is said to have “the keys of death and of Hades” (Rev. 1:18); (2) Jesus is described as “He who is holy, who is true, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, and who shuts and no one opens” (Rev. 3:7); (3) Near the end of the book John has a vision of “an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand” who then binds Satan with the chain (Rev. 20:1-2). These other mentions of “keys” – and especially the parallels between 9:1 and 20:1 – seem to point to the understanding that the one who is given this key is either Christ Himself or one of His ministering angels.

*(2) What is the identity of the “star from heaven”?*

Interpretation #1: Based on passages which refer to Satan falling “like lightning” (Luke 10:18) as well as the previous use of the word “star” in the book of Revelation to describe angels or messengers (Revelation 1:20), some believe this star to be Satan or some other fallen angel.

Interpretation #2: Based on the parallels between 9:1 and 20:1 (above) in which the power to open or shut hell (the bottomless pit or abyss), as well as the effects of the judgment which follow, some believe this star to be Christ or one of His ministering angels.

Concluding interpretation of verse 1 – With so many in disagreement about the interpretation of verse 1, we would be wise not to be dogmatic about it. <sup>[49]</sup> I am personally persuaded that “the star from heaven which had fallen to earth” is a symbol of the coming of Christ and the preaching of the Gospel. It is to him (the star from heaven which had fallen to earth) who was given “the key of the bottomless pit.” Satan or his minions are never portrayed in Scripture as having that sort of power. They are always constrained or loosed by Christ or His angels. Again, it is important to remember that all of this language is symbolic. It speaks not to the healing effects of the Gospel ministry, but the other side: the deleterious effects of God’s Word (Isaiah 6:9-13; Luke 12:51-53).

Thomas Torrance writes in his commentary: “St. John’s vision likens the Word of God to a star that falls out of Heaven and opens the bottomless pit of human nature. The Word of God alone has the key to that dark bottomless pit. What a terrible reaction ensues! Preach the Gospel and keep on preaching it, and either men are ashamed and converted or the bottomless pit is opened...The Cross of Jesus Christ has provoked such a reaction against it that all the latent evil in men has been pushed to the surface in unbelievable wickedness and bloodshed. The very bottomless pit has been opened in our midst, so that heaven and earth have been darkened with its fumes and the whole atmosphere of the world has been poisoned. And out of this bottomless pit there have come hordes of locusts, not the kind that eat grass and greenery, but the kind that attack men, like scorpions with stings in their tails: barbed ideas that cause tension and torment and bitterness. The world is full of locusts and scorpions like that today.”<sup>[50]</sup>

Verses 2-11

(Terrorizing torment) When the pit is opened, engulfing smoke and hordes of locusts are released (vv 2-3). The torment is likened to that of a sting of scorpion which causes the one bitten to long for the release of death, but

is unable to find it (vv 5-6). Their king and ruler is called Abaddon (Hebrew) or Apollyon (Greek) which in either language means ‘the Destroyer.’ Hendriksen writes, “The entire symbolic picture emphasizes this one idea: terror and destruction, for that is Satan’s work!”<sup>[51]</sup>

*(Restrained torment)* These tormenting locusts are not unrestrained: power “was given” to them (v 3), they “were told” only to hurt the men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads (v 4), they “were not permitted” to kill anyone (v 5), and their tormenting is limited to a duration of five months (vv 5, 10). As we have already seen, those who have “the seal of God” are the bond-servants of God who are protected, owned, and certified by God (Revelation 7:1-8). Amidst the tormenters from hell, God’s people are protected.

Verse 12: Here we are told that of the three woes mentioned earlier (Rev. 8:13), the first is past, but two are still coming.

## [2] Revelation 9:13-21 – The Sixth Trumpet (Armies of Murdering Horsemen)

<sup>13</sup> *Then the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God,*

<sup>14</sup> *one saying to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, “Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.”*

<sup>15</sup> *And the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released, so that they would kill a third of mankind.*

<sup>16</sup> *The number of the armies of the horsemen was two hundred million<sup>[52]</sup>; I heard the number of them.*

<sup>17</sup> *And this is how I saw in the vision the horses and those who sat on them: the riders had breastplates the color of fire and of hyacinth and of brimstone; and the heads of the horses are like the heads of lions; and out of their mouths proceed fire and smoke and brimstone.*

<sup>18</sup> *A third of mankind was killed by these three plagues, by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which proceeded out of their mouths.*

<sup>19</sup> *For the power of the horses is in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails are like serpents and have heads, and with them they do harm.*

<sup>20</sup> *The rest of mankind, who were not killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands, so as not to worship demons, and the idols of gold and of silver and of brass and of stone and of wood, which can neither see nor hear nor walk;*

<sup>21</sup> *and they did not repent of their murders nor of their sorceries nor of their immorality nor of their thefts.*

While the judgment and destruction is intensified here (killing versus tormenting), the intent of the afflictions of the sixth trumpet is clearly to bring about repentance, though it never comes (vv 20-21). The altar in heaven – before which the prayers of the saints ascended and from which fire initiated the seven trumpet blasts (Rev. 8:3-5)– is once again the center of attention in this, the sixth seal (v 13).

## Verses 13-16

The four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates (v 14) are not good angels or servants of God, as are the four angels who held back the four winds of the earth (Rev. 7:1). These are evil angels, intent on destruction. In the Old Testament, the Euphrates River was the border of the Promised Land (Genesis 15:18; Exodus 23:31; Joshua 4:1). “It was also the boundary of the Roman empire and in the first century most people would have thought of the Parthians, the world’s most dreaded cavalry, for they came from this region and filled the people with foreboding.”<sup>[53]</sup> The point is: these murdering horsemen are waiting just outside – ready to attack when released. Their coming forth only at the proper time by God’s command is reinforced by the reference to the specific hour, day, month, and year of their release (v 15a). As with the first four trumpets, their destruction is limited to one-third (v 15b).

## Verses 17-19

Again, as with the locusts from the fifth trumpet, the murdering horsemen of the sixth trumpet are symbols. They are released to kill with three plagues of fire, smoke, and brimstone (v 18). It is perhaps best to understand these armies of murdering horsemen as symbols for the destructive nature of war in general, with a particular eye to the 'wars and rumors of wars' (Matthew 24:6) that will be waged toward the end of the church age. These evil angels "relish the idea of plunging mankind into war. Yet they can do nothing unless God permits. And – let us never forget it! – in finally permitting them to be released God uses war as a voice of warning for the wicked (9:20). Thus, war also is included in God's decree, its very hour and day and month and year having been determined."<sup>1541</sup>

### Verses 20-21

Despite the ravishes of war and destruction, those who survive apparently do not get the message. They do not repent, but continue in their demonic idol worship (v 20). Thus, they continue in their wicked ways: murders, sorceries, immorality, thefts (v 21). These things were happening even in Corinth in the first century: "*No, but I say that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons*" (1 Corinthians 10:20).

### Conclusion

At the end of the first century, there is no doubt that many in the church were asking, "Where is God? How are we to understand the torments around us and the evils of war that are everywhere?" Believers still ask these questions. John's vision gives us the answer: Evil afflictions and wars are instruments in God's hand to judge and to command repentance, but the Church will be kept safe through it all.

In Psalm 11, King David asked the same questions (Psalm 11:1-3) and arrived at the very same answers (Psalm 11:4-7).

### Psalm 11

<sup>1</sup> For the choir director. *A Psalm of David.* In the LORD I take refuge; How can you say to my soul, "Flee *as* a bird to your mountain; <sup>2</sup> For, behold, the wicked bend the bow, They make ready their arrow upon the string To shoot in darkness at the upright in heart. <sup>3</sup> If the foundations are destroyed, What can the righteous do?"

<sup>4</sup> The LORD is in His holy temple; the LORD'S throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids test the sons of men. <sup>5</sup> The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, And the one who loves violence His soul hates. <sup>6</sup> Upon the wicked He will rain snares; Fire and brimstone and burning wind will be the portion of their cup. <sup>7</sup> For the LORD is righteous, He loves righteousness; The upright will behold His face.

# Revelation 10

[Interlude, the Little Book and the Seven Thunders]

## Review

In the first four trumpets (chapter 8), we saw God's judgment being unleashed upon unrepentant humanity through creation: the earth and vegetation, the sea, inland and fresh water, and heavenly bodies. The symbolic theme of one-third destruction is intended to show us that the judgment is not final, but designed to bring about repentance. The main over-arching theme of the first four trumpets is to give assurance to God's people that He is sovereign over all creation (WCF 5:1-2)

In the fifth and sixth trumpets (chapter 9), we moved from the realm of creation to the realm of the spirit. The fifth and sixth trumpets described the awful destruction that comes upon those who do not repent. The images that are employed are two: hordes of tormenting locusts and armies of murdering horsemen. The visions and imagery of judgment are intensifying. We interpreted the tormenting locusts as the deleterious effects of gospel preaching for the impenitent, and the murdering horsemen as God's judgments upon demonic worship, idolatry, and other sins with the intent of bringing about repentance.

In chapters 10-11, we have an interlude (10:1-11:14) before proceeding to the seventh and final trumpet (11:15-19). A similar pattern of "six-interlude-seventh" was employed in the seven seals (Revelation 6-8). Chapters 10 & 11 may be outlined as follows:

- (1a) 10:1-7 – The Seven Thunders (the voice of God)
- (1b) 10:8-11 – The Little Book (the future judgments of God)
- (2a) 11:1-2 – The Temple (the invisible Church)
- (2b) 11:3-14 – The Two Witnesses (the witness of the Church)
- (3) 11:15-19 – The Seventh Trumpet (the final judgment)

## [1a] 10:1-7 – The Seven Thunders (the voice of God)

<sup>1</sup> *I saw another strong angel coming down out of heaven, clothed with a cloud; and the rainbow was upon his head, and his face was like the sun, and his feet like pillars of fire;*

<sup>2</sup> *and he had in his hand a little book which was open. He placed his right foot on the sea and his left on the land;*

<sup>3</sup> *and he cried out with a loud voice, as when a lion roars; and when he had cried out, the seven peals of thunder uttered their voices.*

<sup>4</sup> *When the seven peals of thunder had spoken, I was about to write; and I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Seal up the things which the seven peals of thunder have spoken and do not write them."*

<sup>5</sup> *Then the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land lifted up his right hand to heaven,*

<sup>6</sup> *and swore by Him who lives forever and ever, WHO CREATED HEAVEN AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE EARTH AND THE THINGS IN IT, AND THE SEA AND THE THINGS IN IT, that there will be delay no longer,*

<sup>7</sup> *but in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he is about to sound, then the mystery of God is finished, as He preached to His servants the prophets.*

(The Strong Angel and Seven Thunders – 10:1-4)

As the opening verses of chapter 10 unfold, the Apostle John has a vision of a mighty angel who is closely related to Christ. That is, much of the same imagery that is applied to Christ in chapter 1 (amidst the seven golden lampstands) is here applied to this strong angel. This angel is arrayed with glory and in his hand he has “a little book which was open” (verse 2). This little book, as we will see in the following verses (10:8-11) is the bitter-sweet redemption and judgment of God – the little book presumably contains the message which is given through the “seven peals of thunder” which is the voice of God (Psalm 29 is a suggestive parallel to the seven peals of thunder: in that Psalm there are seven references to “the voice of Yahweh”).

We are not told what God says in the seven peals of thunder (v 3), and John is forbidden to write it down (v 4). We may speculate as to what God said, but the point is probably that we ought not to speculate. Like Paul (2 Corinthians 12:4), John seems to understand what God says, but is not permitted to speak of what is said. Again, it is probably best to understand that generally, the message is one of future events surrounding punishment and salvation – the two opposite parts of Jesus’ final coming in judgment (Hebrews 9:27-28).

Speaking of the seven peals of thunder, Hendriksen notes, “The meaning is clearly this: never shall we be able to know and to describe *all* the factors and agencies that determine the future. We know the meaning of the lampstands, the seals, the trumpets, the bowls, *etc.*, but there are other forces at work; there are other principles that are operating in this universe, namely, the seven thunders. What they are we do not know. So let us be very careful in making predictions regarding the future: we may be leaving out a very important factor.”<sup>1531</sup>

#### (The Oath of the Mighty Angel – 10:5-7)

The mighty angel swears an oath in the name of God concerning the fulfillment of the final seventh trumpet: “there will be delay no longer.” That is to say, the final judgment and consummation of the kingdom of God on earth (11:15-19) is sure and imminent. Poythress writes, “The announcement of no more delay (v 6) indicates that the consummation of God’s plans comes with the seventh trumpet. Like the cycle of seven seals, the cycle of seven trumpets leads up to the Second Coming. Here the angel’s announcement emphasizes the significance of the Second Coming as the wrapping up of God’s plan for history (cf. Eph. 1:10).”<sup>1561</sup> The day the Lord will come just like a thief in the night (1 Thessalonians 5:2).

#### (1b) 10:8-11 – The Little Book (the future judgments of God)

<sup>8</sup> *Then the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard again speaking with me, and saying, “Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel who stands on the sea and on the land.”*

<sup>9</sup> *So I went to the angel, telling him to give me the little book. And he said to me, “Take it and eat it; it will make your stomach bitter, but in your mouth it will be sweet as honey.”*

<sup>10</sup> *I took the little book out of the angel’s hand and ate it, and in my mouth it was sweet as honey; and when I had eaten it, my stomach was made bitter.*

<sup>11</sup> *And they said to me, “You must prophesy again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.”*

The voice of God commands John to go and take the book from the hand of the angel; John does as he is told. The meaning of the symbol of this little book is given in verse 11: John is to prophecy concerning **the judgment to come**. The three descriptors (peoples, nations, and tongues) are employed in seven places in the book of Revelation (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15), but this is the only list that contains ‘kings.’ It reminds us that the word of God through his prophets is above all other authorities.

The symbol of “eating” a book or scroll containing God’s message of judgment finds its root in the book of Ezekiel:

Ezekiel 2:8-3:11 <sup>8</sup> “Now you, son of man, listen to what I am speaking to you; do not be rebellious like that rebellious house. Open your mouth and eat what I am giving you.” <sup>9</sup> Then I looked, and behold, a hand was

extended to me; and lo, a scroll *was* in it. <sup>10</sup> When He spread it out before me, it was written on the front and back, and written on it were lamentations, mourning and woe. <sup>3:1</sup> Then He said to me, “Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel.” <sup>2</sup> So I opened my mouth, and He fed me this scroll. <sup>3</sup> He said to me, “Son of man, feed your stomach and fill your body with this scroll which I am giving you.” Then I ate it, and it was sweet as honey in my mouth. <sup>4</sup> Then He said to me, “Son of man, go to the house of Israel and speak with My words to them. <sup>5</sup> “For you are not being sent to a people of unintelligible speech or difficult language, *but* to the house of Israel, <sup>6</sup> nor to many peoples of unintelligible speech or difficult language, whose words you cannot understand. But I have sent you to them who should listen to you; <sup>7</sup> yet the house of Israel will not be willing to listen to you, since they are not willing to listen to Me. Surely the whole house of Israel is stubborn and obstinate. <sup>8</sup> “Behold, I have made your face as hard as their faces and your forehead as hard as their foreheads. <sup>9</sup> “Like emery harder than flint I have made your forehead. Do not be afraid of them or be dismayed before them, though they are a rebellious house.” <sup>10</sup> Moreover, He said to me, “Son of man, take into your heart all My words which I will speak to you and listen closely. <sup>11</sup> “Go to the exiles, to the sons of your people, and speak to them and tell them, whether they listen or not, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’”

Unlike Ezekiel, John is not only to speak to God’s people, but to many peoples and nations and tongues and kings – to everyone. Like Ezekiel, John finds God’s words to taste as sweet as honey in his mouth; however (unlike Ezekiel) God’s word is bitter in his stomach. There are several interpretations concerning why God’s word would taste sweet, but cause bitterness in John’s stomach. The interpretation that seems to make the most sense comes from Leon Morris: “Being God’s word it is necessarily sweet to the believer (*cf.* Pss. 19:9-10; 119:103). But when it contains stern denunciations and tells of woes on evil-doers it is also bitter. We should not miss the point that it is the belly of John, the firm believer in Jesus Christ, which is made bitter. As verse 11 makes clear, the scroll is concerned with the message he must proclaim. The true preacher of God’s word will faithfully proclaim the denunciation of the wicked it contains. But he does not do this with fierce glee. The more his heart is filled with love of God the more certain it is that the telling forth of ‘woes’ will be a bitter experience.”<sup>1571</sup>

#### (2a) 11:1-2 – The Temple (the invisible Church)

<sup>1</sup> *Then there was given me a measuring rod like a staff; and someone said, “Get up and measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship in it.*

<sup>2</sup> *“Leave out the court which is outside the temple and do not measure it, for it has been given to the nations; and they will tread under foot the holy city for forty-two months.*

#### (The Temple – 11:1)

In the first two verses, John is commanded to measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship in it, but he is told to exclude and not measure the court of the nations (or the Gentiles). Similarly, Ezekiel was given a vision in which he was commanded to measure the temple (Ezekiel 40-43). In Ezekiel, the vision of the temple is intended to be presented to the house of Israel in order to show them what they are supposed to be and to shame them for their iniquities (Ezekiel 43:10). Thus, in Ezekiel, the temple functions as a symbolic representation of the house of Israel (the Church in the old dispensation (WCF 7:6)).

Here in Revelation, the temple functions similarly as a symbol of the New Israel (the Church in the new dispensation) – God’s people, who are united in Christ (from many tribes, tongues, languages, and peoples), but it does not include those outside. John’s vision of the temple is simply a symbol of the Church – God’s sanctuary and dwelling place of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:19-22).

#### (Forty-two Months – 11:2)

In the second half of verse 2, the voice of God tells John that the nations will tread under foot the holy city (persecute the Church) for forty-two months. As with most of the images and numbers in the book of



Revelation, times designations are also typically symbolic. The 'forty-two months' here represents the gospel era (the time between the first and second comings of Christ, or perhaps concluding just prior to Christ's second coming). The time-span of 'forty-two months' in verse 2 is representative of the same time described in verse 3 as '1260 days' which is there described as a time of prophecy or witness by the Church. Thus, verse 2 describes the gospel era as a time of persecution of the Church, and verse 3 and following describes the gospel era as a time of witness by the Church.

**Application:** These verses (Revelation 11:1-14) teach us the two things that define the present circumstances of the Church:

(1) Until the return of Christ, the Church is called to bear witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ (Acts 1:7-8; Philippians 2:14-16).

(2) Until the return of Christ, the people of God ought to expect (and not be surprised by, Ecclesiastes 5:8; 1 Peter 4:12; 1 John 3:13) the persecution and hatred of the world.

### (2b) 11:3-14 – The Two Witnesses (the witness of the Church)

<sup>3</sup> *“And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for twelve hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth.”*

<sup>4</sup> *These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth.*

<sup>5</sup> *And if anyone wants to harm them, fire flows out of their mouth and devours their enemies; so if anyone wants to harm them, he must be killed in this way.*

<sup>6</sup> *These have the power to shut up the sky, so that rain will not fall during the days of their prophesying; and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood, and to strike the earth with every plague, as often as they desire.*

<sup>7</sup> *When they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up out of the abyss will make war with them, and overcome them and kill them.*

<sup>8</sup> *And their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified.*

<sup>9</sup> *Those from the peoples and tribes and tongues and nations will look at their dead bodies for three and a half days, and will not permit their dead bodies to be laid in a tomb.*

<sup>10</sup> *And those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and celebrate; and they will send gifts to one another, because these two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.*

<sup>11</sup> *But after the three and a half days, the breath of life from God came into them, and they stood on their feet; and great fear fell upon those who were watching them.*

<sup>12</sup> *And they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” Then they went up into heaven in the cloud, and their enemies watched them.*

<sup>13</sup> *And in that hour there was a great earthquake, and a tenth of the city fell; seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the rest were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven.*

<sup>14</sup> *The second woe is past; behold, the third woe is coming quickly.*

### (The Witness of the Witnesses – 11:3-6)

Following abruptly on the heels of God's command for John to measure the temple, God speaks of 'my two witnesses' which are sent out to prophesy, clothed in sackcloth. These two witnesses have been variously interpreted as representing particular individuals, Moses and Elijah, the Law and the Prophets, the Law and the Gospel, the Old and New Testaments, etc. It might be best, however, to understand these to symbolically represent the missionary task of the Church (or temple) in bearing witness to God's Word. These witnesses are protected (v 5), have the power to judge and condemn (v 6), will be martyred like their Lord (vv 7-8), will be mocked in their deaths by a persecuting world (vv 9-10), and will be resurrected on the Day of Judgment (vv 11-14).

The two witnesses are described as **two olive trees** – they are full of oil, or full of the Holy Spirit (see Zechariah 4:3, 6, 14 for precedent for this image). The two witnesses are also described as **two lampstands** – like the symbolic representation of the seven churches in chapter 1, they are witnesses to God’s light in a sinful world.

Verse 5 tells us that the word of the faithful witnesses is a consuming fire of judgment. Here, fire ought to be taken in the spiritual sense of judgment upon those who reject the Lord’s ambassadors and their message (Matthew 10:14-15). In verse 6 we are told that the very power of heaven goes with those who bear witness to God’s Word.

#### (The Death of the Witnesses – 11:7-10)

At the completion of the time of witness by the Church, the two witnesses are killed (verse 7). At the end of the time of witness, the beast (Satan) will spur on the antichristian world in oppositional war against the church and destroy her witness. Their time is not cut short; their job is done and thus they are martyred. It is not necessary to interpret this as meaning that every believer will be physically killed; however, the Church as a viable witness and disseminator of the Gospel will be destroyed (this is at the end of the forty-two months or 1260 days).

Remembering that these are symbols, the bodies of the two witnesses are said to ‘lie in the street of the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified’ (verse 8). Some have argued that this city is Jerusalem, but “if the passage is symbolical...it is unlikely that any one earthly city is meant. The ‘great city’ is every city and no city. It is civilized man in organized community.”<sup>[58]</sup>

The persecuting world will celebrate over the death of the witness of the Church (verses 9-10) because the ‘two prophets tormented those who dwell on the earth.’ That is to say that the preaching of God’s Word to the impenitent is never soothing, but actual torment of the unrepentant soul (see Revelation 9:5 where the same root word is twice used to describe the activity of the tormenting locusts). The ‘three and a half days’ in which the bodies of the two witnesses lie in the streets is symbolic of the short period of demonic deception at the end of the age, immediately prior to Christ’s return (Rev. 11:9, 11; 13:7; 20:7-10).

