

John's
REVELATION
A Book for All Seasons



He shall be like a tree Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,
Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.

(Psa 1:3 ^{NKJ})

Revelation

A BOOK FOR ALL SEASONS

Contents

Overview	1
Biblical Styles: Revelation is a prophetic book.	1
The Purpose of the Book of Revelation	3
An Outline of John's Revelation	4
Chapters 1-3 – Seven Lampstands.....	7
Chapters 4-7 - Seven Seals	15
Chapters 8-11 - Seven trumpets	23
Chapters 12-14 – Seven Years of Tribulation.....	33
Chapters 15-16 - Seven Bowls	45
Chapters 17-19 - The Fall of the Dragon's Allies.....	53
Chapters 20-22 – Victory Through Christ.....	63
Epilogue	77

This bible study was adapted from a *Youth Group Bible Study* first presented in April 1990. Initially, it was based on *More Than Conquerors* by William Hendriksen (Baker Books, Grand Rapids MI, 1967). It was later supplemented with insights from *Triumph of the Lamb* by Dennis E. Johnson (P&R Pub., Phillipsburg NJ, 2001). But much of it is drawn from my own studies. And so I take full responsibility for any aberrations or novelties that you may find here.

I am an *amillennialist*, which means that I interpret the thousand years in chapter 20, as pointing to the Church Age, which is the *present* age, not an age to come. This has been the traditional view of the reformed churches. I believe it's a reasonable interpretation of that passage in John's Revelation.

When I first read Revelation as a new believer, having read the Old and New Testaments, it seemed obvious to me that John presented the unfolding of the Gospel, from the Old through the New Testaments, in seven progressive cycles. Each retelling of the story provided increasing detail. When I found William Hendriksen's book, *More Than Conquerors*, I wasn't surprised to find this structure wonderfully laid out and explained. When Dennis E. Johnson's book was published, I was delighted to discover a non-controversial and eminently practical explication of John's Revelation. This bible study is a melding of the two, plus what I hope are helpful insights from my own studies, and from various commentaries, such as John Gill's.

John's Revelation is a most extraordinary and exquisite prophecy and exhortation. It is the word of Christ our Lord, proclaimed to the churches, for their edification and encouragement. It is not the cryptic and gnostic ravings that some have made it out to be. No special knowledge is needed to understand it, except the word of God. And of course, God's word may be sufficiently understood by the least among us, informed by His Holy Spirit. I pray this study aids your understanding, while retaining the wonder and mystery of God, who is presently at work in and among His people in the world.

Overview

BIBLICAL STYLES: REVELATION IS A PROPHETIC BOOK.

Although future events may be involved in a prophecy, its main purpose is *not* to predict the future. Prophecy is a style or category of literature with a particular purpose (I'll get to that purpose below). It differs from historical and poetic literature, and it has distinct rules of interpretation. These rules follow what might be called the Levitical or priestly tradition. What this means is that prophetic literature contains words and phrases that have a specific and recognized meaning. A prophetic year, for example, is 360 days. The prophetic calendar is based on lunar movement rather than solar. Numbers are sometimes symbolic; they could be used in a non-mathematical sense. The number 1000, when used prophetically, indicates infinity, or a really long time. Here's where it gets complicated: prophetic books may contain historical and poetic passages; historical and poetic books may contain prophetic ones. Along the way, we may encounter symbols, figures, types, metaphors, and allegories. Parts of the Revelation are historic; others are poetic, figurative, and predictive.

Poetic Scripture

Poetic passages are idealistic. They tend to take things to an extreme in an attempt to give us a sense of an experience that may be physically impossible. They are suggestive, not explicit. They are intensely imaginative. Just when you think you have a grasp of what they describe, the image slips through your fingers like a vapor. They attempt to express a truth that is inexpressible. It is the only language available to us to describe the love, justice, grace, sovereignty, wisdom, and eternal nature of God. We can know something about these things, but we cannot know everything. We are finite. He is infinite.

The Proper Use of Parables

Then there are *parables*, which have their own set of rules. If we use the wrong set of rules to interpret a particular passage, or if we misperceive which style or category a passage belongs to, then the outcome can become nonsensical or even outlandish. Because prophecy differs from parable, parables should not be used as a means to interpret prophetic passages. Therefore, although the parables of the talents and the minas include the return of a master, they cannot help to determine the meaning of passages in Revelation, nor do they describe the physical return of Christ. They have a different purpose. Let me explain why this is true by showing you how these various styles and tools are used (types, figures of speech, symbols, and metaphors).

Types in Scripture

Many of the settings and figures in prophecy are *typical*. That means they foretell of something or someone coming in the future that will be similar to what is described, but not exactly. What is described is only a *type*, a kind of what is to come. Joseph was a type for the Christ who was to come. He was a type in the sense that he was the Provider for the tribes of Israel (his brothers). He saved them from certain destruction, just as Christ did. Yet Joseph was not completely Christ-like. He was not sinless, because he didn't need to be. He was not going to be a holy offering. Christ, by comparison, had to be sinless, or his sacrifice would be ineffectual. Joseph was a type and so he was only similar, not an exact representation. Following this train of thought, Christ is *not* just a type for the Father. He is an exact representation. From a literary point of view, his

function is metaphorical, but that would fall far short of the truth. And so we describe him as the Incarnation of God. He is God made flesh.

Figurative Language

Very close to *typical* language is *figurative* language. It can be an embellishment in the style of poetry. So, for example, in Ps. 91:4 it says, "He shall cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will trust..." This is a figure of speech. God is not a large chicken. It is not metaphorical, because I don't gain any insights about God by studying a chicken, or an eagle. The only intent in this passage is to suggest the image of a mother hen protecting her chicks. But God is not the potential prey of a wolf as a mother hen might be. If it had gone on to say that the hen would sacrifice herself for her chicks, then it would turn into a metaphor: it would perhaps tell us something about the nature of Christ's sacrifice. But it doesn't. Figurative language tends to convey an emotion rather than a fact.

Symbol and Metaphor

A symbol is not a type. A *symbol* always follows in time what it represents, because it serves as a *reminder* of what already is. A *type* always precedes what it represents in time, because it is a *premonition* of what is yet to be. A symbol is meant to represent something in particular. That's also true of a metaphor or an allegory. What makes a metaphor useful, and what distinguishes it from a symbol, is that the closer you examine the metaphor, the more you understand what the metaphor represents. In other words, one thing not only stands for another (as a symbol does), it helps to *explain* the other. A cross is a symbol of Christ's sacrifice, but by examining the wood or the shape, we learn nothing more about his sacrifice. What we know about his sacrifice is external to the symbol itself; the symbol is just a shorthand for that knowledge.

Compare this to a butterfly, which could be a metaphor for the new life we have in Christ: it is a new creation with a new appearance. Its very nature reveals something about ourselves. An **allegory** would take the butterfly metaphor and expand on it. It might describe the journey from caterpillar to butterfly, or how a butterfly feeds. As we learn more about the life of a butterfly, we learn more about our life in Christ. We could say that a caterpillar can destroy the very plant it feeds upon, while a butterfly actually benefits the flower it feeds from by cross-pollinating it. What we learn about ourselves from this allegory is that, as non-Christians, much of our behavior was at the expense of others; it was destructive to those around us. But now that we are in Christ, we benefit those around us. We bring the message of life to them, and we may be blessed to reproduce in them the life we have in Christ.

Parables as Moral Tales

Now, returning to parables, a parable explains a moral or religious truth. That's all we're after when we interpret it. We are asking, "What is the *primary* truth here?" Thus, in a parable many things about the setting and characters help us to *understand* it, but not everything is needed to *interpret* it. Part of the fun is figuring out which things are essential, and which are only window dressing. The setting and characters in a parable don't necessarily represent someone or someplace in particular. Even when they do, their description is seldom completely accurate. So in the parable of the minas (Lk. 19:12 ff), it would be incorrect to think that Christ is hated, or that he is a hard task master; but it would be correct to think that he has expectations of us.

Prophecy

Prophecy, however, is different. Its purpose is not the same as a metaphor or an allegory. It does not explain the nature of something by alluding to something akin to it. Instead, it lifts its audience out of their present circumstances and places them into the stream of eternity. It gives them an eternal perspective on their present circumstances. *Prophecy uses setting and characters to prepare and encourage the target audience for what is to come. This is an essential rule of prophetic interpretation.*

THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION

The Book of Revelation is a handbook of spiritual battle. It was intended to prepare its readers for that battle by describing the nature of the battle and its ultimate outcome. It was designed to instill faith and courage in its readers in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, by emphasizing over and over that the battle is fought in the heavenly realms by Christ Himself. He is already the conqueror king, and we are merely the occupying army of his domain.

There are many interpretations of the Book of Revelation. We will be using one favored in Reformed circles that may help you understand the text without substituting past, current, or future events and personalities for the events and characters of John's Revelation. It identifies seven parallel sections in the Book of Revelation that repeat the same theme in each section, but with increasing detail in each re-telling. This interpretation is favored by L. Berkhof, S.L. Morris, B.B. Warfield and others. Not everyone agrees as to where each section begins and ends, however.

