

# The Book of Revelation



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# The Revelation

## Introduction

“The Revelation of Jesus Christ which God gave Him to show His servants...” Thus begins one of the most exciting and challenging books in the Bible. In the book, addressed to churches [1:4; 22:16] we are confronted with strange symbols and figures, odd beasts and human personages, and with natural phenomena, like winds and seas. Even numbers take on new meanings in this book. J.B. Phillips said that he found the attempt to translate this book “thrilling.” I think we’ll find our attempt to understand and apply it equally so.

### Scope and Purpose

Our primary aim in this study is to learn how we can enjoy victory in Jesus, no matter what circumstances or trials may challenge us. This is the primary message of the book of Revelation, regardless of one’s view of the date of writing of the book. If we are convinced that the war is on and it is our job to fight the battles Satan is still waging, we will improve our perspective and be more effective in our efforts to overcome temptations and trials and to teach the gospel to the lost.

### The Author

While the book names “John” [1:1] as the author, the particular John is not identified. One commentator (in the Anchor Bible Series) has speculated that the book refers to John the Baptist. Her theory has not been taken seriously by anyone else, as far as I know. The consensus is that the author is the apostle John and the earliest tradition supports the view. Justin Martyr (100-165 AD), Irenaeus (130-200 AD), Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) and Tertullian (160-230 AD) are among those who believe the apostle wrote the book.

### Recipients

From 1:4, 11, and chapters 2-3, we know that the book was to be sent to the “seven churches in Asia.” Since there were at least ten churches in Asia Minor, it is likely that the language in Revelation is intended for all churches in all ages. The messages to the churches in chapters 2-3, while specifically applicable to them, seem to be timeless, too.

### Date

While everyone agrees that the book was written in an atmosphere of persecution during the first century, there is less certainty about who the Roman emperor was at the time and, therefore, there is some doubt about when the book was written. Some believe it written during the reign of Nero, perhaps as a prophecy of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. Others suppose it written during Domitian’s reign (AD 81-96), as a prophecy of and response to a widespread, nationally sponsored persecution of Christians. Both views have their adherents. The following is a summary of the views:

**The Reign of Nero (AD 54-68) and the Destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70:** (1) 11:1-2

refers to the "temple" and some believe it refers to the literal temple in Jerusalem. However, 11:8 indicates the city has already fallen so it is unclear how this could be prediction the destruction of the temple. (2) Some take "666" (13:18) as a cryptic reference to Nero. When "Nero(n) Caesar" is transcribed in Hebrew letters, the numerical value equals 666. But God has not instructed us to transcribe letters into numbers; it is an arbitrary practice and hardly amounts to valid reason to date the book during Nero's reign. (3) The "seven heads" of the beast (17:10-11) refer to Roman kings, if taken literally. The "five who have fallen" would probably be the Emperors from Augustus (27 BC -14 AD) to Nero, since Augustus was the first true emperor (not Julius) and was ruling at the time of Christ's birth. But what does the "one who is" refer to? Hard to tell. Robert Mounce comments, "it is unwise to base a literal computation on what appears to be a highly symbolic figure."

**Domitian Persecution (AD 81-96):** While some doubt has been cast on the severity and extent of a "Domitian Persecution," most scholars are still persuaded that the Revelation should be dated during Domitian's reign. In the second century, Irenaeus is quoted as saying, "For it (the Apocalypse) was seen, not long ago, but almost in our generation, near the end of Domitian's reign." Other external evidence is cited, including Origen and Clement of Rome (a contemporary of Domitian), who spoke of "the sudden and repeated calamities and adversities that have befallen us."

Other Considerations supporting a later than AD 70 date: (1) The spiritual decline at Ephesus, Laodicea and Sardis would probably have taken some time to develop; (2) the existence of a distinct heretical sect known as the Nicolaitans, not mentioned in the apostolic epistles; (3) the absence of any reference to the work of Paul in Asia Minor, unlikely if the book was written during his time; (4) the church at Smyrna is not known to have existed prior to AD 60-64; (5) Revelation 3:17 describes the church at Laodicea as "rich" although the city had been almost completely destroyed by an earthquake in AD 60-61 and was not rebuilt until later; (6) there are indications in the book itself that persecution is becoming intense in provinces outside Rome (see 1:9; 2:10, 13; 3:10; 6:19) and it is commonly believed that the persecution prosecuted by Nero was confined to the city of Rome; (7) there is also a belief that the book reflects a development in emperor worship which was not reached at an earlier date.

Below, I summarize a few of the other reasons that I believe John wrote the book in AD 90-100 and that it refers to the downfall of Rome and therefore the victory of Christianity. Still, there are some good arguments on the other side. Some parts of some chapters seem to suggest that John was seeing a vision concerning the end of Jerusalem and the temple (and see Rev. 11:8). Other terms seem to indicate that John is seeing a vision of the church in all its glory, but even if true, that doesn't settle the date question.

Taking the book as a whole, I cannot at this time accept the hypothesis that Jerusalem is the main focus. Here's why:

## Constantine or Theodosius?

The common view is that Constantine is responsible for the declaration of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine issued an Edict of Tolerance that allowed the practice of Christianity and stopped persecutions in 313 AD but did not name it as the official religion of the Roman Empire. That distinction belongs to the Roman Emperor Theodosius. Shortly after his baptism in 380, he issued an edict that stated his belief in Christ and the "Trinity" (the triune nature of the godhead). He then entered Constantinople and gave the Arian bishop there the choice of proclaiming his belief in the Trinity or going into exile. To Theodosius' credit he allowed him to leave rather than burning him at the stake. After this, he called 150 bishops to a church council in Constantinople in 381 AD and they adopted the Trinity overwhelmingly. Thus, Christianity became the state religion of the eastern portion of the Roman Empire in 380, but not in the West.

In 388, Theodosius defeated Magnus Maximus of the western empire and became emperor of the entire Roman Empire. He made a triumphal entry into Rome with his troops and exiled one of the leading priests of Jupiter. He then asked the Roman Senate "whether the worship of Jupiter or that of Christ should be the religion of the Romans." Constantine may have seen the cross in the sky, but with Theodosius and his troops in town, the senators clearly saw the handwriting on the wall. Christianity thus officially became the state religion of the Roman Empire in 388 by a vote of the Roman Senate.

A. From the time of Nero (AD 64), Rome persecuted Christians to one degree or another. The reasons were many, but centered on the refusal of Christians to “confess” the emperor as a god (the failure to confess was regarded as *contumacia*, contempt of court — actually contempt of Caesar — which was punishable by death). There were also several misconceptions and false accusations leveled at Christians. They were accused of forming private associations, a practice that frightened the paranoid emperors in the first and second centuries. Trajan wouldn’t even allow fire brigades to be formed, fearing they would unite for seditious purposes. They were also accused of being cannibalistic because they “ate the body and drunk the blood.” Their agape feasts were considered incestuous and they were socially condemned because they remained aloof from the typical practices of their pagan neighbors. Many have argued that there is no strong evidence (as previously believed) to support the idea that Domitian (AD 81-96) was responsible for widespread persecution. We do know, however, that by the time of Trajan (98-117), the need to “deal with” Christians firmly was assumed. A letter from Pliny, who was proconsul in Bythynia and Pontus in 111-112, to the emperor Trajan, explicitly makes this point. He begins his letter with the following statement:

I have never taken part in trials (*cognitiones*) of Christians; consequently I do not know the precedents regarding the question of punishment or the nature of the inquisition. I have been in no little doubt whether some discrimination is made with regard to age. . . whether renunciation wins indulgence or it is of no avail to have abandoned Christianity if one has once been a Christian; whether the profession of the name is to be punished in itself, even if unaccompanied by disgraceful practices, or only the disgraceful practices commonly associated with the name.

He goes on to describe how he would ask the accused if he was a Christian and if they said “Yes” he would ask them a second and third time, with a warning; if they persisted, “I ordered them to be led off to execution.” No mere proconsul would take it upon himself to extinguish a group of people without some policy being firmly in place. The questions of Pliny had to do with procedure, not policy. Trajan answers him by telling him that he had followed correct procedure in investigation but that no set form of dealing with the cases could be established. Part of the reason for this concern on the part of emperors had to do with protecting pagan worshippers — they were not

concerned with the safety of Christians (Documents of the Christian Church, Second Ed., ed. Henry Bettenson, Oxford University Press, 1963).

So, the extent to which Domitian persecuted is not totally relevant. We know persecution was practiced during his time and the time of emperors following him. The reason primarily had to do with the assumed deity of the emperor — Christ was a challenge and devotion to Him was high treason toward the empire. An “atmosphere” of persecution permeates the Revelation.

B. If Revelation is not discussing, in its historical context, the downfall of Rome, then it seems something significant is missing from the biblical record. Daniel clearly prophesied about the downfall of Rome and one would expect the New Testament to speak of it. Note what Daniel says in chapter 7 of his book:

Thus he said: “The fourth beast will be a fourth kingdom on the earth, which will be different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth and tread it down and crush it. As for the ten horns, out of this kingdom ten kings will arise; and another will arise after them, and he will be different from the previous ones and will subdue three kings. He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One, and he will intend to make alterations in times and in law; and they will be given into his hand for a time, times, and half a time. But the court will sit for judgment, and his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever. Then the sovereignty, the dominion and the greatness of all the kingdoms under the whole heaven will be given to the people of the saints of the Highest One; His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all the dominions will serve and obey Him.” (7:23-27)

If Revelation is not about Rome, then there is nothing in the New Testament that speaks directly to this prophecy. Yet it seems the Bible always completes the circle and leaves nothing unresolved. Daniel speaks of a kingdom (the fourth beast of 7:7) that would persecute the saints. This kingdom was to be destroyed and the kingdom of God would continue forever (7:14, 18, 27). Revelation seems to complete the circle.

C. Do Rev. 1:1, 3 and 22:6, 10, where we are told that these things must “shortly come to pass” or that the time “is near” or “at hand” require a fulfillment within just a few years? Time statements like these are relative. The only way we can determine the meaning is to compare them with similar uses in the Bible. We are all familiar with

the use of “at hand” by John the Baptist and Jesus, referring to the Kingdom of Heaven (Mt. 3:2; 4:17). We usually think of the kingdom as the church, so we immediately think of three years or so until the kingdom came. Yet we are also aware that, in one sense, the kingdom was already present. After all, the *King* was! In Mt. 6:33, Jesus tells His disciples to seek (present tense) the kingdom; in Mk 12:34, Jesus answered a scribe, telling him he “was not far from the kingdom”; in Lk. 17:21, Jesus said the kingdom is “within you” or “in your midst,” again, present tense. “Kingdom” refers, especially in these passages, to the “reign of God.” The point is that the term “at hand” can mean more than one thing, depending upon the context.

In the Old Testament, “at hand” or “is near” refers to periods anywhere from 220-plus years to immediately (see Ezek. 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1; 3:14; Zeph. 1:7, 14 [about 20 years]; Isa. 13:6; Jer 48:16). Is there any limitation on the number of years? Yes, there is. In Dan. 8:26, God tells Daniel to “seal up the vision, for it refers to *many days* in the future,” a period of about 400 years. In Revelation 22:10, John is told not to seal the book, because “the time is at hand.” The term “at hand,” then, could refer to a period somewhere between immediately (some scholars say that it can refer even to past events) and maybe two or three hundred years into the future, but probably no more than that. One thing for sure: “at hand” doesn’t mean 2,000 years as dispensationalists teach.

The term “at hand” often refers to things that are starting to occur already, even if the full realization of the prophecy comes later. It means that something (the “thing” described) is imminent. In Revelation, persecution, spiritual victory and the judgment on Rome were all “at hand.”

D. Historically, Rome’s most severe troubles began after the reign of Marcus Aurelius (180 AD). Even before that, from 164-180, there was an epidemic of the black plague that wiped out large numbers of people, forcing Aurelius to use slaves, gladiators, brigands and barbarians in his army. This problem became more severe when Rome’s enemies began to exert pressure on nearly every frontier. In 180, Scotland defeated the proud Roman army, which was forced to retreat. Meanwhile, emperors were being assassinated regularly, only a few dying natural deaths in those years. Civil war broke out after the assassination of Aurelius’ son and emperor, Commodus. Dio Cassius, a Roman historian, said that after the death of Marcus Aurelius, Rome declined “from a

kingdom of gold to one of iron and dust.”

By 200 AD inflation in excess of 25% was causing Rome to take extreme economic measures. They began to exact high taxes, which affected mostly the middle and upper class. The empire even began to sell palace furniture to raise money and conscripted the rich to work without pay. They were hardly in a position to purchase the luxurious goods for which they were famous (see chapter 18). The period from 180 to 235 was one of internal anarchy and foreign invasion. Rome was at the point of collapse, but got a reprieve under a couple of soldier emperors (Gothicus: 268-270 and Aurelian: 270-275). Still, they were far away from the golden days of the *pax Romana* (the “peace of Rome”) of Augustus (27 BC–14 AD).