#### (The Resurrection of the Witnesses – 11:11-13)

After the ‘three and a half days’ of rejoicing in their temporary victory, the persecuting world’s celebration is cut short. It is as Jesus foretold in His Olivet Discourse, “Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short” (Matthew 24:22). God’s Church is resurrected (verse 11), and gathered to Him in the clouds (verse 12) (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17). “On the day of judgment when the world shall see the Church restored to honor and glory, the world will become frozen with fear.”<sup>[59]</sup>

Fear strikes those who remain are terrified and give glory to the God of heaven, and a portion of them (symbolically described as ‘a tenth’ or ‘seven thousand’) are killed (verse 13). This does not necessarily mean that the survivors of the antichristian world are all converted, but simply that they now realize the truth of God’s glory (note the glory that they give is mixed with terror).

#### (Transition to the Seventh Trumpet – 11:14)

“Now all is ready for the final judgment; for, in spite of all these trumpets of warning, the world has remained impenitent and in addition has rejected the testimony of the two witnesses – the Church as an organization – and has killed them (verse 7). Therefore, now the final reckoning must come. So we read: ‘The second woe is past. Behold the third woe comes quickly.’”<sup>[60]</sup>

#### Application from Thomas Torrance



“Surely there is a question here we must ask ourselves. If there is no wormwood, are we really in touch with the Word of God? If our message is not disturbing and even sometimes tormenting, may we not wonder whether we have ever really eaten God’s holy Word? This chapter tells us quite plainly that we cannot partake of God’s Word in this world without bitterness. Why does the Church of Jesus Christ today sit so easy to her surroundings? Why do Christian people live such comfortable and such undisturbed lives in this evil and disturbed world? Surely it is because we are not true to the Word of God.

Would to God we could all become candlesticks as well as olive trees, filled with a holy oil that is set on fire by God. That is the light of God among men. That is the Word of His Revelation. It is the function of the Christian, to bear witness to the Truth, and to share the fellowship of Christ’s sufferings, joyfully counting it the crown of his glory.

The Apostle’s vision goes on to show how much the world hates the Truth, for the Word of God is a torment to them. It disturbs them in every aspect of their life. When the Christian Church bears faithful witness to God, there is no department in human life that does not feel its penetrating challenge, no region of human experience that is not disturbed and does not suffer upheaval. True it is that the Word of God is always a Word of salvation and peace, but so long as the world is unrepentant, the Word of God can only be a torment to it. This world of ours today is a tormented world. It is haunted by Jesus and tormented by the Word of the Cross. Is it any wonder that whole regions of the earth have tried to stamp out the fire of God and have tried to silence His voice? But who is more guilty than the so-called Christian? What a tormenting embarrassment and uneasy hush we cause people when we speak about Jesus Christ or bear witness to His Word! Everybody seems to have sworn to keep silence, to muzzle the Word of God, and to turn deaf ears to the voice of God’s witnesses.

Let us listen to what this chapter has to say to us. No matter what the world does, the Word of God cannot be silenced.”<sup>[61]</sup>

### (3) 11:15-19 – The Seventh Trumpet

<sup>15</sup> *Then the seventh angel sounded; and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ; and He will reign forever and ever.”*

<sup>16</sup> *And the twenty-four elders, who sit on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God,*

<sup>17</sup> *saying, “We give You thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign.*

<sup>18</sup> *“And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.”*

<sup>19</sup> *And the temple of God which is in heaven was opened; and the ark of His covenant appeared in His temple, and there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder and an earthquake and a great hailstorm.*

When the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, there is rejoicing in heaven (presumably the angels) who are then answered by the entire redeemed multitude (represented in the twenty-four elders). We have already had one description of the second coming of Christ in the sixth seal (Rev. 6:12-17); here, in the seventh trumpet we have another. The “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel’s *Messiah* is taken from two passages (Rev. 11:15 and Rev. 19:16): “Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Hallelujah!”

### (The Consummation of the Kingdom of God – 11:15-17)

The angels in heaven rejoice because of the consummation of the kingdom of God on earth – what was promised through the prophets (e.g. Isaiah 9:1-7) and begun at Christ’s first coming (e.g. Mark 1:15), is now complete (verse 15). The language of their declaration of victory most likely comes from Psalm 2: The kings and

rulers of the earth joined together to oppose “the LORD and against His Anointed” (Psalm 2:2), but God breaks them with a rod of iron and shatters them like earthenware (Psalm 2:9).

When the twenty-four elders join, they speak to God as the Almighty, “who are and who were” (verse 17). At the opening of the book, John brings greetings from Him “who is and who was and who is to come” (1:4), and Jesus refers to Himself as the One “who is and who was and who is to come” (1:8). The future tense is not present here in the seventh trumpet (“who is to come”) because He has come; with regard to God’s interaction with His creation, there is no more future tense – He was and He is. At the consummation of the Kingdom of God as described in these verses, the long-awaited future event is now present. When God is praised for having taken His great and power and begun to reign, it is not as though God were not reigning before. The point is that “God has decisively dethroned evil and has entered on his reign.”<sup>[62]</sup>

### (The Final Judgment – 11:18)

“The nations were enraged” again is similar language from Psalm 2:1, and God responds with wrath of His own (Psalm 2:5). The time of **judgment** has come: God’s faithful people are rewarded, those who destroy the earth are destroyed. All of God’s people are comprehensively described using four different descriptors: bond-servants, prophets, saints, and those who fear Your name. These are not different categories, but a description of the whole – the small and the great – all are rewarded.

### (The Heavenly Temple Opened – 11:19)

Earlier in the chapter the people of God were symbolically represented as the temple of God (11:1-2). Here it is the actual temple in heaven which is opened to reveal the ark of the covenant. Interestingly, in the Old Testament it is normally referred to as “the ark of the covenant.” Here it is called “the ark of His covenant” emphasizing that these are God’s promises – He is faithful and true. And, Christ in His sacrificial work has granted access to the great blessings of those covenant promises through the veil of His own flesh (Hebrews 6:19; 10:20). At the same time, the majesty of God’s power and holiness is shown forth in flashes of lightning, sounds, peals of thunder, and an earthquake – just as it was at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:16; 20:18), and His judgment upon sin is symbolized in a great hailstorm.

At Christ’s second coming on the Day of Judgment, the temple is opened and we are shown a picture of both blessing and curse, reward and destruction, grace and justice.

Psalm 2 is a messianic psalm that describes in song what we have seen in the seventh trumpet:

### Psalm 2

<sup>1</sup> Why are the nations in an uproar  
And the peoples devising a vain thing?

<sup>2</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand  
And the rulers take counsel together  
Against the LORD and against  
His Anointed, saying,

<sup>3</sup> “Let us tear their fetters apart  
And cast away their cords from us!”

<sup>4</sup> He who sits in the heavens laughs,  
The Lord scoffs at them.

<sup>5</sup> Then He will speak to them in His anger  
And terrify them in His fury, saying,

<sup>6</sup> “But as for Me, I have installed My King  
Upon Zion, My holy mountain.”

<sup>7</sup> “I will surely tell of the decree of the LORD:  
He said to Me, ‘You are My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations  
as Your inheritance,  
And the *very* ends of the earth as Your  
possession.

<sup>9</sup> ‘You shall break them with a rod of iron,  
You shall shatter them like earthenware.’”

<sup>10</sup> Now therefore, O kings, show discernment;  
Take warning, O judges of the earth.

<sup>11</sup> Worship the LORD with reverence  
And rejoice with trembling.

<sup>12</sup> Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish *in* the way, For His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!

## Excursus: Time Designations <sup>[63]</sup>

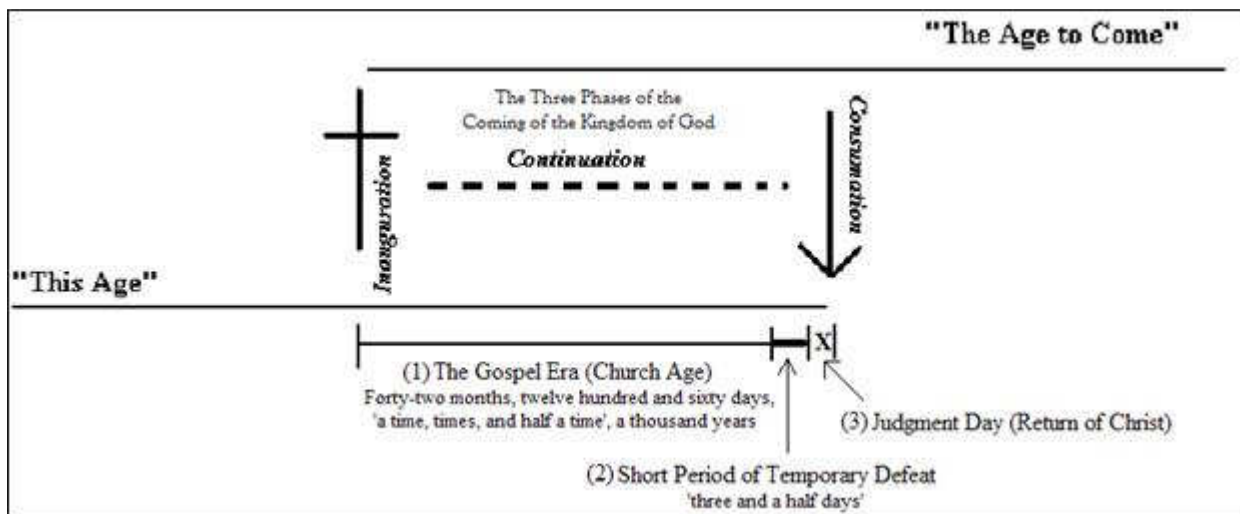
(Compare chapters 11, 12 and 20 of Revelation: a very striking parallel.) In all these chapters we have the following order.

- (i) A long period (the gospel era) '42 months', 'a thousand years', 'a time, times, half a time', and 1,260 days (Rev. 11:2,3; 12:6,14; 13:5; 20:2-5).
- (ii) A very short period of 3 ½ days (Rev. 11:7,9; 13:7; 20:7-10).
- (iii) The judgment day (Rev. 11:11,12,16ff.; 14:14ff.; 20:11ff.).

We immediately see that the three ways of designating this period which we find in chapters 11, 12, and 13 differ but slightly. In fact, forty-two months equal to 1,260 days; both are equal to 'a time, times, and half a time', if the term 'time' be interpreted as meaning one year, and 'times' as indicating two years. In all three cases we are dealing with a period which is designated as three years and a half.

It is in order to ask why the term 'three years and a half' is used to characterize this long period. To answer this question we must remember that during the old dispensation there was a period of three years and a half which God's people could never forget. It was a period of affliction, yet also a period during which the power of God's Word was exhibited (1 Ki. 17; Jas. 5:17). When you compare James 5:17 with Revelation 11:6, you immediately see that the apostle was thinking of the days of Ahab and Elijah. During that period of three and a half years God's Church was persecuted (1 Ki. 18:10,13) yet not destroyed (1 Ki. 18:4,39; 19:18). God's Word showed its great power (1 Ki. 17:1). Elijah and others were nourished by Jehovah in a miraculous manner (1 Ki. 17:4,9ff.). Similarly, through the present long period of gospel activity, beginning with Christ's first coming and extending nearly to the second coming, the Church is persecuted but not destroyed, God's Word exerts a powerful influence, and God's people receive spiritual nourishment.

The expression 'a time, and times, and half a time' occurs first in the book of Daniel 7:25; 12:7. It is the period of the antichrist. John emphasizes the fact that the spirit of the antichrist is in the world already (1 Jn. 4:3). In the Apocalypse this period of three years and a half refers to the entire gospel age. It is followed by the 'three days and a half' during which 'the beast that comes up out of the abyss' – the antichristian world in its final phase – will kill the witnesses and will silence the voice of the gospel (*cf.* Rev. 11:7ff.).



# Revelation 12

[Christ Defeats Satan, Satan Persecutes the Church]

## Overview of Second Section of Revelation (chapters 12-22)

“...chapter 12 is the beginning not only of another minor section, namely, the fourth, but also of the second major division of the book. This major division covers chapters 12-22. It forms a unit. The main characters that arise in opposition to Christ and His Church are introduced in chapters 12-14. They are the dragon, the beast out of the sea, the beast out of the earth, Babylon, and the men that have the mark of the beast. The visions that follow show us what happened to each of these antichristian forces, to those having the mark of the beast (chapters 15, 16), to the harlot Babylon and to the two beasts (chapters 17-19), and, finally, to the dragon (chapters 20-22). It is clear, therefore, that the central theme of the first main division (chapters 1-11) is continued in the second. That theme is, as has been indicated, the victory of the Christ and of His Church over the dragon and his helpers. But whereas the first main division pictures the outward struggle between the Church and the world, the second part of the book reveals the deeper background. We now see more clearly than in the preceding division that the conflict between the Church and the world is but the outward manifestation of the war between the Christ and Satan (the dragon).”<sup>[64]</sup>

## Outline (chapters 12-14)

Chapter 12 – Christ defeats Satan, Satan persecutes the Church

Chapter 13 – The Two Beasts

Chapter 14 – The Triumph of God’s Church & the Judgment of the Wicked

The unity of chapters 12-14 is evident by the use of seven “signs” throughout this section<sup>[65]</sup>:

- (1) 12:1-6 – The Woman Clothed with the Sun
- (2) 12:7-12 – Satan Cast Out
- (3) 12:13-17 – War between Satan and the Woman and Her Son
- (4) 13:1-10 – The Beast from the Sea
- (5) 13:11-18 – The Beast from the Earth
- (6) 14:1-5 – The Lamb on the Mount
- (7) 14:6-20 – The Harvest of the Earth

## [1] Revelation 12:1-6 (The Woman, the Dragon, and the Birth of the Son)

<sup>1</sup> *A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars;*

<sup>2</sup> *and she was with child; and she cried out, being in labor and in pain to give birth.*

<sup>3</sup> *Then another sign appeared in heaven: and behold, a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads were seven diadems.*

<sup>4</sup> *And his tail swept away a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to give birth, so that when she gave birth he might devour her child.*

<sup>5</sup> *And she gave birth to a son, a male child, who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His throne.*

<sup>6</sup> *Then the woman fled into the wilderness where she had a place prepared by God, so that there she would be nourished for one thousand two hundred and sixty days.*

The Woman (vv 1-2) – the people of God, Israel, are here described using imagery from Joseph’s dream (Genesis 37:9 - “Lo, I have had still another dream; and behold, the sun and the moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me”). The Woman (Israel) is pregnant and in labor. This too is reminiscent of certain Old Testament images which are used to describe God’s people: “As the pregnant woman approaches *the time* to give birth, She writhes *and* cries out in her labor pains, Thus were we before You, O LORD. We were pregnant, we writhed *in labor*, We gave birth, as it seems, *only* to wind. We could not accomplish deliverance for the earth, Nor were inhabitants of the world born.” (Isaiah 26:17-18)

The Red Dragon (vv 3-4) – Satan is described as a red dragon having seven heads and ten horns. The “seven heads and ten horns” of the dragon are together most likely meant to symbolize two things: there are multiple manifestations of Satan’s kingdom and his power is extensive, thus hard to defeat. Satan attacks heaven itself in sweeping away a third of the stars of heaven, attacking God’s order and rule. The context of verses 1-2 helps us to see that this assault by Satan is coincident with Jesus’ first coming. These verses do not describe Satan’s initial rebellion, but rather the continuing enmity between his seed and the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15).

Verse 4 “has given rise to speculation that a third of the angels fell and became demons at the time that Satan rebelled against God. But, the Bible provides few clues about the fall of Satan and his angels. The immediate focus of verse 4 is not on Satan’s original act of rebellion, but on his attack on the male child.”<sup>[66]</sup>

The Child is caught up & the Woman flees (vv 5-6) – The male child is obviously the Lord Jesus Christ; His birth is the fulfillment of many prophecies – especially Micah 5:2-3: “But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, *Too* little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity. Therefore He will give them *up* until the time When she who is in labor has borne a child. Then the remainder of His brethren Will return to the sons of Israel.” His ruling the nations with a rod of iron is also foretold in the Old Testament (e.g. Psalm 2:9; Isaiah 9:1-7).

The futuristic method of interpretation (which is most commonly employed by dispensationalists) sees a break here between verse 5 & 6: “Since Revelation 12:5 describes the ascension of Jesus, and Revelation 12:6 describes yet-to-occur events in the 70<sup>th</sup> week of Daniel, between these two verses lies hundreds of years (our current period).”<sup>[67]</sup> This erroneous interpretation is based on the so-called ‘near-far’ break of prophecy interpretation.

However, it is more consistent and much simple, to understand verse 5 as describing the whole of Jesus’ earthly ministry from birth to ascension, and then verse 6 describes the era between Jesus’ first and second coming using the same time reference as we have already seen employed: three and a half years (11:2-3, 12:14). Here, the woman – God’s people, the Church – is described as fleeing to the protection and nourishment of God (His present provision of another Helper, the Holy Spirit (John 14:16-17)). “For the early Christian there was an important continuity between the old Israel and the church, the true Israel. Here the woman is undoubtedly Israel who gives birth to the Messiah, but later in the chapter she is the church who is persecuted for her faith.”<sup>[68]</sup>

## [2] Revelation 12:7-12 (The Defeat of the Dragon – Postpartum Victory & Persecution)

<sup>7</sup> *And there was war in heaven, Michael and his angels waging war with the dragon. The dragon and his angels waged war,*

<sup>8</sup> *and they were not strong enough, and there was no longer a place found for them in heaven.*

<sup>9</sup> *And the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him.*

<sup>10</sup> *Then I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation, and the power, and the kingdom of our God*



*and the authority of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren has been thrown down, he who accuses them before our God day and night.*

<sup>11</sup> *“And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.*

<sup>12</sup> *“For this reason, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them. Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time.”*

#### The war in heaven and defeat of the Dragon (vv 7-9)

The angel Michael functions as an agent of Christ. Through His earthly ministry in bringing the kingdom of God (Mark 1:15), Christ is victorious over Satan and the devil is ‘thrown down’ (Luke 10:18; Luke 11:10-22; Revelation 20:2-3). We learn that the devil is a deceiver from the opening pages of Scripture (Genesis 3), but here we see that Satan’s ability to deceive the whole world has been placed in check. Here (in verse 9), Satan’s power to deceive the whole world is taken from him by his being ‘thrown down.’ In a parallel passage (Revelation 20:2-3), Satan’s ability to deceive the nations is taken from him by his being bound. Each image is a description of the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15, and describes the same event: Jesus’ victory over Satan in his first coming.

Again, the futurist model of interpretation does violence to this text when it posits that this heavenly war culminating in the victory of Christ is a reference to some future event. The result of this interpretation is to hope in Christ in the next life only – and makes us the second most pitiable of all men (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:19). Also, if the victory of Christ and the defeat of Satan (12:6-9) is not synchronous with Jesus’ first coming, then the proclamation and promises in the next verses (12:10-12) cannot apply to us in the present church age. Yet, when you read them, it is hard to imagine these words applying to any other time in redemptive history.

#### The Proclamation of Heaven (vv 10-12)

Notice the fourfold reason for praise: the salvation, power, kingdom of God, and authority of His Christ has come. Christ has won, Satan has been defeated and has been thrown down. Satan may be the accuser of the brethren, but “we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

Leon Morris comments, “The reason for the song of triumph is that Satan has been overthrown. He is *the accuser of our brothers* and that he has been busy comes out in the words *who accuses them before our God day and night*. The picture is one of implacable hostility on the part of Satan as well as of the complete triumph of God. Satan urged the sins of the *brothers* in the highest court. But now he has been overthrown and is completely powerless against them. Christians accordingly are not working towards victory, but from a victory already achieved.”<sup>[69]</sup>

Verse 11 is a summary verse of this entire chapter. It brings together the objective work of Christ (the blood of the Lamb) and its subjective application to every believer (the word of their testimony). Believers overcome Satan through both the objective work of Christ and their own subjective faithfulness, producing a people who do not love their life even when faced with death (v 11). The voice from heaven is clearly speaking of martyrs, but this same quality of devotion and love for Christ is required of all believers. As Jesus declared, “He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal” (John 12:25).

Verse 12 tells us that there is much rejoicing in heaven because of the defeat of Satan, but the victory of Christ means also that Satan will molest those in the earth and sea. Having been defeated by the male child, the devil turns his wrath upon the woman. “Not much time remains suitable for the activities of the evil one. The troubles of the persecuted righteous arise not because Satan is too strong, but because he is beaten. He is doing all the harm he can while he can. But he will not be able to do this for much longer.”<sup>[70]</sup>

### [3] Revelation 12:13-17 (The Woman and the Dragon – Postpartum Persecution & Protection)

<sup>13</sup> *And when the dragon saw that he was thrown down to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child.*

<sup>14</sup> *But the two wings of the great eagle were given to the woman, so that she could fly into the wilderness to her place, where she was nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.*

<sup>15</sup> *And the serpent poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away with the flood.*

<sup>16</sup> *But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and drank up the river which the dragon poured out of his mouth.*

<sup>17</sup> *So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.*

Persecution and Immediate Divine Protection (vv 13-14) – Revelation 12:13-14 is very similar to Revelation 11:2-3 in that it describes both the tribulation and the blessing that marks the church age between Christ's first and second comings. In chapter 11, the Church is "tread under foot" as well as given authority to prophesy for 1260 days (three and a half years which symbolically represents the present gospel era). Here in chapter 13, the dragon persecutes the woman (the Church or true Israel), but the woman flies to an oasis of sorts in the wilderness where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time (also three and a half years which symbolically represents the present gospel era). The imagery of the two wings of the great eagle which were given to the woman seems to come from a parable which the Lord gave through Ezekiel (Ezekiel 17).

### Persecution and Secondary Divine Protection (vv 15-17)

Some commentators see the river of water pouring out of the mouth of the serpent as indicative of Satan's being a deceiver and a liar who pours forth a river of lies in order to wage war against God's people. But, the earth comes to the aid of God's people and swallows up the flood waters. The referent for this image (v 16) is most likely the deliverance which God miraculously provided for the Israelites as they fled the pursuing Egyptian army: "You stretched out Your right hand, The earth swallowed them" (Exodus 15:12).

Like verse 11, verse 17 is also a summary of the teaching of this chapter.