Although you are not bound to the interpretation presented here, as a student of Scripture you should certainly be familiar with it. Do not discount it out of hand, no matter what other interpretations you may already be familiar with or comfortable with. There is a great deal of needless confusion, intentional misrepresentation, and heated debate surrounding the End Times and the Book of Revelation. Feel free to bring any viewpoint into the fray as we sort out the book of Revelation in the light of the whole of God's Holy Word. But do not hold so dearly to a particular point of view that you lose the insight provided by other students and scholars.

What you believe about the future is a reflection of what you believe about the past. If a battle of Armageddon is yet to be fought, then Christ failed to defeat Satan on the cross, and our current role is far different than it would have been. We would be a conquering army instead of an occupying force. Someone else's territory would have to be taken, instead of taking possession of what is already ours. The land of Canaan was promised to God's people. He went ahead of them to conquer it. Their mission was to take possession of the Promised Land. It was *theirs* for the taking. Only three things were required: obedience, trust, and courage. That is the only sense in which we should be looking at our present spiritual battles. We are not told to conquer, but to stand firm.¹ Advancing the kingdom is done by staking out our individual territory and defending it. We then grow our occupying force by setting free the prisoners of our enemy. These new creatures will in turn stake out their own territory. Our enemy is the already-defeated usurper of Christ's throne. We need to act like we believe it.

¹ OT - Ex 14:13; 2Ch 20:17; Isa 46:8; Da 11:32; NT - 1Co 16:13; 2Co 1:24; Ga 5:1; Eph 6:13; Php 4:1; 2Th 2:15; 1Pe 5:12;

AN OUTLINE OF JOHN'S REVELATION

There are seven parallel divisions of the book:

1. (1-3) Christ in the midst of the 7 golden lamp-stands (representing the 7 churches)
2. (4-7) The book with seven seals
3. (8-11) The seven trumpets of judgment
4. (12-14) The seven years of tribulation: woman and Man-child persecuted by dragon, beast, and harlot
5. (15,16) The seven bowls of wrath
6. (17-19) The fall of the great harlot (Babylon) and of the beasts
7. (20-22) The judgment upon the dragon (Satan) followed by the new heaven and earth, and the New Jerusalem

These seven sections fall into two groups as well. Chapter 12, verse 1 (or 11:15 for some commentators) seems to be where the first group of visions ends and the second begins:

The **FIRST GROUP** (chapters 1-11) portrays the struggle among men, that is, between believers and unbelievers. The world attacks the Church but the Church is avenged, protected and victorious.

The **SECOND GROUP** (chapters 12-22) indicates that this struggle on earth has a much deeper background. It is actually the outward manifestation of the devil's attack upon the Man-child. The dragon attacks the Christ. Repulsed, he directs all his fury against the Church.

The sections in the second group are synchronous with the first group, but they are a continued story. The time frame is ALL of church history, from the beginning of God's plan to its conclusion. And it is equally applicable in its conclusions in ALL ages of the Church. However, do not confuse this kind of multiple application with multiple fulfillment. The original prophecy was written to a specific audience, at a specific point in time, with a message for *them* to understand, about *their* circumstances. However, the lessons and principles that were taught to them may apply to similar circumstances in our own time. And so we must be alert to recognize today's circumstances for what they are, and to respond to them biblically. When we do, we will apply the lessons and principles taught to the original audience, through the original circumstances.

OT Imagery

One last thing before we begin. In the Book of Revelation, there are at least 400 references to the imagery and the Scripture of the Old Testament. Therefore, to properly understand what is being said in this book, we must understand the imagery and the OT texts to which it alludes. For each chapter, there are footnotes or comments with many of the corresponding passages from the OT.

We will study this book as we would any other. We will identify the author, the time, the audience, and the circumstances under which it was written. What we are looking for is the message that the author intended to convey to his audience. Once we determine what he said, and what it means, we will be in a position to apply its teaching to our own circumstances: what it means to us.

BACKGROUND

Author: the Apostle John, by his own testimony, and by tradition.

When: Some say the book was written toward the end of John's life, c. 95-97AD. This is based on John's own testimony that he had his visions while on the island of Patmos (1:9-10). The Romans used the island as a penal settlement. They sent political agitators and others there who threatened the peace of the empire (Tacitus Annals 3.68; 4.30; 15.71). According to Eusebius, John was banished to Patmos by the Emperor Domitian, 95 AD, and released 18 months later under Nerva 96-98 AD (Euseb., III.18.1; 20.8-9).

Problems with the later date: Eusebius based his dates on the writings of Irenaeus. But those writings say it was during the reign of *Domitianou*, referring actually to Nero, not Domitian (who was *Domitianikos*). Other early writers say it was during the reign of the "tyrant." And that too, according to all early Roman and Christian writers, would refer to Nero. Additionally, Clement maintained that all prophecy ceased with Nero, limiting it to his reign of 54-69AD.

Therefore, others favor a date prior to 70AD. If the date were later than 70AD, it seems incredible that John would fail to mention the temple's destruction and the loss of a million lives (Tacitus says 600,000, Josephus says 1.1 million). Now, if John were on Patmos prior to Domitian, that would help explain writing the book on Patmos without mentioning the destruction. And indeed, Clement wrote of John returning from Patmos and chasing down a bandit on horseback. That is far more likely to have happened when he was 60 years old than when he was 90. To be fair, others say that Clement was writing of John the Elder, not John the Apostle, when he related this story. Personally, I favor the earlier date, as did Philip Schaff, the great church historian.

Audience: John writes to his brothers and companions in the tribulation and in the kingdom, servants of Jesus Christ (1.9). He specifically addresses it to the "seven churches." (1.4) There were far more than just seven churches in the kingdom, and so we need to look closer at the number *seven*. It is a prophetic term for completeness. And so we may reasonably conclude that this is a letter to the general church, which is under Roman persecution. This is because it is written during the reign of Nero. Its symbology and language should be understood in that context. Nonetheless, its message will be eternal, and its lessons will apply to the persecuted church in all ages.

Intent of the Book: to comfort the Church in its struggle against evil and persecution. It is a call for each of the churches to come under the cover of God through faithful obedience and perseverance, or else have its lampstand removed (2.5).

Message: things are not as they seem; there is more going on here than mere opposition. Be firm, stand your ground, be faithful to the point of death, and you will receive a crown of life (2.10).

NOTE: In the *first half* of this study (chapters 1-11), verses are briefly paraphrased to explain their meaning. Please read those chapters fully for yourself. However, because of the increasing complexity and detail in the *second half* (chapters 12-22), many verses are quoted in full there. And a different font is used to distinguish Scripture from my comments.

Questions for your consideration:

1. What difference does the type of language make to properly interpreting the Bible?
2. What strange interpretations might arise by interpreting a figurative phrase literally? What are a few examples of *figurative* language in the Bible?
3. "Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" (Joh 8:57 ^{NKJ}) Does that mean Jesus was in his forties at the time? Why not? How would you disprove it? (e.g., Luk 3.1-2; Act 11.28)

Chapters 1-3 – Seven Lampstands

Chapter 1 – Introduction and Setting

(1.1) Author: John who testified (past tense) of the word of God and of Jesus Christ (i.e. author of Book of John).

(1.3) Purpose: to show what must happen soon (v.1) because the time is at hand.

(1.4) Audience: the seven churches in Asia.

(1.5) Source: the seven spirits before the throne of Christ, and Jesus Christ himself.

(1.6) Of Christ: he loves us, loosed us from our sins by his blood, and made us a kingdom, priests of God the Father.

(1.7) Poem: He comes with the cloud (such as the one which led Israel in the wilderness) and all will see him.

(1.8) Of the Son: he is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, eternal, almighty.

(1.9) Of John: he is a brother, sharing with them in the present tribulation, and in the kingdom and steadfastness of Jesus Christ.

(1.9) Where: the isle of Patmos.

(1.10) Why: because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ (Mat 10.22).

(1.11) The Vision: he was in the Spirit, given a task to write what he sees in the vision.

(1.12-16) The Glorified Christ: in the midst of the 7 candlesticks, representing 7 churches (v.20). These are *representative* churches. There are far more than 7 churches at this point in time. The number 7 is an indication of completeness, suggesting that it refers to the whole group rather than these specific churches alone. They are **TYPES**. It is interesting that the lampstand is given to a church, and apparently not to individual believers. This fits with Paul's description of the church as an organic whole (1Cor. 12). Each *church* is a bearer of the light of truth that is to shine out from believers in concert (the "you" in Matt. 5:14-15 is plural) – **the Son of Man** is an allusion to Dan. 7:13. It is a statement that Jesus is the Son of Man in Daniel's vision, and the fulfillment of his prophecy. And so it agrees with Matt. 11:13 which limits the prophecies of the OT to the coming of the Christ, and not beyond. He holds in his right hand (symbol of strength and honor) 7 stars, which are the 7 angels of the 7 churches. It is an affirmation that behind every physical and temporal object is a spiritual and eternal force (Rom. 8:38; Eph. 3:10; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 2:15). Each church is an expression of Christ in the world, under the guidance and protection of his messenger for that church. Each lampstand has been intentionally placed there, but it can be removed (Rev. 2:5).