Internal troubles continued, but external pressure reached massive proportions by the beginning of the third century. The Parthians raided Roman provinces in the East from 224-260, eventually taking Emperor Valerian prisoner. He died in captivity. In the West and North, German barbarians raided Roman provinces. The Germans lacked an organized army, but conducted guerilla warfare, eventually taking over the Balkan provinces. When Rome put their resources there, other German warriors attacked the areas that had been deserted. During this time, Rome neglected its roads and harbors and trade fell off drastically (cf. Revelation 18). By 311 in the East and 313 in the West, Rome had totally capitulated to Christianity, or at least a form of it. There was no longer a national policy of persecution.

Even without considering Rome’s troubles before Aurelius’ death, the events “at hand” were within 80 or 90 years of John’s time, but the storms were brewing over Rome even as he wrote. The judgment of God on Rome (and similarly on the “world principle”) was already at work.

The message of the book, which should not be lost in disagreement about the date, is that Christians are to be comforted in their struggle against the forces of evil, as long as they remain “faithful until death” (3:10). Revelation 2-3 repeatedly refers to these saints as those “who overcome.” They can confidently expect to reach heaven and no earthly tribulation can strip that hope away.

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# Interpreting Revelation

Nearly all interpreters take one of four approaches in seeking to interpret Revelation:

**Preterist (or Contemporary-Historical):** All of the book is fulfilled in the days of the Roman Empire and is only of literary/historical interest to us today. The main objection to this view is that the book has no real, continuing message for us today.

**Continuous-Historical:** A forecast, in symbols, of the history of the church. This is the most popular theory from the Reformation (16th century) to the present. Objections: little meaning for the original recipients and the use of variant, subjective timetables.

**Futurist:** All of the book is yet future, starting with chapter 4, dealing with events “just prior to Christ’s second coming.” This is the most popular view today among “Premillennialists” and/or “Dispensationists.” Objections: inconsistent with 1:1 and 22:10; it is literalism to the extreme, except when impossible, creating an arbitrary interpretative scheme; materialistic; egocentric – it assumes modern America is the target for Revelation; no meaning for original recipients.

**Historical Background:** A combination (“eclectic”) method. Guides for interpretation: Written first in John’s day, so there is a need to understand the historical background; it is written in symbolic or figurative language; uses Old Testament terminology with a New Testament meaning (familiarity with the Old Testament will be a significant aid to the comprehension of the book); instead of pressing every detail into a literal message, we see visions as a whole – more like a movie than a book; addressed chiefly to the imagination. This is the method that will be followed throughout this study.

# Bibliography and Abbreviations

<b>Abbr</b>	<b>Document</b>
ASV	The American Standard Version
Bauer	Walter Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, rev. and aug. by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from the 5th ed. (1979)
Caird	G. B. Caird The Revelation of St. John the Divine, Harper's New Testament Commentaries, Harper & Row, San Francisco, 1966
ESV	English Standard Version
Hailey	Homer Hailey, Revelation, An Introduction and Commentary, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI. 1979
WmH	William Hendrickson, More than Conquerors, Baker, Grand Rapids, MI, 1944
JB	The Jerusalem Bible
Kittel	The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, 10 vols. (1964-76)
Kubo	Sakae Kubo: A Reader's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (1975)
McG	Jim McGuiggan, The Book of Revelation, Montex, Lubbock TX, 1976
Metzger	Bruce M. Metzger: A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament (1971)
Moffat	James Moffat, The Revelation of St. John the Divine, in the Expositor's Greek Testament, Volume V, Eerdmans, 1951
Morris	Leon Morris, Revelation, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, Reprinted 1983
Mounce	Robert H. Mounce The Book of Revelation, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, MI, 1977
NASB	New American Standard Bible (1995 Update)
NBD	The New Bible Dictionary, J. D. Douglas, et al, eds., 2nd Ed. (1982)
NIDNT	The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, ed. Colin Brown, 3 vols.
NIV	New International Version
TWBB	A Theological Word Book of the Bible, Alan Richardson, ed. (1958)

## Other Abbreviations

AD	anno domini – "in the year of our Lord"
BC	before Christ (before the Christian age)
Cf.	compare, confer
f., ff.	follow, following (where f., read next verse; where ff., read through paragraph)

# Outline of Revelation

(Adapted from Robert H. Mounce, Revelation)

Prologue (1:1-20)

Letters to the Seven Churches (2:1–3:22)

Adoration in the Court of Heaven (4:1–5:14)

The Seven Seals (6:1–8:5)

The Seven Trumpets (8:6–11:19)

Interlude: Visions of the Prophetic Role (10:1–11:14)

Seventh Trumpet: (11:15-19)

Conflict Between the Church and the Powers of Evil (12:1–14:5)

Interlude: Visions of Final Judgment (14:6–20)

The Seven Last Plagues (15:1–16:21)

The Fall of Babylon (17:1–18:24)

The Final Victory (19:1–20:15)

The New Heaven and the New Earth (21:1–22:5)

Epilogue (22:6-21)

## Interpreting Figurative Language

Excerpt from D.R. Dungan, Hermeneutics, pp. 195- 225

### SEC. 51. HOW CAN WE KNOW FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE?

Rule 1. The sense of the context will indicate it. Rule 2. When the literal meaning of a word or sentence involves an impossibility (Jer. 1:18); Mt. 8:22; 26:26-28; Rev. 6:13). Rule 3. If the literal makes a contradiction with another passage. Rule 4. When the Scriptures are made to demand that which is wrong (Mt. 5:29-30). Rule 5. When it is said to be figurative (Jn. 2:18-20; 7:37-39; Gal. 4:24). Rule 6. When the definite is put for the indefinite number (Lk. 4:19). Rule 7. When it is said in mockery (1 Kings 18:27). Rule 8. By the use of common sense (Mt. 20:22-23).

### SEC. 52. RULES FOR THE INTERPRETATION OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE.

Rule 1. Let the author give his own interpretation (Jn. 2:19-22; Mt. 13:18-23). Rule 2. Should agree with general and special scope (Psa. 19:7 ; Mt. 18:20; Jn. 14-16 ). Rule 3. Compare the figurative with literal accounts of the same things (Isa. 44:3; Acts 2:17, 38). Rule 4. By the resemblance of things compared (Mt. 23:27-28). Rule 5. By the use of the facts of history. Rule 6. Any inspired interpretation or application of the language (Isa. 6:9-10 applied to Christ in Mt. 13:14-15; cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-8). Rule 7. We must be careful not to demand too many points of analogy. Rule 8. Figures are not always used with the same meaning. Rule 9. Parables may explain parables. Rule 10. The type and the antitype are frequently both in view at the same time (Hb. 4:1-10; 1 Pet. 3:16-21).



# Special Study

## Christ in Revelation

### The Seven-Fold Ministry of Christ [1:5-7]

THE FAITHFUL WITNESS [Ps. 89:37] Cf. Jn. 18:37-38. Christ bears witness to the truth.

THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD [Psa. 89:27] Cf. Col. 1:18]. Christ is the risen Lord.

RULER OF THE KINGS OF THE EARTH. Jesus exercises dominion over earthly rulers as Yahweh did in Old Testament times; Mt. 28:18 – All authority has been given to Him in earth and heaven

HE WASHED US FROM OUR SINS (His Redemptive Work). The blood of Christ is the source of our redemption (Titus 2:13, 14; Hb. 9:14)

HE MADE US TO BE A KINGDOM AND PRIESTS [Dan. 7:13, 14] Cf. Rev. 5:9, 10.

TO HIM BE GLORY AND DOMINION FOR EVER AND EVER. Cf. Phil. 2:9-11.

HE IS COMING WITH THE CLOUDS. He is coming in judgment (cf. I Thess. 4:13-17). Not restricted to final judgment (Isa. 19:1; Mt. 24:30; 25:31ff.)

### Christ in the Midst of the Lampstands [1:10-20]

CLOTHED WITH A GARMENT [Dan. 10:5]. Kingly, priestly garments.

WHITE HEAD AND HAIR [Dan. 7:9]. His eternal dominion

EYES AS FLAMING FIRE. The penetrating gaze of Christ toward churches.

FEET LIKE FINE, BURNISHED BRASS [Dan. 10:6; Ezek. 1:7]. His power, the ability to trample His foes.

VOICE AS THE SOUND OF MANY WATERS [Ezek. 1:24; 43:2]. His word will judge (Jn. 12:48); emphasizes His strength and power.

SEVEN STARS IN HIS RIGHT HAND [1:20]. The Angels: Total control in Christ.

SHARP TWO-EDGED SWORD [Isa. 49:2] 19:15. Judgment.

COUNTENANCE LIKE THE SUN. “I am the Light of the world” (Jn. 8:12)

# 1 Christ and the Seven Churches

## Chapters 1-3

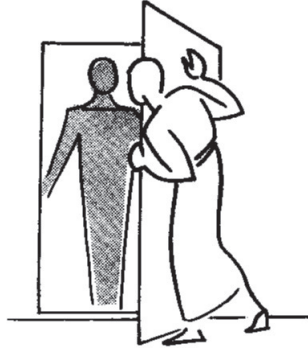
The book of Revelation is a book written to several churches in Asia Minor. These were real churches, with real people who had real problems and sinned real sins. Most of the churches Jesus addresses are failing at some level.

They need to hear His admonition and repent of those things that are amiss. But most of the churches were also commended for doing some things well. The message is to keep doing those things.

These are messages to the living about how to live a life that overcomes. They are encouraged and warned to not allow anything to come between them and heaven. Jesus said it is better to go into heaven maimed than for the whole man to go into hell (see Mt. 5:29-30).

The message is made even more impressive, and the demand for repentance more urgent, as we consider the opening chapter and the picture of Christ we find there. John was so impressed by the vision, that it caused him to “fall at His feet as a dead man” (1:17). As we examine our life in light of the demands of the Judge, what do we see? Are we absolutely determined to do what it takes to be with Christ? What is our response to Him? These are “bottom-line” questions, and our answers are critical.

It has been noted that there were more than seven churches in Asia. Because of that, some argue that the things that are said in chapters 2-3 are more symbolical than literal, that they refer to the problems of churches down through time, not necessarily to these specific churches. There is symbolic value here, but these were real churches with problems. As we examine the concerns of



Jesus with regard to these seven churches, we are impressed with how much these first-century churches have in common with modern ones. It just illustrates the maxim that people don't change very much. The people who made up the churches of first century Asia were very much like you and me.

Remember that churches are collections of individuals. Therefore, the errors of individuals become the errors of churches. Churches don't go to heaven or hell - individuals do. Even so, our alliances are important and will affect our final destination. We need to be sure to take these warnings seriously, both as individuals and in connection with the local church of which we are a member.

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### Outline: 1:1 –3:22

- 1:1-3: Introduction & Blessing
- 1:4-9: Salutation
- 1:10-20: Description of the Vision on Patmos
- 2:1-3:22: Letters to the Churches
  - 2:1-7: Ephesus - Lost Love
  - 2:8-11: Smyrna - Suffering (Faith)
  - 2:12-17: Pergamos - Doctrine
  - 2:18-29: Thyatira - Immorality
  - 3:1-6: Sardis - Deadness
  - 3:7-13: Philadelphia - Endurance (Faith)
  - 3:14-22: Laodicea - Independence

# Background

## The Seven Churches of Asia

The seven churches to which Christ appeared each had its own personality and was facing its own set of problems. It may be helpful to know what kinds of circumstances and challenges the individuals in these particular churches were up against. There is a fascinating connection between the message to the church and the characteristics of the cities in which they existed.

**The Church at Ephesus:** Apparently the church had grown strong in defending doctrine but weak in love of the brethren. They had forgotten the importance of doing everything in love (I Cor 13) and are charged with leaving “their first love.” Stated another way, they didn’t love like they used to. Ephesus had a population of about 250,000 and was the most important city in Asia. You could find many temples in the city – to Claudius, Hadrian and Severus; to the goddess Diana (Artemis) and others. Paul had spent three years there (Acts 20:31), establishing the church in 52 AD, and both Timothy and John had spent time there. But because Ephesus was so centrally located and was a popular trade route, the church was susceptible to itinerant frauds and many false apostles made their way there. Paul warned about them in Acts 20 and in his letters to Timothy. It may be this influence that caused the church to slip in their love of the brethren as they focused more on “ravenous wolves.”

**The Church at Smyrna:** Presently Izmir, in Turkey. The city had a population of around 200,000 and had a special relationship with Rome to which she owed strong allegiance. It was famous for its beauty and for its magnificent buildings. A famous thoroughfare there was called “The Street of Gold.” There was a large Jewish population that was hostile to Christians and had martyred Polycarp there, probably around 155 AD. While Ephesus had its “false apostles,” Smyrna had its “false Jews.” The church was probably very poor (“poverty,” v. 9), but spiritually it was very rich. Like Philadelphia, the Lord found no cause to criticize Smyrna.