<sup>17</sup> So the dragon was enraged with the woman, and went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.

The dragon (Satan) is enraged with the woman (the Church), and makes war with her children (believers). In the second half of verse 17, we are prodded to remember and do two things: obey and trust ("keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus.")

One is reminded of the Westminster Shorter Catechism teaches about the two-fold emphasis or the two principal teachings of the Scriptures:

WSC 3 – What do the Scriptures principally teach?

Answer – The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.



# Revelation 13

[The Two Beasts]

## Introduction

This chapter is easily divided into two sections: The Beast from the Sea (vv 1-10) and the Beast from the Earth (vv 11-18); however, the division of the chapter is the only thing that is simple about it. There is a wide variety of interpretation as to the symbolic meaning of these two beasts. In our introduction to the interpretation of the book of Revelation, we used the “beast from the sea” as an example of the four different interpretive models:

**Preterist** - the entire book of Revelation is to be interpreted as events having occurred in the first century AD, and mostly before 70 AD – at the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Thus, “the beast” is the persecuting power of the Roman Empire, particular Nero (54-68 AD).

**Historicist** - the entire book of Revelation is to be interpreted as events that occur throughout the “Christian era” from the coming of Christ until His return. Thus, “the beast” is usually interpreted as the persecuting power of the Roman Catholic Church, particularly the Pope.

**Futurist** - the entire book of Revelation is to be interpreted as events that will occur in the future – at the end of the age, immediately prior to Jesus’ second coming. Thus, “the beast” is usually held to be synonymous with “the antichrist” and is often interpreted (and then, re-interpreted) as a particular individual (Mussolini, Hitler, the United Nations, the European Union, Sadam Hussein, etc.)

**Idealist** - the entire book of Revelation is to be interpreted as being concerned with ideas and principles that are played out in the Church age. Thus, “the beast” is the representation in John’s vision of all the persecuting power of Satan against Christ’s Church through various nations and governments throughout history.

This last methodology – idealist – seems to be the way of interpretation which provides the best safeguards against unfounded speculation. It’s the main way that we have been interpreting the book up until this point, and will be the primary method of interpretation that we employ in this chapter, as well. So, in general, we will be following Hendriksen: “The first [the beast from the sea (vv 1-10)] represents the persecuting power of Satan operating in and through the nations of this world and their governments. The second [the beast from the earth (vv 11-18)] symbolizes the false religions and philosophies of this world. Both these beasts oppose the Church throughout this dispensation; yet the apostle describes them in terms that indicate the form which they assumed during the closing decade of the first century AD.”<sup>[71]</sup> The way one arrives at this interpretation is by comparing the imagery of the chapter with that of the rest of Scripture.

## [1] Revelation 13:1-10 (The Beast from the Sea) – Nations of this World and their Governments

The vision of the first beast combines features from the four beasts of Daniel 7. As in Daniel’s vision of the four beasts, this beast comes out of the sea (Daniel 7:3). In the ancient world and in Scripture, the sea was often a symbol of evil. In Scripture, the sea also represents nations and governments that are separate and opposed to God’s people (Isaiah 17:12; Revelation 17:12). This first beast is a parody of Christ – it puts on a false front in an effort to look like the Savior of the world.

<sup>1</sup> *And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names.*

<sup>2</sup> *And the beast which I saw was like a leopard, and his feet were like those of a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. And the dragon gave him his power and his throne and great authority.*

*(13:1-2) “Ten horns and seven heads” - these symbolize the different governments which persecute the Church. Elsewhere in Revelation (17:12), ‘ten horns’ are interpreted as kings who will receive authority. This*

*first beast looks like the dragon, Satan (Revelation 12:3).*

<sup>3</sup> *I saw one of his heads as if it had been slain, and his fatal wound was healed. And the whole earth was amazed and followed after the beast;*

<sup>4</sup> *they worshiped the dragon because he gave his authority to the beast; and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who is able to wage war with him?"*

<sup>5</sup> *There was given to him a mouth speaking arrogant words and blasphemies, and authority to act for forty-two months was given to him.*

<sup>6</sup> *And he opened his mouth in blasphemies against God, to blaspheme His name and His tabernacle, that is, those who dwell in heaven.*

(13:3) "His fatal wound was healed" – Nero committed suicide in 68 AD; Domitian continued persecuting Christians. After Nero's death, "a rumor spread that he had not really died, and that he would soon return at the head of the Parthians to wreak vengeance. But the symbolism has broader application. The revival of a powerful movement or an institution after serious trouble seems to indicate to its followers that it is invincible."<sup>1721</sup>

(13:4-6) The dragon (Satan) gives authority to the beast (antichristian governments), and the world looks upon the persecuting nation-state as a deliverer and redeemer, something to be worshiped. These corrupt nation-states blaspheme the name of God and His tabernacle (those who dwell in heaven) for forty-two months. Again, the time reference is the same as we have seen before (Rev. 11:2,3; 12:6,14; 13:5; 20:2-5), and describes the Church age (between Christ's first and second comings).

<sup>7</sup> *It was also given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them, and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him.*

<sup>8</sup> *All who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.*

(13:7-8) The beast will overcome the saints, but their faith will persevere because their names are written in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain (v 8). All those, however, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world worship the beast, placing their hope and trust in the earthly governments.

**Aside:** Does "from the foundation of the world" describe 'the Lamb who was slain' or 'the name that was has been written in the book of life'? Some translations have that it was the Lamb who was slain from the foundation of the world (KJV, NKJ, NIV), while others have that it is the writing of the name of believers which has been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life (NASB, RSV, ESV).

Verse 8 (two representative examples of interpretation):

*NASB* – <sup>13:8</sup> All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *everyone* whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who has been slain.

*KJV* – <sup>13:8</sup> And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Both interpretations are legitimate – compare 1 Peter 1:19-20 and Ephesians 1:4. The word order supports linking 'from the foundation of the world' with 'the Lamb who was slain' (as in 1 Peter 1:19-20). However, Revelation 17:8 is a parallel passage where 'from the foundation of the world' is linked with the writing of the names in the book. So, it is probably best to interpret Revelation 13:8 the same way (as in Ephesians 1:4), thus following the NASB, ESV, and RSV: the foundation of the world refers to the writing of names in the book.

<sup>9</sup> *If anyone has an ear, let him hear.*

<sup>10</sup> *If anyone is destined for captivity, to captivity he goes; if anyone kills with the sword, with the sword he must be killed. Here is the perseverance and the faith of the saints.*

(Verse 10) A summary verse of how Christians should apply our understanding of the first beast (persecuting nations and their governments). Simply stated, verse 10 says to the Christian: Accept your captivity and do not resort to the sword, recognizing that it is your faith that will see you through.

Leon Morris writes, “The first couplet teaches an acceptance of the realities of life. If it is in the providence of God that the Christian is for captivity, then to captivity he will surely go (*cf.* Je. 15:2). But the second has to do with requital. Anyone who kills with the sword will be killed as he has killed (*cf.* Mt. 26:52). If the Christian takes the sword he will not establish the faith, for the truth of Christ cannot be defended by violence. He will simply perish by the sword. But the persecuted can know that the last word is not with the persecutors.”<sup>[73]</sup>

## [2] Revelation 13:11-18 (The Beast from the Earth) – False Religions and Philosophies of this World

The second beast is, elsewhere in Revelation, named ‘the false prophet’ (16:13; 19:20; 20:10). This second beast or false prophet is a “propagandist for the Beast...In first-century Asia Minor, the main propagandists were priests of the emperor cult and the ‘Commune of Asia,’ a council of distinguished city representatives who promoted loyalty to the emperor. In our day as well, totalitarianism enlists propagandists.”<sup>[74]</sup> This is antichristian, worldly wisdom (Philippians 3:19; James 3:15) which seeks to entice men and women to put their faith in anything but the one true God. William Hendriksen describes Revelation 13:11-18 as “perhaps the most difficult paragraph in the entire book of Revelation. The main ideas are clear; the details are obscure.”<sup>[75]</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth; and he had two horns like a lamb and he spoke as a dragon.*

(13:11) “Two horns like a lamb and spoke as a dragon” – Just as the first beast was a parody of Christ, this second beast is a parody of the Holy Spirit: instead of two witnesses (11:13ff), this false prophet has two horns. They are like the horns of a lamb, even as Jesus warned in the Sermon on the Mount: “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matthew 7:15). This beast looks like a harmless sheep, but its words are that of a dragon.

<sup>12</sup> *He exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence. And he makes the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose fatal wound was healed.*

<sup>13</sup> *He performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down out of heaven to the earth in the presence of men.*

<sup>14</sup> *And he deceives those who dwell on the earth because of the signs which it was given him to perform in the presence of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who had the wound of the sword and has come to life.*

<sup>15</sup> *And it was given to him to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast would even speak and cause as many as do not worship the image of the beast to be killed.*

(13:12-15) This second beast (false religions and philosophies of this world) works for the first beast (nations and government) and makes humanity worship the first beast (v 12). The priestly class of spiritual gurus and philosophers perform pseudo-miracles (v 13). The image that comes to life and is worshiped (vv 14-15) has been variously interpreted as the image of the emperor in first century Rome to the television set today. Whatever the situation or the culture, the point is that antichristian governments often use religious-spiritual means to woo loyalty towards its own ends and power. And, those who do not bow to the state are killed.

<sup>16</sup> *And he causes all, the small and the great, and the rich and the poor, and the free men and the slaves, to be given a mark on their right hand or on their forehead,*

<sup>17</sup> and he provides that no one will be able to buy or to sell, except the one who has the mark, either the name of the beast or the number of his name.

(13:16-17) “The mark of the beast” – The second beast causes all people to be given a mark (the name of the beast or number of his name) without which they cannot buy or sell. Many have interpreted this mark as an outward, visible sign that will appear at one particular moment in history. But, in seeking to understand what this “mark” is, it is necessary to keep in mind that it is directly connected to the beast. Wherever the beast is, there you will find his mark. And, the beast has been at work throughout the Church age.

In the Old Testament, God commanded the Israelites to bind Scriptures to their hands and their foreheads called phylacteries (Exodus 13:9-16; Deuteronomy 6:6-9; 11:17-23) in order to remember the commands of God and to do them (thought-life and deeds; hearers and doers of the Word (James 1:22-25)). In Revelation, this image carries a similar meaning, except here the mark of the beast symbolizes antichristian thought and action.

Only those who have the mark of the beast are able to buy or sell. Those who worship at the altar of the antichristian state are given particular favors – they are able to trade in the market-place and have financial gain. Those who are sealed by the name of Christ on their forehead, however, receive the protection of the sealing of the Holy Spirit to eternal life (Revelation 7:3; 9:4; 14:1; 22:4). Though they are killed, yet they shall live (John 11:25).

<sup>18</sup> Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man; and his number is six hundred and sixty-six.

“Six hundred and sixty-six” – The only clue that John gives us as to the meaning of this number is that it is “the number of the beast, for the number is that of a man.” Many have tried to use numerology to determine a particular name. The possibilities are almost endless and require a lot of somersaults. For instance, some have posited that 666 refers to ‘Nero Caesar.’ According to Leon Morris, however, “to get this result we must use the Greek form of the Latin name, transliterated into Hebrew characters, and with a variant spelling at that.”<sup>[76]</sup> William Hendriksen comments, “The attempts to arrive at an interpretation by adding the numerical values in the name Nero, Plato and so on, lead to nothing because they lead to everything. The Apocalypse is a book of symbols; it is not a book of riddles!”<sup>[77]</sup>

It is much simpler, and probably more in keeping with the original intent of the author, to see 666 as a symbol of incompleteness or falling short of the goal. The number of the beast is the number of man, the number of imperfection – not seven. “Six means missing the mark, or failure. Seven means perfection or victory. Rejoice, O Church of God! The victory is on your side. The number of the beast is 666, that is, failure upon failure upon failure!”<sup>[78]</sup>

## Conclusion

Though not thinking about Revelation 13, in my own estimation Neil Postman elucidates the two beasts and their dangers when he describes the difference between Orwell’s *1984* and Huxley’s *Brave New World*. In my opinion, it seems that Orwell’s *1984* may be seen as revealing the dangers of the first beast from the sea (nations of this world and their governments); Huxley’s *Brave New World* may be seen as revealing the dangers of the second beast from the earth (false religions and philosophies of this world). Neil Postman writes:

“Contrary to common belief even among the educated, Huxley [*Brave New World*] and Orwell [*1984*] did not prophesy the same thing. Orwell warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in Huxley’s vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think. What Orwell feared were those who would ban books. What Huxley feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. Orwell feared those who would deprive us of

information. Huxley feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. Orwell feared that the truth would be concealed from us. Huxley feared that truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. Orwell feared we would become a captive culture. Huxley feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As Huxley remarked in *Brave New World Revisited*, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny ‘failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distraction.’ In *1984*, Huxley added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In *Brave New World*, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, Orwell feared that what we hate will ruin us. Huxley feared that what we love will ruin us. This book is about the possibility that Huxley, not Orwell, was right.”<sup>[79]</sup>

Commenting on verse 15 of this chapter, Vern Poythress writes:

“Nebuchadnezzar threatened death to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego for not bowing down to his image (Dan. 3). Christians in the Roman Empire might be killed for treason, or disloyalty to the emperor, if they refused to participate in the imperial cult. Totalitarian governments of our time are seldom so crude. But the local government official, as an image of government power, requires total allegiance such as a Christian cannot give. Successful modern democratic governments are not killing people literally. They do not need to, as long as their idol programs are so successful! They travel not toward paternal severity, but toward maternal smothering. The state undertakes to help you by stuffing you with what is good for you—according to its wonderfully ‘enlightened,’ beneficent judgment. But if you do not agree, you are socially unfit and maladapted. The old ‘you’ must be ‘killed,’ socially speaking, by social engineering, in order that the new ‘you’ may function as an upstanding, healthy citizen of the state. To this end, the state uses education, financial penalties, financial inducements, endless regulations, and bureaucrats overseeing and directing your decisions. No, we Christians in such a country do not feel the immediate threat of the sword. But untangling ourselves from the clinging web of idolatry is like death. For the web exists inside us as well as outside, in the ways in which we have already, as members of our society, absorbed its godless assumptions. As verse 16 indicates, participation in the society is hardly possible without idolatry. The society regards the Christian as a misfit, a misanthrope, a victim of insanity. He does not share knowledge of the ‘obvious verities,’ and so cannot be trusted. Thus a consistent Christian will find it difficult to fit in and mix with pagan society. The difficulties may be subtle, as in ‘tolerant’ modern democratic societies, or they may be blatant and harsh, as in the Roman Empire or modern totalitarian countries, where Christians may suffer literal confiscation of property.”<sup>[80]</sup>

Chapter 13 of the book of Revelation ought to put us on our guard. Not against bar-codes, tattoos, and computer chip implants, per se. Rather, as believers who have been sealed by the Holy Spirit in the name of Jesus Christ, we ought to be on our guard against acquiescing to the temptation of placing our hope and faith in the two beasts: the beast from the sea (earthly powers, principalities, and kingdoms) or the beast from the earth (false prophets, philosophers, and idealistic culturalists).

The beast from the sea (antichristian nations and governments) along with their propagandists (the false prophets of world religions and philosophies) will continue to lure and tempt people to seek protection and fulfillment through political or social power. Whether we persecuted by these beasts or seek to use these powers for our own ends – either way, we will receive the mark of the beast (the number of man) and fall short of the goal.

Let us not become too comfortable in this world – in a particular worldly nation or in a particular worldly society – lest we forget the warnings of Jesus, Himself:

John 15:16-19

<sup>16</sup> “You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and *that* your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you. <sup>17</sup> “This I command you, that you love one another. <sup>18</sup> “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before *it hated* you. <sup>19</sup>

“If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you.”

# Revelation 14

[The Triumph of God's Church & the Judgment of the Wicked]

## Introduction

Chapter 12 began with the birth of Christ; chapter 14 concludes this section with a description of the return of Christ. In this section (chapters 12-14), we have been introduced to the enemies of Christ and His people: the dragon (Satan) who was defeated by Christ and then sought to destroy His people (Rev. 12); the beast from the sea (antichristian nations and governments) who persecute Christ's people on behalf of the dragon (Rev. 13:1-10); and the beast from the earth (the propagandists of earthly antichristian powers, i.e. false religions and philosophies, a.k.a. "the false prophet") who solicit the worship of the first beast (Rev. 13:11-18).

In chapter 14, we are introduced to the final enemy of Christ's people: Babylon (or evil and idolatrous 'seduction' itself). We are only introduced to this last enemy, but she is further described in later chapters (Rev. 16-18) as "Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and of the abominations of the earth" (17:5).

However, the main emphasis of chapter 14 is as follows:

(14:1-5) – the return of Christ

(14:6-13) – the perseverance of the saints amidst the punishment of the wicked

(14:14-20) – the two-fold harvest of the righteous and the wicked

## Revelation 14:1-5 (The Return of Christ)

<sup>1</sup> *Then I looked, and behold, the Lamb was standing on Mount Zion, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His name and the name of His Father written on their foreheads.*

<sup>2</sup> *And I heard a voice from heaven, like the sound of many waters and like the sound of loud thunder, and the voice which I heard was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps.*

<sup>3</sup> *And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders; and no one could learn the song except the one hundred and forty-four thousand who had been purchased from the earth.*

<sup>4</sup> *These are the ones who have not been defiled with women, for they have kept themselves chaste. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These have been purchased from among men as first fruits to God and to the Lamb.*

<sup>5</sup> *And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless.*

(v 1) "the Lamb standing on Mount Zion" – There no need to think of this as a physical place situated in Israel. Throughout the poetic and prophetic books of the Old Testament, Mount Zion became a symbol of the dwelling place of the Lord (e.g. Psalm 74:2; Micah 4:7). Mount Zion is a symbol of deliverance (Joel 2:32) and the city of the great King (Psalm 48:2) which is comprised of God's people (Psalm 48:11; Hebrews 12:22-24).

(v 1) "one hundred and forty-four thousand" – As we saw previously (Rev. 7:1-8), the 144,000 represent the entire number of God's elect – the Church. They bear the name of the Lamb (Christ) and the name of the Heavenly Father on their foreheads. They are sealed and saved; not one has been lost (John 10:27-29).

(vv 2-3) "a new song" – the 144,000 sing a new song, the song of redemption which only they know (John 1:10; 14:17; 1 John 3:1) because they have been purchased from the earth.

(vv 4-5) "virginal, chaste, followed the Lamb, first fruits, truthful, blameless" – This symbolic language speaks both to the imputed righteousness of Christ in having been purchased from among men, as well as the faithful obedience of God's people (Genesis 6:8-9; Hebrews 11:7). Poythress comments, "Sexual imagery is used here to



denote spiritual purity. Christ's faithful followers keep away from Babylon the prostitute and are loyal to him exclusively, as his pure bride (19:7-8; Eph. 5:26-27).<sup>[81]</sup>

Revelation 14:6-13 (The perseverance of the saints amidst the punishment of the wicked)

- <sup>6</sup> *And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people;*  
<sup>7</sup> *and he said with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give Him glory, because the hour of His judgment has come; worship Him who made the heaven and the earth and sea and springs of waters."*  
<sup>8</sup> *And another angel, a second one, followed, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, she who has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality."*  
<sup>9</sup> *Then another angel, a third one, followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives a mark on his forehead or on his hand,*  
<sup>10</sup> *he also will drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is mixed in full strength in the cup of His anger; and he will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.*  
<sup>11</sup> *"And the smoke of their torment goes up forever and ever; they have no rest day and night, those who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name."*  
<sup>12</sup> *Here is the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus.*  
<sup>13</sup> *And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."*

(vv 6-7) "the eternal gospel of the angel flying in midheaven" – Previously, we saw the symbol of an eagle flying in midheaven declaring woe to the inhabitants of the earth (Rev. 8:13). Here, an angel flies in midheaven declaring the 'eternal gospel' to all peoples. This is the first of three angelic proclaimers in these verses. The emphasis of this first angel is on the command of the gospel to fear God and worship Him alone as Creator.

(v 8) "another angel, a second one" – the second angel declares the downfall of Babylon the great. Leon Morris writes, "The name [Babylon] stands for the pride of mankind and for the heathen city-empire."<sup>[82]</sup> And, Hendriksen comments, "Babylon is never called *moichalis*, 'adulteress'; always *porne*, 'harlot'. Hence, Babylon was never the Lamb's wife. She is not the false church...the symbol indicates that which allures, tempts, seduces and draws people away from God."<sup>[83]</sup>

(vv 9-11) "another angel, a third one" – the third angel declares judgment upon those who worshipped the beast and his image. The symbol of the wine of the wrath of God finds its source in the prophetic books (e.g. Jeremiah 25:15). Eternal torment and punishment are the reward of those who received the mark of the beast (i.e. followed him and did his work). Interestingly, verse 10 describes the eternal state of the wicked as being tormented with fire and brimstone *in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb*. In one sense, we may speak of hell as separation from God's mercy and love (Matthew 7:23; 25:41), but in another sense it is also the ever presence of His wrath and anger (Revelation 6:16; 14:10).

(vv 12-13) "the perseverance of the saints" – as horrific as the descriptions of the punishments of hell are, the ones who have repented and turned to Christ are promised blessed rest. Those who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus are given eternal rest from their labors: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!' Leon Morris sees in this, the second of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14).<sup>[84]</sup> Upon death, in the presence of Christ, Christians will rest from their labors (or their painful toils), but their deeds will follow them. See 2 Corinthians 5:6-10 and 1 Corinthians 3:10-15.

Revelation 14:14-20 (The two-fold harvest of the righteous and the wicked)

- <sup>14</sup> *Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and sitting on the cloud was one like a son of man, having a golden crown on His head and a sharp sickle in His hand.*  
<sup>15</sup> *And another angel came out of the temple, crying out with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Put in*



*your sickle and reap, for the hour to reap has come, because the harvest of the earth is ripe.”*

*<sup>16</sup> Then He who sat on the cloud swung His sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped.*

*<sup>17</sup> And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, and he also had a sharp sickle.*

*<sup>18</sup> Then another angel, the one who has power over fire, came out from the altar; and he called with a loud voice to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, “Put in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, because her grapes are ripe.”*

*<sup>19</sup> So the angel swung his sickle to the earth and gathered the clusters from the vine of the earth, and threw them into the great wine press of the wrath of God.*

*<sup>20</sup> And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood came out from the wine press, up to the horses’ bridles, for a distance of two hundred miles.*

(vv 14) “one like a son of man” – Daniel used similar language to describe his vision of the coming of Christ: “I kept looking in the night visions, And behold, with the clouds of heaven One like a Son of Man was coming, And He came up to the Ancient of Days And was presented before Him” (Daniel 7:13). Likewise, John the Baptist foretold of Jesus as One who will “baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:11-12).