(1.17-18) Christ as God – John falls before the figure of the Son of Man as if dead, as he would be if he were to meet God face to face. But the risen Christ ("who was dead and lives") encourages him not to be afraid. There is now a new relationship; a new covenant is in effect because of Christ: he holds the keys of Hades and of death in his hands. We are therefore no longer prisoners of death for Christ will set us free from it.

(1.19) Time - what is revealed is what already is, and what will *soon* be (reading v.1 forward into this one). Here we find out that what we are about to read is partly historical, and partly in the immediate future for these churches.

Chapters 2 and 3 – The State of the Church is described in 7 representative churches.

(2.1) To the church at **Ephesus**¹ write... The angel is the messenger who conveys the message from Christ who holds the seven stars (representing the ministers of the seven churches) in his right hand (i.e. under his authority and rule). Christ is the one who walks in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, which represent the presence of the Holy Spirit in each of the seven churches.

(2.2) He is risen, but he is also present and knows what goes on in his churches. He praises them for testing those who claim to be apostles and discovering that these men teach lies instead of truth.

(2.3) He praises their *endurance*.

(2.4) But he chastises them for their lack of *zeal*, for having left their first love – they have not neglected the object of their love, but the fire they had at first is waning.

(2.5) The cure is to recognize what has changed, and to repent – to repeat the works they did at first, or else he will remove their lampstand. If they continue to slight and grieve the Spirit, the Spirit will depart from their midst.

(2.6) To their credit, they hate the teaching of the Nicolaitans², but it is not enough to hate evil. We must love good.

(2.7) This caution is given to all the churches. **Those who are conquering** (*present active participle*), will be given fruit to eat from the tree of life, which has been preserved for us in the paradise of God.

(2.8) To the church at **Smyrna**³ write, these are the words of the First and the Last who was dead and now lives – that is, Jesus Christ.

¹ **EPHESUS** was located at the entrance to the Cayster River, an important seaport in Asia Minor. Pliny calls this city the work of the Amazons, and the light of Asia. It was famous for the temple of Diana (Gr. Artemis), one the Seven Wonders of the World. Paul preached there and stayed for two years. It was one of the largest and most impressive cities of the time, a political, religious, and commercial center. Capital of Asia under Hadrian, it was the 4th largest city in the world with a population of 250,000. It had public baths, a 24,000-seat theater, sports gymnasium, library, public assembly, commercial assembly, and even a marble road.

² This was a heretical sect holding to the "teaching of Balaam" which upheld the freedom to eat food offered to idols. The fear was that if Christians unwittingly ate such food, purchased from the marketplace and offered to an idol by its seller, that they had desecrated the temple of their body, losing their holiness and their salvation. **Response** – Paul rejected that idea, asking "is that anything?" He provided a weaker-stronger brother standard in 1Cor. 8-10. This ruling upheld the freedom we have in Christ concerning food sacrificed to idols, but weighed that freedom against the temptation to new believers; its bottom line was to avoid it where possible, but not to fret if it happened. As far as the use or presence of idols, or committing fornication, Acts 15:20 is an absolute prohibition. Rev. 2:20 outright condemns intentionally eating food sacrificed to idols (participating in idolatry).

³ The city of **SMYRNA** was legendary for its loyalty to Rome. "Faithful as Smyrna" was a proverb. This church was probably founded by Paul on his 3rd missionary journey AD 53-56 (Ac 19:10). Polycarp was bishop of the church, a pupil of John. He was faithful to death, being burned at the stake in AD 155 eagerly assisted by the Jews. Polycarp refused to say, "Caesar is Lord." Instead he said, "Eighty-six years I have served him, and he never did me any injury: how then can I blaspheme my King and my Savior?"

(2.9) This church is hard-working, poor, and persecuted, and yet it is rich in everything that matters. He knows that these believers are slandered by the Jews who are in reality a synagogue of Satan.

(2.10) They are told not to fear (to prepare themselves). There will be "ten days" (i.e. years) of jailings, trials, and persecutions. If they remain faithful even to the point of death, the crown which is life is theirs.

(2.11) Let all the churches understand that **those who are conquering** will by no means be harmed by (literally, out of) the second death. This is a double-entendre (which John loves to use). We died in Christ and are raised in Christ. This body may die, but not our soul which lives on eternally. That's one meaning. The other needs some background. The Jews taught a second death after the death of the body – a death for the wicked at Judgment.¹ Christians are not harmed at the Judgment, for Christ is our Redeemer and Advocate.

(2.12) "To the angel of the church at **Pergamum**,² write" the words of the One who holds a sharp sword, two-edged.³

(2.13) They dwell where the seat of Satan dwells (here it is a reference to the emperor – see fn. 6 below). They have held fast to the name Christian, and to the faith of Christ, even in the face of the martyrdom of their pastor Antipas.

(2.14-16) Even so, there are some who are lured by the "doctrine of Balaam" – that is, Nicolaitans.⁴ Refusing to partake in the festivities wasn't like abstaining from Halloween. It meant withdrawing from the social life of the community. The trades required attendance or else you lost your job and your trade. You became an outcast with corresponding loss of position and income. Some argued that you could participate (and thus avoid the consequences) if you simply understood that the idol was meaningless. Others might have argued that the church needed to thoroughly

¹ John Gill: The phrase is Jewish, and is opposed to the first death, or the death of the body; which is the effect of sin, and is appointed of God, and which the people of God die as well as others; but the second death is peculiar to wicked men. So the Jerusalem Targum on Deu 33:6; paraphrases those words, "let Reuben live, and not die", thus, "let Reuben live in this world, and not die במותא תניינא", "by the second death", with which the wicked die in the world to come.

² Or "The Citadel" (Perga on the heights). It was built on a rocky mountain with a tower on it (thus it is synonymous with high and lofty). The city below (Perga) was the seat of the kings of Attalia. It was given to the Romans by Attalus, their last king. It was famous as the home of Galen the physician. It had a temple to the god of healing, Aesculapius, whose symbol was the serpent – the symbol of Satan. In fact, it is said that Satan dwells here (v. 13). It was home to Apollodorus the rhetorician, who taught Augustus Caesar. It was famous for inventing and making parchment, from which it gets its name. It was the capital of the province and therefore the place where the temples are dedicated to emperor-worship. Believers were asked to offer incense to the image of the emperors and say, "Caesar is Lord."

³ Refers to Rev 1:16 – It is two-edged because it will be used against the Nicolaitans unless they repent (v. 16). John Gill says that the sword comes out of the mouth of Christ, and so it is the word of God, not man. Being two-edged may refer to the Law and the Gospel: the law lays open the sins of men, filling them with grief and anguish. It not only wounds, but kills; the Gospel cuts down man's wisdom, holiness, righteousness, and worldly privileges in which he trusts. It also cuts down the worst in man, teaching him to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. The word of God may also be two-edged because it both saves and destroys. It is the means of eternal life to some, and eternal death to others. It is both an offensive and defensive weapon: it is for the defense of the saints against Satan, false teachers, and every other enemy; and it is an offensive weapon in the sense that it cuts down the enemies of the church, eternally destroying them and their principles. Or it may refer to the judiciary sentence of Christ which is pronounced on the wicked, both convicting and destroying the nations.

⁴ Balak wanted to get some of the most beautiful women in his kingdom to ply the men of Israel and draw them into sin, into idolatry. He hoped to make God angry with them to gain an advantage over them. Indeed, the Israelites did sleep with the whores of Moab, ate things sacrificed to idols, and in the end, they bowed down to Baal Peor (Num 25:1).

understand their practices if we were to evangelize them. Sound familiar? These are called justifications, not reasons. Therefore, repent of it.

(2.17) Let all the churches understand this warning. **Those who are conquering** this temptation, will be given the hidden manna of life (the fullness of Christ known only to believers), the white stone¹ (approval and absolution), and a new name written on it known only to those who receive it ("Christ's" or "God's"). See Num 6:27; Isa 62:2; 65:15; Rev 3:12; 14:1; 22:4. "New" is the Greek word *kainos*, which means fresh or unprecedented in either form or substance. Both of those will characterize us when we enter into the very presence of God in glory, perfected in Christ and without blemish (Col 1:22-23, 28).

(2.18) To the church at **Thyatira**² write the words of the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire and feet like burnished bronze. This is probably the image of an altar whose flame lights up and consumes the darkness of our lives, and whose feet are steady and strong for the work.

(2.19) I know your open goodness: increasing good works, love, faith, service, and patient endurance.