**The Church at Pergamos** (or “Pergammum”): Pergamos was the capitol of Asia, a “citadel,” sitting on a mountain 1,000 feet high with its altar to Zeus visible for miles. It was a center of pagan worship with idols spread all over the town: besides Zeus, there was Athene, Dionysus, Asclepius (called “*soter*,” the Greek word for “savior”). But most importantly, Pergamos was the center of the imperial cult (emperor worship) which had become the criterion for civic loyalty under Domitian. It was the first city to receive permission to build a temple to a living ruler. The term “two-edged sword,” possessed by Christ, had special meaning to the people here because the proconsul had “the power of the sword.” According to legend, Antipas was roasted to death in a brazen bull during Domitian’s reign. Balaam was the prototype of all corrupt teachers who lead people to compromise with worldly ideologies. With regard to the hidden manna, there is a Jewish Tradition that Jeremiah took the pot of manna, which was placed in the ark of the covenant, during the destruction of the temple in 586 BC, and hid it in Mt. Nebo (see 2 Macc. 2:4-7). It was to remain there until the Messiah came and then Jeremiah would reappear and return it to the new temple in Jerusalem.

**The Church at Thyatira:** It was on the present site of Akisar, in what is now Western Turkey. We know that Lydia was from here (Acts 16:14), or at least owned a house here. It was a city full of trade guilds for dyeing, pottery, garment making and brass-working. Note the description of Christ in v. 18: “fine brass.” These guilds (“unions”) were inseparably connected with pagan religious worship of various kinds, including acts of immorality. You can readily imagine the pressure placed upon Christians who had been members of these guilds or who tried to find jobs in the city without joining a guild.

**The Church at Sardis:** Though this city had a magnificent past, in which its name was at once associated with great wealth, it was, by the time of the Revelation, just a relic. It was noted for its luxury clothing, which may account for the reference to “white garments.” The words of Christ to the church seem to correspond with what was true of the city – both were living in the past and resting on their laurels and were, therefore, almost dead.

**The Church at Philadelphia:** This city, the newest of those mentioned, was a city of great commercial importance in Asia and was called the “Gateway to the East.” Earthquakes were common there and there were many temples and religious festivals. It was called “Little Athens” and its chief pagan cult was that of Dionysus. The church was probably small (“little strength”) and was facing a period of opportunity (“open door”). It and Smyrna were the only two of these churches to be commended without criticism by the Lord.

**The Church at Laodicea:** This was the wealthiest city in Phrygia, famous for its soft, black, glossy wool. In 60 AD, it was totally devastated by an earthquake (this is an argument for the late date of Revelation, since many feel it is unlikely that the city could have been rebuilt to its former splendor in the 6-8 years that a Neronian date would require). It also was famous for its medical school, which had developed an eye-salve and an ear ointment (notice the wording in the message to Laodicea). There were a large number of Jews there. In light of the “lukewarm” statement to the church, it is interesting that water was piped into the city from hot springs a fair distance south of the city and probably arrived lukewarm. For all its wealth, it could provide neither the hot, healing waters of its neighbor, Hierapolis, or the cold, refreshing water to be found at nearby Colossae. It was just lukewarm.

Note that the Lord had something good to say about all of these churches, with the exception of two – Sardis and Laodicea. Note also that in every case, He refers to their *works*. Churches have work to do and the Lord will hold them responsible for it.

# 2 The Throne in Heaven

## Chapter 4

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### Outline

- 4:1 The summons by Christ
  - 4:2-3 The description of the One sitting on the throne
  - 4:4-6 The twenty-four elders and a description of the throne
  - 4:7-8 The four living creatures
  - 4:9-11 Worship and praise given to God
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### Questions for Discussion

1. Where is this vision taking place? Why is this important?
  
2. What is the significance of these terms: trumpet; throne; the gemstones; 24 elders; white robes and crowns of gold; thunderings and lightings; seven lamps (seven spirits); sea of glass; four living creatures; casting of crowns before the throne; the saying in v. 11.

## Comments

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The Worship of God as Creator – Revelation 4  
What would you give for a peek into the place where God dwells? Read Chapter 4, verse 1: “after these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven.”

John was ushered into the throne room of the almighty God of heaven, and the sight was something to behold. On the throne sat One who had the appearance of jasper and sardius stones (Jerusalem Bible: “diamond and a ruby”). A rainbow encircled it, reminding one of the covenant God made with Noah and all creation. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones with twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white with crowns of gold on their heads.

There are several possible explanations of the twenty-four elders. The most likely is that it refers to an exalted order of angels (cf. Isa. 24:23) with special reference to the 24 priestly classes mentioned in I Chron. 24:1-9. “White” has reference to triumph and the crowns to their high place (though the Greek word *stephanos* is used which usually refers to a victory wreath. The other Greek word is *diadema* which usually applies to a diadem or crown of royalty. Here, it is possible that the *stephanos* refers to that victory, in corresponding to the white robes, instead of the thrones).

From the throne came the voice of God, depicted as “lightnings, thunderings and voices.” The seven Spirits of God are seen as seven lamps of fire. In 1:4, the seven Spirits were understood to be the Holy Spirit in its full power and activity and that would certainly fit here. Before the throne, John saw a “sea of glass, clear as crystal.” In the first century, “clear” glass was unusual and very costly. A legend from the Torah records that the Queen of Sheba, when she came to see Solomon, thought the clear glass pavement in front of his throne was real water. She therefore lifted her skirt as she approached. There may be some reference to that incident here.

In the midst of the throne (that is, near the throne) and around the throne were four living creatures. They were in a place of honor and are depicted as attending God. In other places, we see them represented as:

1. Close to God’s throne, as here (5:6; 14:3)
2. Constantly praising God (4:8; 5:8, 14; 7:11; 19:4)
3. Associated with the outpouring of God’s wrath (6:1-7; 15:7)

The four living creatures are probably a representation of the whole of creation, though it is hard to say for certain. There was a Rabbinic saying dated circa AD 300 or earlier which went like this: “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.” As in Isa. 6:2, the “wings” probably refers to their swiftness in rushing to do the will of God. The reference to their eyes (“around and within”) would indicate that they are all-seeing and continually watchful.

The four living creatures are continually praising God. Their chant is “holy, holy, holy.” This is the only attribute of God that is given in triplet in the Bible. God is love, God is light, God is a consuming fire, God is many things. But let there be no doubt: *God is holy!* Holy means separate, sanctified, set apart. It is the direct opposite of compromise with the world. The book of Revelation deals mainly with how God and His people answer evil, and that answer is based in the holiness of God. God’s holiness will be victorious over evil!

When glory and honor and thanks are poured out to God by the four living creatures, the twenty-four elders also bow down before Him. They throw down their crowns in a show of humility and honor. It is because of His place as creator that he is worthy to receive all glory, honor and power.

The constant picture of worship to God is what stands out most graphically in this chapter. After John wrote to the churches on earth, he immediately saw a picture of God on His throne. It is the church’s place to work and labor and obey. It is God’s place to rule and to be honored and praised. We honor and praise God by our obedience. Someday, if we will remain “faithful unto death” (2:10), it will be our privilege to worship God for an eternity.

# 3 The Scroll, the Lamb and Six Seals

## Chapters 5-6

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### Outline

#### **5:1-14: Worthy is the Lamb**

5:1-4: The unopened scroll

5:5-7: The Lamb takes the scroll

5:8-14: The spontaneous praise of the Lamb

#### **6:1-17: The First Six Seals**

6:1-2: The First Seal: Conquering Nations

6:3-4: The Second Seal: War

6:5-6: The Third Seal: Famine

6:7-8: The Fourth Seal: Pestilence

6:9-11: The Fifth Seal: The Cry of the Martyrs

6:12-17: The Sixth Seal: Cosmic Disturbances

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### Questions for Discussion

1. Who is the Lamb and what is the “scroll”?
2. Why did John weep?
3. What is the significance of the “bowls of incense” (“prayers of the saints”)?
4. What are the songs in chapter 5 describing? What does it tell us about heaven?
5. [Chapter 6] Describe each of the six seals and attempt to determine the nature and purpose of each of them.
6. What do the “four horsemen” in 6:1-8 represent?
7. Why is the Lord full of wrath? [6:17]

## Comments

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### Chapter 5

The constant worship of God dominates this chapter as it did chapter 4. The attention, however, now turns to God the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29). Before John sees and hears the great songs of praise directed toward Christ, he sees a “strong angel” searching for someone to “open the scroll and loose its seals” (v. 2). No-one was found who was worthy, not only to open it but to even *look* at it! (1:3). John wept. But his sorrow was turned to joy when Christ stepped forward as the worthy One (v. 5). The taking of the scroll by the Lamb prompted a great outpouring of praise and adoration. They sang a new song and every creature joined in (vv. 9-14).

### Chapter 6

Only the Lamb is worthy to open the seals and reveal the contents of the scroll. He begins to do this in chapter 6. The scroll is not completely unveiled until chapter 8 and chapters 6 and 7 should be read with that in mind.

The first four seals reveal four horsemen. Passages such as Zech. 1:8ff.; 6:1ff; Ezek. 14:21 should be compared to aid the interpretation of this figure. Remember that the Lamb is opening the seals and revealing events which were to come to pass or which had already passed. These first four seals probably represent continuing events occurring throughout history. They are things which have happened and will happen again because of “man’s inhumanity to man,” which is a consequence of the sin of man. Eventually, the scroll will reveal the remedy. First, however, the problem must be disclosed and described. The first six seals, therefore, describe the predicament of man.

The first seal is generally believed to describe Christ. This is because in 19:11ff., a similar description is given, and there we are told specifically that it is the “Faithful and True.” It is doubtful, however, that this passage describes the Christ, for a number of reasons. First, there are differences in the two passages. In 19:11, Christ is wearing “many crowns” (Gk., *diadema* or crowns of royalty) while in 6:2, the rider wears a crown of victory, like a victory wreath won in the games (Gk., *stephanos*). Also, in 6:2, the rider has a bow while in 19:11ff., Christ has the more common “sword.” A reference to “white” often means “purity” or “holiness,” but it can also bear a meaning of “triumph” or “victory.” Compare

the present passage with similar Old Testament references, we find that the four horsemen ride in order to bring about some kind of negative judgment. It seems that each horse of the four (four is the “earthly” number, remember) must have an equivalent function. If not, then there is no apparent relevance in the figure “four”; if the rider on the white horse represents Christ, then we have 3 + 1 – Christ standing apart from the other riders. He would be going out “conquering and to conquer” which would bear no relationship with the other horsemen, who are going out to wreak havoc. In addition, it does not seem likely that Christ would be represented as conquering on the earth and yet not completely victorious, since the martyrs subsequently are represented as wondering how long it will be until they are avenged.

It seems to make better sense, then, to understand the rider on the white horse as depicting invading or conquering nations. This is a repeating historical event, like the others. It corresponds to war (the red horse); to famine (the black horse); and to pestilence (the pale or ashen horse). The first four seals then are united in presenting events which have taken their toll on all people. Sometimes, as the Old Testament passages point out and as the term “was given to him” in our present passage implies, these are indirect judgments of God. That is, He permits these things to take place (though He is not the author of the evil). He takes people and events as He finds them and uses them to fulfill His divine purposes (cf. Rom. 9:27 re: Pharaoh).

The fifth seal reveals martyrs under the altar in heaven crying with loud voices to the Lord. They desire to know when their blood will be avenged upon *those who dwell on the earth* (a term always used of those who are hostile to God and His people). The answer is that more of their brethren will die before God’s plan is completed. This is followed by the sixth seal which unveils all manner of cosmic disturbances. 6:12-17 is rich in Old Testament imagery and there is an obvious similarity to Matthew 24, which is a discussion of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The point of this passage, however, is that the Day of the Lord is coming and will bring down all of those who have failed to humble themselves before God. There have been many such judgments of God throughout history. God is the one who ordains governments and allows them to exist. He has had occasion to judge those governments as well. Twice, Jerusalem was destroyed. And even mighty Rome would fall some day.

# 4 The 144,000 and the Seven Trumpets

## Chapters 7-8

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### Outline

7:1-8: The Sealing of the 144,000

7:9-17: The Inhabitants of Heaven

8:1-6: The Opening of the Seventh Seal: Prelude

8:7: The First Trumpet: Trees and Green Grass Struck

8:8-9: The Second Trumpet: The Seas Struck

8:10-11: The Third Trumpet: Inland Waters Struck by Burning Star (“Wormwood”)

8:12: The Fourth Trumpet: “Light” Struck

8:13: Interlude: The Eagle (NKJV: “angel”) Sounds a Warning

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### Questions for Discussion

1. What do the four angels represent?

2. Two groups of people are mentioned in chapter 7: the 144,000 and the great multitude. Who are they and why are they mentioned here?

3. What does chapter 7 add about our knowledge of heaven?

4. [Chapter 8] What does the 7th seal reveal?

5. What is the function of trumpets? Describe each of the four mentioned in chapter 8.

# Comments

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## Chapter 7

### Interlude: Visions of Security and Salvation

Chapter 6 describes the beginning of the opening of the seals, the completion of which will reveal God's plan of redemption. Chapter 7 is an interlude. It is designed to make an important point about the fate of God's people in light of the judgments of God on earth.