(vv 15-16) “the earth was reaped” – This first part of the harvest is the ingathering of all of God’s elect (Mark 13:26-27). Curiously, an angel seems to give a command to Christ to ‘put in your sickle and reap.’ But, perhaps the angel is simply delivering a message from God the Father to begin the final harvest. This would be in keeping with Jesus’ own words, “But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone” (Mark 13:32).

(vv 17-20) “the great wine press of God’s wrath” – This second part of the harvest is the sweeping up of all the rest (the non-elect who were not already gathered). Two angels are described here: one bears the sickle, the other (who has power over fire) calls upon the first angel to gather the ripe grapes from the vine of the earth. Once gathered, these are thrown into ‘the great wine press of the wrath of God.’ Similar language and imagery is used in Isaiah 63:1-6 to describe judgment and wrath.

It is significant to note that the wine press is ‘outside the city’ (the elect who have been gathered in are exempt). The blood from the great winepress of God’s wrath is described as rising up to the bridle or bits of horses (they can swim in it) and for a distance of literally “1,600 stadia.” A stadia is 1/8 of a Roman mile or about 600 feet. So the width of this lake of blood is about 184 miles (or 300 kilometers). William Hendriksen comments, “...four is the number of the universe and the earth. This is the judgment of the wicked. Ten is the number of completeness. So, sixteen hundred, which is the product of four time four, times ten times ten, would seem to indicate that this is the thoroughly complete judgment of the wicked. And the winepress of God’s wrath was trodden down outside the Holy City!”<sup>[85]</sup>

## Conclusion

This graphic description of the complete awfulness of the final judgment causes those who worship the Lamb to cling to Him even more and to be more thankful for the promise:

“Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!” (Revelation 14:13).

# Revelation 15-16

[The Church Triumphant, the Sanctuary, and the Seven Bowls of Wrath]

## Introduction

“The cycle of seven bowls of God’s wrath composes the fourth cycle of visions leading up to the Second Coming [the seven seals (Rev. 4-7), the seven trumpets (Rev. 8-11), and the final harvest (Rev. 14)]. The opening scene of worship (15:1-16:1) calls to mind the worship around God’s throne in 4:1-5:14. The overcomers rejoice in God’s presence (15:2). Seven resplendent angels receive bowls from the presence of God in the temple. The bowls symbolize the cup of God’s wrath, which in the Old Testament makes the nations drunk (cf. Isa. 51:17, 20, 22; Jer. 25:15-29; Lam. 4:21; Ezek. 23:31-34; Hab. 2:16; Rev. 14:10; 16:19). The bowls are poured out at God’s command (16:1), resulting in seven last plagues. The plagues lead up to and include the Second Coming, since ‘with them God’s wrath is completed’ (15:1).

The seven bowls show notable similarities with the seven trumpets. The first four bowls, like the first four trumpets, result in devastation on the four major regions of creation: dry land, sea, fresh water, and sky. Like the trumpets, the bowls are reminiscent of the Mosaic plagues against Egypt. But the bowls result in more severe judgments than did the trumpets. The trumpet judgments typically affected a third of the total, but the bowls affect the whole.

These bowls symbolize the judgments of God against evildoers. The general pattern may include both the judgments against the godless Roman Empire and the final crisis leading up to the Second Coming. The symbolism also asserts that, throughout this age, God may at his pleasure send judgments of utmost devastation on those who rebel against him.”<sup>[86]</sup>

## Outline of Chapters 15-16

- (1) 15:1-4 – The Church Triumphant
- (2) 15:5-8 – The Opening of the Sanctuary
- (3) 16:1-21 – The Seven Bowls of Wrath

## Revelation 15:1-4 – The Church Triumphant

<sup>1</sup> *Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous, seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished.*

<sup>2</sup> *And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God.*

<sup>3</sup> *And they sang the song of Moses, the bond-servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, “Great and marvelous are Your works, O Lord God, the Almighty; Righteous and true are Your ways, King of the nations!*

<sup>4</sup> *“Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You alone are holy; For ALL THE NATIONS WILL COME AND WORSHIP BEFORE YOU, FOR YOUR RIGHTEOUS ACTS HAVE BEEN REVEALED.”*

(15:1) The seven angels who have the seven last plagues is a symbolic reference indicating the completion of God’s wrath: “in them the wrath of God is finished.”

(15:2) “a sea of glass mixed with fire” – Hebrews 12:22-29 contrasts Mount Zion with Mount Sinai (Hebrews 12:18-21); however, as in our present passage (Revelation 15:1-8), God’s mercy and grace through the Lord Jesus Christ is understood in the context of God’s justice and holiness. In Hebrews, the exhortation for believers concludes with a reminder of God’s righteous judgment: “Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot

be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28-29). So here, the sea of glass is mixed with fire (Revelation 15:2) and the song of the victors exalts the name of the Lord because of His holiness (Revelation 15:3-4). “Lovingkindness and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed each other” (Psalm 85:10).

(15:2-4) “the song of Moses...and the song of the Lamb” – Those who were victorious are standing on a sea of glass singing the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb. This is reminiscent of Exodus 15:1-21 (the song of victory sung by Moses and the Israelites after they crossed the Red Sea). Also, we are reminded of when Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel ate and drank with God on a ‘pavement of sapphire’ (Exodus 24:9-11). Most importantly, however, we should take note of the continuity which is described here between the Old Covenant and New Covenant, as well as the paradigmatic nature of the exodus as it foreshadows new and ultimate exodus through the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world.

#### Revelation 15:5-8 – The Opening of the Sanctuary

<sup>5</sup> *After these things I looked, and the temple of the tabernacle of testimony in heaven was opened,*

<sup>6</sup> *and the seven angels who had the seven plagues came out of the temple, clothed in linen, clean and bright, and girded around their chests with golden sashes.*

<sup>7</sup> *Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God, who lives forever and ever.*

<sup>8</sup> *And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power; and no one was able to enter the temple until the seven plagues of the seven angels were finished.*

(15:5-6) The “tabernacle of testimony” (Revelation 15:5) is the same phrase which is employed in the Pentateuch in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) to describe the wilderness tabernacle. The wilderness tabernacle of the Old Covenant was a copy and shadow of the real tabernacle in heaven which was shown to Moses (Exodus 25:40; Hebrews 8:4-5). The holy garb of the seven angels (Revelation 15:6) symbolizes either the priestly or military activity of the angels. Either way, the point is that “it emphasizes the purity from which the wrath is poured out on the world. This is not bestial thing, evil with passion. It is pure concern for the right.”<sup>[87]</sup>

(15:7-8) The seven angels get seven golden bowls full of God’s wrath from one of the living creatures. As the temple fills with smoke, we are reminded of Isaiah’s vision: ‘And the foundations of the thresholds trembled at the voice of him who called out, while the temple was filling with smoke’ (Isaiah 6:4).

#### Revelation 16:1-21 – The Seven Bowls of Wrath

<sup>1</sup> *Then I heard a loud voice from the temple, saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God.”*

God gives the command to pour out His wrath. The plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-11) foreshadow the manifestation of God’s wrath on the wicked in the seven bowls. And, these bowls of wrath follow a similar pattern which we saw in the seven trumpets (Revelation 8-10) yet intensified: the trumpets affected one-third of the respective populations, while the bowls are entire and conclusive in their effects. Thus, the parallel and progressive nature of these visions is maintained.

#### Revelation 16:2 – The First Bowl of Wrath

<sup>2</sup> *So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a loathsome and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.*

The first bowl (loathsome and malignant sore) describes God’s judgment through afflictions of the flesh. As we saw earlier (Revelation 13:16-17; 14:9-11), those who have received the “mark of the beast” are those who have worshipped the beast; they have not received the seal of God (Revelation 7:1-10; 9:4). Thus, there are two

groups of people: those who worship the beast and those who worship Christ. These judgments seem to be pointing us to the final judgments of God upon the wicked, not the righteous – unlike the trumpet judgments which affected all creation. Similar imagery is employed in Zechariah 14:12-13.

#### Revelation 16:3 – The Second Bowl of Wrath

*<sup>3</sup> The second angel poured out his bowl into the sea, and it became blood like that of a dead man; and every living thing in the sea died.*

The second bowl (sea turned to blood) describes God's judgment through maritime calamities. "Just as all maritime calamities constitute warnings for the wicked, so also by means of some of these disasters the impenitent are hurled into hell."<sup>[88]</sup>

#### Revelation 16:4-7 – The Third Bowl of Wrath

*<sup>4</sup> Then the third angel poured out his bowl into the rivers and the springs of waters; and they became blood.*

*<sup>5</sup> And I heard the angel of the waters saying, "Righteous are You, who are and who were, O Holy One, because You judged these things;*

*<sup>6</sup> for they poured out the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink. They deserve it."*

*<sup>7</sup> And I heard the altar saying, "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."*

The third bowl (inland waters turned to blood) describes God's judgment through poisoned waters. This is retribution for the martyrdom of the saints and prophets (Revelation 16:6). Previously, the souls of the martyrs cried out from underneath the altar in heaven: "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Here, the altar responds in verse 7: "Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments." According to verse 6, those who have spilt the blood of saints and prophets are deserving of their judgment "for we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10).

#### Revelation 16:8-9 – The Fourth Bowl of Wrath

*<sup>8</sup> The fourth angel poured out his bowl upon the sun, and it was given to it to scorch men with fire.*

*<sup>9</sup> Men were scorched with fierce heat; and they blasphemed the name of God who has the power over these plagues, and they did not repent so as to give Him glory.*

The fourth bowl (sun, fire, heat) describes God's judgment through fiery heat. The Lord promises to guard and protect His people from the smiting of the sun and moon (Psalm 121:5-6), but the blasphemers are afforded no such protection; instead, they are judged through the heavenly luminaries. As with the first four trumpets (Revelation 8:7-12), the four bowls of wrath follow the same pattern: the earth, the sea, the springs of water, and the heavenly bodies.

#### Revelation 16:10-11 – The Fifth Bowl of Wrath

*<sup>10</sup> Then the fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became darkened; and they gnawed their tongues because of pain,*

*<sup>11</sup> and they blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores; and they did not repent of their deeds.*

The fifth bowl (the throne and kingdom of the beast) describes God's judgment on antichristian governments. Gnawing one's tongue because of pain (verse 10) is an awful image which perhaps describes the futility that

comes from trying to distract oneself from the reality of judgment. Eventually, though, it will be replaced by a “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matthew 8:12; 13:42, 50; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30; Luke 13:28).

Again, as we are told in the conclusion of the seven trumpets (Revelation 9:20-21), in the face of the righteous judgments of God, the blasphemers did not repent (Revelation 16:9, 11). “It is possible that we should take the darkening in this plague to denote the waning of the power of the beast, and this will be further stressed in the remaining plagues.”<sup>[89]</sup>

### Revelation 16:12-16 – The Sixth Bowl of Wrath

<sup>12</sup> *The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river, the Euphrates; and its water was dried up, so that the way would be prepared for the kings from the east.*

<sup>13</sup> *And I saw coming out of the mouth of the dragon and out of the mouth of the beast and out of the mouth of the false prophet, three unclean spirits like frogs;*

<sup>14</sup> *for they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them together for the war of the great day of God, the Almighty.*

<sup>15</sup> *(“Behold, I am coming like a thief. Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes, so that he will not walk about naked and men will not see his shame.”)*

<sup>16</sup> *And they gathered them together to the place which in Hebrew is called Har-Magedon.*

The sixth bowl sets into motion the gathering together of the enemies of God (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet gather) and sets them up for their final defeat. “The woe of the sixth bowl is depicted according to the description of God’s judgment of Babylon and Israel’s restoration, which itself was patterned after the drying up of the Red Sea at the exodus (cf. Exod. 14:21-22 with Isa. 11:15; 44:27; 50:2; 51:10; cf. also Josh. 3:16; 4:23). The OT prophesies that this judgment would include the drying up of the Euphrates River (Isa. 11:15; 44:27; Jer. 50:38; 51:36; cf. Zech. 10:11). The prophecy was fulfilled by Cyrus’s diversion of the river (cf. Isa. 44:27-28), which allowed his army to cross the river, enter Babylon unexpectedly and defeat it... The means by which God delivers the godly – drying up water – are sometimes used as the means by which he punishes the ungodly.”<sup>[90]</sup>

(16:12) Euphrates – symbolizes Assyria and Babylonia, which in turn symbolizes the wicked world. The drying of the river allows all the antichristian powers to gather together for their attack upon the Church.

(16:13-14) The dragon (Satan), the beast (antichristian government), and the prophet (antichristian religion) use ‘unclean spirits like frogs’ (satanic plans) to gather the kings of the world together. The ‘day of God’ is elsewhere described as the catalyst by which “the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat” (2 Peter 3:12).

(16:15) The believer is protected by being clothed with the righteousness of Christ (Revelation 3:18)

(16:16) These forces gather at Har-Mageddon (Revelation 11:7-11; 19:11-21; 20:7-9). God’s strategy on the last day seems to be not divide and conquer, but unite His enemies and then conquer them – unite and conquer!

“Har-Magedon” (aka Armageddon) – the symbol of Armageddon is probably rooted in Judges 4-5 and the deliverance of the Israel from the hands of the Canaanites at Megiddo (Judges 5:19-21). With the unfettered interpretation of the symbol “Armageddon” we would do well to heed the words of Vern Poythress: “The name is symbolic, and so cannot be used as a basis for speculations about geographical details of the final battle. In any case, the final battle is preeminently spiritual in character. Attempts to correlate it with the maneuvers of particular national armies miss the point. The battle is between the servants of God and the enemies of God, not between two earthly nations. Because of the missionary expansion of the church, nearly all nations now have in their midst both Christians and non-Christians.”<sup>[91]</sup>



The drying up of the Euphrates (Revelation 16:12) which draws upon imagery mainly from Isaiah combined with the gathering of God's and the Church's enemies at Har-Magedon (Revelation 16:16) which draws upon imagery mainly from Judges ought to tell us something: these visions are not intended to draw out a geographical map for the 'last battle.' Again, these are symbolic visions and ought to be interpreted as such. "[J]ust as Babylon has been universalized and become symbolic (see on 11:8; 14:8), so the Euphrates cannot be a literal geographical reference to the Euphrates in modern Iraq, Syria, and Turkey but must be figurative and universal, despite those who contend that that the reference is literal."<sup>1921</sup>

#### Revelation 16:17-21 – The Seventh Bowl of Wrath

*<sup>17</sup> Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl upon the air, and a loud voice came out of the temple from the throne, saying, "It is done."*

*<sup>18</sup> And there were flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder; and there was a great earthquake, such as there had not been since man came to be upon the earth, so great an earthquake was it, and so mighty.*

*<sup>19</sup> The great city was split into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. Babylon the great was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of His fierce wrath.*

*<sup>20</sup> And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*

*<sup>21</sup> And huge hailstones, about one hundred pounds each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.*

(16:17) The seventh bowl ('upon the air') describes God's final judgment, and the final fall of Babylon – the wicked world is judged and destroyed. At the beginning of this section, we were told by the Apostle John that these seven plagues are the last because "in them the wrath of God is finished" (Revelation 15:1). Here in the seventh bowl, God speaks from out of the temple from the throne, "It is done." (see also Revelation 21:6 where 'He who sits on the throne' utters the same words). The point is that the final judgment – the last day, the day of God (2 Peter 3:12; Revelation 16:14) – has come.

(16:18) Lightning, thunder, and great earthquake symbolize universal judgment that is unique.

(16:19) The great city is the evil and idolatrous seductions, also symbolized as 'Babylon' (Revelation 11:8; 18:10, 21). The city splits into three parts, completely breaks up (Jeremiah 51:1-59). God does not forget her sins; He judges the anti-Christian world accordingly. 'The cup of the wine of His fierce wrath' finds its root in Jeremiah 25 where the nations are caused to drink from the cup of God's wrath. In Jeremiah 25, Babylon acts as the agent of the cup of God's wrath upon Israel and the other nations, but in the end she is made to drink to her 'everlasting desolation' (Jeremiah 25:12). This same pattern is followed in the book of Revelation.

(16:20-21) As with the lightning, thunder, and great earthquake (verse 18) nothing has ever been seen like this before. Hailstones weighing one hundred pounds each fall from heaven upon men. The weight of the hailstones is literally the weight of one talent which "varied in ancient times from 45 pounds up to 130 pounds."<sup>1931</sup> Even amidst the final judgment of God, wicked men blaspheme God and do not repent.

#### Conclusion

Like the seven trumpet judgments (Revelation 8-11), these seven bowls of wrath follow a similar pattern and do describe God's prerogative to judge mankind throughout the Church age; however, the bowl judgments are different from the trumpet judgments in several ways. First of all, the bowl judgments speak to the full or complete judgment of God (Revelation 15:1; 16:17), while the trumpets were partial judgments (typically affecting only one-third of their respective objects, Revelation 8:7-12; 9:15, 18). Second, the trumpet judgments affected believers and unbelievers alike (Revelation 9:15, 18), while the bowl judgments are reserved for the wicked (Revelation 16:2). Third, the trumpet judgments seem to emphasize God's providential judgments through calamities, wars, natural disasters, diseases, etc in the present age (albeit concluding in the final

judgment); the bowl judgments do have reference to present judgments, but the emphasis seems to be mostly on the final judgment on the last day and the complete destruction of God's enemies.

# Revelation 17

[The Judgement of Babylon]

## Introduction to Chapters 17-19

- (1) 17:1-18 – The Judgment of Babylon
- (2) 18:1-23 – The Fall of Babylon
- (3) 19:1-21 – Rejoicings in Heaven

Having seen God's judgments meted out through the seven bowls of God's wrath in the previous "cycle" (Revelation 15-16), here we are getting another view and further explanation of the judgments against the enemies of Christ. And, having been introduced to the four great enemies, their defeat and destruction are described in the reverse order in which they were introduced: Babylon, or the harlot woman (14:8; 17:1-18:24), the beast from the land, or false prophet (13:11-18; 19:19-21); the beast from the sea, or persecuting earthly authorities (13:1-10; 19:19-21); and the dragon, or Satan (12:1-17; 20:1-15).

"John now gives himself over to a whole-hearted description of the mighty triumph won by God over all his enemies. Hitherto his book has put a good deal of emphasis on God's sovereignty. He has heartened his trembling fellow-believers by showing plainly that God is not mocked. Again and again he has made the point that in the end evil will be completely overthrown. But his concern has been basically with the here and now. He has shown his readers that, while evil may appear to be strong and they themselves may be helpless before it, in reality evil can do no more than operate as God permits. It exercises only the power that God allows it to exercise. John has wrestled with the paradox involved in the conjunction of two facts: God is almighty and the people of God are oppressed. The solution he has offered in a variety of ways is that the wicked do and can do no more than God allows them to do. Now John fixes his eyes firmly on the end time. He concerns himself not with the apparent triumph of evil, but with its final and complete overthrow. He sees God as chasing down every stronghold and hurling his judgments against the wicked. No might of theirs avails. God is completely triumphant."<sup>[94]</sup>

## Outline of chapter 17 (The Judgment of Babylon)

- (1) 17:1-6 The vision of the woman (lure of the world) and the beast (antichristian persecution)
- (2) 17:7-14 The description of the woman and of the beast
- (3) 17:15-18 The explanation of the woman and the beast

## Revelation 17:1-6 (The vision of the woman (lure of the world) and the beast (antichristian persecution))

<sup>1</sup> Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls came and spoke with me, saying, "Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot who sits on many waters,

<sup>2</sup> with whom the kings of the earth committed *acts of immorality*, and those who dwell on the earth were made drunk with the wine of her immorality."

<sup>3</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness; and I saw a woman sitting on a scarlet beast, full of blasphemous names, having seven heads and ten horns.

<sup>4</sup> The woman was clothed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a gold cup full of abominations and of the unclean things of her immorality,

<sup>5</sup> and on her forehead a name *was* written, a mystery, "BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND OF THE ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH."



<sup>6</sup> And I saw the woman drunk with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the witnesses of Jesus. When I saw her, I wondered greatly.

In this section, the same image (Babylon the harlot) is set forth in two different visions:

(17:1-2) The great harlot who sits on many waters – the vision of the great harlot is none other than Babylon (Rev 17:5), embodiment of evil and idolatrous ‘seduction’ itself who has ‘made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality’ (Rev. 14:8). The ‘many waters’ upon which she sits are later described as the ‘peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues’ (Rev. 17:15) who are ‘drunk with the wine of her immorality.’

(17:3-6) The woman sitting on a scarlet beast – Here, the harlot woman (or Babylon) is described as sitting upon a “scarlet beast.” This beast is the first beast from chapter 13:1-10 – the beast from the sea, antichristian persecution (Revelation 13:1, 5-8). “The beast is the entire antichristian persecution movement throughout history, embodied in successive world empires.”<sup>[95]</sup> She is a symbol of the deceitful world (Matthew 13:22; 1 John 2:16).

She is beautifully adorned in royal splendor (Rev. 17:4a), but her gold cup is full of abominations and immorality (Rev. 17:4b). In the Aaronic priesthood, a gold plate was worn on the forehead of the high-priest with the engraving, “Holy to the LORD” which symbolized the cleansing nature of the sacrificial system (Exodus 28:36-38). Here, the woman Babylon wears on her forehead a description of her defiling work (Rev. 17:5). John ‘wonders’ at this mysterious symbol (Rev. 17:6), which the angel explains to him in the next section.