(2.20-25) But I also know your sin which you think is hidden: you allow someone of the spirit of Jezebel (who killed the prophets of the Lord – 1Kings 18), who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce you to know "the deep things" of Satan and his practices. She has been given an opportunity to repent but has not. Therefore God will pay her back with death, and all who follow her (her children v. 23). It is God who knows the deep things of men, and judges them accordingly.

(2.26) **Those who are conquering** and attending carefully to my business to the end will be given authority over the nations.

(2.27-29) They will rule with a rod of iron, breaking the dominion of the nations under the authority of Christ, just as a potter shatters his earthen vessels. This was clearly understood by the potters of Thyatira who were guildsmen. Those who are conquering will be given the morning star – this is the name of Christ himself (22:16). He is the sure promise of the dawn: a new day is coming, even though the darkness is still upon us. Let all the churches hear.

¹ John Gill: Latins used the phrase "to add a white stone" to give approval to something; Christ will give his approval of them before his Father, angels, and men at the last day. The Greeks used white stones to mark good or lucky days; Christ promises his people who overcome happy days after the persecutions are over. White stones were given to the conquerors in the Olympic Games. Their names were written on them with the value of the prize they won; believers who overcome may expect the crown of life and glory; they are more than conquerors through Christ. Roman judges would condemn the accused by placing black stones into an urn, or absolve him by placing white stones into it; believers will receive white stones – guilty, but pardoned for Christ's sake.

² **THYATIRA**: a city on the Lycus river in Asia Minor. It was the center of a number of trade guilds that made it prosperous. One of Paul's first converts, Lydia, was a resident of Lycus. She was a seller of purple dye and therefore probably a guild member. It was in a valley between two other valleys. A garrison was stationed there to protect Pergamum, the capital, because it had no natural protection.

Chapter 3 - (3.1) To the church at **Sardis**¹, write 'The words of him who has the seven spirits of God and the seven stars.' That is, Christ has all the fullness of God (Col 1:19); to him has been given the Spirit without limit (Jn 3:34). In his hands are held the seven (or sevenfold) ministers of the Gospel (v. 2:1), those who serve at the churches which belong to Jesus Christ. This church may look alive by its outward activities, but appearances are deceiving. In fact, it is lifeless (as distinct from permanently dead).

(3.2) Arise and invigorate what remains – for what remains is dying! Your work is not yet done.

(3.3) Remember what you were taught and repent. If you will not take heed, I will come against you like a thief in the night (Sardis was partly destroyed by an earthquake in 17 AD, so they understood this well).

(3.4) There are a few even in Sardis who have not soiled their robes with sin. They will walk in white with me, for they have maintained their value (they are worthy).

(3.5) The one who is conquering will be clothed in a white robe. His name will remain in the BOOK of LIFE forever² and his name will be recited by Christ to the Father and his angels (from the Book of Life).

(3.6) 'Hear what the Spirit says to the churches.'

(3.7) To the church at **Philadelphia**³ write what is said by the One who is Holy and True (perfect and genuine) and who holds the key of David (that is, he is the rightful ruler of the House of David – he holds the key to the gates of the eternal city – for eternal rule was promised by God to David in 2Sa 7:14-16, 1Kg 2:4, 8:25; it affirms that Jesus Christ is the one prophesied about in Isa 9:6-7. If Christ gives entrance, then it is assured – no one else has the key to give or deny entrance to the kingdom.

(3.8) Christ sees the works of this church, and has given it an open door that none may shut. This church has little power in a worldly sense, and yet it has remained obedient to Christ's teachings and loyal to his name. It has set an example for all the churches. "Yet you, O Bethlehem, though you are least among the tribes of Judah, yet out of you shall come the ruler who will shepherd my people Israel." Mat 2:6.

(3.9) The Jews who persecute the church are labeled a synagogue of Satan – they are Jews by heritage but not by faith (Rom 2:28); they are physical Israel but they are not spiritual Israel and are not inheritors of the promise made to Abraham. There are those

¹ **SARDIS** was situated on an impregnable hill overlooking the Hermus Valley. It was the former capital of Lydia. Its people were over-confident that no one could scale the walls of its hill. The only point of access was a narrow neck of land in the South that could be easily fortified. And yet Sardis was over-run in 549 BC and 218 BC. There was a weak point, a crack in the face of the rock wall by which skilled climbers could slip into the city. It was a city in decline, physically as well as spiritually. The church there was not only in the world, but of it.

² His name will not be blotted out from the Book of Life, in a positive sense. This is a reference to those who are not Israel being blotted out "from under heaven." See Ge 6:7; 7:4 (the Flood does not affect the remnant who are preserved); Ex 17:14; De 25:19; 29:20 (the enemies of Israel – the Amalekites will be blotted out); Ex 32:33; Deut 9:14 (those who oppose God and his chosen ones are blotted out); 2Ki 14:27 (Israel will not be blotted out).

³ **PHILADELPHIA**: this city is situated in a valley on an important road. Its name was given to commemorate the loyalty of its founder (Attalus II) to his brother Eumenes – hence the name "brother-lover" as distinct from "the city of brotherly love."

among them whom God will have to worship in the Church, and to acknowledge Jesus as the Christ.

(3.10) Because this church has kept God's teachings of steadfastness, it will be kept from the trial which is coming and is to come upon the whole inhabited world to test those who dwell upon the land – Christ will sift his church to shake out the chaff.

(3.11) Christ will come quickly. Hold fast to what you have so that no one may remove your honor.

(3.12) **The one who is overcoming** will be a pillar in the temple of God, never to be removed. This is a pillar in the present Church Age, the Church Militant in the world. And Christ will write upon him the name of God, and the name of the city of God, the New Jerusalem, which is coming and is to come down from heaven (i.e. its inhabitants are all born from above), and Christ's new name: King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev 19:16).

(3.13) Let all the churches hear.

(3.14) To the Church at **Laodicea**,¹ write, The words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of God's creation.

(3.15-17) "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked." ²

(3.18) God is the only source of their wealth and sight, their remedy and their provisions.

(3.19-20) Therefore repent and turn back to God, or else be disciplined. Behold, he stands at their door and knocks, waiting for them to come to him and bid him enter into their midst.³

(3.21) The one who conquers, as Christ has conquered, will rule by his side.

(3.22) Let him has ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit has to say to the churches!

"The church is in the world. That was true then. It is still true today. The church should shine in the midst of darkness. 'You are the light of the world – and the seven lampstands are seven churches.'" (*Conquerors*, p. 80)

¹ **LAODICEA** was a very wealthy town with a gymnasium, baths, theaters, and a stadium. It was a city of bankers and financiers. When an earthquake hit, they were wealthy enough to decline government aid. The city was situated near hot springs. A famous school of medicine was founded here, producing, among other things, a remedy for weak eyes. Their hot waters were famed for their healing powers, yet the church here is told that they are neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm – a way of saying that they are ill and blind, and without remedy. They only think they are well-off, when in fact they are suffering.

² This is a self-contented church, not troubled by any consciousness of sin. They were "tepid, flabby, half-hearted, limp, always ready to compromise, indifferent, listless." They were all "nice" people. This is the only place in Scripture where Christ is grieved by them, so disgusted that he is getting ready to vomit them out of his mouth. His eyes, unlike theirs, can see their ailment.

³ This is not referring to regeneration, which is entirely of God, but to true conversion, repentance, and sanctification. The audience is the church; these are believers who suffer from easy-believism, and remain worldly in all their ways. Their values are the values of the world, not of the kingdom. And so they are called to discern the difference. Are they lampstands and light-bearers or not?

Questions for your consideration:

1. Examine yourself: what's your spiritual condition? Are you like any of the seven churches? (neither hot nor cold; think you're OK, but you're not; etc.) What will you do about it?
2. How are you "conquering" for Christ, so that the second death will not harm you at all?
3. How are you "ruling" over your flesh and the world? Are you instead ruled by them?

Chapters 4-7 - Seven Seals

"Whenever in history the Church is faithful to its calling and bears testimony concerning the truth, tribulation is bound to follow. Apart even from this fact, the Church is *in* the world. Accordingly, it suffers along with the world. Children of God do not escape the horrors of war, famine, and pestilence. The Church needs these tribulations. It needs both the direct antagonism of the world and participation in the common woes that pertain to this earthly life as a result of sin. The Church, too, is sinful. It is in constant need of purification and sanctification." (*Conquerors*, p. 81)

When we are tempted to speak and act as if the control of events and the destiny of the world rested in the hands of men instead of God, Chapter 4 ushers us into the Throne-room of God to behold the world from an eternal perspective in which God reigns in all matters, large and small, with absolute authority.

(4.1-6) – John is told he will be shown something that must take place "after this." The voice he hears is like the first voice at his first vision, sounding like a trumpet.¹ This is the voice of Christ, the Alpha and Omega (**1.8,10**). John is told to come up (from Patmos) to the throne room (in the kingdom of the New Jerusalem, which will later descend; Rev 3.12; 21.2). He is going to be shown "what *must* take place after this." John says, "Immediately I was in the Spirit."