The number four figures prominently in the first verse, immediately signaling that what is about to take place has something to do with the earth. The angels are not to harm the earth until the "servants of our God" are sealed on their foreheads (v. 3). The number of those who were to be sealed was 144,000 out of the tribes of Israel. The tribes are enumerated, beginning with Judah, in vv. 5-8.

After the sealing of the 144,000, John sees a group of people (a "great multitude which no one could number") before the throne and before the Lamb. They are doing the same thing they were doing back in chapters 4 and 5: praising God and serving Him day and night (v. 15). They have entered their rest in heaven and are beyond hunger and thirst and the heat of the day. Every tear is wiped from their eyes (v. 16).

While this vision may be interpreted as describing the two classes of people in the church, Jew and Gentile (per Rom. 1:16: "Jew first..."), it is not likely. Rather, it seems to be describing the whole church under two figures. The first is that of Israel. The church is new Israel, the Israel of God (see Gal. 6:16; Rom. 2:28-29; Phil. 3:1-3; Heb. 8:10f.). The church is described in terms of the "12 tribes" in Jas. 1:1. (cf. I Pet. 1:1). In our text, only this group is "sealed"; there is no reference to "sealing" the great multitude of vv. 9ff. John is seeing the church sealed while on earth, prior to the great judgment which is to come (under the final seal). Sealing is a mark of ownership and implies a condition of safety — not physical safety, necessarily, but spiritual safety (cf. Isa. 11). These Christians will be preserved from spiritual harm, if they remain loyal. There is an obvious reference to Exodus 12, when the doorposts in Israel were marked with blood so the messenger of death would "pass over" the house of Israel, during the tenth plague. Concerning the marking on the "foreheads," see especially Ezek. 9:4, 6.

John is then shown the great number who have been redeemed and are safely in heaven, out of the reach of the persecutors. They came out of the great tribulation and were delivered by the blood of the Lamb. Notice that they are in "His temple" — i.e., God's heaven — serving Him day and night. They are totally safe in the presence of the Lamb.

The message is clear. While you live on the earth in the midst of persecution you are one of the "sealed." You are spiritually secure, even if the judgments come and you are affected by them. If you should die at the hands of the persecutors, you are eternally safe in the Throne Room of God. God knows how to preserve the righteous (Psa. 1:6).

## Chapter 8

With the completion of the sealing of the righteous, it is now time to open the seventh seal. Chapter 8 records the dramatic results. When the seal is opened, there is silence in heaven for half an hour. The Greek word for silence here is *sigao*. It means *dead silence*. A half an hour may not seem like a long time. But think about driving in your automobile (say, in a desolate part of Utah) listening to the radio, when all of a sudden everything goes silent — no sound whatsoever on any station. It's frightening. The silence here is for dramatic effect. There's something big coming!

Following the silence, and within the seventh seal, comes the revelation of seven trumpets. Remember that a trumpet is the instrument of choice to call attention to or make an announcement about something. The trumpets in this seal are announcing more destruction to come upon the earth. Chapter 8 includes four of the trumpets with an interlude at v. 13. All of these announce a partial ("one-third") destruction that affects the earth: of vegetation, of the seas, of the inland waters and of the light-giving heavenly bodies.

These announcements are followed by an interlude involving an eagle "flying through the midst of the heaven." His mission: to announce that things will be getting worse! "Woe, Woe, Woe" he says in a loud voice. The remaining three blasts of the trumpet predict afflictions worse than the first four. Not good news!

# 5 The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets

## Chapter 9

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### Outline

9:1-12: First Woe, Fifth Trumpet: Locusts from the bottomless pit

9:13-21: Second Woe, Sixth Trumpet: Angel from the Euphrates

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### Questions for Discussion

1. What or who is the “star fallen from heaven to earth”? What is “the bottomless pit”?
2. What do the locusts represent? Describe them [9:7-10]. What power were these “locusts” given? For how long? What Old Testament prophet spoke about a locust plague? Is there any connection?
3. What is the “seal of God” on men’s foreheads?
4. What will people “seek” in “those days”? Why?
5. Describe the sixth trumpet and its impact.

## Comments

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### Interlude: Visions of Security and Salvation

John continues to observe graphic symbols of destruction now under the fifth and sixth trumpets. It is not as important to pinpoint a specific time or event in history as to get the message: God's wrath is revealed against "all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men..." (Rom. 1:18). To those who are suffering because of the oppressive ungodliness of men, this message is critically important. Such was the case in the first century as Christians were tormented (or about to be) by their persecutors. John's message is: you need not fear; terrible destruction is coming upon those who trouble you. God's way is not only morally and spiritually right, it is also ultimately victorious (cf. 2 Thess. 1:6-12).

John describes the first of the three woes: locusts which rise up from the "abyss." The "fallen star" (v. 1) is given a key to the bottomless pit. Hailey believes this is Satan; commentators offer various other interpretations. It is possible that he is simply an agent of God for judgment (like the messenger of death in the tenth plague in Exodus). In any case, a horrible horde of locusts, who come out of the smoke, are revealed (vv. 2-3). These creatures were given power (note the passive voice) to harm a third of mankind. They were not to harm those who had been sealed (7:1-8). Remember, the 144,000 who were "sealed," represent Christians on earth at any given time, not a particular number. The locusts have no power over them.

The locusts possibly represent the spiritual decay which torments men and society. One commentator sees them as representative of the forces of decay and corruption which God will use to undermine the Roman Empire. These locusts had no power to kill. Their mission was to "torment them for five months" (v. 5). Like a scorpion, they would cause great pain, but the wounds would not be fatal. However, men would "wish they were dead" (v. 6), though they know that death in their condition would bring them even greater torment. Compare this with Paul's attitude in Phil. 1:21!

The "five months" probably refers to limited power, though it may also have some reference to a limited time-frame; i.e., men would be tormented for a short time in order to bring them to repentance.

These locusts are led by a king, the angel of the bottomless pit named Abaddon, in Hebrew and Apollyon in Greek. The Hebrew name means "Destruction" and the Greek name means "Destroyer." The Greek name is possibly a cryptic reference to the god Apollo. Beasley-Murray says that both Caligula and Nero "aped the deity Apollo [but] Domitian claimed to be his incarnation. [John's] last word about the 5th trumpet was a master stroke of irony: the destructive host of hell had as its king the emperor of Rome!"

The sixth trumpet sounds the second woe. Four angels who had been bound at the River Euphrates are to be released for the purpose of killing a third of mankind. Four is the earthly number, and here the angels are represented as unleashing terrifying and demonic powers onto the earth in the form of a great world army. The Euphrates River marked the boundary, both for the enemies of Israel and the Roman Empire. The Demonic Cavalry of 200 million (not the Chinese Militia, as John Walvoord says!) is to come from there with fire, smoke and brimstone (corresponding to the colors on their breastplates) issuing from the horses' mouths. As they sweep through with their destructive force, they leave misery in their wake, symbolized by their tails which are like snakes (v. 19).

Even with the terrifying judgments against sin, men do not repent of their evil ways. Their idolatry, murders, sorceries, fornication and thefts continue. They continue to serve that which destroys them! Cf. Gen. 19.

## Additional Notes

The sounding trumpets have announced relentless judgment upon the world of the unregenerate. One-third of the environment has been dealt a deadly blow – vegetation, ocean, inland waters and the heavens (Chapter 8). Judgment then is directed to mankind. The fifth angel sounds his trumpet (9:1) and the bottomless pit (“the abyss”) is opened. Out of it pours smoke, as if from a great furnace (9:2), and out of the smoke come locusts. Obviously, these are not literal locusts (see vv. 8-9). Their destructive power is aimed, not at vegetation, but at man. They were not to kill, but to torment men for “five months.” Only those who are not sealed are subject to this torment, however (cf. 7:1-8). The suffering will be so severe that men will wish they were dead, but they will not die (9:6).

The suffering described here is not physical. If it was, death would surely result. The torment is undoubtedly psychological or, more to the point, spiritual. If the “star fallen from heaven” is Satan, then the picture is clear: the devil and his angels are released from the pit for the purpose of tormenting men in their souls. Locusts are used to depict this plague since they have a strong Old Testament feel (cf. Ex. 10:4-20; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11; Dt. 28:42; I Kings 8:37; Psa. 78:46). The description of the locusts supports this view. Note the paradoxical terms used, such as “hair like women’s” and “teeth like lion’s,” which perfectly describes the variety of approaches which Satan will use to torment men.

Note that this judgment, however, is controlled by God. He is not the author of the evil, but He allows Satan to “do his thing,” within limits. That is why the “locusts” cannot kill and why they are limited to “five months” (which may, by the way, have nothing to do with time, per se, but with the extent of their power). When we think in terms of spiritual torment, the picture of these creatures takes on a more sinister form. Note that their king is appropriately called the “Destroyer” (9:11, margin).

The next woe (9:13-19) is external and comes in the form of a large world army. This time, power is in the mouths and tails of the horses (9:19) and they have power to kill with “three plagues” - fire, smoke and brimstone (9:17-18). However, their power is limited to a third of mankind. The rest, though they are aware of the judgment on man, still refuse to repent and continue in their

idolatry and immorality (9:20-21). Because of that, another woe must come.

I see a similarity in the first six trumpets and the first six seals. The first four seals and the first four trumpets both reveal judgment on the earth under various figures. The fifth of each portray some kind of inner torment: the fifth seal disclosed martyrs in heaven crying “how long?”; the fifth trumpet portrays internal misery of the unregenerate. The sixth seal displayed cosmic disturbances under the figure of an earthquake and other signs. The sixth trumpet also portrays worldwide trouble, this time in the form of an invading army which not only kills but leaves “harm” in its wake. The point is that God judges the world of the unregenerate on behalf of the church.



**...before me was a great multitude...  
from every nation...  
standing before the throne.**

Revelation 7:9

# 6 Two Witnesses and the 7<sup>th</sup> Trumpet

## Chapters 10-11

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### Outline

10:1-7: The Vision of the Little Book

10:8-11: John Eats the Little Book

11:1-14: The Two Witness

11:15-19: The Seventh Trumpet - Christ's Reign

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### Assignment

1. Describe the “mighty angel” that John sees. What did he have with him?
2. What was John to do with the “little book”? Why?
3. [Chapter 11] What part of the temple was John to measure? What would happen to the other parts of the temple?
4. What does “forty-two months” represent? What about 1,260 days?
5. Describe the “two witnesses.” Who are they? What happens to them?
6. Who is the beast that comes from the bottomless pit?
7. Where is the great city described in 11:8?
8. Who are “those who dwell on the earth”?
9. Describe the seventh trumpet and its impact.

## Comments

### Chapter 10: The Mighty Angel and the Little Scroll

Before the final woe is pronounced under the seventh trumpet, John sees another vision, recorded in 10:1-11:13. As in previous interludes, this section is designed to comfort the saints who are reading it. The message of inexorable judgment is bound to terrify sensitive people who take God most seriously. But the message is not designed to frighten the godly but to comfort them. Chapters 10 and 11 fulfill that purpose.

In the midst of the visions of judgment against the unrighteous comes a giant, mighty angel (v. 1). In his hand is a "little book" (v. 2). His roar, which is like a lion's, precedes the voices of "seven thunders" (v. 3), but John is prevented from disclosing the message from the voices of the seven thunders (v. 4). The angel, however, raises his hand to heaven and swears that "there should be delay no longer" (v. 6). Whatever God has in store (the "mystery" – v. 7) is about to be finished. It is coming very soon.

The "little book" is the commission or message which John is to teach or prophecy about "many peoples, nations, tongues and kings" (v. 11). It is probably that which follows in chapters 11-22, involving the beasts from the sea and land (chapter 13), among other things. The "mystery" is that which was "declared to His servants the prophets," a very "Old Testament" statement. A "mystery" is God's plan previously undisclosed (see Eph. 3:8-1; Rom. 16:25-26). What is about to "be finished" is God's plan revealed in the "little book" which John is to "eat" (vv. 9-11). The church will not have to wait much longer for the victory of God over His enemies. It is probably because the church must still suffer on earth that the book is both "bitter" and "sweet" (cf. Ezek. 2:8-3:3; Jer. 15:16).

### Chapter 11: The Two Witnesses

In chapter 10, John had been given the "little book" and was told to "eat" it. It was sweet to the taste, but bitter to the stomach, signifying the nature of the message which he was to proclaim. He was then told that he must prophesy concerning "many peoples and nations and tongues and kings" (v. 11). Now, in chapter 11, he is given another assignment. "Someone" tells him to measure the temple, meaning the inner sanctuary (Gk. *naos*; each of the sixteen references in Revelation refers to the inner sanctuary and not the outer courts). Actually, John is to measure, not only the temple,

but the altar and those who worship there. The purpose of the measuring is for protection. But he is not to measure the outer courts, as they have been given to the nations. That, and the "holy city" will be trodden under foot for forty-two months.