Revelation 17:7-14 (The description of the woman and of the beast)

<sup>7</sup> *And the angel said to me, “Why do you wonder? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.*

<sup>8</sup> *“The beast that you saw was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss and go to destruction. And those who dwell on the earth, whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, will wonder when they see the beast, that he was and is not and will come.*

<sup>9</sup> *“Here is the mind which has wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits,*

<sup>10</sup> *and they are seven kings; five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; and when he comes, he must remain a little while.*

<sup>11</sup> *“The beast which was and is not, is himself also an eighth and is one of the seven, and he goes to destruction.*

<sup>12</sup> *“The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but they receive authority as kings with the beast for one hour.*

<sup>13</sup> *“These have one purpose, and they give their power and authority to the beast.*

<sup>14</sup> *“These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful.”*

The details of this description are very difficult to understand to say the least, but however we understand the particular interpretation of the “seven heads and ten horns” of the beast (Rev. 17:7) the main point seems to be clear: they represent earthly kingdoms, kings, or political states who derive their temporary authority from the beast (v 12), with the purpose of waging war against the Lamb who, along with those who are with Him (v 14). And, the Lamb with those who are His will overcome them (v 14). Now, to some of the details.

(17:9-11) “Seven heads are seven mountains” (17:9) – When John wrote the book of Revelation, Rome was the main embodiment of Babylon (the worldly city), and Rome was known as the city built on seven hills. The “Seven kings, five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come” (17:10) is interpreted by some as symbolically representing kings or emperors of the Roman Empire. Others find the root of this symbol in Daniel, chapter 7 in which case these seven kings would be empires: (1) Babylonia, (2) Assyria, (3) New Babylonia, (4) Medo-Persia, (5) Greco-Macedonia, (6) Rome, (7) Yet unknown and unnamed.

The beast is an eighth king (17:11) and could also be a reference to the “man of lawlessness” of which Paul speaks: “Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God” (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4). Whatever the case, he goes to destruction.

(17:12-14) The angelic interpretation that the “ten horns... are ten kings”(17:12) seems to describe these horns as symbolic of anything which serves authorities for self-aggrandizement (Revelation 17:13). Their authority with the beast is for only a very brief time according to God’s time table (“one hour” is also used in the book of Revelation to describe the quickness of Babylon’s destruction (Rev. 18:10, 17, 19)).

The rule and oppression of earthly kings is short and ultimately the Lamb will overcome and conquer, along with those with Him who are called, chosen, and faithful (17:14). The contrast between the people of verse 8 (those “whose name has not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world”) and verse 14 (those who are with Christ – the called and chosen and faithful) tells us in no uncertain terms that “in spiritual warfare, there is no neutral position. Ultimately, you are either for God or against him.”<sup>[96]</sup> In our introduction to the book, we noted that Revelation 17:14 is an excellent summary of the main message of the entire book.

Revelation 17:15-18 (The explanation of the woman and the beast)

<sup>15</sup> *And he said to me, “The waters which you saw where the harlot sits, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues.*

<sup>16</sup> *“And the ten horns which you saw, and the beast, these will hate the harlot and will make her desolate and naked, and will eat her flesh and will burn her up with fire.*

<sup>17</sup> *“For God has put it in their hearts to execute His purpose by having a common purpose, and by giving their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God will be fulfilled.*

<sup>18</sup> *“The woman whom you saw is the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.”*

(17:15) Here the angel interprets the waters upon which the harlot sits from the earlier vision (Rev. 17:1) as symbolizing peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues (those who are not called and chosen and faithful (v 14). They are the peoples of the world who oppose the Church (Jeremiah 15:13).

(17:16-17) The beast turns on the woman. Those who seek to use wealth and power for their own ends (and thus serve, or worship, wealth and power) become victims of that which they worship. The world destroys itself in the following typical manner: (1) people become infatuated with pleasure and treasure, thereby hardening themselves against God; (2) God hardens them as they harden themselves (Romans 1:21-24); (3) Finally, when it is too late, they become repulsed by their own longing but can do nothing else but turn on themselves in self-loathing. Their punishment is according to the execution of God’s purpose, yet it is also the natural (or logical) end of their desires. As C.S. Lewis has so aptly put it, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”<sup>[97]</sup>

(17:18) In the final explanatory statement from the angel, John is given the identity of the woman (the harlot, Babylon). She is “the great city, which reigns over the kings of the earth.” Previously, this “great city” was described as that which “mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified” (Rev. 11:8) and also the “cities of the nations” and Babylon (Rev. 16:19).

“She [the woman] includes the entire evil economic-religious system of the world throughout history. She receives power from the political realm (‘the kings of the earth’). But their loyalty will shift toward the beast and they will become antagonistic toward her in the end time. That the ‘woman’ has sovereignty over the world demonstrates that she must be identified more broadly than merely with unbelieving Jerusalem or the apostate church. Likewise, 18:23 reveals her universal nature by describing her as one who has ‘deceived all the nations’ (so also 14:8; 17:2; 18:3, 9).”<sup>[98]</sup>

## Conclusion

Though this chapter is fraught with difficult imagery, the first words of the angel who speaks to John give us the overall point: “Come here, I will show you the judgment of the great harlot...” (Rev. 17:1). There are at least three applications which we may draw from this revelation of God’s judgment (WCF 33:3): [1] to warn God’s people – the Church – to not give in to the enticements of wealth and political power (e.g. Jezebel (Rev. 2:20)); [2] to console God’s people – those who are with Christ – in their perseverance under oppression and tribulation that the Lamb will overcome (Rev. 17:14); and [3] to recognize the futility of worldly securities and to long for the day of Christ (Luke 12:35-36; Revelation 22:20).

WCF 33:3 As Christ would have us to be certainly persuaded that there shall be a day of judgment, both to deter all men from sin; and for the greater consolation of the godly in their adversity: so will He have that day unknown to men, that they may shake off all carnal security, and be prepared to say, Come Lord Jesus, come quickly, Amen.

# Revelation 18

[The Fall of Babylon]

## Outline of Chapters 17-19

- (1) 17:1-18 – The Judgment of Babylon
- (2) 18:1-23 – The Fall of Babylon
- (3) 19:1-21 – Rejoicings in Heaven

Having seen God's judgment against Babylon, or 'great city' (Revelation 17), here in chapter 18, we have a description of fall and complete desolation of this harlot woman. As we seek to understand this portion of John's vision, it is helpful to remember that in the previous chapter, this harlot woman (Babylon) was described as sitting upon 'many waters' (Rev 17:1). The waters represent 'peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues' (Rev 17:15). Thus, the woman Babylon is the symbolic embodiment (like Jezebel, cf. Rev 2:20) of evil and idolatrous seduction (Rev 17:5) who 'has made all the nations drink of the wine of the passion of her immorality' (Rev 14:8).

In describing Rev 18, Leon Morris writes, "In vivid and unforgettable language John outlines the judgment of the great city. He describes her fall and its effect on those who were in sympathy with her...He [John] is catching up all that the prophets have said as they announce the doom of Tyre or Babylon or Nineveh. But he is thinking not of the fall of one city or empire but of the collapse of civilization. Final judgment means the overthrow of all that opposes itself to God."<sup>1991</sup>

## Outline of chapter 18 (The Fall of Babylon)

- (1) 18:1-3 The angelic declaration of Babylon's defeat
- (2) 18:4-5 God's call for separation
- (3) 18:6-8 Babylon is recompensed
- (4) 18:9-19 The friends and allies of Babylon lament her fall
- (5) 18:20-24 The judgment and fall of Babylon is carried out

## [1] Revelation 18:1-3 (The angelic declaration of Babylon's defeat)

<sup>1</sup> *After these things I saw another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illumined with his glory.*

<sup>2</sup> *And he cried out with a mighty voice, saying, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place of demons and a prison of every unclean spirit, and a prison of every unclean and hateful bird.*

<sup>3</sup> *"For all the nations have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, and the kings of the earth have committed acts of immorality with her, and the merchants of the earth have become rich by the wealth of her sensuality."*

Another angel with great authority comes down out of heaven; the light of his glory illumines the earth – this is no piecemeal judgment! The declaration of Babylon's fall is reminiscent of a previous announcement of this same judgment in an earlier parallel cycle in Revelation (14:8); the prior announcement was a simple announcement – here in chapter 18, the announcement is followed by a full description of her utter fall and devastation.

No good thing dwells in Babylon – demons are there, and unclean spirits are her prisoners (Proverbs 5:1-6; 7:26-27). The phrase in verse 3 (“the passion of her immorality”) is a good synopsis of the symbolic meaning of Babylon (Isaiah 21:9; Jeremiah 50:2; 51:8-13); literally, it is the “wrath of her fornication.” Verse 3 also mentions that nations, kings, and merchants have drunk her wine and followed in her immorality, becoming ‘rich by the wealth of her sensuality.’ These are those who have served wealth, rather than God (Matthew 6:24). “These merchants are all those who have set their hearts on the wares of the world.”<sup>[100]</sup> They have followed the world in the ‘lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life’ (1 John 2:16).

### [2] Revelation 18:4-5 (God’s call for separation)

<sup>4</sup> *I heard another voice from heaven, saying, “Come out of her, my people, so that you will not participate in her sins and receive of her plagues;*

<sup>5</sup> *for her sins have piled up as high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.*

God calls His people to ‘come out of her’ (Isaiah 48:20; 52:11; Jeremiah 50:8; Zechariah 2:7) in order that they may not be caught up in the judgment of Babylon. “Compromise with worldliness is fatal. God’s people must, while playing their full role in the community, hold themselves aloof from what is involved in being worldly-minded...In a sense this appeal is the key to the whole chapter. John is not gloating over the city’s downfall. He is appealing to Christians to see the realities of the situation and act accordingly.”<sup>[101]</sup>

This admonition to ‘come out’ of Babylon (worldly seduction) is addressed to God’s people throughout the ages (Genesis 12:1; 19:12ff; Numbers 16:23-24; Isaiah 7; 48:20; 52:11; Jeremiah 50:8ff; 51:6, 45; Zechariah 2:6-8; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 5:11-12; 1 Timothy 5:22). Because this call is not tied to a specific time or place in redemptive history, “it also appears that Babylon is not only the city of the end time. It is the world, as centre of seduction, in any age. To depart from Babylon means not to have fellowship with her sins and not to be ensnared by her allurements and enticements.”<sup>[102]</sup>

### [3] Revelation 18:6-8 (Babylon is recompensed)

<sup>6</sup> *“Pay her back even as she has paid, and give back to her double according to her deeds; in the cup which she has mixed, mix twice as much for her.*

<sup>7</sup> *“To the degree that she glorified herself and lived sensuously, to the same degree give her torment and mourning; for she says in her heart, ‘I SIT as A QUEEN AND I AM NOT A WIDOW, and will never see mourning.’*

<sup>8</sup> *“For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong.*

The Lord God judges Babylon according to what she has earned (Revelation 17:7; 16:6 – “They deserve it.”). Verse 7 is a quotation from Isaiah 47:7 where God declares that Babylon will not be able to charm away the evil that will come upon her (Isa 47:11); the evil that will come upon her will consist of two things: loss of children and widowhood (Isa 47:9) – no progeny and no protection (see Isaiah 47:5-11).

The illusion of material prosperity in every age, even in the face of impending judgment for the worship of Mammon, is reminiscent of the warning against the church in Laodicea (Rev 3:17). The Lord God is a strong judge (verse 8) who acts not with revenge but requital (or recompense for her deeds). In one day He brings four plagues of judgment against Babylon: pestilence (literally, “death” (thanatos – qa,natoj)), mourning, famine, and fire.

### [4] Revelation 18:9-19 (The friends and allies of Babylon lament her fall)

Three different groups of people mourn for the loss of Babylon – not because they love her per se, but because of what they could get out of her. “Revelation illustrates the wide-ranging scope of Babylon’s work and the meaning of her downfall by picturing the reactions of her friends. Kings, merchants, and sailors have been

seduced to worship the luxury of Babylon. They have all admired her and profited from her. They are terrified by the destruction that they see, and they stand far off, fearful of getting caught in the destruction (vv 10, 15, 17). But they do not repent. Instead, they look back longingly to the earlier time of her prosperity, even as Lot's wife looked back longingly at Sodom and Gomorrah. Cases of hardened wickedness take this very pattern. Even when people know that they are sinning, and when they know that destruction follows, they cannot bear to give up their sins. They cannot give up the pleasures or wealth that they obtain from sin."<sup>[103]</sup>

These three groups of people derive their ultimate power (kings), pleasure (merchants), and provision (seafarers) from following in the immorality and sensuous life of materialism and sordid gain.

(1) (18:9-10) The kings who derived their power from Babylon

<sup>9</sup> *"And the kings of the earth, who committed acts of immorality and lived sensuously with her, will weep and lament over her when they see the smoke of her burning,*

<sup>10</sup> *standing at a distance because of the fear of her torment, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city! For in one hour your judgment has come.'*

The political powers and rulers of this world who have 'lived sensuously' with Babylon (Rev 1:3, 7, 9). The word 'sensuality' (strenos – strh/noj) in verse 3 carries the idea of self-indulgence and arrogance. The verb form of this word ('to live sensuously' (streniao – strhnia,w)) is used in verses 7 and 9 to describe the pleasure seeking nature of Babylon and the kings of the earth, respectively.

(2) (18:11-17a) The merchants who derive their pleasure from Babylon

<sup>11</sup> *"And the merchants of the earth weep and mourn over her, because no one buys their cargoes any more--  
<sup>12</sup> cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every article of ivory and every article made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble,*

<sup>13</sup> *and cinnamon and spice and incense and perfume and frankincense and wine and olive oil and fine flour and wheat and cattle and sheep, and cargoes of horses and chariots and slaves and human lives.*

<sup>14</sup> *"The fruit you long for has gone from you, and all things that were luxurious and splendid have passed away from you and men will no longer find them.*

<sup>15</sup> *"The merchants of these things, who became rich from her, will stand at a distance because of the fear of her torment, weeping and mourning,*

<sup>16</sup> *saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, she who was clothed in fine linen and purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls;*

<sup>17</sup> *for in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!'*

These have put their hope and trust in financial gain. The whole gambit of material gain is described: minerals (12a), plants (12b-13a), animals (13b), men (13c). The merchants who become rich from Babylon also stand at a distance to weep over the fall of their mistress for fear of being caught up in her torment (v 15). Babylon, the great city, was once regally adorned (v 16), but her wealth has quickly been laid waste.

(3) (18:17b-19) The seafaring men who derive their provision from the trade of Babylon

And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance,

<sup>18</sup> *and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, 'What city is like the great city?'*

<sup>19</sup> *"And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'*



“All these had secured their livelihood from the activities of the great city and accordingly all lament her passing. But, like the groups previously mentioned, they stand *far off*. No-one stretches out a hand to help. The great city has brought profit to many but affection to none.”<sup>[104]</sup> The mourning of the seafarers, in comparison to the previous lamenters, is increased to include the throwing of dust on their own heads (v 19).

Again, the seafarers – like the kings (v 10) and the merchants (v 17) – perceive Babylon’s fall as occurring ‘in one hour.’ We are reminded of Jesus’ admonition: “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19-21). Thus, followers of Christ are to “seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

[5] Revelation 18:20-24 (The Judgment against Babylon is carried out)

<sup>20</sup> *“Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her.”*

<sup>21</sup> *Then a strong angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying, “So will Babylon, the great city, be thrown down with violence, and will not be found any longer.*

<sup>22</sup> *“And the sound of harpists and musicians and flute-players and trumpeters will not be heard in you any longer; and no craftsman of any craft will be found in you any longer; and the sound of a mill will not be heard in you any longer;*

<sup>23</sup> *and the light of a lamp will not shine in you any longer; and the voice of the bridegroom and bride will not be heard in you any longer; for your merchants were the great men of the earth, because all the nations were deceived by your sorcery.*

<sup>24</sup> *“And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth.”*

In contrast to the weeping and lamenting of those who have put their hope and trust in Babylon, the voice from heaven (v 4) calls upon His people to rejoice over Babylon because God prosecutes Babylon for the sake of His Church (v 20). The designation of ‘saints and apostles and prophets’ (v 20) seems to have its referent in Ephesians 2:19-22 where God’s household is described as a building in which the saints are being fitted together on the foundation of the apostles and prophets as a dwelling of God in the Spirit, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone. What a glorious image!

The image of a great millstone being thrown into the sea (v 21) is also found in the prophets to describe the final destruction of Babylon: Jeremiah commands Seraiah, the quartermaster, “And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, and say, ‘Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her; and they will become exhausted’” (Jeremiah 51:63-64).

In Revelation 18:21-23, Babylon’s complete destruction is also described with the six-fold use of the phrase ‘no more’ which is literally a double negative, ‘no none’ (ou me – ouv mh.). She will no more be found (v 21), have no more music, no more craftsmen, no more sound of a millstone (v 22), no more light, and no more voice of the bridegroom and bride (v 23a) because the merchants, great men, and nations were ‘deceived by your sorcery’ (v 23b).

The wickedness of Babylon makes her deserving of her punishment, but the fact that she deceived others by her sorcery makes her deeds and accomplishments deserving of a double-portion of God’s judgment (Rev 18:6). Perhaps this is one of the commonalities of the images of the millstone in judgment in Scripture. According to Jesus, it would have been better for the one who causes believers to stumble ‘to have a heavy millstone hung around his neck, and to be drowned in the depth of the sea’ (Matthew 18:6).

The autopsy of Babylon (v 24) reveals the smoking gun: the blood of all Christian martyrs (prophets and saints) is found in her. “This is another indication that we must take ‘the great city’ symbolically. There is no one city on earth of which this can be said. Babylon is clearly a symbol for all earthly cities (*cf.* the similar statement about Jerusalem, Mt. 23:35).”<sup>[105]</sup>

## Conclusion

This account of the fall of Babylon and the extensive description of the mourning (vv 9-19) of those who have been seduced and enslaved by her (v 2) is a strong warning for us. Those who have drunk of the wine of the passion of her immorality, committed acts of immorality with her, and become rich (v 3) must come out of her lest they participate in her sins and receive of her plagues (v 4). With the strong emphasis in the book of Revelation (and especially in this chapter) on separateness and not falling prey to the wiles of Babylon, a difficult conundrum arises: we still live in this world. So, if we have not yet been taken out of the world (John 17:15), but are not of the world (John 17:16), how are we to be sanctified in the truth (John 17:17)?

William Greenhill writes: “If we are not to love the world, must we then totally cast off the world and have nothing to do with it? The answer is no. It [1 John 2:15] does not say that we may not have anything to do with the world, but that we must not love the world.”<sup>[106]</sup> It is helpful to understand that as believers we are called to be ‘in the world, but not of the world’ – but, the practical application of this idea is easier said than done. To better live this out, it is helpful to think in terms of a two-fold application: corporate and individualistic.

Corporately, the Church of Jesus Christ is an other-worldly institution on a pilgrimage; we are aliens and strangers in this world, called to be a holy priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God’s own possession. Here’s where the doctrine of the ‘spirituality of the church’ is helpful. The church as a separate and distinct organism is the only institution that will last forever and is thereby distinct and separate from the other political and cultural institutions of this world.<sup>[107]</sup> As Marva Dawn has written: “Because we take our direction from the Trinity and the Revelation [from God and the Bible], because we are citizens first of heaven, God’s people are a society parallel to the world surrounding us. When we gather for worship and education, we tell the narratives of the faith, sing our hymns, and say our prayers until we know the truth so well that we and our children can go out to our neighbors and offer alternatives to the lies of the principalities and powers that dominate U.S. society. As royal priests, we offer to the world around us the gifts of the One who is the Truth, the Way, and the Life.”<sup>[108]</sup>

Individually, each believer must, of necessity, associate with the world and immoral people (1 Corinthians 5:10). And, because individual believers vary in degrees of maturity, and vary in points of temptation, each one must apply godly wisdom in his or her dealings with the world. Learning to become as “shrewd as serpents and innocent as doves” (Matthew 10:16) requires careful consideration, deliberateness, and wisdom from above (James 3:17).

Consider the conclusion to Greenhill’s little book:

“[C]onsider again our text: ‘Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him’ (1 John 2:15). Take it this way: if your heart is wedded to the world, the Father does not love you. Or you may take it another way: you do not love the Father if your affections are chained to the world. Therefore, if you want evidence that the Father loves you and that you love the Father, stop loving the world. Instead, let your love abound more and more for the Father. Then you will have more and more evidence of His love, and evidence that you do not love the world. Thus you see many arguments, remedies, and helps for getting our hearts off the world. May the Lord make them effectual.”<sup>[109]</sup>



# Revelation 19

[Rejoicings in Heaven]

## Introduction

In this, the sixth cycle in the parallel sections of the book of Revelation, we have seen God's judgment against Babylon, or 'great city' (Revelation 17). Then we saw these judgments enacted upon Babylon; the harlot woman as the embodiment of worldly seduction was recompensed for her wicked deeds and leading others to their follow her (Revelation 18:1-8). Those who benefited from her lamented over her judgment because their prosperity was linked to their loyalty to her (Revelation 18:9-19). But, God's people were persecuted by her and her followers are ultimate avenged (Revelation 18:20-24).

In this final chapter of this section, the redeemed of the Lord and all His hosts respond very differently to the overthrow and judgment of Babylon: there is much rejoicing in the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:1-10). In the second (or middle) section of this chapter, we have an account of the return of Christ as the glorious victor riding on a white horse (19:11-16). In the third and final section of this chapter, the cycle ends as the last cycle did (16:12-21) with the final battle and the complete overthrowing of Christ's enemies (19:17-21).

"The sixth section, chapters 17-19, describes the fall of Babylon and of the beasts. Babylon stands for the worldly city – the forces of secularism and godlessness which are in opposition to the kingdom of God. The end of chapter 19 depicts the fall of the dragon's two helpers: the beast out of the sea, and the false prophet, who appears to be the same figure as the beast out of the earth (see 16:13). Once again we see clear reference to the end-time at the end of this section. Chapter 19:11 describes the Second Coming of Christ..."<sup>[110]</sup>

## Outline of chapter 19 (Rejoicings in Heaven)

- (1) 19:1-10 Four Hallelujahs – the marriage of the Lamb
- (2) 19:11-16 The Glorious Victor on a white horse
- (3) 19:17-21 The Beast and its armies are defeated

## Revelation 19:1-10 (Four Hallelujahs – the marriage of the Lamb)

<sup>1</sup> *After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;*

<sup>2</sup> *BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER."*

<sup>3</sup> *And a second time they said, "Hallelujah! HER SMOKE RISES UP FOREVER AND EVER."*

<sup>4</sup> *And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, "Amen. Hallelujah!"*

<sup>5</sup> *And a voice came from the throne, saying, "Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great."*

<sup>6</sup> *Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.*

<sup>7</sup> *"Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready."*

<sup>8</sup> *It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints.*

<sup>9</sup> *Then he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he*

said to me, “These are true words of God.”