What he sees (4.3) is the throne set in heaven, and the One sitting on the throne, with a rainbow around it.² And around that throne were twenty-four other thrones with twenty-four elders sitting on them.³ There were, again, seven burning torches before the throne, representing the seven spirits of God, as in Rev 1.4. There are four creatures at the four sides of the throne "full of eyes in front and behind", with the faces of a lion, ox, man, and eagle – each with six wings: *cherubim* (Isa 6.1-3), They guard the holy things of God (the tree of life, Gen 3.24); they're depicted on the veil before the holy of holies, (Exo 26.31); their wings cover the Mercy Seat of the Ark (Exo 25.20).

They sing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty, Who was, and is, and is to come." It's a reference to Rev 1.8, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." So the repetition has begun, providing more detail than we had in chapter 1. In 4.6 there is a "sea of glass" before the throne, a pool, which is an image of the laver that sat before the Sanctuary, used to cleanse the priests for their duties. It represents the cleansing blood of Christ (Rev 1.5).

¹ The allusion is to the blowing of trumpets at the opening of the door of the temple; "every day there were one and twenty soundings of a trumpet in the temple, three לפתיחת שערות, "at the opening of the doors", and nine at the daily morning sacrifice, and nine at the daily evening sacrifice (Misn. Succa, c. 5. sect. 5)." And one of them was called the great door of the temple; and he that slew the daily sacrifice, did not slay till he heard the sound of that door when it was opened (Misn. Tamid, c. 3. sect. 7); so here at the opening of the door in heaven, in the church, of which the temple was a type, the voice of the Son of God is heard as the sound of a trumpet, talking loudly and familiarly to John. – John Gill

² The covenant sign of Noah (Gen 9.13-17).

³ Rev 5.8-10 says they were redeemed by the blood of the Lamb out of every kindred, tongue, people, and nation. So they represent the whole Church, in every age. The number "twenty-four" is an allusion to the twenty-four courses of the priests, into which they were divided by David (1Chr 24:1ff), and to the twenty-four stations of the Levites, who in turn attended the service of the temple daily. They represented the whole body of Israel, in putting their hands on the sacrifices, and praying for them (2Chr 30.16; 35.10f). – John Gill

Their faces represent the ministers of God, with the strength of a lion, the labor of an ox, the intelligence of a man, and the swiftness of an eagle. Whether it's the living creatures or the elders on their thrones, they all face, submit to, and serve the One on the throne, the Triune God who rules over all (Rev 1.5; 4.9-11). "For you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (see Joh 1.3; Act 17.28)

Chap. 5 – Who is Worthy to Open the Scroll?

(5.1) A scroll is in the right hand of the One on the throne (the Father) – it's written on front and back, like the scroll of woe that Ezekiel saw (2.9-10). But this one is sealed with seven seals. In Heb 10.7 Jesus says, "it is written of me in the scroll of the Book" (Gen 3.15; Psa 40.8; Luk 4.21). When Jesus began his ministry, he opened the scroll of Isaiah, 61.1, and declared that he was its fulfillment (Luk 4.21). In other words, this scroll, "The Book," is of Christ.

(5.2-4) A "mighty angel" asks "Who is worthy to open the scroll and loose its seals?" No one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open it. John sobs at this, for there is no one to execute God's plan.

(5.5-7) One of the elders tells John not to weep. Look! The Lion of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered *so that HE* can open it. There Christ stands "between" the throne and the four living creatures, and "among" the elders, as Mediator. His seven horns and seven eyes are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth, by means of the Church (Rev 1.20). The Son goes to the Father, and takes the scroll from His right hand.

(5.8-10) At this, the Church falls down before him with harp and incense, and begins to sing a new song of redemption, describing his victory, and the translation of the Church into a kingdom of priests to God, who shall reign on the earth.

(5.11-13) The Church is now joined in song by the heavenly host, and by every creature in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and in the sea, and all that is in them – for even the earth itself yearned for renewal (Rom 8.19-21). The song closes with Amen, and the elders fell down and worshipped.

The Five Doxologies:

4.8, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God, the Almighty."

4.11, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory, honor, power. For you created..."

5.9, "Worthy are you to receive" the book... for you were slain, and purchased..."

5.12, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain, to receive power, riches, wisdom, might, honor, glory, blessing."

5.13, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing, honor, glory, dominion, forever and ever."

Chap. 6 – The Lamb opens the Scroll of Judgment

Its seven seals represent times of trouble and persecution in the world, sent by God to shake the earth (see Rev 3.10, sifting the wheat from the chaff). The number seven not only symbolizes that these will not stop until God's judgment of the earth is complete, but also that they are operations of God's Spirit who convicts the world of its guilt (Joh 16.8). For each of the first four seals, John is summoned by one of the creatures to "come and see" – why? He is a faithful witness to what? How will this encourage the churches?

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse – This is an allusion to Zec 1.8ff.

Zec 1:8 I saw by night, and behold, a man riding on a red horse, and it stood among the myrtle trees in the hollow; and behind him *were* horses: red, sorrel, and white.

(6.2-3) The **FIRST SEAL** - the **WHITE HORSE** – Its rider has a bow, and he went out conquering. This is Christ, who has conquered (Joh 16.33; Rev 3.21; 5.5; 17.4; 19.11), is conquering, and is to conquer.

Psa 7:11-13 God is a just judge, And God is angry *with the wicked* every day. ¹² If he does not turn back, He will sharpen His sword; He bends His bow and makes it ready. ¹³ He also prepares for Himself instruments of death; He makes His arrows into fiery shafts.

Hab 3:8-9 O LORD, were *You* displeased with the rivers, *Was* Your anger against the rivers, *Was* Your wrath against the sea, That *You* rode on *Your* horses, *Your* chariots of salvation? ⁹ Your bow was made quite ready; Oaths were sworn over *Your* arrows. Selah *You* divided the earth with rivers.

(6.4) The **SECOND SEAL** - the **RED HORSE** – Its rider was a peace-taker, not a peace-maker; for Christ is the Peace-maker for the elect, but not for those who reject him. He is given a short-sword (*machaira*) used for close battle, as Christ brings the sword of truth to divide families and mark his enemies (Mat 10.34; also Psa 45.3-5). The Church is not at peace with the world, but instead is persecuted by it. And it is "granted" to him, that one should kill another – meaning that God will grant martyrdom to the faithful. This is not an avoidable accident, but God's ordained means of spreading the seed of the Gospel.

Joh 12:24 Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain.

Christ says this not only of himself, but of believers. His work is our work (Joh 14.12). And so Stephen falls (Act 11; 22.20); and James falls (Act 12.2), and Paul, and Peter, etc.

(6.5-6) The **THIRD SEAL** – the **BLACK HORSE** – Its rider carries the **SCALES OF JUSTICE** in his hands, meaning that those who harm the elect of God will be weighed in these scales. It ties this horse and its rider to the second one. The oil and wine remain, but to be rationed out to believers:

Eze 4:10-11 "And your food which you eat *shall be* by weight, twenty shekels a day; from time to time you shall eat it. ¹¹ "You shall also drink water by measure, one-sixth of a hin; from time to time you shall drink.

The persecution of the church meant that you either held your guild credentials, or you belonged to the Church, but you could not do both. To withdraw from the trade guild meant to go on rations, loss of job, deprivation, and suffering. Unlike Israel of old, this is not imposed on believers as punishment for their sin, but as a testimony of their faith. It is a costly faith, and honor is due them for withstanding their trials **(2.10)**.

(v. 7-8) The **FOURTH SEAL** – the **PALE HORSE** – Its rider is death, and Hades followed with him. He had power and authority to kill a quarter of the earth, with the sword, hunger, death [the black death *or plague*], and beasts. The whole world is going to be shaken, and the Church will not escape such earthly disasters as war, famine, pestilence,

and raging beasts. There is no special protection; only special providence. Death cuts down, and Hades gathers the slain. However, what Death may take – its power and authority – is governed by God. This isn't random, limitless mayhem, but it's directed and restrained by the hand of God. It has bounds set on it – a quarter of the earth.

Eze 14:21-22 For thus says the Lord GOD: "How much more it shall be when I send My four severe judgments on Jerusalem-- the sword and famine and wild beasts and pestilence-- to cut off man and beast from it? ²² Yet behold, there shall be left in it a remnant who will be brought out, *both* sons and daughters; surely they will come out to you, and you will see their ways and their doings. Then you will be comforted concerning the disaster that I have brought."

The sword used here isn't the short-sword (*machaira*) for slaughter of the innocents, but *rhomphaia*, the long great sword which David used to take Goliath's head. This is war. It is a universal woe, not directed at the Church in particular. Likewise, famine and plague aren't particular about who they claim, and raging beasts always take the weakest without political or religious affiliation coming into play.