What is the meaning of all this? (See the supplementary comments below). The inner, measured temple probably signifies the church, or perhaps the inner life of a Christian. God has promised to protect true worshippers from the onslaughts of Satan. The outer courts and the "holy city" are symbolic of the persecuted church suggesting that God has not promised to protect the physical life of believers. The trampling of the holy city symbolizes great martyrdom (see Caird, Hailey). The forty-two months does not necessarily refer to any period of time, but may instead refer to the extent of persecution. 42 months is equal to 1,260 days, or the "time, times and 1/2 a time" of Dan. 7:25, etc. (It is also equal to 3<sup>1/2</sup> years, a common symbol for persecution; cf. Lk 4:25; Jas 5:17).

Two witnesses next come on the scene in John's vision. There is a clear reference to Zurrubabel and Joshua, the ruler and high priest, respectively, who supervised the rebuilding of the temple after the exile (516 BC). But there is another reference to Moses and Elijah, prophets of God and purveyors of His power before the "nations" of old. These two witnesses will have great power to protect themselves until they are finished with their testimony. They will then be killed and their dead bodies will be left in the street of the "great city." The "peoples, tribes, tongues and nations" will gaze on the bodies (v. 8) and celebrate their apparent victory over these "troublers" (cf. I Kings 18:17). But they will be shocked when they are risen back to life, like the old dry bones of Ezek. 37:5ff., and ascend into heaven. Elijah, who was taken up in a fiery chariot, comes especially to mind here.

The "two witness" probably refers to the collective witness of Christians in the world. Two witnesses were necessary to establish every word in the Old Testament (see Dt. 17:6, etc.), so the figure is carried over here. The "great city" could represent Jerusalem (suggested by the words, "where their Lord was crucified") but that is unlikely. In other places in the Revelation, it refers to the great world city, often referred to as "Babylon," a symbol for the Roman Empire. Figuratively, Jesus was crucified in the city limits of Rome as

surely as He was in Jerusalem. Remember, there were people from all nations who were celebrating over the dead witnesses. Rome also fits the picture suggested by the terms “Sodom” and “Egypt” – Rome is a spiritual Sodom because of its immorality and Egypt because of its mistreatment of the people of God.

After the raising of the witnesses, a great earthquake strikes the city and a tenth of the city falls and 7,000 people are killed. A “tenth” represents a large, but less than complete destruction; 7,000 probably means that a large number were killed from all classes of society (symbolized by the number 7). At any rate, the judgment was cataclysmic, if not total. The rest of the people were so scared they glorified God, though they didn’t humble themselves.

It is only now that the seventh trumpet is ready to sound. When it does, it announces the complete reign of Christ. All kingdoms have become His kingdom – He has now begun to reign in earnest. Notice, the “nations” were enraged (cf. Psa 2 and Acts 4:23f.) but became the objects of God’s wrath. The saints, however, receive their reward.

John sees the temple of God in heaven open up and the ark of the covenant revealed. This represents the extension of the church into heaven (cf. Heb 12:25ff.) and the promises of God (symbolized by the ark of the covenant) that give us that access.

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## Additional Notes: Revelation 11

“This chapter is extraordinarily difficult to interpret and the most diverse solutions have been proposed...”

– Leon Morris, *Revelation - Tyndale NT Commentaries*

Resolving the difficulties in this chapter (as in others) turns on the understanding of the symbolic language used. So, we must know what we are doing when we attempt to identify them and draw some meaning out of them. Remember that the figures had meaning to those who were reading it in the first century. The source of their understanding was not through commentaries nor random speculation. It came first from a thorough reading of the document itself to discover whether the interpretation of the figure is given there, and then from a strong background in the Old Testament. We too can utilize the same means in our attempt to arrive at an understanding of the Revelation, and particularly, this chapter.

## The Figures

Remember that we have already determined that Revelation is a figurative book. In most Bible documents, we would assume a literal meaning of words, phrases and sentences, unless there were strong reasons to do otherwise. Here, it is just the reverse. We assume a figurative meaning, unless context or some other compelling reason leads us to a literal interpretation. This is especially important to remember in this chapter because it is tempting to make literal applications of the terms.

Rule #1 is to let the writer interpret his own figures. Therefore, if John uses a figure in a certain way (generally) then we ought to understand in that way as well, unless the context directs us along another route. Rule #2 is to remember that the book has a major theme that it is revealing. The whole book must fit its historical context or it flies apart (that’s why those who differ on the dating of the book see things differently. Each has already decided, of necessity, when the book was written and those historical presuppositions guide the interpretation). John’s specific scope is the Christian’s overcoming of the persecution of the church by Rome. Any conclusions we draw must have that scope as the basis. We cannot just “plug in” various objectives of John – he had one major purpose and sought to drive the point home. With that in mind, let’s examine the figures.

**Temple:** Gk, *naos* - In the OT, it was the place where God came to meet the people. The Greek word can apply either to the innermost sanctuary (the Holy of Holies) or the temple proper. It is also a common figure for the church in the NT (I Cor. 3:16; II Cor. 6:16). Significantly, in Revelation, the temple often refers to heaven itself (see v. 19). I believe this points to the close connection between the church and heaven (cf. Phil. 3:20; Heb 12:23, etc.) The term *measuring* (cf. Ezek 40:3ff.) is used throughout scripture to describe either destruction or preservation. The latter is clearly the meaning here. Note that he is to measure the temple and the altar (place of worship) and those who worship. All are to be protected. The court outside the temple is not to be measured (protected). It and the holy city are to be trodden underfoot by the Gentiles for 42 months (see below on the number). “Gentiles,” generally, refers to non-Jews who are hostile to God; in this case, Rome. Since they are going to trample the outer temple and the holy city, the latter terms must be something opposed to the Gentiles and hence on the side of God. Since the temple refers to the church and the outer court is connected to the temple and exists in the

“holy city,” it likely refers to some characteristic of the church. If we remember that the church is a group of individuals, then it’s not hard to make the connection to one individual. So John is telling his readers that the spiritual life and relationship of the Christian to God can never be harmed. But the “Gentiles” may well harm the physical body and disturb the peace of the individual Christian (and, therefore, the church as a whole). It is most unlikely that John means that one group of people within the church will be protected while another group is harmed.

**Forty-Two Months:** The same as 1,260 days (v. 2) and Daniel’s time, times and 1/2 a time (Dan. 7:25). This is the “time” when the Gentiles will have power to trample the holy city (church) and it is the “time” that the witnesses (see below) will prophesy. Yet it probably has nothing to do with time, but more to do with the extent or scope of the persecution. That is, it is less than complete (note, it is one-half of 7, which is the “complete” number). The message is that the church will be persecuted (though the inner person [soul] cannot be killed), but the persecution will not be complete — the church will overcome!

**Two Witness:** Witnesses “bear testimony” - i.e, they tell the story, preach the gospel, evangelize. There are “two,” because the Old Testament required two in order to establish testimony (Dt. 17:6; cf. Mt. 26:65, for a negative example). The witnesses represent either the total witnessing (preaching) power of the church or they represent specific individuals charged with the preaching mission. In any case, they symbolize the preaching of the gospel, the unfolding of God’s plan (Cf. the revealing of the seven seals). They will prophesy without fear of harm (and with power to protect themselves) for the same period that the Gentiles have power to trod the “holy city.” In other words, while the persecution is going on, the preaching will continue. This fits the Acts picture, where persecution, in that case mainly by the Jews, actually was a cause of the spread of the gospel. [Persecution has never been a big problem for the church; indifference has, however]. The witnesses are described under the figure of two olive trees and two lampstands. These figures seem to go back to Zech. 4:3. In both places, “oil” figures in and the connection may be to the oil as a source of power for the lamps and hence, “light” — the light of the word. In Revelation, lampstands have also been used as a figure for the churches (see Rev. 2 and 3). There is also an analogy drawn between these two witnesses and Moses and

Elijah, two prophets present at the transfiguration of Christ (for whom Peter wanted to build a tabernacle (or “temple”). While we wouldn’t want to make too much of it, it is hard not to see a reference to these two when reading vv. 5-6.

**Beast:** This is the first mention of the beast, but there is no doubt that it refers to Rome (see Rev. 13:1-4, etc.). He will have temporary victory over the witnesses (and, by extension, the church). The dead bodies of the witnesses will lie in the street of the great city (see below) for 3<sup>1/2</sup> days, another figure for “less than complete.” Those from the peoples, tribes, tongues and nations (representing the “beast” and the “Gentiles”; cf. 10:11) or those who dwell on the earth (same group) will rejoice, since they thought they won a victory. These terms must mean the same thing they meant earlier in the book — note 7:9, for example.

**Great City:** Three cities are mentioned: Sodom, Egypt and, by implication, Jerusalem. If you believe John saw a literal city, then your interpretation will be colored by your conclusions regarding the dating of the book and other factors. As far as where “their Lord is crucified” is concerned, the analogy could apply equally well to Jerusalem or Rome. In any case, the figure seems to point to a cosmopolitan city; or, perhaps, no particular city is meant, the figures standing for the sum of unbelieving mankind. Regardless of what side you come down on regarding the actual identity of the city, the point is the same: mankind, which is opposed to God, will seek to destroy and inhibit the spread of His word; and they will rejoice whenever they feel they have gained the upper hand and gotten rid of the “troublers.”

**Breath of life:** After the 3<sup>1/2</sup> days, the witnesses arise to ascend into heaven at the special invitation of one who speaks from heaven. The picture reminds us of Ezek. 37:5ff., where God showed Ezekiel a vision of dry bones springing to life. This represented the rebirth of the people of God, with renewed hope and strength. Likewise, after the short period of persecution, the church will emerge stronger and continue to grow, overcoming even her own enemies. A tenth of the city will fall and 7,000 men will be killed. Note that there still is a “remnant” of the enemy and they will again persist in persecuting the church, though, perhaps to a much smaller degree (Satan is bound, yet not completely helpless).

# 7 War in Heaven!

## Chapter 12

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### Outline

12:1-6: The Woman, the Child and the Dragon

12:7-12: Satan Thrown Down

12:13-17: The Woman Persecuted

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### Assignment

1. Who do the “woman,” “child” and “dragon” represent? Describe each.
2. Who fought against the dragon? Where? What happened to the dragon?
3. How did the “brethren” overcome the dragon?
4. What will happen to “the inhabitants of the earth”?
5. Is the “woman” in v. 13 the same as the “woman” in v. 1, 4 and 6? Why or why not?
6. How does the “earth” help the woman?
7. Who is the woman’s “offspring” and what happens to them?

## Comments

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### Chapter 12: War in Heaven!

Remember that there is not necessarily a chronological sequence in the Revelation. Chapter 12 is a good example. The chapter starts with a rehearsal of the birth of Christ and then moves into the present (AD 90's) and future. The story which unfolds is a dramatic account of the attempts of Satan to defeat the Kingdom of Heaven — and his utter failure. The message, of course, is one we've heard before (see 11:15, for example): Christ and His church reigns, even in the midst of persecution.

The great sign of v. 1 follows the heavenly turmoil which had emanated from heaven. It is essential to note that the great sign appears in heaven, meaning that the conflict which follows is primarily spiritual in nature. In other words, the victories which Christians enjoy are spiritual ones, not necessarily physical ones. The great sign pictures a woman who is about to give birth to a child. This woman is clothed with the sun, the moon is "under her feet" and there is a "garland of twelve stars" on her head. She is with child and cries out to give birth. This clearly refers to the birth of the Messiah, the Christ-child. The woman represents the people of God, here the Israelites, specifically, the tribe of Judah, from which He came (see Rom. 9:4-5). We'll see a slight change in the figure later on, where the "woman" becomes the church (cf. John 4:22 where Jesus said "salvation is of the Jews").

There is another sign which appeared, revealing the arch enemy of the child. He is depicted as a "great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads" (v. 2). V. 9 identifies the dragon for us, in case there is any doubt: he is Satan himself, and he is set on destroying this Child. Certainly, a dragon whose "tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to earth" would have no problem defeating a child! And so the devil stands there waiting to "devour the Child as soon as it was born." But this Child is no ordinary child but is to "rule all nations with a rod of iron." And so, God protects the Child, taking Him up to Himself and His throne. (The devil failed to stop Christ as a child; what chance does he have to stop Him as an "adult"?)

Christ will survive to do His work and the devil will never touch Him spiritually (though he will bruise the heel of Jesus, cf. Gen. 3:15). Meanwhile, there is the matter of the woman, or the "people of God." What will become of her? V. 6 tells us that God prepared a place for her in the "wilderness" where she fled. Note that God does not take the woman up to Himself and His throne, but He protects her just the same. She will be fed there for 1,260 days. Later, the same "time" is mentioned under the figure time, times and half a time (v. 14). Remember, in chapter 11 this was the "time" or extent of the church's persecution by Rome. It is "less than complete" (half of seven), the same figure which describes the "time" in which the Gentiles will trample the holy city (11:2, forty-two months).