<sup>10</sup> Then I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, “Do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and your brethren who hold the testimony of Jesus; worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.”

Chapter 19 opens with a vision of heavenly worship not unlike that of Revelation 4 & 5. In chapter 4, however, the emphasis of the worship of God was centered around God as Creator (4:11) and Christ as Redeemer (5:9). Here in chapter 19, the worship of God is centered around God as Judge (19:2-3) and Christ as the Bridegroom (19:6-8). In this worship scene, the word “Hallelujah” (or “Praise Yahweh”) is used four times – the only uses of this word in the entire New Testament (19:1, 3, 4, 6). Three different voices are heard, culminating in joint praise from all the host of heaven:

#### (19:1-3) “A Great Multitude”

Because these worship of the twenty-four elders was previously closely connected with that of the angels (Rev 5:9-12), as here (Rev 19:4), these are most likely the angels of heaven. The three-fold description – ‘salvation and glory and power belong to our God’ (19:1) – are praise of the events that were just described in the previous chapter in the destruction of Babylon. This judgment is further described in 19:2 (God’s judgments are righteous, have been accomplished, and have avenged His bond-servants). The allusion to the smoke of Babylon’s destruction rising up forever and ever (19:3) finds its source in Isaiah 34:10 and God’s judgment on the nations.

#### (19:4) “The twenty-four elders and the four living creatures”

This is the fourth time in the book of Revelation where we see the twenty-four elders (the complete number of God’s people from the old and new covenant) prostrate themselves before the throne of God (Rev 4:10; 5:8; 11:16). Here, they add their ‘Amen’ and ‘Hallelujah’ to the praise of the angels.

#### (19:5) “A voice from the throne”

Heavenly direction in worship is given from the throne for all God’s bond-servants who fear Him to ‘Give praise to our God.’

#### (19:6-8) “like the voice of a great multitude, like the sound of many waters, like the sound of mighty peals of thunder”

It would seem that this unified voice is so unique that John has difficulty finding the proper way to describe what he hears. Two reasons are given for their praise of God: [1] (19:6) The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. The good news of the gospel to which the Apostle Paul refers (Romans 10:15) is this very truth: “Your God reigns!” (Isaiah 52:7). The statement is a declaration of the victory of God. [2] (19:7) The marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. The Scriptures are replete with this imagery of God’s people as His bride (e.g. Isaiah 54:6; Ezekiel 16:8ff; Hosea 2:14ff; Matthew 22:2ff; 25:1ff; Mark 2:19; John 3:29) and is further employed and expanded later in the book of Revelation (21:2, 9ff; 22:17).

Hendriksen makes note of the fact that according to Jewish custom, there are four parts of the marriage customs of the Jews: **Betrothal** – legally considered husband and wife, **Interval** – when the dowry is paid, **Procession** – when the groom goes and gets the bride and brings her home, **Wedding-feast** – includes the marriage supper and lasts seven or more days.<sup>[111]</sup> In this schema, then, the Church of Christ is living in the period of the interval, though having a foretaste of wedding feast. Revelation 19 tells of the procession and wedding feast (19:7-6).

At the end of this scene of worship, John sees the bride of the Lamb (the Church) given “fine linen, bright and clean” (19:8) by which she is clothed. Whether these represent “righteousness” (KJV) or “righteous acts (or

deeds)” (most other translations), we should not miss the point that their righteous clothing is not their own, but given to them (Matthew 22:1-14; Ephesians 2:8-10).

### (19:9-10) An angelic command and rebuke

John is commanded by the angel to write concerning the blessedness of those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb (19:9). “Earlier [John] was commanded to write the whole book (1:11, 19), and to write to each of the seven churches (chs. 2-3). He was forbidden to write what the seven thunders said (10:14), but was instructed to write down the little saying about the dead who die in the Lord (14:13). He will be commanded to write down yet another saying (21:5).”<sup>[112]</sup>

On two occasions (Rev 19:10; 22:8), John mistakenly attempts to worship the messenger, rather than God. Like Barnabas and Paul (Acts 14:14-17), the angel rebukes John and directs his worship to God alone. The angel adds, “For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” That is, those who give testimony from Jesus are prophetic people. “[A]ngels in heaven and believers on earth are fellow servants in that they both have prophetic roles. Prophets here are not an exclusive office but the same group mentioned as prophets elsewhere in the book, where the prophetic role of the entire church is in mind (so 11:3, 6, 10; cf. 16:6). John is part of this general group, but he is also part of a narrower class of NT prophets and apostles who continue the OT prophetic office (e.g., see on 1:10; 4:1-2; 10:11; 17:1-3; cf. 22:9).”<sup>[113]</sup>

### Revelation 19:11-16 (The Glorious Victor on a white horse)

*<sup>11</sup> And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war.*

*<sup>12</sup> His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself.*

*<sup>13</sup> He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*

*<sup>14</sup> And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses.*

*<sup>15</sup> From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty.*

*<sup>16</sup> And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, “KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.”*

“The great victory has been won. The power of evil has been broken. There remains only to complete the final ordering of things, by putting the wicked away permanently and introducing the righteous to heaven. The preceding section has prepared us for a vision of the Bridegroom. But, as often, John surprises us. He gives us instead a vision of a Warrior.”<sup>[114]</sup> This is not Jesus meek and mild. This is Jesus raucous and righteous, gruff and glorious. This is Jesus, the Mighty Warrior! This description of Jesus bears similarities to that of Jesus in the beginning of this book (Revelation 1:12-16); however, there are some differences.

In Revelation 1, Jesus stood in the midst of the seven golden lampstands (the church) as their defender; here, Jesus ‘judges and wages war’ (19:11) against the enemies of His church as He rides upon a white horse. He is called ‘Faithful and True’ (19:11, see Rev 3:14) and ‘The Word of God’ (19:13; cf. John 1:1), though He also has a name which only He knows (19:12). The hidden-ness of Christ’s name could signify two things: mere creatures are never able to completely understand Him and/or no one is able to exert power over Christ by knowing His name.

Morris maintains that Jesus’ being ‘clothed with a robe dipped in blood’ (19:13) is “surely a reference to Calvary; Christ overcame by shedding his blood.”<sup>[115]</sup> However, it is more likely that this blood is the blood of Christ’s enemies whom he tramples in the wine press of His judgment (19:15; 14:18-20; Isaiah 63:1-3).<sup>[116]</sup>

The armies which follow Christ are also riding on white horses (19:14), though they seem to have no distinct role in the battle. The armies are clothed like the bride of the Lamb (19:8); however, these are more likely the holy angels: (Matthew 25:31) “But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne.”

(19:15) From His mouth comes a sharp sword to strike down the nations. It is with God’s Word and not His armies by which Christ smites His enemies: (Isaiah 11:4) “But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.” He rules over them with a rod of iron (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 2:27; 12:5).

(19:16) The “Hallelujah Chorus” of Handel’s *Messiah* is taken from two passages (Rev. 11:15 and Rev. 19:16): “Hallelujah: for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ; and He shall reign for ever and ever. King of Kings, and Lord of Lords. Hallelujah!”

Revelation 19:17-21 (The Beast and its armies are defeated)

<sup>17</sup> *Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God,*

<sup>18</sup> *so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.”*

<sup>19</sup> *And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies assembled to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.*

<sup>20</sup> *And the beast was seized, and with him the false prophet who performed the signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image; these two were thrown alive into the lake of fire which burns with brimstone.*

<sup>21</sup> *And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.*

“The wedding feast, the consummation of blessing and satisfaction [19:7], contrasts pointedly with the horrific feast of 19:17-18, 21, in which the birds consume the corpses of the wicked. Everyone will participate in one or the other feast.”<sup>[117]</sup>

(19:17-18) An angel in the sun calls all the birds to assemble for the great supper, i.e. to eat the flesh of God’s enemies who are about to be destroyed (Revelation 6:15; 17:12, 15). David mocked Goliath, “Come to me, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the beasts of the field” (1 Samuel 17:44). This description of ‘the great supper of God’ builds upon the imagery of Ezekiel 39:4, 17-20 where the same is said of Gog’s armies.

(19:19) The beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies assemble for war. As we saw in the previous parallel section (Revelation 16:16), Christ’s tactic in the final battle is not to divide and conquer, but to unite and conquer! The actual battle is blanked between 19:19 and 19:20. The implication seems to be that “though the forces of evil appear mighty they are completely helpless when confronted by the Christ.”<sup>[118]</sup> Hendriksen observes, “This battle of Har-Magedon is not a protracted struggle with now this, and then that, side winning. No, ‘with the breath of his mouth’ Christ, at His coming, defeats the foe.”<sup>[119]</sup>

(19:20) The beast of the sea (antichristian persecution, Revelation 13:1-10) and the false prophet (beast out of the earth, antichristian religion and philosophy, Revelation 13:11-18; 16:13) are thrown into the lake of fire. In the next chapter, the devil (20:10), death and Hades (20:14), as well as anyone whose name was not written in the book of life (20:15) are also thrown into this same lake of fire.

(19:21) The kings of earth and their armies are killed and fed to the birds (cf. Revelation 19:17-18). In isolation, one could perhaps interpret ‘the lake of fire which burns with brimstone’ (19:20), along with the fact that the

kings of the earth and their armies are described as being killed and fed to the birds (29:21), as annihilationism (the doctrine of the final judgment which states that whoever is not redeemed by God will ultimately be put out of existence); however, Revelation 20:10 describes this same lake of fire as the place where those who are thrown are “tormented day and night forever and ever” (see also Revelation 14:10-11).

Even worse, some interpreters have completely disavowed the biblical understanding that “the wicked who know not God, and obey not the Gospel of Jesus Christ, shall be cast into eternal torments, and be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (WCF 33:2). A recent example is confused (and confusing) pastor and author Rob Bell:

“Many have heard the gospel framed in terms of rescue. God has to punish sinners, because God is holy, but Jesus has paid the price for our sin, and so we can have eternal life. However true or untrue that is technically or theologically, what it can do is subtly teach people that Jesus rescues us from God. Let’s be very clear, then: we do not need to be rescued from God. God is the one who rescues us from death, sin, and destruction. God is the rescuer. This is crucial for our peace, because we shape our God, and then our God shapes us.”<sup>[120]</sup>

In limiting God’s role to the rescuer of sinners (which is true, but not the whole story), Bell removes God’s role as righteous judge. We do not ‘subtly teach people that Jesus rescues us from God’ (as Bell suggests) – we proclaim it as the glorious truth of the gospel! Just within Revelation 19, we see Jesus Christ as both the vindicator of His people (the bridegroom and Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, 19:1-10) and the righteous judge (the one who wages war and stamps out the wicked, 19:11-21). Lest we ‘shape our God’ in order that this god of our own making might then shape us (as Bell suggests), let us shape our understanding of God as He has revealed Himself to us in the Scriptures, that we might then be shaped aright.

### Conclusion

The doctrine of the final judgment and the day of Christ is not a pleasant thought for those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:6-8). But, for Christ’s bride – for those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of the lamb (1 Peter 1:17-19) – there is much rejoicing (Revelation 19:1-7) for blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb...these are true words of God (Revelation 19:9).

“We have seen the end of the men who bear the mark of the beast (Rev. 15, 16). We have also witnessed the fall of Babylon (17:1 ff.). We have read the description of Christ’s victory over the beast and the false prophet (19:11 ff.). All go down in defeat. Their discomfiture is not complete until the day of Christ’s second coming in judgment. Then all go down together, even though their histories have been presented under different symbols and in separate paragraphs. One foe, the leader of them all, remains. It is the dragon, Satan. His ruin is described in the final section of the Apocalypse.”<sup>[121]</sup>



# Excursus: The Millennium

## Introduction

As we take a brief respite from our chapter by chapter study in order to examine the major millennial views, this is a good time to step back and re-examine some of the exegetical issues that we addressed in the introduction to our study. In the introduction to our study, we noted that there are **four methods (or schools) of interpretation** concerning the book of Revelation: (1) preterist (first century events), (2) historicist (sequential description of church age), (3) futurist (end of the age), and (4) idealist (ideas and principles throughout church age). In this study, we have been applying the idealist methodology. In conjunction, we have been emphasizing the literary structure of the book in terms of ‘progressive parallelism’ or recapitulation.

While we have been taking some helps here and there from the various methods of interpretation, hopefully by now it is clear to see that if one adopts the progressive and parallel interpretation of the book (as we have done), then the preterist, historicist, and futurist views are precluded. For the historicist and futurist methods of interpretation rely upon a reading of the book of Revelation that is chronological – each vision and event is understood to chronologically come after the event that precedes it in the book; and the preterist method of interpretation relies upon a reading of the book of Revelation that is condensed and an immediate concern for only the first century Christians, not the entire church age.

So, as we examine the various millennial views, it is important to keep in mind that the understanding and interpretation of the millennium is not a stand-alone doctrine. As we go along, it will hopefully become clear that ‘the millennium question’ is influenced and influences not only how one interprets and applies the book of Revelation, but also how one interprets and applies several other key doctrines of the Christian faith. There are, in fact, multiple webs of reciprocity that exist between our understanding of the Bible, our systematic theology, and our world-view.<sup>[122]</sup>

## Four Views

Basically, there are four different interpretations of the meaning of the millennium:

1. Amillennialism: “The word itself means literally ‘no millennium.’ It’s proponents do not anticipate a literal one-thousand-year golden age sometime in the future but find some other significance to the symbol in Revelation 20...all amillennialists anticipate that the Second Coming of Christ will mark the beginning of eternity without an intervening interregnum.”<sup>[123]</sup> Amillennialists interpret the thousand years of Revelation 20 as the symbolic representation of the present church age, concluding with Christ’s second coming. This view rose to prominence with Augustine, is the view of Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, and (according to Venema) is the majority view within Reformed and Presbyterian churches.<sup>[124]</sup>

2. Postmillennialism: “The present age will gradually merge into the millennial age as an increasingly larger proportion of the world’s inhabitants are converted to Christianity through the preaching of the gospel...As the millennium becomes a reality, Christian principles of belief and conduct will be the accepted standard for nations and individuals. Sin will not be eliminated, but will be reduced to a minimum.”<sup>[125]</sup> There are two varieties of postmillennialism: ‘golden age’ postmillennialists and ‘theonomic reconstructionist’ postmillennialists. The difference being that the latter believe “that the civil authorities play an instrumental role in the realization of God’s kingdom purposes for the golden age millennium.”<sup>[126]</sup>

3. Historic Premillennialism: So named due to “the claim of proponents that this variety of premillennialism has been present in the church since the patristic era. Its defenders anticipate a time of tribulation directed against the church, climaxed by Christ’s coming to rescue the community of his disciples from the forces of evil.”<sup>[127]</sup> “Premillennialists hold that at Christ’s return the Christian dead will be raised, and believers still living on earth will be caught up to meet him in the air (1 Thes. 4:17). They will reign on earth with Christ for 1,000 years (the

millennium). After this Satan will be released for a time. This short period will be followed by the raising of the rest of the dead.”<sup>[128]</sup>

4. Dispensational Premillennialism: Classic dispensationalism is marked by two distinctives: (1) it divides redemptive history into seven eras which are marked by different means of salvation; (2) there are two distinct peoples of God (national Israel and the Church). “Dispensationalists differ from their historic premillennialist cousins on the basis of their understanding of which people will be the focus of God’s attention in the tribulation and the millennial era. Rather than view the future tribulation and millennium in terms of God’s program for the New Testament church, dispensationalism tends to find the significance of these eras in God’s intention for national Israel.”<sup>[129]</sup>

### Why eschatology and the millennial question is important

Too often, Christians think of certain doctrinal issues (e.g. eschatology, or the study of the last things) as being inconsequential to their faith. More specifically, the understanding and interpretation of “the millennium” in Revelation is often erroneously viewed as unimportant. How many times have we heard someone joke about being a pan-millennialist (a person who doesn’t hold to any view of the millennium, but is just waiting to see how it all ‘pans’ out in the end). To be sure, one’s view of the millennium ought not to be the ultimate litmus test of a person’s orthodoxy (except in the case of *dispensational* premillennialism which is out of accord with the Westminster Standards). At the same time, one’s view of eschatology (in general) and one’s view of the millennium (in specific) is important, as it is informed and informs: one’s hermeneutic (or biblical interpretation), one’s world view, one’s view of the nature of the kingdom of God, the keys of the kingdom, etc.

At stake then, depending upon one’s view of eschatology and the millennium, are several key doctrines:

1. Hermeneutics: The four methodologies of interpreting the book of Revelation (preterist, historicist, futurist, or idealist) will inform and be informed by one’s view of the millennium. For instance, premillennialism depends on the futurist interpretation of the book of Revelation, while amillennialism is linked to the idealist interpretation and the theory of recapitulation (progressive parallelism).

2. Church & the World: Generally speaking, **postmillennialism** will favor engagement in the world (sometimes leading to theonomic reconstructionism); **premillennialism** will favor fundamentalist separatism (sometimes leading to isolationism); in between these two, **amillennialism** will favor cautious or qualified engagement in the world where “victory and defeat, success and failure, good and evil will coexist until the end.”<sup>[130]</sup>

“During the last two centuries, the multiplicity of positions concerning the thousand years have crystallized into three basic alternatives: postmillennialism, premillennialism and amillennialism. Beyond the position each takes concerning the actual interpretation of the vision of the millennium, the viewpoint each of the three articulates as to the nature of the thousand years illustrates a deeper conviction concerning the flow of history. Simply stated and no doubt somewhat oversimplified, they embody three foundational theological moods: optimism (postmillennialism), pessimism (premillennialism), and realism (amillennialism).”<sup>[131]</sup>

3. Kingdom of God<sup>[132]</sup>: Key to the interpretation of Revelation 20 is one’s view of the definition and meaning of the kingdom of God as proclaimed by Jesus (e.g. Mark 1:15) and its relationship to the thousand years of the Apocalypse. Typically, **dispensationalist premillennialists** view the kingdom of God as an ethnically Jewish (and future) reality equal to the future, literal, millennial reign of Christ. With relation to their view of the kingdom of God, the remaining three millennial positions have much more in common with each other than they do with dispensationalism. **Historic premillennialists** view the kingdom of God as both present and future, fully realized in the earthly thousand year reign of Christ with His church (which is comprised of both Jew and Gentile). **Postmillennialists** tend to view the kingdom of God as being extended in the world through the preaching of the gospel and the saving work of the Holy Spirit as the kingdom of Satan is gradually reduced and almost eliminated. With the postmillennialists, **amillennialists** see the kingdom of God as being extended through the

proclamation of the gospel, but see the biblical data as pointing to the increase of conflict with the kingdom of Satan (victory is ultimately and only realized at Christ's second coming).[\[133\]](#)



# Revelation 20

[The Binding of Satan & the Final Judgment]

## Introduction to Chapters 20

Hendriksen provides an excellent introduction and overview to our study of Revelation 20:

“Revelation 19:19ff carried us to the very end of history, to the day of final judgment. With Revelation 20 we return to the beginning of our present dispensation. Thus, the connection between chapters 19 and 20 is similar to that between chapters 11 and 12. Revelation 11:18 announces ‘the time of the dead to be judged’. The end has arrived. Yet with Revelation 12 we return to the beginning of the New Testament period, for Revelation 12:5 describes the birth, ascension, and coronation of our Lord. Similarly, with chapter 20 we begin anew...

“Once this ‘order of events’ or ‘programme of history’ is seen, Revelation 20 is not difficult to understand. All one needs to do is to remember the sequence: Christ’s first coming is followed by a long period during which Satan is bound; this, in turn is followed by Satan’s little season; and then is followed by Christ’s second coming, *i.e.* His coming in judgment. It should be clear immediately to anyone who carefully reads Revelation 20 that the ‘thousand years’ precede the second coming of our Lord in judgment. This second coming in judgment is not described until we reach the eleventh verse. It is clear that the theory of the premillennialist is at variance with the facts here.

“Yet, though in Revelation 20 we traverse the same ground as in the preceding visions, namely, this entire dispensation from the first to the second coming of Christ, we view it from a different aspect. You remember that Revelation 12 introduces five enemies of the Church. All go down together! Yet the account of their defeat is spread over several distinct visions. The preceding visions have told us what happens to four of the five foes introduced in chapter 12. Only one is left, namely Satan himself. His defeat is described in our present vision.”<sup>[134]</sup>

## Outline of chapter 20 (The Binding of Satan to the Final Judgment)

- (1) 20:1-3 The ‘thousand years’ on earth: the binding of Satan
- (2) 20:4-6 The ‘thousand years’ in heaven: the reign of the saints
- (3) 20:7-10 The Final Battle (cf. Rev. 16:12-21; 19:19-21)
- (4) 20:11-15 The Final Judgment: the great white throne

## Introduction

In keeping with (1) our methodology of interpretation that we have been following (idealist), (2) our interpretation of the literary structure of the book (progressive parallelism), (3) and our understanding of the kingdom of God as the present rule of Christ in the church which will finally and only be consummated at His second coming (the already/not-yet status of the kingdom of God), we will interpret Revelation 20 through the lens of the amillennial position.<sup>[135]</sup>

As such, this chapter spans the entire course of time between Jesus’ first and second comings. The last two chapters of the book (chapters 21-22) describe the eschatological realities following the final judgment. Thus, like the other six parallel visions which precede it, this seventh ‘cycle’ is a retelling of the same part of redemptive history. However, unlike the other six parallel visions which precede it, much more emphasis is

given to the description of the time following the final judgment. The preceding visions concluded with, and increasingly emphasized the final judgment. In this vision, we move past the final judgment into a much fuller description of the new heaven and new earth, the new Jerusalem, and the eternal state of blessedness of Christ's bride.

## 1. Revelation 20:1-3 (The 'thousand years' on earth: the binding of Satan)

<sup>1</sup> *Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand.*

<sup>2</sup> *And he laid hold of the dragon, the serpent of old, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years;*

<sup>3</sup> *and he threw him into the abyss, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he would not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were completed; after these things he must be released for a short time.*

An angel binds the dragon (serpent of old, the devil, Satan) for a thousand years 'so that he would not deceive the nations any longer.' The Gospel goes forth to all nations (Acts 14:16; Psalm 2:7-8; 72:8-17; Matthew 12:22-29; Luke 10:17-18; John 12:31-32; Colossians 2:13-15). As these other references in Scripture show, the binding of Satan is accomplished at the first coming of Christ. The 'thousand years' describes the time between Jesus first and second coming. This long period of the gospel era has been represented through various symbols throughout the book of Revelation: '42 months', 'a thousand years', 'a time, times, half a time', and 1,260 days (Rev. 11:2,3; 12:6,14; 13:5; 20:2-5).<sup>[136]</sup> "Satan has been bound through the triumph of Christ in his crucifixion and resurrection."<sup>[137]</sup>

To be sure, Scripture does speak of the power of Satan as "the god of this world (or age)" who has blinded the minds of the unbelieving (2 Corinthians 4:4) and our adversary who "prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). Yet, at the same time, we must understand that the devil's power is limited, chained by the sovereignty of God in the work of Christ: "Now judgment is upon this world; now the ruler of this world will be cast out. And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to Myself" (John 12:31-32).