(6.9-11) The FIFTH SEAL – The CRY OF THE MARTYRS. Underneath the heavenly altar as holy sacrifices, are the souls of the martyrs, slain for their testimony, crying out for justice to avenge their blood. "How long O Lord?" When will the guilty be punished, and the unjust brought to justice? Here is Job's lament, and Solomon's lament in Ecclesiastes.

Ecc 8:12 Though a sinner does evil a hundred *times*, and his *days* are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be well with those who fear God, who fear before Him.

Lev 17:11 'For the life of the flesh *is* in the blood, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it *is* the blood *that* makes atonement for the soul.'

Christ has atoned for their sins with *his* blood, but who will atone for *their* blood, shed as a testimony to Christ? When will the scales of the third rider be balanced? And in answer, they are each given a white robe, and told to rest awhile longer for the testimony in blood is not yet complete.

(6.12-17) The SIXTH SEAL – the FINAL JUDGMENT. This seal points to an appointed day that has not yet come, but will, inexorably. Believers must understand that there will be an accounting – that the wicked are not getting away with anything. Justice will come and be meted out according to what has been done in the flesh on earth. The image is from Hebrews 9 and from the Tabernacle ceremonies described in Leviticus.

Seven angels with seven trumpets will announce the Day of the Lord's Wrath. An angel with a golden censer takes the coals from the altar, and the incense of the prayers of the saints, and offers them on the golden Incense altar before the throne. The smoke of the incense with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God. Then the angel filled the censer with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. The one fire purifies, and the other destroys.

The number six here points to man, whose number is 666 (Rev 13.18). There are six objects of creation mentioned, distributed among six classes of men. The objects are the earthquake which blackens the sun, and turns the moon blood-red, the stars fall to the

earth, the sky recedes, and the mountains crumble. The classes are the kings of the earth, great men, rich men, commanders, mighty men, and finally, slaves and free men – who all call for the mountains to fall on them, to hide them from the face of the One who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb. "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?" Who indeed.

None of these protected and privileged classes will avoid the Judgment. And none of the underprivileged classes will escape either, free or slave. This is not about class warfare. It's about the children of God versus those who are not, Jacob and Esau, the elect and the reprobate. Jesus was very clear:

Joh 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

The *Seventh Seal* won't be opened until chapter 8.

Chap. 7 – Sealing the Elect.

There is only one protected class, and that is the elect. "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. (Joh 14:6) "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (Joh 6:40) "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day." (Joh 6:44)

This is no cause for looking down on others, "for it is by grace that you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God." Eph 2.8. "Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand." (Rom 14:4) "There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?" (Jam 4:12)

And so, if we are to stand on that day, we must be made to stand. And we must be kept from destruction, set aside for God. An angel descends from the east, with the seal of the living God, notifying the four angels who were authorized to harm the earth, sea, and trees "till we have sealed the servants of our God on their foreheads." There would be 12,000 from each of the 12 twelve tribes, or 144,000 "of the children of Israel," a symbolic number representing the entire Church militant in the old and new dispensations.

Rom 8:28-29 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose. ²⁹ For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Rom 9:6-8 They *are* not all Israel who *are* of Israel, ⁷ nor *are they* all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." ⁸ That is, those who *are* the children of the flesh, these *are* not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed.

Gal 3:16 Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.

Eph 1:13-14 In Him you also *trusted*, after you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also, having believed, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, ¹⁴ who is the guarantee of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

Eph 4:30 Those who belong to Christ are sealed. "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."

(7.9) "After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could number of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, ***clothed with white robes***, with palm branches in their hands."

They are countless, "no one could number" them, despite having just numbered 12,000 from each tribe. This indicates that the numbers were perfect or complete. There is a specific fixed number of elect who are saved, that only God knows – for "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!" **(7. 10)** Who they are, is hidden from us; it belongs to our Redeemer, and not to us. But every one of them shall be saved:

Joh 6:39 "This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. – literally, "all whom he has given me shall not perish; rather I will raise them in the Last Day."

There is also a reference here to the Fifth Seal, concerning those who were under the altar and given robes of white (6.9-11). An elder asks if John understands who they are.

(7.13-14) "Who are these arrayed in white robes, and where did they come from?" ¹⁴ And I said to him, "Sir, you know." So he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

The timing in v. 14 is unclear. These are the ones who "are coming" out of the great tribulation. The Greek is present tense ongoing. It suggests that as they are killed, they come immediately into the presence of Christ:

(7.15) "***Therefore*** they ARE before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. And He who sits on the throne will dwell among them." – literally, "will tabernacle over them," hence the ESV translation, "will shelter them with his presence."

(7.16-17) "They shall neither hunger anymore nor thirst anymore; the sun shall not strike them, nor any heat (alluding to Psalm 121); ¹⁷ "for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will shepherd them and lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." Jesus will come for them as their Shepherd, and will lead them to fountains of living water (the NKJ misplaced the adjective, rendering it "living fountains of water," as did the KJV – the RSV/ESV corrects it).

Their race is over (2Tim 4.7); their pain has ended (Rev 21.4); they have persevered and been faithful unto death, and now receive the promised crown of life (Rev 2.10).

This is the message John is to give to the churches undergoing persecution and martyrdom. It will be their consolation: the fixed promise of the Living God.

Questions for your consideration:

1. What is your church doing, so that it may be described as "faithful to its calling and bearing testimony concerning the truth"?
2. What makes Jesus Christ worthy to break open the seals on the scrolls? In what ways are you "walking worthy of the calling (*vocation* KJV) with which you've been called?" (Eph 4.1)
3. How are you "sealed" for the day of Judgment, so that you're not consumed? (2Cor 1.22; Eph 1.13; 4.30; 2Tim 2.19)

Chapters 8-11 - Seven trumpets

RECAP

The history of the Church has twice been unrolled, once in chapters 1-3, and the second time in chapters 4-7. In the first three chapters, we find seven lampstands representing the churches of Christ – His body on earth; each one is assessed by the Head of the Church who was described in chapter 1 as the risen Christ, ruler of the Kingdom of God, who holds the keys of Hades and Death. And therefore there is no need for any who are in Christ to fear death. They may therefore testify to the truth of who Christ is, and what He has done, without worrying about earthly consequences. The assessment of the churches relates directly to how well they have obeyed Christ, and invested the talents he has entrusted to them. And then comes the ongoing invitation:

"Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." (Rev 3:20) Who then is ready to open the door and fellowship with him while there is still time?

And so chapter 4 rolls back the clock to the Ascension. Again we see that Christ is ascended, as we saw in the 1st chapter. He is holy, holy, holy, the Alpha and Omega. But he and the events are now described in greater detail in the heavenly realm. We knew that he holds the keys to death, but now we find out that he alone is able to open the seven seals of the Book of Scrolls – the revelation of the Judgment upon the earth. The first FOUR scrolls record the four horsemen. Christ rides forth on the white horse with his sword of the Gospel. Following close behind is the red horse, raining persecution on **the church**. Then come the **scales of justice** recording the wrongs done to the church. **Death and destruction** follow, from which the church is not exempt. This is the great earthquake that shakes the foundations of the earth, "For in My jealousy *and* in the fire of My wrath I have spoken: 'Surely in that day there shall be a great earthquake in the land of Israel.'" (Eze 38:19) There was a great earthquake as the stone rolled away from Christ's tomb (Mat 28.2). And a great earthquake opened the prison doors, freeing Paul and the others to work (Ac 16.26).

–The FIFTH scroll records the **cry of the martyrs** who have testified of Christ with their blood. They must wait for justice: more martyrs will come before Judgment is executed. Then comes the SIXTH scroll, Judgment Day, *the Day of the Lord's wrath*. Yet, prior to its execution, the SEVENTH scroll is opened, **sealing the elect** and preserving them from the wrath of the Lamb (6.16). God's Judgment on those who killed the martyrs is at hand. As with Abel, their blood cries out from the ground for justice, and they shall have it. Even so, their race is over, and they shall have their reward. "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes." (7.17)

Chap. 8 – Seven Angels with Seven Trumpets – The first Four.

(8.1) There is a half-hour of silence in heaven at the opening of the SEVENTH SEAL – referring to Hab 2.20, "But the LORD is in His holy temple. Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

(8.2) Seven angels are given seven trumpets: The Watchman must sound his warning to Israel (i.e., to the Church) lest he be held accountable for their blood. See Eze 33.1-6.

Isa 27:12-13 "And it shall come to pass in that day *That* the LORD will thresh, From the channel of the River to the Brook of Egypt; And you will be gathered one by one, O you children of Israel. ¹³ So it shall be in that day: The great trumpet will be blown; They will come, who are about to perish in the land of Assyria, And they who are outcasts in the land of Egypt, And shall worship the LORD in the holy mount at Jerusalem."

Joe 2:1, 3, 4 "Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the LORD is coming, For it is at hand: ... ³ A fire devours before them, And behind them a flame burns; The land is like the Garden of Eden before them, And behind them a desolate wilderness; Surely nothing shall escape them. ⁴ Their appearance is like the appearance of horses; And like swift steeds, so they run."