The woman of v. 6 is now referring to the church. The church is the object of the persecution and thus would need to "flee." While we

**"The point is that Satan is a defeated foe, so heaven can rejoice. But the inhabitants of the earth have reason to fear!"**

should not be too concerned with time-frames, it's hard not to notice that the woman flees into the prepared place *after* Christ is caught up to God. Viewed strictly from an historical viewpoint, the persecution of the church started some years after Christ ascended.

At some point, "a war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon." Eventually, Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven (cf. Jude 6). John is seeing this during the days of Rome, but when did it actually occur? If we insist on viewing this literally, we will immediately begin to think of a time before time (cf. Eph. 1:4). But there are a couple of problems with that analysis. First, Revelation is full of figurative language; there is no reason to believe that it is different here. Secondly, John did not see this in order to learn a lesson about the origin of Satan.

Verse 10 tells us that now salvation has come, including the power of His Christ. This happened at the death and resurrection of Christ! In John 12:31, Jesus said, just before His death, "now is judgment of this world. Now the ruler of this world is cast out." Furthermore, the church has a

part in this “casting out” because “they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death” (v. 11). While these are historical events, they are not necessarily presented in Revelation in a chronological sequence.

The point is that Satan is a defeated foe, so heaven can rejoice. But the inhabitants of the earth have reason to fear! When the loud voice says “rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!” he is not just talking about “up there.” Christians sit in the “heavenly places,” according to Eph. 2:6. Think about the meaning of that in the context of Revelation.

After the dragon was cast to earth, his only alternative was to attempt to persecute the woman who bore the Child. This time, we’re told that the woman was given “two wings of a great eagle” and was permitted to fly into the “wilderness to her place” (v. 14). There she is nourished for that “time” again, away from the presence of the serpent. But that didn’t stop Satan. He “spews water out of his mouth like a flood,” in an attempt to seduce her into his web. The “water” represents lies, deceptions and temptations which Satan places in the path of the church to catch her. But the church has an unwitting ally – the “earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood” (v. 16). And thus the church was protected, at least for the “time, times and half a time.” But the Devil continues to make war with the “rest of her offspring,” referring probably to the faithful through the ages.

#### **Alternative Views**

An alternative interpretation views this chapter as similar to the first part of chapter 11, where the inner portion of the temple was measured (i.e., the spiritual or inner man) and the rest of the temple and the holy city were trampled for forty-two months. The parallel to the inner temple would be the woman nourished, while the woman’s offspring would be parallel to the outer temple and holy city.

Others see the whole chapter in terms of the Jewish element of the church (the faithful remnant) who were persecuted by Rome, but protected in some way, and the “offspring” would be the rest of the church. There are a couple of problems with such a view, though. One, it forces an arbitrary separation between Jewish and Gentile Christians which Paul spends a great deal of time

discouraging, especially in Ephesians 2 and Galatians (see Gal. 3:28, for example). Also, it doesn’t correspond very well with history. In what sense were the faithful remnant protected as compared to the rest of the church? The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 may be one possibility. But I’m not sure history supports a grant of special protection to the Jewish Christians. The scope of chapter 12 seems to be wider than just the destruction of Jerusalem.

When the loud voice says “rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them!” he is not just talking about “up there.” Christians sit in the “heavenly places,” according to Eph. 2:6. Think about the meaning of that in the context of Revelation.

# 8 The Beasts and the Lamb

## Chapters 13-14

### Outline

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- 13:1-8: Description of the Beast from the Sea
- 13:9-10: Encouragement to the Saints
- 13:11-18: Description of the Beast from the Earth
  
- 14: 1-5: The Redeemed and the Lamb on Mt. Zion
- 14:6-20: Visions of Judgment
  - 6-13: Impending Judgment Announced
  - 14-16: Harvest of the Earth
  - 17-20: Vintage of the Earth

### Questions for Discussion

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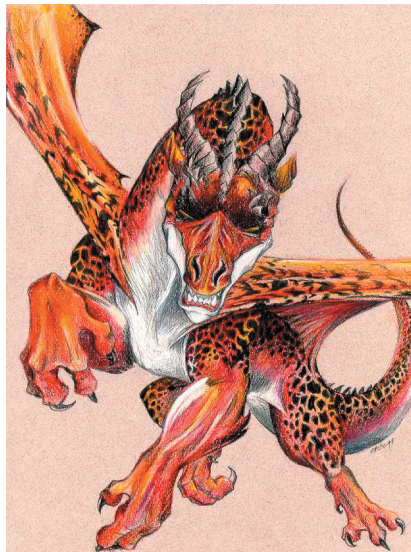
1. Describe the two beasts (one from the sea, one from the land). What do they symbolize?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. [Chapter 14] In contrast to the beasts, there is the Lamb with 144,000. Who are they? What sets them apart “among men [mankind, ESV]”?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What is the message of each of the three angels in 14:6-11?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. “Blessed are the dead...” Why? [Note: there are seven “blessings” stated in Revelation: 1:3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14. Read these, remembering that the term “blessed” means “approved by God”].
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. The Son of Man will do some reaping. Describe the nature of the harvest.

## Comments

### Chapter 13: The Beasts from the Sea and Earth

From viewing the great signs in heaven, John now stands on “the sand of the sea.” From there he witnesses the rising up of two beasts, one from the sea and then, in v. 11, one from the earth. The beasts obviously represent that which is opposed to God and His saints and are motivated and empowered by the “dragon” (Satan).

Each beast represents an aspect of the Roman Empire. The first beast is described very much like the dragon in chapter 12 (v. 3), though they are not identical. He comes from the sea, perhaps reflecting his world-wide renown among the nations. He has great power and might; he is tenacious (v. 3) and forceful. His strength was such that people began to worship him and therefore, indirectly, the dragon who had given him his power. This beast makes war with the saints (v. 7) and has dominion over every “tribe, tongue and nation.” This beast represents the governmental aspect of Rome.



The next beast comes from the earth. His authority is exercised in the presence (only?) of the first beast and is the cause of the worship of the first beast. He performs great signs and uses them to deceive the world and encourages “those who dwell on the earth” to make an image to the beast (v. 14). Those who fail to worship the beast are killed through his authority (v. 15). This beast probably represents false religion in Rome which was, of course, the basis of Emperor worship (“the imperial cult”). See Romans 1:19-32 for the results of this “religion.” In all of this, there is one note of hope. Can you find it?

### Chapter 14: A Judgment Scene

From the depressing scene in chapter 13, John turns to witness a glorious scene in heaven. The Lamb stands on Mt. Zion, a common term for

heaven (cf. Heb. 12:22), with 144,000 who have the name of the Father and Son on their foreheads. John hears a mighty voice and the playing of harps and the singing of a new song (cf. 5:9) which only to be sung by the 144,000.

Who are the 144,000? They do not represent any particular group, but the whole church, saved in heaven. Moreover, vs. 4-5 describe them as virgins, as “those who follow the Lamb,” and as the “redeemed from among men.” They also do not lie and are without fault. Each of these descriptions should be taken symbolically, by far the most difficult being the reference to them as “virgins.” But the Old Testament often refers to Israel as “virgin” or the “virgin daughters of Zion” (cf. II Kings 19:21; Jer. 18:13; Amos 5:2). And when she went into idolatry, she was referred to as one who “played the harlot” (Jer. 3:6). In the New Testament, Paul hopes to present the church at Corinth as a “pure virgin to Christ” (II Cor. 11:2). The church is the bride, the Lamb’s wife (21:9), and is to be presented “without spot or wrinkle” (Eph. 5:27). There is a conspicuous contrast with those who have “committed fornication with the great harlot” (17:1-2). To make this verse teach celibacy as a higher form of godliness is contradictory to the tone of the New Testament, which condones and honors marriage (cf. Eph. 5:23-35; Heb. 13:4) and ignores the figurative nature of the language. The meaning is that the church is faithful in following the Lamb and, as “firstfruits,” has offered herself on the sacrificial altar to God. They don’t lie and are “blameless” (probably in the sacrificial sense; i.e., they are “unblemished”). These 144,000 may or may not be the same as those in chapter 7. If they are, then those who were sealed on the earth in chapter 7 are now saved in heaven.

The vision now turns to earth again, as three angels proclaim judgment upon “those who dwell on the earth.” The first angel brings the “everlasting gospel” which demands that all men give glory to God. This is God’s eternal purpose (cf. Eph. 1:1-12). God is to be worshipped as Creator, something that people have failed to notice (Rom. 1:19-21). Another angel pronounces judgment upon “Babylon, the great,” using language reminiscent of Isa. 21:9 and Jer. 51:7. “Babylon” probably symbolizes Rome, especially to first century readers, but I like what Leon Morris says: “It is the symbol of man in community opposed to the things of God.”

The third angel brings notice of judgment to all who would worship the beast and receive his mark. He will be made to drink the “wine of the wrath of God,” and that will happen “in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb” (v. 10). Torment is everlasting (v. 11). Saints can endure because judgment is coming (v. 12). Meanwhile, everyone who dies “in the Lord” are blessed in that they will “rest from their labors” and “their works do follow them.” Labors and works probably refer particularly to their labor of faithfulness in the face of great persecution.

John next sees “One like the Son of Man” preparing to reap the earth (v. 14). The picture is from Daniel 7:13-14 and undoubtedly refers to Jesus. “Son of Man” was His favorite title and occurs frequently in the gospels (including John’s). An angel then comes out of the temple (which v. 17 says is in heaven) and gives the Son of Man the order, probably from the Father, to thrust in the sickle and reap the earth (vss. 15-16). Another angel comes out, this time from the “altar,” perhaps the place where the prayers of the saints had ascended (see 5:8; 8:3-4), and is instructed by still another angel to “thrust in your sickle” (v. 18). This time the picture is of a cluster of grapes which is fully ripe and ready to be delivered to the “winepress of the wrath of God” (v. 19). The scene is one of terrible judgment and loss for those who deny Christ and worship the beast. So fierce is God’s wrath that blood runs up to the “horse’s bridles” for 1,600 furlongs (v. 20). The distance, approximately 184 miles, happens to be the length of Palestine, but is also a square of the number four multiplied by the square of 10. Four is the “earth” number and ten is the number of completeness. Note that the judgment takes place “outside the city” (cf. Heb. 13:12), which may well represent Jerusalem.

The message of this chapter is clear: there is a severe judgment due upon those who blaspheme the name of God and persecute His saints. A theology (“the study of the nature of God and religious truth”) which refuses to impute wrath to God or anger to Christ is not a biblical theology. The wrath of God (though certainly in many respects different from our wrath) is as much an attribute of Him as His love. His love, coupled with our obedience and allegiance, causes Him to voluntarily set aside His wrath for those who are

“in Christ (Rom. 8:1 — to be accurate, His wrath has never been ignored but was satisfied in the death of His only Son; see Rom. 1:18-3:31). But obstinate rebellion must meet it face to face, sooner or later. There is a sense in which the saints can take comfort in that fact (cf. II Thess. 1:3-10).

“The scene is one of terrible judgment and loss for those who deny Christ and worship the beast. So fierce is God’s wrath that blood runs up to the ‘horse’s bridles’ for 1,600 furlongs (v. 20)”

# 9 Plagues and Bowls of Wrath

## Chapters 15–16

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### Outline

15:1-8: Prelude to the Bowl Judgments

16:1-21: The Seven Bowls of Wrath

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### Questions for Discussion

1. As chapter 15 opens, where does the next sign appear? Describe it.
2. Why is the song the “song of Moses” and “the Lamb”? Why not just “the Lamb”?
3. Where do the seven angels appear from and how are they clothed? What is their function?
4. [Chapter 16] Describe each of the bowls of wrath and what they signify.

## Comments

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### **Seven Angels, Seven Plagues, Seven Bowls of Wrath**

The seals revealed God's plan, the trumpets announced it and, now the bowls will execute it. The time for God's judgment, fully poured out on those who hate Him, has come. "In them, the wrath of God is complete," 15:1 says. "Complete" does not necessarily mean "final." What John sees is a total victory of God over His adversaries, and God's people share in this victory.

There is no question that God's justice is being vindicated here. He is angry with the wickedness and is venting His wrath without mercy on the evildoers. In 14:10, His wrath is likened to wine, "poured out unmixed into the cup of His indignation." "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," for "He is a consuming fire" (see Heb. 10:31; 12:29).

The golden bowls were introduced in 5:8 where they held the incense, which was described as the "prayers of the saints." It appears, at least from the viewpoint of Revelation, that saints have every right to expect, and even desire, that their blood be avenged. But vengeance belongs totally to God, not to the saints themselves (cf. 8:3-5; Rom. 12:17-21; the "imprecatory Psalms" cf. 7; 35; 40; 55; 58-59; 69; 79; 109; 137; 139; 144). The answer to questions of anger is to give the anger to God and let Him deal out due retribution.

Chapter 16 records the pouring out of the bowls of wrath. The similarity both to the plagues in Egypt and to the trumpet judgments is striking. Concerning the latter, the bowls represent an intensification of the particular judgments, not a chronological progression. Again the theme of God's perfect justice is central (cf. vv. 5-7). Men are getting their "just due" (v. 7). Yet they refuse to repent and continue to blaspheme God (vv. 9, 11, 21) — they not only worship the beast they have taken on his character.