This understanding of the binding of Satan in the first coming of Christ is an important corrective for believers who have a misappropriated fear of the devil. It is one of the glorious truths of the gospel and confirmed elsewhere in Scripture (Hebrews 2:14-15): "Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives."

The key of the abyss and great chain are both "clearly symbolical for there cannot be a key to the abyss nor can a spirit be shackled with a chain. But they show that the angel had authority over the abyss and that he could restrain Satan."<sup>[138]</sup> Sometimes an objection is raised that Satan cannot be bound during the present age because of the great evils that we still see. This is a misunderstanding of 'binding.' Satan still has some power, but one only need look to the witness of Scripture and the history of missions since Pentecost as confirmations of this truth. The gospel is no longer "confined to one nation, as before under the law" (WCF 25:2). The powers of the age to come (Hebrews 6:5) have intruded upon this age when Christ inaugurated His kingdom (Mark 1:15).

## 2. Revelation 20:4-6 (The 'thousand years' in heaven: the reign of the saints)

<sup>4</sup> *Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

<sup>5</sup> *The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection.*

<sup>6</sup> *Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.*

John's mentioning of "the first resurrection" and "the second death" implies that there is a "second resurrection" as well as a "first death." Defining these terms<sup>[139]</sup> will provide a basis for understanding these difficult verses:

First Death – (not mentioned) bodily death of which all (believers and unbelievers) partake – *physical death*

Second Death – judgment and consignment to hell, the lake of fire (20:14-15) – *spiritual death*

First Resurrection – a remedy for the second death (20:6) – *spiritual resurrection*

Second Resurrection – (not mentioned) a remedy for the first death – *physical resurrection*

These definitions, then, help us to see the two different experiences of the righteous (believers) and the wicked (unbelievers). Believers and unbelievers alike partake of the first death and the second resurrection (Hebrews 9:27 – "it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment"); however, only believers partake of the first resurrection, and only unbelievers partake of the second death (for the former protects from the latter (verse 6)).

**Believers:**

first death (physical) → first resurrection (spiritual) → second resurrection (physical) → ~~--[No Second Death]--~~

**Unbelievers:**

first death (physical) → ~~--[No First Resurrection]--~~ → second resurrection (physical) → second death (spiritual)

From the binding of Satan by the angel who came down out of heaven, John now describes what is going on in heaven during this 'thousand years.' "This section [20:4-6] is thus contemporaneous with the preceding. We expect the reign of Christ but we get that of his people."<sup>[140]</sup> "Of course, these two aspects of the millennium, namely, the earthly (verses 1-3) and the heavenly (verses 4-6), the binding of Satan and the reign of the saints, are most intimately related."<sup>[141]</sup>

Verse 4 speaks of heavenly thrones from which all the souls of Christian believers reign. This is in keeping with the promise from the letter to the church of Laodicea: "He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne" (Revelation 3:21). Those who are presently reigning in heaven 'came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years' (v 4). Since this is a present reign and a spiritual reign, it is evident that this verse is speaking of the present spiritual reign of both deceased and yet living believers. "Though the privileges enjoyed by the saints whom John sees in this vision are glorious, it should be noted that all believers in union with Christ may be said to live and reign with him as priests to God."<sup>[142]</sup>

Futurists typically see this reigning on thrones to be future and physical; however, it is helpful to keep in mind that the New Testament presents the spiritual rebirth of believers through regeneration and union with Christ in terms of 'resurrection' (John 11:25-26; Romans 6:12-23; 2 Corinthians 3:18; 4:16; Galatians 2:19-20; Ephesians 2:4-7; Colossians 2:9-14; 3:1-3). Thus, this 'first resurrection' (Rev 20:5) which leads to a spiritual reigning is rightfully interpreted to be synonymous with the spiritual rebirth (John 3:3ff) which all believers experience. Believers already enter into this reign now (Hebrews 12:22-24), but do not yet experience the fullness of this reign (Hebrews 2:8; 1 John 3:2).

What all of this means, then, is that the beatitude of Revelation 20:6 is a blessing for all believers (living and dead) who have been united to Christ in His death and resurrection. Thus, those who have part in the first resurrection (have been born again) are blessed and holy – during the present 'millennium' they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him. The second death has no power over these believers (John 11:25-26).

### 3. Revelation 20:7-10 (The Final Battle (cf. Rev. 16:12-21; 19:19-21))

<sup>7</sup> *When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison,*

<sup>8</sup> *and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore.*

<sup>9</sup> *And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them.*

<sup>10</sup> *And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

(20:7-8) As was forewarned in verse 3, Satan is released for a short time in order to deceive the nations, as he was not previously allowed to do during the ‘thousand years.’ This short period has been previously symbolized in the book of Revelation as 3 ½ days (11:7-9). The “nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog” (v 8) is a symbol of the enemies of God from the whole world (Ezekiel 38-39). We have also seen a description of this gathering together of God’s enemies in previous cycles (Revelation 16:16; 19:19).

The ‘camp of the saints’ is the common descriptor of the dwelling place of God’s people during their exodus wanderings (e.g. Exodus 14:19-20; Leviticus 4:21; Numbers 31:24). The church from all ages is also described as the ‘beloved city.’ And, just as we saw in previous cycles in the book (Revelation 16:17-21; 19:20-21), Christ’s tactic is not to divide and conquer His enemies, but unite and conquer them. They are devoured by heavenly fire in one swift blow.

The devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone simultaneously with the beast and the false prophet (the two beasts of Revelation 13; c.f. 19:20). Fire and brimstone is reminiscent of the judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, has been previously mentioned in Revelation (14:10), and is equated with the ‘second death’ of which the wicked will partake (21:18). The unholy trinity will be tormented day and night forever and ever. “This wording is best taken to mean that they will not be annihilated but will suffer torment that will endure endlessly for eternity.”<sup>[143]</sup>

### 4. Revelation 20:11-15 (The Final Judgment: the great white throne)

<sup>11</sup> *Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them.*

<sup>12</sup> *And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life; and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds.*

<sup>13</sup> *And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.*

<sup>14</sup> *Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.*

<sup>15</sup> *And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

(20:11) Classic dispensationalists separate the ‘judgment seat of Christ’ (2 Corinthians 5:10) from the ‘great white throne judgment’ (Revelation 20:11); some even see even more than two judgments. However, the Scriptures never make such differentiations (Hebrews 9:27-28).

Commenting on verse 11, Hendriksen notes that “not the destruction or annihilation but the renovation of the universe is indicated here. It will be a dissolution of the elements with great heat (2 Pet. 3:10); a regeneration (Mt. 19:28); a restoration of all things (Acts 3:21); and a deliverance from the bondage of corruption (Rom. 8:21). No longer will this universe be subject to ‘vanity’.”<sup>[144]</sup>

(20:12-13) The judgment of all humanity is described in verses 12-13. Books are opened (Daniel 7:10, 22, 27), and the book of life is especially mentioned. All of the dead, the great and the small are judged, and we are twice

told that this judgment will be “according to their deeds.” The Scriptures clearly teach that salvation is by grace through faith (Romans 4:16; Ephesians 2:8). At the same time, the Scriptures clearly teach that the final judgment is on the basis of works (Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:28-29; Romans 14:10; 2 Corinthians 5:10). Thus, these works are not the merit of salvation, but the evidence of salvation. “The issue is not salvation by works but works as the irrefutable evidence of man’s actual relationship with God.”<sup>[145]</sup>

(20:14-15) If there was any confusion as the main point of this chapter or the understanding of the sometimes confusing language, the last two verses bring clarity. Here, we are given the definition of ‘the second death.’ It is the final judgment – a throwing into the lake of fire.

At the beginning of the book of Revelation (1:18), Christ declares that He has the keys of death and Hades (power over the grave). Here, near the end of the book, death and Hades – the result of the curse (Genesis 2:17) – are the final enemies of God’s people to be thrown into the lake of fire.

According to the last verse of chapter 20, ultimately it is whether or not one’s name is recorded in the book of life that determines his final fate. Those whose names have not been found written in the book of life are thrown into the lake of fire, as well: “Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels’” (Matthew 15:41).

And, as we have seen before (Revelation 13:8; 17:8), the names have been written in the book of life ‘before the foundation of the world’! Thus is the fulfillment of the purpose of God’s grace to His people: “so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:4-7).

# Revelation 21-22

[The New Heaven and New Earth, the New Jerusalem, Conclusion]

## Outline of Chapters 20-22

- (1) 20:1-15 – The Binding of Satan and the Final Judgment
- (2) 21:1-27 – The Great Renewal: the New Heaven and New Earth
- (3) 22:1-21 – The Layout of the City & the Conclusion of Revelation

## Introduction

Although we must divide chapters 21-22 into several pericopes (or sections) for interpretation and analysis, these two chapters ought to be taken together as a whole. We have seen this necessity before in the book of Revelation (e.g. chs 2-3, 4-5, 15-16). Chapters 21-22 describe the recreated order of the cosmos, with the people of God at the center. These final two chapters are very different than much of the rest of the book of Revelation. Brief glimpses were given before, but previously more attention was given to the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. (Note the progressive and parallel descriptions of the second coming and the final judgment throughout the book: 1:7; 6:12-17; 11:15-19; 14:14-20; chs 15-16; 19:11-12; 20:11-15.)

In the book of Revelation, John seems to have been drawing out a sense of anticipation among his readers, and in these last two chapters, we are not disappointed. As we will see in the analysis of these last two chapters, we have here a description of the final end of God's redeeming work through His Son, Jesus Christ. At the same time, we must also keep in mind that presently we have a foretaste of the new heavens and the new earth and the new Jerusalem in the covenant community of the Church. "What we find here in Revelation 21:1-22:5 is a description of the redeemed universe of the future as foreshadowed by the redeemed Church of the present."<sup>[146]</sup> For the sake of simplicity, we will divide these last two chapters into five sections.

## Outline of chapter 21 (The Binding of Satan to the Final Judgment)

- (1) 21:1-8 The New Heaven and the New Earth
- (2) 21:9-21 The Layout and Measurements of the New Jerusalem
- (3) 21:22-27 The Light of Righteousness in the New Jerusalem
- (4) 22:1-5 The Water of Life in the New Jerusalem
- (5) 22:6-21 Epilogue: Closing Exhortations

## Revelation 21:1-8 (The New Heaven and the New Earth)

<sup>1</sup> *Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea.*

<sup>2</sup> *And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband.*

<sup>3</sup> *And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,*

<sup>4</sup> *and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away."*

<sup>5</sup> *And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."*



<sup>6</sup> *Then He said to me, "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost.*

<sup>7</sup> *"He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.*

<sup>8</sup> *"But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."*

(21:1-2) It is important that we understand and properly interpret what is said in these first two verses because they summarize the whole of this final vision and set the trajectory for how we are to understand the final act of God in redemptive history.

"new heaven and new earth" – We should note two things about this phrase. First, it is a description of the future when heaven and earth will no longer be distinguishable, but one and the same: to live in the new heaven is to live in the new earth. Second, the word translated as "new" here helps us understand what is being described (the word is *kainos* (kaino,j), not *neos*(ne,oj)). "There is a qualitative distinction between the two world orders. *kaino,j* ("new") usually indicates newness in terms of quality, not time; newness in time is a typical nuance of *ne,oj*, though the two words could sometimes be synonymous."<sup>[147]</sup>

"first heaven and first earth passed away" – If the use of the word *kaino,j* ("new") implies continuity between the old and the new (as in, a re-newed heaven and re-newed earth), this description of the passing away of the first heaven and first earth implies discontinuity. A similar concept seems to be employed by the writer of Hebrews in speaking of the relationship between the old and the new covenant (Hebrews 8:13). But, there is a better, more closely related paradigm, that we may employ to understand the continuity and discontinuity.

"Isaiah 65:17-25 and Romans 8:21-23 indicate that a transfiguration of the old world in view, like the way in which our new bodies will be transfigurations of our old ones (1 Cor. 15:35-57)."<sup>[148]</sup> If we apply the paradigm of the resurrection of our bodies to understand the recreation of the cosmos (particularly with an eye to the imagery of the sowing of a seed), we are better able to see the balance of the continuity and discontinuity: (1) Continuity: like our resurrected bodies, the new heavens and new earth will be recognizable (not changed in kind); (2) Discontinuity: like our resurrected bodies, the new heavens and new earth will be qualitatively different (as in the difference between seed and stalk) which is brought on through death.

"no longer any sea" – Throughout Scripture, the sea is almost always symbolic of chaos and evil (Psalm 42:7; 69:1; Jonah 2:3; Daniel 7:3; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9-10; Revelation 13:1).

"holy city, new Jerusalem...made ready as a bride" – The redeemed of the Lord take up residence as the center-piece of the new heavens and new earth. "After the new Jerusalem descends there appears to be no difference between heaven and earth."<sup>[149]</sup>

(21:3-4) "The Tabernacle of God is among men" – the concept of the tabernacling of God among humanity finds its roots in the wilderness wanderings of the Israelites (Leviticus 26:11). This realization of the Old Testament foreshadow is found in Christ's first coming (John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 6:16), and completely fulfilled after His second coming. The first things have passed away resulting in no more tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain. Revelation 11:15 speaks of this tabernacling in terms of the consummation of God's kingdom on earth.

"From verse 3 we learn that the dwelling place of God will no longer be away from the earth but on the earth. Since where God dwells, there heaven is, we conclude that in the life to come heaven and earth will no longer be separated, as they are now, but will be merged. Believers will therefore continue to be in heaven as they continue to live on the new earth. 'He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people' are the familiar words of the central promise of the covenant of grace (cf. Gen. 17:7; Exod. 19:5-6; Jer. 31:33; Ezek. 34:30; II Cor. 6:16; Heb. 8:10; I Pet. 2:9-10). The fact that this promise is repeated in John's vision of the new earth implies



that only on that new earth will God finally grant his people the full riches which the covenant of grace includes. Here we receive the firstfruits; there we shall receive the full harvest.”<sup>[150]</sup>

(21:5-7) He who sits on the throne declares that He is making all things new (Romans 8:20-22). We should note the present tense of verse 5 which transitions to completed action in verse 6: “It is done.” God makes promises concerning the free gift of the spring of the water of life (v 6, cf. Isaiah 55:1-3) and the one who overcomes who will inherit as an adopted son (v 7). In John 4:13-14 Jesus declares that He is the giver of this life-giving water, and each of the seven letters of Revelation 2-3 concludes with a promise to “He who overcomes” which finds its fulfillment in these verses.

(21:8) “Both as a warning and as a guarantee, verse 8 notes that the wicked will be excluded from the new Jerusalem. This exclusion summarized the point already made in 20:11-15. The standard of God’s justice, as well as the holiness and the peace of the new Jerusalem, requires the exclusion of evil. No sin or second fall into evil will disturb the permanent security and bliss of the new world.”<sup>[151]</sup>

### {Transition} – Introduction to Revelation 22:9-22:5

In the next section, we have a description of the new Jerusalem, the holy city, the bride and wife of the Lamb. As such, we should remember that the main thrust of this pictorial vision is a description of the redeemed of the Lord – the church victorious. In the new heaven and new earth, there is no longer any distinction between the visible and the invisible church; they are one and the same. In our analysis of these verses, we will divide them into three broad sections:

1. (Rev 21:9-21) The Layout and Measurements of the New Jerusalem
2. (Rev 21:22-27) The Light of Righteousness in the New Jerusalem
3. (Rev 22:1-5) The Water of Life in the New Jerusalem

### Revelation 21:9-21 (The Layout and Measurements of the New Jerusalem)

For ease of interpretation, we may divide this lengthy description of the layout and measurements of the new Jerusalem into four sub-parts (note that sub-sections 1 & 3 go together, as do sub-sections 2 & 4):

#### *(1) John’s Call: View the Holy City (Revelation 21:9-11)*

<sup>9</sup> Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues came and spoke with me, saying, “Come here, I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”

<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God,

<sup>11</sup> having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.

Revelation 21:9 begins the same way as 17:1, except formerly the angel spoke of judgment, here the angel speaks of grace. This holy city, Jerusalem, is described not only as the bride, but with an emphasis on her final status, she is called ‘the wife of the Lamb’ (v 9). The Apostle Paul tells us that Christ is the loving husband who cleansed His bride, the Church, by the washing of water with the word, “that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless” (Ephesians 5:25-27). Though it has been called her glory, here in John’s vision, we see clearly that the Church is adorned with the glory of God (v 11). It is God’s glory which makes her brilliant, holy, and blameless.

#### *(2) The Gates and Foundation Stones: The Meaning (Revelation 21:12-14)*

<sup>12</sup> It had a great and high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels; and names were written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> *There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west.*

<sup>14</sup> *And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.*

The description of holy city finds much similarity to Ezekiel's vision (chs 40-41), as well as the command for John to measure the heavenly Temple in Revelation 11:1-2. There are actually five twelves in these three verses. Twelve angels guard the twelve gates; as in Jesus' parable of the dragnet (Matthew 13:47-50), the angels do God's bidding in determining who may enter into God's kingdom. The twelve gates bear the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve foundation stones bear the names of the twelve apostles. The dividing wall between Jew and Gentile is broken down in Christ (Ephesians 2:11-22); here Old Covenant Israel and the New Covenant Church are shown to be one holy city of God. The gates provide entrance to people from the four points of the compass (v 13), and their ordering is the same as that in Ezekiel 42:16-19.

“Noteworthy is the observation in 21:14 that the apostles are part of the foundation, whereas the tribes are part of the gates in the wall built on the foundation. One might have expected the opposite portrayal since Israel preceded the church in redemptive history. But the reversal figuratively highlights the fact that fulfillment of Israel's promises has finally come in Christ, who, together with the apostolic witness to his fulfilling work, forms the foundation of the new temple, the church, which is the new Israel (so also Eph. 2:20-22). Specific reference to historical Israel in the OT is not in mind here. Rather, the apostles are portrayed as the foundation of the *new* Israel, which is the church. This is consistent with 7:4-8 and 7:9ff., where the tribes of Israel in the new age are interpreted to be none other than innumerable multitudes from the nations.”<sup>[152]</sup>

### *(3) John's Call: Measure the Holy City (Revelation 21:15-17)*

<sup>15</sup> *The one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city, and its gates and its wall.*

<sup>16</sup> *The city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, fifteen hundred miles; its length and width and height are equal.*

<sup>17</sup> *And he measured its wall, seventy-two yards, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements.*

Previously, John measured the Temple (Rev 11:1-2), here John is given a gold measuring rod to measure the entire city. The measurement in verse 16 is literally 12,000 stadia (about 1,400 miles). The city is a perfect cube: “its length and width and height are equal” (v 16). “The shape is the same as the Most Holy Place in the tabernacle and the temple, but now immensely magnified. Thus, the whole city is not only architecturally perfect, but has become the most intimate dwelling place of God (21:22-23; 22:4).”<sup>[153]</sup> The wall of the city is literally 144 cubits thick – or perhaps, high? (v 17). These numbers 12,000 cubed and 144 (12 squared) are obviously symbolic, and they denote the perfection and the security of the holy city of God.

### *(4) The Foundation Stones and Gates: The Materials (Revelation 21:18-21)*

<sup>18</sup> *The material of the wall was jasper; and the city was pure gold, like clear glass.*

<sup>19</sup> *The foundation stones of the city wall were adorned with every kind of precious stone. The first foundation stone was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, chalcedony; the fourth, emerald;*

<sup>20</sup> *the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolite; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, topaz; the tenth, chrysoptase; the eleventh, jacinth; the twelfth, amethyst.*

<sup>21</sup> *And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; each one of the gates was a single pearl. And the street of the city was pure gold, like transparent glass.*

In Revelation 21:12-14, we were given the meaning of the twelve foundation stones and the twelve gates; here, they are described. Though the twelve foundation stones are named for the apostles (21:14), they are each adorned with a precious stone that seems to find its corollary in the twelve stones of the high-priest's breastplate

which symbolized the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:17-21). “This unique, redemptive-historical position of the apostolic witness is underscored in that the twelve jewels are *not* applied to the twelve tribes, who now are portrayed as the gates, which represent the church, ultimately resting on the foundation (21:12-14) of the apostles.”<sup>[154]</sup> The gates of the city are said to be made of a single pearl (which is obviously symbolic, cf. Isaiah 54:11-12). Like the city itself (v 18), the streets are made of pure gold like transparent glass. There is no limit to the opulence of this holy city!

#### Revelation 21:22-27 (The Light of Righteousness in the New Jerusalem)

<sup>22</sup> *I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.*

<sup>23</sup> *And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp is the Lamb.*

<sup>24</sup> *The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.*

<sup>25</sup> *In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed;*

<sup>26</sup> *and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it;*

<sup>27</sup> *and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life.*

(21:22-23, 25) The imagery and prevailing symbol in this portion of the description of the holy city is ‘light.’ “The radiance of God’s majesty and glory, in all its fullness, fills the entire city. It is not limited to any particular place in the city. It manifests itself everywhere. No sanctuary is needed, for the fellowship of believers with their God is direct and immediate.”<sup>[155]</sup> As long as it is day, the gates of the holy city will never close, and since the glory of God illumines it and the lamp is the Lamb, there is no night there – thus, the gates of the city are never closed.

(21:24, 26) The kings and the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. This is in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 60:3-5), and speaks to the redeemed of the nations, not unbelieving Gentiles.