(8.3-5) Another angel with a golden censer comes and stands at the altar. He puts the prayers of the saints on the golden lampstand with much incense, and the smoke ascends before God. Now that angel takes the censer, fills it with fiery coals from the altar, and throws it to the earth.

(8.6) Each of the seven angels now sounds the call to Judgment.

(8.7) The FIRST TRUMPET: hail and fire, mingled with blood.

Eze 38:22 "And I will bring him to judgment with pestilence and bloodshed; I will rain down on him, on his troops, and on the many peoples who are with him, flooding rain, great hailstones, fire, and brimstone.

(8.8-9) The SECOND TRUMPET: a fiery mountain is thrown into the sea, turning a third to blood.

Jer 51:25, 27: "Behold, I am against you, O destroying mountain, Who destroys all the earth," says the LORD. "And I will stretch out My hand against you, Roll you down from the rocks, And make you a burnt mountain [i.e., Babylon, or Rome – earthly powers that oppose God]." "Set up a banner in the land, Blow the trumpet among the nations! Prepare the nations against her."

(8.10-11) The THIRD TRUMPET: A great star fell like a torch onto the rivers and springs.

Isa 14:12-15 "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, You who weakened the nations! ¹³ For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation On the farthest sides of the north; ¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High.' ¹⁵ Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol..."

(8.12-13) The FOURTH TRUMPET: A third of the sun, moon, and stars are darkened.

Isa 13:10-11 For the stars of heaven and their constellations Will not give their light; The sun will be darkened in its going forth, And the moon will not cause its light to shine. ¹¹ "I will punish the world for *its* evil, And the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, And will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible."

Eze 32:7 When I put out your light [i.e. Egypt], I will cover the heavens, and make its stars dark; I will cover the sun with a cloud, And the moon shall not give her light.

God's threat against Egypt was that He would bring Babylon upon it – and His threat against Babylon is that He will bring Persia against it. And so it has gone, age upon age, one empire rises as another is destroyed. But the Kingdom of God advances forcefully (Mat 11.12). The sons of Abraham by faith are continually raised up to testify of God's grace to the nations, as those nations come and go. In every age, the Word goes forth like a flood; the witness is a light in the darkness that cannot comprehend it; the earth is cleansed in the blood of the martyrs; and then comes the purging fire of Judgment.

These are the progressive images of the four horsemen.

The trumpets herald the coming Purge of sin, and the ongoing rule of the Righteous King:

Isaiah 32:1 Behold, a king will reign in righteousness, And princes will rule with justice. ² A man will be as a hiding place from the wind, And a cover from the tempest, As rivers of water in a dry place, As the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. ³ The eyes of those who see will not be dim, And the ears of those who hear will listen. ⁴ Also the heart of the rash will understand knowledge, And the tongue of the stammerers will be ready to speak plainly.

(8.13) *Three Woes* are proclaimed to the earth's inhabitants: three remaining trumpets.

Chap. 9 – The Fifth and Sixth Trumpets – the Seventh is delayed.

(9.1-12) The FIFTH TRUMPET: ***the first woe***. A Fallen Angel is given the key to the bottomless pit and opens it. He has been given authority over the occupants of the fiery pit (hell). See 1.18; 3.7. He is the angel of the Abyss (9.11), "the Serpent of old, who is called the devil and Satan" (12.7-9). Smoke arises from the pit, like the smoke of a great furnace, darkening the sun and the air. This image of the bottomless pit will repeat in chapters 11, 17, and 20.

Mat 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

Out of the pit come locusts, which look like war horses, with wings like chariots. This is an allusion to Exo 10.14-15 – the swarm of locusts which were God's plague on those who opposed His people; also Joel 1.6-7; 2.1-2. The war horses and chariots are clattering onward, repeating the image and sounds of Rev 2.3-5, 10.

This is demonic torment of all those of the earth who have not been sealed with God's name. But there is a contrast with what happened in Exodus. There, all the great plants and fruits were consumed by the locusts. Here they are protected (v.4). They harm people, not plants – except for the servants of God (7.3-8, repeated in 14.1-5). And they do not kill, but only torment them for five months (vv. 5, 10). The demons don't torment the people of the Kingdom of the Son, but those of the Kingdom of Darkness, of the air, "who dwell on the earth." Those are the ones who will get the mark of the beast and worship him (13.14-17).

The locusts turn Eden into a desert, and the fallen into wanderers, like Cain. They do not live in the City of God (Zion), or walk on the Highway of Holiness (Isa 35), but live as highway robbers, in rubble cities (Eze 7.22-27). They remain under Adam's curse and

bondage (Joh 3.36), tormented and terrorized as their man-made civilization crumbles around them – it's built on sand, and not on the Rock (Mat 7.26), plastered with untempered mortar (Eze 13.10-13), and filled with whitewashed tombs (Mat 23.27).

(9.13-21) THE SIXTH TRUMPET: *the second woe*. A voice from the four horns of the golden altar (the voice in the midst of the four creatures, 6.16) calls for the four angels, the four winds bound at the Euphrates River to be released (7.1; Jer 49.36; Dan 7.2; 11.4; Zec 2.6-13). Again, this suggests a typical progression, repeated time and again in Scripture and in history, *including our own time*. An invasion from the east is about to begin. God's restraint is unbound, and the escalation of judgment will now proceed. A third of the land, sea, rivers, and sky (the earthly realm) has been destroyed. Now comes the destruction of a third of mankind.

The Euphrates is a sort of dividing line between the Promised Land, and the empires of the east like Assyria, the Medes, Babylon, and Persia. It's the place of exile – Cain went east (Gen 4.16). An army arises from there, described as fire-breathing lions who desire to have them (Gen 4.7), agents of the dragon of old (12.9; 20.2), who was a murderer from the beginning (Joh 8.44). His army is two hundred million strong (9.16), a massive plague upon the earth.

"And thus I saw the horses in the vision" (v.17). "By these three plagues a third of mankind was killed – by the fire and the smoke and the brimstone which came out of their mouths. For ***their power is in their mouth***, and in their ***tails***." If God did not spare His own people from judgment, why should He spare His enemies?

Isaiah 9:13 For the people do not turn to Him who strikes them, Nor do they seek the LORD of hosts. ¹⁴ Therefore the LORD will cut off head and tail from Israel, Palm branch and bulrush in one day. ¹⁵ The elder and honorable, he is the head; The prophet who teaches lies, he is the tail. ¹⁶ For the leaders of this people cause *them* to err, And *those who are* led by them are destroyed.

And the rest of mankind (outside the Kingdom of the Son), did not repent of their idolatry, murder, sorcery, immorality, or thefts – *oblivious to the warnings and destruction around them*, as was the generation of Noah – until it was too late.

Mat 24:37-39 "But as the days of Noah *were*, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. ³⁸ "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Chap. 10 – The Mighty Angel Standing on Sea and Land.

(10.1) As with the delay between the sixth and seventh seals, there is a delay here between the sixth and seventh trumpets. The first was to take time to seal the elect so they would be preserved. This takes time to reflect of God's covenant of grace. Another "mighty angel" (not *dunamis* as in 2Th 1.7, but *ischuros* as in 5.2 and 18.21) descends from heaven, a little scroll open in his hand. He is clothed with a cloud (the presence of the Lord, 1.7); and a rainbow was on his head (as in 4.3; Gen 9.14), his face shone like the sun (Jesus at the transfiguration, Mat 17.2), and feet like pillars of fire (Exo 13.21) – John Gill thought, this is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Dan 10:5 I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, a certain man clothed in linen, whose waist *was* girded with gold of Uphaz! ⁶ His body *was* like beryl, his face like the appearance of lightning, his eyes like torches of fire, his arms and feet like burnished bronze in color, and the sound of his words like the voice of a multitude.

Dan 12:7 And I heard the man clothed in linen, who was above the waters of the stream; he raised his right hand and his left hand toward heaven and **swore by him who lives forever** that it would be for a time, times, and half a time, and that when the shattering of the power of the holy people comes to an end all these things would be finished.

He set his right foot on the sea, and left foot on the earth, signifying they were both his domain; this is a comfort when the two beasts rise out of the sea (13.1), and are destroyed by him. Seven "thunders" are heard. And then there is a direct allusion to Daniel:

Rev 10:4 Now when the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write; but I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up the things which the seven thunders uttered, and do not write them."

While Daniel was told to write it down (that's the little scroll), "the words are shut up and sealed until the time of the end." (Dan 12.9), John is told **not** to write them down. Why not? Because this is the end foretold in Dan 8.17. The mighty angel swears by him who lives forever (v.6) that there will be no more delay. The mystery of God would now be fulfilled, as announced to the prophets. John is then told to eat the little scroll in the angel's hand, bitter to the stomach, but sweet as honey in the mouth (lit. hard to stomach, but God's word nonetheless, Psa 119.103). This is why we say we are NOW in the end times, "The Church Age."