The wrath of God is manifested in themes of pain, blood, fire, darkness, natural disasters (hail & earthquakes) and war. The latter plague is pictured not only as a war waged against the beast (v. 12) but also as a "world war" waged by the kings of the earth against God (v. 14-16). This war is described in detail in 19:11-21.

*Guess who wins!*

"The seals revealed God's plan, the trumpets announced it and, now the bowls will execute it."

# 10 Judgment of the Harlot

## Chapter 17

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### Outline

17:1-6: Vision of the Woman & the Beast

17:7-18: Interpretation of the Woman & the Beast

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### Questions for Discussion

1. Who is the “woman” (i.e., what does she represent)? Describe her judgment. How does she differ from the “woman” of chapter 12? [What lesson does this teach about how to read figurative language?]

2. What had the woman done that was worthy of such extreme judgment?

3. Who are the “seven kings” [v. 10]? Who is the beast that “was and is not” and is the eighth king? [11] Who are the ten kings that have no power [12]?

4. How long will the kings battle the Lamb? What is the outcome of the battle?

## Chapter 17: The Judgment of the Harlot

John has seen the vision of the bowls of wrath, a vision which symbolizes God's wrath poured out on those who have persecuted the saints and blasphemed His name. Chapter 17 seems to be a continuation of the vision, only in more detail. The object of God's wrath is symbolized by a "great harlot" who sits on a scarlet beast, on "many waters." There are a number of statements in this chapter which are difficult to interpret. It is not difficult to see, however, that John is seeing and describing the complete destruction of the offending government (in his time, Rome), a destruction which comes from within.

The difficulties in interpreting certain terms in this chapter are again compounded when we attempt to construe them literally. Again, the language in Revelation is primarily symbolic. Failure to remember that causes us to get hopelessly hung up trying to figure out details about heads, horns and mountains. That's not to say that these figures do not represent anything — of course they do. To interpret these figures literally requires a wide degree of speculation, which is nothing more than a guessing game.

Let's look at the vision and the message it presents. John is told that he will see the judgment of a great harlot (also called just a "woman"), described in v. 18 as the "great city." We have previously identified the great city with Rome or, more generally, with civil power organized against God (or perhaps "the world principle"). She is pictured as a prostitute, probably because of her seductive practices in regard to other nations (v. 2). She has formed immoral alliances and connections and has thus reigned "over the kings of the earth" (v. 18). The vision takes place in the "wilderness" (v. 3) where the woman is sitting on a scarlet beast which has seven heads and ten horns. She was wearing the garments of royalty, power and seduction (v.4). The focus of her life is abominations (NIV, "abominable things") and adulteries. She is further described by her name, written on her forehead (see v. 5) and she is drunk with the blood of the saints (v. 6).

John was stunned when he saw her, but the angel assures him that he will explain the mystery of the woman (v. 7). The difficulty is trying to figure out who is who and when "who" was and who is. Here's my view:

The beast, we've already learned, represents the imperial power. According to chapter 12, he is guided by Satan (the "dragon"). He "was, and is

not and will come" (v. 8). This is an obvious play on words comparing the beast with Christ (1:18; 2:8) and God (cf. 1:4, 8; 4:8). The beast has had power, it has been taken away (at the cross, probably) and will arise again, but only to go to perdition (destruction), unlike Christ who lives forever at the right hand of God. Those who dwell on the earth marvel at the beast, but blaspheme God.

It was common in the literature of the time (e.g., Virgil, Cicero) to describe Rome as having begun as a network of seven hill settlements on the left bank of the Tiber River. There may well be significance in that literal detail, or the seven mountains may be another way of symbolically describing its prominence among the nations.

At any rate, the seven heads of the beast apparently has a dual meaning, since John is also told about seven kings (v. 10). Again, if taken literally, it would appear that this statement would solve all our problems with regard to the dating of the book. Just figure out who "one is" refers to and start counting. But with which king do you start? Julius Caesar? If so, then the five who have fallen would be Julius Caesar, Augustus (27 BC-14 AD), Tiberius (14 - 37), Caligula (37 - 41) and Claudius (41 - 54). That would make the one who is Nero (54 - 68) and would settle the question of when the book was written. But there is also another who is not yet come and must continue for a short time. Could it be insignificant Galba? And the eighth, the equally undistinguished Otho? Or do we ignore the three rival emperors who reigned during 69 AD and killed each other off? Then the one who is not yet come would be Vespasian (69 - 79) and the eighth would be Titus (79 - 81). But the latter two were certainly not very prominent, especially with regard to Christian persecution. Deciding that the eighth is not a separate king but is connected somehow with the seven or the seventh doesn't help because we're still left with Vespasian as the "one who is to come."

There are problems inherent in any approach you might take, but if you start with Augustus (technically, the first Caesar), you end up with the same set of dilemmas. The same is true if you start with Caligula (the first emperor to demand the worship of himself) or with Nero (the first emperor to systematically persecute Christians). There is simply no acceptable solution, at least from our standpoint in history.

But what about viewing the passage figuratively? Is there an acceptable (or at least plausible)

alternative? Even in the most “literal” part of the book, John addressed the seven churches of Asia, yet we know there were more than seven, so there may well have been symbolic significance there. Here, it is likely that “seven kings” represents the kingdom of the “great city” (historically Rome, but, conceptually, any power that positions itself against God). Notice v. 12 says of the “ten kings” that they have no kingdom yet and that they gave their kingdom to the beast (v. 17). The seven kings, then, is a symbolic way of describing *the whole of the Roman rule*. Some of the rule has passed, some is present, some future. The beast is not a literal eighth king — he is of the seven (of the kingdom of Rome), but stands distinct from the other emperors. He is the *Antichrist*. Calling him the eighth may be another way of stating where and how the beast fits in with the royalty of Rome. Perhaps part of the message is that the worst of the persecution of Christians is to come, yet the beast, who appears so invincible, is on his way to perdition.

The ten kings of v. 12 are also the subject of much speculation, with virtually no satisfying solution. But if one insists on taking the seven kings literally, then he must, to be consistent, do the same with the ten. However, we should remember that the number ten is, like the number seven, significant in Revelation, representing “completeness.” I think it makes sense to see these ten kings as provincial governors (men such as Pilate). This serves to round out the description of Roman rule and, as we’ll see, complete the picture as to the reason Rome fell. Notice that they are of one mind in giving their allegiance to the beast and they are the ones who make war with the Lamb (v. 14). Yet all this serves God’s overall purpose (v. 17) and His words will be fulfilled. It is predicted that these ten horns will (note future tense) hate the harlot, with certain results (v. 16). I’m guessing that this is describing the decline and fall of Rome from the inside. Internal decay and destruction will be the main reason for the fall of Rome, proving the self-defeating power of evil.

Chapter 18 will record the prophecy of the actual fall of “Babylon” and the result the fall had on the rest of the world.

“The seven kings, then, is a symbolic way of describing *the whole of the Roman rule*. Some of the rule has passed, some is present, some future. The beast is... of the seven but stands distinct from the other emperors. He is the *Antichrist*.”

# 11 The Fall of Babylon, Rejoicing

## Chapters 18-19

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### Outline

18:1-8: Babylon Declared Desolate

18:9-20: Mourning of Kings, Merchants and Sailors

18:21-24: Babylon Thrown Down

19:1-10: Heaven Glorifies God because Babylon is Defeated

19:11-16: The Messianic Warrior

19:17-21: The Beast and his Armies Defeated and Cast into the Lake of Fire

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### Questions for Discussion

1. The angel that John sees as chapter 18 opens is “coming out of heaven” onto the earth. How is that different than the visions in which John sees into heaven itself?

2. Who is Babylon and how did she fall? How extensive is her destruction? Why? Why does the earth mourn her fall?

3. [Chapter 19] Why does heaven rejoice over the fall of Babylon?

4. Who is the “bride” who will “marry” the Lamb?

5. Describe the features of Christ as depicted in 19:11-16.

6. A great battle is waged, recorded in 19:17-21. Who wins? How?

## Comments

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### Chapter 18: Fall of Babylon

An angel with great authority comes to announce the fall of "Babylon." Babylon has always been symbolic of civilization opposed to God. This passage undoubtedly refers to Rome (cf. I Pet. 5:13; Rev. 14:8; 16:19), but we must be careful not to restrict the symbol: when men collectively oppose the God of heaven, they must expect severe judgment. And more to the point for the saints, when men, in their opposition to God, persecute the people of God, the latter must know that God will judge the opponents. Their physical suffering at the hands of evil will be avenged. Such is the general message of this chapter. It uses language which is very similar to that used regarding Tyre (Ezek. 26-28) and literal Babylon (Isa. 13, 14, 21; Jer. 50-51). Reading these passages will help you get a feel for the kind of language employed by John to predict the fall of his contemporary "Babylon."

In Chapter 19 we'll notice that it is the "great harlot" who is judged (v. 2) and that "her smoke rises up forever and ever" (v. 3). This seems to indicate that the harlot, the beast and Babylon all refer to the same thing — the "great city." The various figures are used to create different pictures of the destruction of, in this case, Rome (but, perhaps, including any world order opposed to God, represented by the number 666 of 13:18). The reason given for the judgment of Babylon is identical to that given for judgment of the whore — because she has been the cause of the sin of others: "the nations... kings have committed fornication with her" (v. 3). The world has depended upon her and has been affected by her evil. God's people have been harmed in the process. The message to them is clear: "Come out of her my people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (v. 4; cf. 2 Cor. 6:17-7:1). The road to heaven is, among other things, a road which flees wickedness and rejects the pleasures of the culture in which we live. The constant message of the prophets in the Old Testament was to "come out" and return to God.

The judgment of Babylon will be complete. There will be no quarter given, for she will suffer according to the measure that she glorified herself and lived luxuriously (v. 7). In her heart, she saw herself as indestructible and invulnerable, but she fails to consider the strength of the

God who judges her (v. 8). It will be when she least expects it that judgment will come — in "one day." The term has nothing to do with time, but is instead a symbol of suddenness. Four plagues are mentioned here: death, mourning, famine and judgment by fire. The smoke of a burning city was the signal of its collapse, and John calls upon the figure to describe the fall of Rome under God's hand.

After the collapse, the nations of the world will mourn. The kings will stand at a distance, so they can avoid the plagues (v. 10), but lament the fall because the source of their great riches will be cut off. The merchants will also weep and mourn over her (v. 11). They too will be deprived of the major source of financial gain, since trade will cease. Rome's resources and wealth was beyond compare. In the Talmud it is written, "Ten measures of wealth came down into the world; Rome received nine, and all the world one." Robert Mounce, (*New International Commentary on the New Testament, Revelation*, page 329), quoting William Barclay, supplies the following stunning facts: At one of Nero's banquets, the Egyptian roses alone cost nearly \$100,000. Vitellius had a penchant for delicacies like peacock's brains and nightingale's tongues. In his reign of less than a year, he spent \$20,000,000, mostly on food. Another prominent Roman citizen, after squandering an immense fortune, committed suicide because he could not live on what remained — about \$300,000. "Small wonder that the suppliers of such gross extravagance mourned the passing of their market!" (Mounce). But it may be the sailors who will be the most disturbed at the passing of the great city (vv. 17-19). They will throw dust on their heads, the symbol of deep mourning.

Meanwhile, heaven and the saints can rejoice because the latter have been avenged (v. 20). It was in her that the blood of prophets and saints and all who were slain on the earth (v. 24). Therefore, her judgment will be sudden and complete (vv. 21-23) and all evidence of her as a world power will pass away.

## Chapter 19: Scenes of Victory

After the defeat of Babylon, heaven rings out with praise to God. We can't ignore the fact that this happens because of the defeat of the spiritual enemy, in this case the "great harlot." Her demise is reason for celebrating because the blood of Christ's servants has been avenged.

This is a chapter about victory. Of course, the whole book is about victory. Not only in the end, but even now, Christ reigns and His saints reign with Him. That calls for great rejoicing and John sees a marriage feast to illustrate it. The church has been redeemed; evil has been overcome; and Christ and His saints can praise God together for the salvation that He gives.

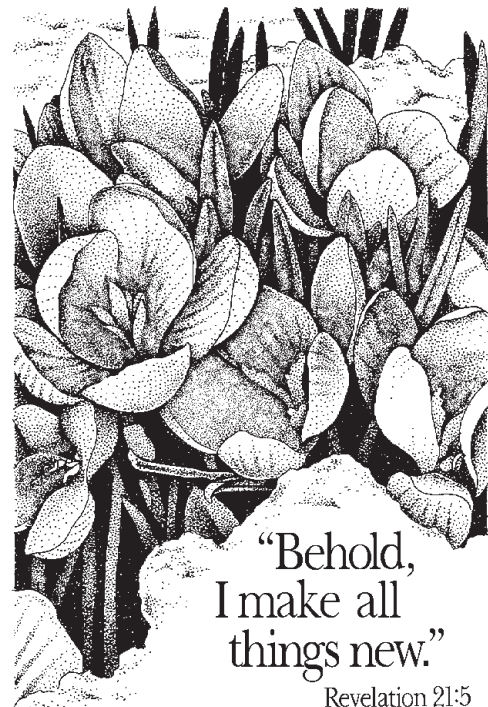
The figure of the bride and Bridegroom should not be pressed too far. Some see the Hebrew custom of betrothal in the picture in which the bride and groom were referred to as "husband and wife," though not yet married. Presumably, then, the picture here relates to such a betrothal of Christ and the church with the "marriage" to come later. Some would say this would happen only at the judgment.