“‘Bringing glory’ into the city in vv 24 and 26 is spatial language, but it conveys a nonspatial notion. This is supported by recalling that the dimensions of the city in vv 15-17 are spatial though the meaning conveyed is nonspatial. Consequently, it would be incorrect to infer that the picture of people making a pilgrimage into the new Jerusalem refers to a literal pilgrimage from outer spaces into the city’s inner space, just as it is false to infer that the city covers 144,000 square stadia of earth, but not the whole earth.”<sup>[156]</sup>

(21:27) Verse 27 confirms our interpretation of the nations bringing splendor into the city as referring to the redeemed of the nations, not unbelieving Gentiles (or even the wealth and cultural works of worldly cultures). Nothing unclean, no idolaters will gain entry, only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life. This is of great assurance, especially when we remember that these names were written in this book of life “from the foundation of the world” (Revelation 13:8; 17:8).

#### Revelation 22:1-5 (The Water of Life in the New Jerusalem)

<sup>1</sup> *Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb,*

<sup>2</sup> *in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.*

<sup>3</sup> *There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;*

<sup>4</sup> *they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.*

<sup>5</sup> *And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.*

The imagery and prevailing symbol in this portion of the description of the holy city is 'water' even as it reiterates the all-encompassing illumination by the Lord God, Himself. A beautiful picture of the holy city emerges here in which a river of the water of life flows out from the throne of God and of the Lamb to give sustenance to the entire population. Strangely, yet obviously symbolically, the one tree of life stands on either side of this river of the water of life. Hendriksen comments, "The garden symbolizes supply in abundance. But man has been driven out of the garden. Ever since that day the city, as it were, has been crying for the garden and the garden for the city. Finally, here in the New Jerusalem, the garden is inside the city."<sup>1571</sup>

The presence of the river of the water of life and the tree of life means that the curse under which all humanity and creation has existed (Genesis 3:14-24) has been removed (Revelation 22:3a). Indeed, those from the nations who have believed the gospel have found healing in the leaves of the tree of life (Revelation 22:2b). God through the Lamb will rule, His bond-servants will serve Him (Revelation 22:3b). Here, 'service' (latreu,w (latreuo)) to God and the Lamb has in mind the priestly service of worship, as the other use of this word in the book of Revelation (7:15) makes clear.

All of these symbols (e.g. access to the river of the water of life and the tree of life, the removal of the curse, and the perfection of the restored relationship between God and His people) apply in principle to this present age, but are perfected and completely fulfilled in the new creation (Zechariah 14:5-11, esp. v. 11; John 7:37-39; Philippians 2:9-11; Matthew 28:18; Acts 2:36). In his hymn *Joy to the World*, Isaac Waats beautifully connects the beginning of the restoration of all things (the removal of the curse) with the first coming of Christ: "No more let sins and sorrows grow / Nor thorns infest the ground; / He comes to make His blessings flow / Far as the curse is found, / Far as the curse is found, / Far as, far as, the curse is found."

#### Revelation 22:6-21 (Epilogue: Concluding Exhortations)

Throughout this final section, it is difficult to get a sense of who is speaking at the various intervals. Below, I have tried to divide the passage according to the several dialogues or monologues, but it is very difficult to be precise or dogmatic in these divisions.

<sup>6</sup> *And he said to me, "These words are faithful and true"; and the Lord, the God of the spirits of the prophets, sent His angel to show to His bond-servants the things which must soon take place.*

<sup>7</sup> *"And behold, I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who heeds the words of the prophecy of this book."*

Verses 6-7 are a summary conclusion of the previous vision (22:1-22:5), as well as that of the whole book. In fact, these verses with the first three verses of the book, form an inclusio (or literary book-ends) which bracket the major visions of this book. Compare these verses with Revelation 1:1-3:

<sup>1</sup> The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show to His bond-servants, the things which must soon take place; and He sent and communicated *it* by His angel to His bond-servant John, <sup>2</sup> who testified to the word of God and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, *even* to all that he saw. <sup>3</sup> Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.

<sup>8</sup> *I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship at the feet of the angel who showed me these things.*

<sup>9</sup> *But he said to me, "Do not do that. I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book. Worship God."*

<sup>10</sup> *And he said to me, "Do not seal up the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is near.*

<sup>11</sup> *"Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy."*

(22:8-9) In a similar manner to Paul's giving emphatic, personal testimony to the contents of his letter to the Galatians (6:11-18), here John puts his personal seal on the recording of these visions in the book of Revelation.

For a second time, the Apostle John – upon hearing and seeing these things – attempts to worship the angel and messenger from God (Revelation 19:10; 22:8). Once again, he is rebuked by the angel with the same admonition: angels are fellow servants, worship God alone.

(22:10-11) In Revelation 10:4, John was commanded to “seal up” (or keep hidden) that which he heard from the seven peals of thunder. Here (Revelation 22:10), the angel commands John to not seal up the visions that he has recorded in this book. This could also refer to the fact that these visions and prophesies are “soon to take place” (Revelation 1:1). Verse 11 seems to encourage those who are sinning to keep on sinning, and those who are practicing righteousness to continue to practice righteousness. What could the angel mean? Leon Morris is helpful: “He probably means that the Lord’s coming will be so swift that there will be no time for change. As they are at that moment, so the Lord will find them. The words are clearly meant as an encouragement to believers. The evil continue to pursue their way. Well, let them. The Lord’s return is sure and soon.”<sup>[158]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *“Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to render to every man according to what he has done.”*

<sup>13</sup> *“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”*

<sup>14</sup> *Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city.*

<sup>15</sup> *Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.*

<sup>16</sup> *“I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things for the churches. I am the root and the descendant of David, the bright morning star.”*

In this section, Jesus seems to be the one speaking (22:12-13), and then John (22:14-15), and then Jesus again (22:16).

(vv 12-13) Jesus is now speaking. The promise of the speedy return of Christ (22:7) is repeated here (22:12). We have seen before how Christ will judge the living and the dead according to their deeds (20:12); the same standard of judgment is mentioned here. But, as we saw in chapter 20, good works are not the basis of one’s salvation, but they are the irrefutable evidence of it – and, these good works are also God’s gift to His saints (Ephesians 2:10). God has previously declared Himself to be the alpha and omega (Rev 1:8), here the same description is applied by Christ to Himself.

(vv 14-15) Verses 14-15 seems to be John’s commentary or interpretation of what he has seen in these visions, and how they point to the ultimate separation of the righteous from the wicked. Verse 14 is the seventh of seven beatitudes in the book of Revelation (1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7; 22:14). Those who wash their robes are those who have been cleansed by the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13-15). These, and these alone, have the right (John 1:12-13) to enter the city and gain access to the tree of life. Hypocrites and unregenerate men are outside – not allowed into the city – for they are dogs (cf. Philippians 3:2) and practitioners of sin (sorcerers, immoral persons, murderers, idolaters, lovers and practicers of lying).

(v 16) Again, Jesus speaks and describes Himself and His authority. Although all of Scripture makes much of the fact that Jesus is the descendent of David, Revelation is the only book in which He is referred to, or refers to Himself, as the root of David (Rev 5:5; 22:16). The emphasis is upon Jesus’ royal authority. Jesus is the morning star who arises in our hearts (2 Peter 1:19) and the gift of Himself to he who overcomes (Revelation 2:25-28). Here, Jesus describes Himself as the *bright* morning star which is in keeping with the imagery of light from the previous vision (Revelation 21:22-22:5).

<sup>17</sup> *The Spirit and the bride say, “Come.” And let the one who hears say, “Come.” And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.*



The Holy Spirit and the bride (the church) speak with one voice. “Spirit and bride always work together (cf. Rom. 8:16). They are constantly saying, ‘Be coming.’ This, be it noted, is a present imperative. It refers not only to the actual even, namely, the final coming of our Lord, but also the whole course of history that still precedes this event.”<sup>[159]</sup> Two exhortations seem to be in mind here. In the first half of the verse, the Spirit and the church call upon Christ to “come.” In the second half of the verse, they call upon the one who is both thirsty & willing to come and receive the free water of life (Isaiah 55:1-3). “Some interpreters have seen all the occurrences of ‘come’ as addressed to thirsty human beings. But the atmosphere of anticipating the Second Coming makes it more probable that the first two occurrences are addressed to Christ, in longing for his coming. The invitation to the thirsty is then a surprise twist...The invitation extends both to those who already trust in Christ and to those who are still in rebellion. Come while there is still time, before the Lord comes.”<sup>[160]</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book;*

<sup>19</sup> *and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.*

<sup>20</sup> *He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming quickly.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.*

<sup>21</sup> *The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen.*

(vv 18-19) The testimony of John is that the book of Revelation is prophecy, communication from God. Those who add to the book will reap the plagues of the book. Those who take away from the book will be barred from the tree of life and the holy city. “In Deut. 4:1-2 and 12:32 the same sort of language serves as a warning against deceptive teaching that idolatry was not inconsistent with faith in the God of Israel...Such false teaching amounts to ‘adding to’ God’s law. It is also tantamount to ‘taking away from’ God’s law, since it violates the positive laws against idolatry, consequently nullifying their validity...Therefore, ‘adding and taking away’ are not general disobedience to the divine word, but adherence to false teaching about the inscripturated word...The twofold warning of 22:18-19 is directed against those who foster or follow such seductive teaching.”<sup>[161]</sup> These plagues and punishments for tampering with the book of Revelation are in stark contrast to the blessing which is promised to those who read, hear, and heed the prophecies of this book (Revelation 1:3; 22:7).

(22:20-21) In keeping with the promise from Jesus that He is coming quickly, we pray, “Maranatha – O Lord, come!” (1 Corinthians 16:22) and “Your kingdom come. Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven” (Matthew 6:10).

## Conclusion

As we have been emphasizing throughout this study, rather than instill fear in believers (as many try to do through the study of Revelation), this book of prophecy is meant to instill confidence and hope in those who belong to Christ. The Apocalypse – the revelation of all things – is something for which the church ought to be praying, something for which the church ought to be longing. “The whole book of Revelation is meant to stir our longings and prayers for the full realization of God’s purposes, which will take place at the Second Coming. Revelation ends on this note (see 1 Cor. 16:22). Come, Lord Jesus!”<sup>[162]</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> William Hendriksen, *More than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1940; Commemorative Edition, 1982), 7.

<sup>[2]</sup> Richard Pratt, *He Gave Us Prophets* (Third Millennium Ministries, 2000), Lesson 1 in the video series.

<sup>[3]</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 11-13.

<sup>[4]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 18-20. [The appendix (pp 9-10) contains an example of how these four views interpret Revelation 13:1-10].

<sup>[5]</sup> William Hendriksen, 24-33.

<sup>[6]</sup> William Hendriksen, 7.

- [7] William Hendriksen, 22-50.
- [8] William Hendriksen, 16-21.
- [9] William Hendriksen, 34-36.
- [10] William Hendriksen, 35.
- [11] Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 18-20.
- [12] Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 29.
- [13] Hendriksen, William. *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*. William Hendriksen, 1940. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 56-57.
- [14] *Ibid.*, 57.
- [15] Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Sowers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 376.
- [16] Herman Hoeksema, *The Intermediate State* [pamphlet on-line] (Orthodox Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, 1958); available from [http://www.prc.org/pamphlets/pamphlet\\_81.html](http://www.prc.org/pamphlets/pamphlet_81.html); Internet.
- [17] Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, Tremper Longman III, ed., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Sowers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 349.
- [18] Both John Calvin (*Institutes*, II.16.8-12) and Zacharias Ursinus (*Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*) argue that for this phrase to mean ‘the place of the dead’ or death, would be redundant (restating what is said with the phrase ‘was buried’) and that it actually “signifies those extreme torments, pains, and anguish, which Christ suffered in his soul, such as the damned experience, partly in this, and partly in the life to come” (Ursinus). Thus, they seem to interpret ‘hell’ from this part of the Apostles’ Creed as figurative gehenna (Christ did not go to hell, but experienced its torments), while the WCF seems to interpret it as hades (Christ did not go to hell, but occupied death – the place of the dead). Personally, I believe that both interpretations are viable, as well as helpful.
- [19] Hendriksen, William, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (William Hendriksen, 1940. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 56-57.
- [20] Lewis, C.S., *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (C.S. Lewis, 1950. Reprint, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1970), 123.
- [21] *Ibid.*, 76.
- [22] Poythress, Vern, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing, 2000), 83-84.
- [23] Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, 65.
- [24] Poythress, Vern, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation*, 86.
- [25] Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, 72.
- [26] Jason J. Stellan, “The Letter to the Church in Sardis,” *Tabletalk* (May 2009): 19.
- [27] Hendriksen, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, 76.
- [28] Hendriksen, 84.
- [29] Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 89.
- [30] Morris, 90.
- [31] Hendriksen, 92-93.
- [32] Hendriksen, 89.
- [33] Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 114.
- [34] Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 101.
- [35] Morris, 106.
- [36] Morris, 109.
- [37] Hendriksen, 89.
- [38] Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 117-118.
- [39] Hendriksen, 110.
- [40] [http://www.watchword.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=48&Itemid=48](http://www.watchword.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=48&Itemid=48)
- [41] Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 121.
- [42] Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 119.
- [43] Hendriksen, 117.
- [44] Morris, 118.
- [45] Hendriksen, 118.
- [46] Hendriksen, 118.
- [47] Morris, 121.
- [48] Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 119.
- [49] “The most diverse identifications of the star-angel are given. He might be Nero (Weymouth), a fallen angel (Simcox, Love), the ‘angel of the abyss’ (Orr), an evil spirit (Kiddle), even Satan himself (Hendriksen, Hoeksema, Atkinson; sweet thinks ‘possibly



Satan'). On the other hand he is seen as the Word of God (Torrance), an angel, possibly Uriel (Charles), our Lord himself (Berkeley)." Morris, 124.

<sup>[50]</sup> Torrance, Thomas F., *Apocalypse Today* (James Clarke & Co., 1961), 75.

<sup>[51]</sup> Hendriksen, 122.

<sup>[52]</sup> "two hundred million" – literally, "double myriad myriad" (δισμυριάδες μυριάδων) where a myriad equals 10,000, thus: 20,000 times 10,000 (in other words, a really big number which John could not count, but had to be told to him (Rev. 9:16b)).

<sup>[53]</sup> Morris, 130.

<sup>[54]</sup> Hendriksen, 122.

<sup>[55]</sup> Hendriksen, 124.

<sup>[56]</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 125-126.

<sup>[57]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 138-139.

<sup>[58]</sup> Morris, 146.

<sup>[59]</sup> Hendriksen, 131.

<sup>[60]</sup> Hendriksen, 132.

<sup>[61]</sup> Torrance, Thomas F., *Apocalypse Today* (James Clarke & Co., 1961), 85-86.

<sup>[62]</sup> Morris, 149.

<sup>[63]</sup> The entirety of this excursus (minus the diagram) is directly quoted from Hendriksen's *More Than Conquerors*, 143-144.

<sup>[64]</sup> Hendriksen, 134.

<sup>[65]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 150-181.

<sup>[66]</sup> Poythress, 135.

<sup>[67]</sup> David Guzik, "The Woman, the Child, and the Dragon," (online: <http://www.enduringword.com/commentaries/6612.htm>).

<sup>[68]</sup> Leon Morris, 153.

<sup>[69]</sup> Leon Morris, 157.

<sup>[70]</sup> Leon Morris, 158.

<sup>[71]</sup> Hendriksen, 144.

<sup>[72]</sup> Poythress, 142.

<sup>[73]</sup> Morris, 165.

<sup>[74]</sup> Poythress, 143.

<sup>[75]</sup> Hendriksen, 148.

<sup>[76]</sup> Morris, 169.

<sup>[77]</sup> Hendriksen, 151.

<sup>[78]</sup> Hendriksen 151.

<sup>[79]</sup> Postman, Neil, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), *Forward*, vii-viii.

<sup>[80]</sup> Poythress, 146-147. Poythress' book *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* is available in its entirety to be read online: <http://www.frame-poythress.org/ebooks/the-returning-king/>.

<sup>[81]</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 148.

<sup>[82]</sup> Morris, 174-175.

<sup>[83]</sup> Hendriksen, 167.

<sup>[84]</sup> Morris, 47.

<sup>[85]</sup> Hendriksen, 156.

<sup>[86]</sup> Poythress, 153-154. Poythress' book *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* is available in its entirety to be read online: <http://www.frame-poythress.org/ebooks/the-returning-king/>.

<sup>[87]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 185.

<sup>[88]</sup> Hendriksen, 161.

<sup>[89]</sup> Morris, 190.

<sup>[90]</sup> Beale, G.K., *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 827.

<sup>[91]</sup> Poythress, 157.

<sup>[92]</sup> Beale, 828.

<sup>[93]</sup> Beale, 845.

<sup>[94]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 196.

<sup>[95]</sup> Hendriksen, 168.

<sup>[96]</sup> Poythress, 166. Poythress' book *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* is available in its entirety to be read online: <http://www.frame-poythress.org/ebooks/the-returning-king/>.

<sup>[97]</sup> C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1946), 75.

- <sup>[98]</sup> Beale, G.K., *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 888.
- <sup>[99]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 207-208.
- <sup>[100]</sup> Hendriksen, William, *More Than Conquerors: An Interpretation of the Book of Revelation* (William Hendriksen, 1940. Reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1997), 174.
- <sup>[101]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 209-210.
- <sup>[102]</sup> Hendriksen, 174.
- <sup>[103]</sup> Poythress, 169. Poythress' book *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* is available in its entirety to be read online: <http://www.frame-poythress.org/ebooks/the-returning-king/>.
- <sup>[104]</sup> Morris, 214.
- <sup>[105]</sup> Morris, 217.
- <sup>[106]</sup> William Greenhill, *Stop Loving the World* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 29. [Originally titled "Being against the Love of the World" and published as an appended sermon to *The Sound Hearted Christian* (London, 1670).]
- <sup>[107]</sup> Of the many resources available concerning the Reformed doctrine of 'the spirituality of the church,' the following two articles are excellent introductions: (1) *The Spirituality of the Church* by D.G. Hart and John Muether, published in *Ordained Servant* (vol. 7, no. 3, July 1998), pp 64-66 [available online here: <http://www.opc.org/OS/html/V7/3d.html>]; (2) *Christianity, Culture, & Common Grace* by Ken Myers [available online here: <http://storage.cloversites.com/redeemerpresbyterianchurch3/documents/ComGrace.pdf>].
- <sup>[108]</sup> Marva Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), 49.
- <sup>[109]</sup> Greenhill, 73.
- <sup>[110]</sup> Hoekema, Anthony, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 225.
- <sup>[111]</sup> Hendriksen, 179-180.
- <sup>[112]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 221.
- <sup>[113]</sup> G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 948.
- <sup>[114]</sup> Morris, 222.
- <sup>[115]</sup> *Ibid.*, 224.
- <sup>[116]</sup> This is the view of Beale (957), Poythress (174-175), and Hendriksen (182).
- <sup>[117]</sup> Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 171.
- <sup>[118]</sup> Morris, 226.
- <sup>[119]</sup> Hendriksen, 183. [Personal note: I can't help but be reminded of how in the movie, *The Matrix* (1999), Neo asks Morpheus, "What are you trying to tell me? That I can dodge bullets?" To which Morpheus responds, "No, Neo. I'm trying to tell you that when you're ready, you won't have to."]
- <sup>[120]</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 182.
- <sup>[121]</sup> Hendriksen, 183.
- <sup>[122]</sup> For a basic definition and description of this reciprocity see "Appendix A: Perspectivalism" in John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1987), 89-90.
- <sup>[123]</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *The Millennial Maze: Sorting Out Evangelical Options* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 25.
- <sup>[124]</sup> Cornelis P. Venema, "The Four Main Millennial Views," in *The Last Days: A Christian View of History*, eds. Richard D. Phillips and Gabriel N. E. Fluhrer (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2011), 107-123. Richard Gaffin also notes in his chapter "Theonomy and Eschatology" (published in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990) that according to B.B. Warfield, "a-millennialism, though not known in those days under that name, is the historic Protestant view, as expressed in the creeds of the Reformation period including the Westminster Standards."
- <sup>[125]</sup> Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 175.
- <sup>[126]</sup> Venema, 120.
- <sup>[127]</sup> Grenz, 26.
- <sup>[128]</sup> Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 227.
- <sup>[129]</sup> Grenz, 26.
- <sup>[130]</sup> Grenz, 187. This world view analysis is based upon Grenz's discussion on pages 184-187.
- <sup>[131]</sup> Grenz, 184.
- <sup>[132]</sup> This analysis of the views of the kingdom of God is based upon Hoekema's discussion on pages 164-193.
- <sup>[133]</sup> In this discussion, it is helpful to note that the Westminster Confession of Faith equates the visible church with 'the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ,' - the manifestation of the kingdom of God on earth (WCF 25:2). This is one of the main reasons that dispensational premillennialism is incompatible with Reformed theology.
- <sup>[134]</sup> Hendriksen, 184-185.

- [\[135\]](#) For more thorough yet very readable explanation of the Biblical support for the amillennial position, see: David J. Engelsma, *A Defense of (Reformed) Amillennialism*. Available online at: <http://www.pcca.org/articles/amillennialism.html>.
- [\[136\]](#) See the lesson from Revelation, chapters 10-11 for a more detailed discussion of time designations in the book of Revelation, or Hendriksen's *More Than Conquerors*, pp 143-144.
- [\[137\]](#) Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 178.
- [\[138\]](#) Morris, 228-229.
- [\[139\]](#) Poythress, 180.
- [\[140\]](#) Morris, 230.
- [\[141\]](#) Hendriksen, 190.
- [\[142\]](#) Cornelis P. Venema, *The Promise of the Future* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000), 334.
- [\[143\]](#) Beale, 1028-1029.
- [\[144\]](#) Hendriksen, 196.
- [\[145\]](#) Morris, 234.
- [\[146\]](#) Hendriksen, 197.
- [\[147\]](#) G.K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 1040.
- [\[148\]](#) Vern S. Poythress, *The Returning King: A Guide to the Book of Revelation* (Phillipsburg: P&R Publishing Company, 2000), 185.
- [\[149\]](#) Leon Morris, *The Book of Revelation: an introduction and commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 237.
- [\[150\]](#) Anthony A. Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), 285.
- [\[151\]](#) Poythress, 187.
- [\[152\]](#) Beale, 1070.
- [\[153\]](#) Poythress, 191.
- [\[154\]](#) Beale, 1080-1081.
- [\[155\]](#) Hendriksen, 203.
- [\[156\]](#) Beale, 1098-1099.
- [\[157\]](#)<sup>[157]</sup> Hendriksen, 206.
- [\[158\]](#) Morris, 252.
- [\[159\]](#) Hendriksen, 209.
- [\[160\]](#) Poythress, 197.
- [\[161\]](#) Beale, 1151.
- [\[162\]](#) Poythress, 198.