There are a couple of problems with this view. First, verse 7 says that the "marriage" (not espousal, betrothal or engagement) "of the Lamb has come and His wife has made herself ready." John saw a marriage. In v. 9, people are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb. In Eph. 5:23ff. and Rom. 7:1ff., Paul writes as if the church was then married to Christ. Eph. 5:30-33 seems to be explicit on that point. The church and Christ are pictured, not only under the figure of Head and body, but also of Husband and bride. Perhaps it is best just to understand the figure in Revelation 19 as that which is meant to convey the happiness and the atmosphere of rejoicing which accompanies marriage. Perhaps nothing more is meant; certainly, nothing more is obvious.

After the great picture of rejoicing saints and heavenly beings, John sees heaven opened. He then views a majestic warrior sitting upon a white horse. In 6:2, I took the position that the one sitting upon the white horse there was not Christ, but conquering nations, or perhaps even the principle of such. There, the Greek word for "crown" was *stephanos*, meaning a victory crown or wreath. Here, the "many crowns" (*diadema*) are crowns of royalty. Regardless of how we interpret 6:2, there is no question about who this rider is. He is

"Faithful and True" and "the Word of God" is His name (vv. 11, 13).

It may be that the battle of Armageddon (16:16) is being described here, though the name is not used (remember that it is possible that Har-Megiddo, from which we get our translation Armageddon, has a secondary meaning in Hebrew of simply "place of gathering." In verse 19, we see the armies "gathered" to make war). In any case, the nations (v. 15) and the kings of the earth (v. 18) are defeated. The beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire (v. 20). The "rest" (i.e., all of those who received the mark of the beast and worshipped his image, v. 20) were killed by the sword which proceeded out of His mouth (v. 21). Total spiritual victory (the only kind that really matters - though there is a physical aspect to it here) belongs to the KING OF KINGS AND THE LORD OF LORDS.



# 12 Scenes of Judgment

## Chapter 20

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### Outline

20:1-6: Satan Bound and Saints Reign for a Thousand Years

20:7-10: Satan Released and Judged

20:11-15: The Final Judgment

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### Questions for Discussion

1. Attempt to interpret the “thousand year reign” and “thousand year binding of Satan.” List what the text says, ignore what it doesn’t say and remember that the language is figurative.

2. What is the general thrust of this chapter? Describe the relative positions of Satan, Christ and the saints. When do you suppose this all occurs?

## Comments

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The details of this chapter are difficult to interpret with any degree of certainty so we must be careful not to be dogmatic about our view of it and to avoid speculation. We should also view with great skepticism anyone who claims to have “all the answers” about the thousand year binding of Satan and the thousand year reign.

Being perplexed about the details does not prevent us from getting the message, however. If we keep the “moving picture” of Revelation in mind, we can see the significance of this scene: Satan is being bound and will not be able to deceive the nations anymore. Although he will be “released,” it will be for just a “little while.” This is a point emphasized over and over again: Christ wins and, therefore, so do His saints! The saints “reign” for as long as Satan is “bound.” The saints have their victory over the beast, but ultimately also over Satan himself. This is the general message, no matter what we get from the details.

With those cautions and an understanding of the general sense in view, I’ll venture to present my thoughts on the chapter. In Ezekiel 36-39, a sequence is described which, I believe, has a bearing on Revelation 20 (perhaps the whole book!). Israel was condemned by God because she bore “the shame of the nations” (36:5). But the day was coming when God was going to restore and renew Israel, not for her sake, because she was so righteous (she wasn’t!) but for His own name’s sake (36:22). To picture this, Ezekiel was told to preach to some bones (chapter 37) and the dry bones came to life (37:7). Israel would again be established as one kingdom under one King. That King would be “David” (37:24). Of course, in this prophecy, the King is Jesus, “son of David” and the kingdom is the church.

In all of this, “Israel” (the church) is set in contrast to the “nations” (Gog and Magog, 38:2). Ezekiel was to prophesy against them and predict their utter defeat by the Lord, so that the Lord would be magnified (38:23). This “war” and judgment is described in terms of a great earthquake, or “shaking” (38:19), mountains being thrown down (38:20). Ezek. 38:22 describes a judgment with pestilence and bloodshed, flooding rain, great hailstones (cf. Rev. 16:21) and fire and brimstone. After this judgment, Gog would be “buried” (39:11) and “the house of Israel shall know that I am the Lord their God from that day forward” (39:22). God will not hide his face from

them anymore because He has poured out His spirit on them (39:29).

The similarities between this section of Ezekiel and Revelation 15-22 is striking. There seems to be three stages in God’s plan for the church. The establishment of “new Israel” (cf. Gal. 6:16 for Paul’s use of the term, “the Israel of God”), a war against the church by the nations and the ultimate victory of God and the judgment on the nations which flows from it. John is seeing the latter two stages in even more detail: the war and the ultimate victory. This has been the theme throughout Revelation. Chapter 20 is stating it, perhaps, in another way, with some added information.

In Revelation 20, Satan is bound, meaning he is unable to deceive the nations. There is a more general sense in which he is bound and therefore unable to reach the heart of a person unless the person allows him in (cf. Jn. 12:41; Mt. 12:29). But the language of Chapter 20 is more restrictive: Satan is totally bound from doing something. Read verses 1-3: the angel has the key to the bottomless pit and he has a chain — not to bind Satan to a tether, as some have illustrated it, but to cast him into the pit, shut him up and set a seal on him! He is “bound from deceiving the nations” (v. 3). We read too much into the passage if we teach more than that. Jesus is not showing John anything that relates to Satan’s powers, He is showing His demise. This “binding” is to last for a thousand years, the same period of time which the saints (or at least those who have died for Christ, v. 4) reign.

“After these things” Satan must be released for “a little while” (v. 3). It is entirely possible that these “time-figures” have nothing to do with time. But we must be careful before we draw that conclusion, since it is hardly an obvious one. It seems that the “little while” is simply a way of describing the end of time and the judgment of the devil. Note in v. 7 that Satan will be released “to go out to deceive the nations.” It does not say that he succeeds, but simply that he is released and goes out to do it. Satan is Satan — he does what is in his nature to do; he is arrogant and confident. Therefore, when he is released from his prison, he’s going to make the attempt, once more, to accomplish what he tried to accomplish with Rome. However, notice that immediately after he gathers “Gog and Magog” together that fire “comes down from God out of heaven” and devours them (v. 9). Then, the devil is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, tormented day and night forever (v. 10).

This is followed by a vision of the judgment

— Jesus sitting on the great white throne, a vision even earth and heaven could not face (v. 11). All are judged, both small and great. The “rest of dead” (see v. 5), meaning those who followed the beast, were raised to stand judgment and they will suffer a “second death,” since they will be cast into the lake of fire. Saints will not face this death (v. 6). Instead, they have a part in the first resurrection at their “first death” in that they reigned with Christ in heaven. The “second resurrection” will come at judgment and would correspond to I Cor. 15, etc. (The terms “second resurrection” and “first death” are not used in Revelation, but are strongly implied by the use of their opposites).

Chapter 20 then presents the “End” in graphic terms. God has his victory over the nations and Satan can no longer deceive them (a continuing blessing for us today). At the end, Satan will be released from his prison. The picture is of Satan gathering his “army” of nations together for a war against God. But this is just a figurative way of presenting the End and answering the lingering question about the final disposition of Satan and the nations. We know from II Pet. 3:9ff. that the earth is going to be burned up and everything is going to happen fast, in a moment, in a “twinkling of an eye” (cf. I Cor. 15:52). John’s vision of Satan being released does not contradict those passages if we do not make the mistake of putting a literal interpretation on Revelation 20. John is describing in picturesque terms (e.g., the “gathering for war” — cf. Rev. 16:16, “Armageddon”) what Paul describes in literal terms in I Cor. 15:24: “Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and authority and power.” Paul goes on to say (v. 26) that “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death.” Compare that language with Revelation 20:14, where Death and Hades are cast into the lake of fire.

All of this is followed by Revelation 21-22, in which we find *no Satan*. Like Ezekiel, the eternal aspect of the kingdom is described. Christ destroyed the power of Satan with regard to both the living and the dead. Satan no longer has access to heaven and, therefore, at Christ’s ascension, the righteous dead were “raised” (or transported) from the Hadean world (“paradise”) and ushered into heaven. Satan was still active on earth, however. He was allowed to deceive the nations until the judgment on Rome was finalized. He was then “bound” from doing so any longer, though he has never been totally bound from deceiving

the hearts of individuals, if they swallow his lies (remember Chapter 12?). At the end, he will get what he deserves — he will be cast into the lake of fire, which was prepared for him and his angels (cf. Mt. 25:41).

“Jesus is sitting on the great white throne, a vision even earth and heaven could not face (v. 11). All are judged, both small and great. The “rest of dead” ... were raised to stand judgment and they will suffer a “second death,” since they will be cast into the lake of fire. Saints will not face this death.”

# 13 Scenes of Reward: Heaven!

## Chapters 21-22

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### Outline

- 21:1-8: All Things are New  
21:9-26: The New Jerusalem  
22:1-5: The River of Life, the Tree of Life  
22:6-20: Epilogue: The Time is Near
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### Questions for Discussion

1. What is the “new heaven and new earth” and the “new Jerusalem”?
2. Who will “inherit all things”? Who will have “their part in the lake that burns with fire”?
3. Describe the holy city, “Jerusalem.” Why is there no temple, nor sun or moon?
4. [Chapter 22] What do the “river of life” and “tree of life” represent? Where do we first read about a “tree of life”? Where else does it occur in Revelation?
5. “The time is at hand” – what is the significance of that statement in Revelation? See 1:3.
6. Describe the nature of the invitation in 22:17. Why the “Spirit and the Bride” and not the “Lamb and the Bride”? Who is invited to “come”? What does “without cost” [NASB] mean?
7. The book closes with a warning and a promise. Describe them.

## Comments

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At the end of our lives, when all the suffering and fighting against evil is done, a home awaits. It is a home prepared by Jesus at His death (cf. Jn. 14:1ff.). John saw it with eyes of flesh, though flesh and blood does not enter it. He describes it as a “New Jerusalem,” the holy city now perfected and ready to receive the faithful. But the central point in the description is that God is there (21:3). He is in control and welcomes into the city all who “overcome” (21:7). The “overcomers” are those who refused to wear the mark of the beast and held fast to their confession regardless of the physical consequences. All others will face the “second death” (21:8).

It is interesting that one of the seven angels who executed the wrath of God is the one who shows John the holy city (21:9-10). John sees a picture of immeasurable beauty. However, even this description is inadequate, bound as we are with human eyes. It is a place of pristine beauty and perfect holiness (21:27), a restoration of the Garden of Eden, with the curse removed (22:1ff.). God will be the light and saints will reign forever and ever (22:5). As the song says, “after we’re there 10,000 years, bright shining as the sun, we’ve no less days to sing His praise as when we first begun.” What a thought! Why would anyone reject it? Why would anyone give it up?

The things described in Revelation must “shortly take place” (22:6). Heaven itself is a reality and is “near” for those who are “faithful unto death” (3:10). But the primary reference is to the judgment of the nations opposed to God especially, in this case, Rome. Unlike Daniel (Dan. 8:26), John is not to seal the words of the prophecy (22:10). Instead, it was to be “published” so that the faithful knew where they stood in light of the terrible persecution. At the point of judgment, your fate is sealed, whether you are unjust and filthy or righteous and holy (22:11). Jesus is “coming quickly” with His “reward” (22:12). He is offering an invitation, along with the Spirit and the bride – all say, “Come!” and drink freely of the water of life (cf. John 7; Isa. 55:1).

John adds a warning: don’t even think about adding or taking away from this prophecy. One who does is worthy of the same punishment as those who beheaded Christians! “God will add to him the plagues written in this book” (22:18-19). This passage has often been used out of context

– it relates to the book of Revelation specifically. But there is a similar statement in Dt. 4:2 (giving the book of Revelation the same status as the Law of Moses) and surely states a principle of God about tampering with His word.

Jesus again states that He is coming quickly. John says, “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” (22:20). Can we – do we – say that? When we are confident about our position in Christ and have a good grasp of what heaven is like, perhaps we will say it more, and with confidence.

“...don’t even think about adding or taking away from this prophecy. One who does is worthy of the same punishment as those who beheaded Christians! “God will add to him the plagues written in this book”

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## Notes

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