Eze 3:1 "Son of man, eat what you find; eat this scroll, and go, speak to the house of Israel."

Likewise John is told, "You must again prophesy about many peoples, nations, tongues, and kings." That is, prophesy about the Kingdom of God which has been ushered in. God's promises are being fulfilled in his day, and that will continue until the end.

Christ himself is the Promise, and the One who Promises, and the One who Fulfills his promises.

Chapter 11.1-14 – Measuring the Temple

(11.1,2) John is given a measuring rod to measure the temple of God and the altar, and those who worship there, but NOT to measure the court outside the temple. That has been given over the nations [or Gentiles] to trample the holy city for 42 months. So this is about the temple of the saint's heart, mind, and body (1Cor 3.16; 6.19), not the outer court of those who have only a form of godliness (2Tim 3.5). The church is only as strong as the faith of its members, and the winnowing fork is in Christ's hand.

Mat 3:12 "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The Ethiopian version of the bible calls the measuring rod the "golden reed." That's the term used in Rev 21.15, where this scene is repeated in greater detail. This measuring device is also known as a line, rule, and rod. This is the Word of God, our standard of life and godliness – the rule and measure of doctrine and faith, of discipline, worship, and practice – the plan of a gospel Church gathered out of the world and separated from it. What is measured is our conformity to it, in each part. And John is to do the measuring – not God, and not an angel. He has been given the Word of God, and he is instructed to use it as his standard.

Eze 40:3 He took me there, and behold, there was a man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze. He had a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand, and he stood in the gateway.

Jer 31:38-40 "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, that the city shall be built for the LORD from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate. ³⁹ "The surveyor's line shall again extend straight forward over the hill Gareb; then it shall turn toward Goath. ⁴⁰ "And the whole valley of the dead bodies and of the ashes, and all the fields as far as the Brook Kidron, to the corner of the Horse Gate toward the east, *shall be* holy to the LORD. It shall not be plucked up or thrown down anymore forever."

Zec 2:1 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand.

(11.3,4) God will empower His two witnesses, who will testify for the whole of those 42 months (1260 days divided by 30 days per month). The truth is established in the mouth of two or three witnesses (Deu 19.15). "These are the two olive trees and two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth." The reference is to Zechariah's prophecy.

Zec 4.2-6 "What do you see?" I said, "I see, and behold, a lampstand all of gold, with a bowl on the top of it, and seven lamps on it, with seven lips on each of the lamps that are on the top of it. ³ And there are two olive trees by it, one on the right of the bowl and the other on its left." ...⁶ Then he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD of hosts."

We know from 1.20 that the lampstands represent the presence of God's Spirit in the churches, and that lampstand can be removed (2.5). David writes, "But I *am* like a green olive tree in the house of God" (Psa 52:8). Israel is described as an olive tree (Hos 14.4). Paul alludes to this in Rom 11.17 with the ingrafting of the Gentiles. And so, the Spirit at work in His churches, is a witness to the world. Its ministers are sent two by two into the world to do the works of Christ as a testimony to him (Joh 5.36).

(11.5,6) Anyone who would dare harm these two witnesses will be consumed by the fire that comes from their mouth – the word of God, unheeded, is a consuming fire.

Jer 23:29 "Is not My word like a fire?" says the LORD, "And like a hammer *that* breaks the rock in pieces?"

Furthermore, the two witnesses have the power to shut up the sky so no rain falls during the period of their prophesying – an allusion to Elijah (1Kng 17.1); and they can turn the waters into blood and strike the earth with plague, as often as they desire. This refers to the plagues against Egypt, which would not let God's people go (Exo 7.20). The Church, acting as prophets of God, has the authority to judge and condemn the world. In its

ministry of the Word, as long as it is true to the Word, its judgments are God's judgments (Mat 16.19; 18.18-19; Joh 20.20-23). Those who would destroy the church and its ministers, will themselves be destroyed by God.

Zec 2:8 For thus says the LORD of hosts: "He sent Me after glory, to the nations which plunder you; for he who touches you touches the apple of His eye."

(11.7,8) "When they finish their testimony," and not before, the attack against them begins by the serpent, the dragon of old who is the devil. He will make war against them. This revisits the pattern of the white horse of gospel proclamation, followed by the red horse of church persecution. The two witnesses, ministers of the word, aren't preserved, but overcome and killed, martyred – literally, "witnessed" (6.9). Like Christ, their bodies lie in the street – the "broad way," says the Greek – of a fallen and corrupt world, the Great City of Sodom and Egypt. It's impressive to the eye, satisfying to the flesh, yet filled with death and destruction, not for these witnesses, but for its residents.

Mat 7:13 "Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it.

These witnesses are citizens of another city. We know they are *individually* resurrected to eternal life in the City of God, clothed in white robes that have been washed in the blood of Christ (7.14). The serpent, defeated by Christ on the cross, is ever defeated by the word of the testimony of these witnesses (12.11).

(11.9,10) Here we see the collective effect of the testimony of the Church, those who minister the Gospel, the word of the risen Christ, even to the point of death. The elect from every people, tribe, tongue, and nation will see their martyred bodies for three and a half days (Christ in the grave) – three and a half years – 42 months.

Dan 7:25 He shall speak *pompous* words against the Most High, Shall persecute the saints of the Most High, And shall intend to change times and law. Then *the saints* shall be given into his hand For a time and times and half a time.

That phrase time, times, and half a time is quoted in Rev 12.14. It's the same 42 months. There is a time limit, set by God – but *our duty is to testify during the whole of that time*. The church may mourn its fallen heroes, but the world will celebrate – freed from the tormenting of the Gospel and its "foolishness" – as mistaken as Satan was while Christ was in the grave, that they have triumphed.

(11.11,12) But the church is perpetually resurrected from the grave, with the same power that raised Christ. The world – their enemies – will see them resurrected. Christ will be visibly present in the remnant. And the fallen have ascended into heaven in a cloud, just as Christ visibly ascended in the sight of 500 disciples (1Cor 15.6).

Phi 3:8-11 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; ¹⁰ that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, ¹¹ if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.

And great fear will fall upon all. The phrase "every people, tribe, tongue, and nation" points to the elect, not the reprobate. Yes, the testimony of the martyrs convicts their killers, but it also summons the elect with the Gospel warning to flee to Christ.

2Co 2:16 To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death, and to the other the aroma of life *leading* to life.

(11.13,14) Temporal judgment now falls on the Fallen City. "In the same hour there was a great earthquake," as there was at Christ's own death when the veil was torn and the graves were opened (Mat 27.51-53), as when the stone was rolled away from the tomb (Mat 28.2), and which freed Paul and Silas from prison (Act 16.25). A tenth of the Fallen City is destroyed, seven thousand killed, and the rest are terrified and give glory to God.

Mat 5:16 "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."

1Pet 2:12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by *your* good works **which they observe**, glorify God **in the day of visitation**.

The Second Woe is over – Behold! The Third Woe is coming *quickly*.

Chapter 11.15-19 – The Seventh Trumpet

(11.15) The seventh angel "sounded." Loud voices in heaven shout, "The kingdoms of this world **have become** *the kingdoms* of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"

1Co 15:24-26 Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy *that* will be destroyed is death.

Heb 1:13 But to which of the angels has He ever said: "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?

(11.16,17) And the response of the elders of the Church is to fall on their faces and worship God, who even now is fulfilling his promise of a righteous King (Isa 9.6-7). They give Him thanks – the Lord God Almighty, who is, and was, and **is coming**, "because You have taken Your great power and **reigned**."

Isa 9:6-7 For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

So between verses 15 and 17, we see that Christ has been reigning, and he continues to reign, until all the kingdoms of the earth come under his rule, and he will continue to reign "ages unto ages." The seventh trumpet announces this, introduces it as an ongoing event: not just a description of what has passed, but what is presently taking place, and will continue into eternity – *the reign of Christ*. The kingdoms of the world, in the end,

will come under His lordship, but that time is not yet, for he is yet **coming** as King over all. This is why Jesus taught us to pray: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done."

(11.18) We've seen how the elders have responded to Christ's ongoing reign. Here we see how the nations respond to His rule: they are **angry** instead of *thankful*. And so, at last the wrath of the Lamb (6.16) **has come**.

Acts 17:31 "because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

But here is a double-judgment, for the righteous in Christ will now receive their reward.

Mat 16:27 "For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works."

Luk 6:22 Blessed are you when men hate you, And when they exclude you, And revile you, and cast out your name as evil, For the Son of Man's sake. ²³ Rejoice in that day and leap for joy! For indeed your reward is great in heaven;

(11.19) We now turn back to the image of the Temple that was previously measured. Nothing is closed off, or kept from view – the Ark of the Covenant is no longer veiled and out of sight. Believers may now worship freely and not hide. And at the opening of the Temple of God, upon seeing the Ark of the Covenant with its mercy seat for the elect, there were lightnings, loud noises, thunderings, an earthquake, and great hail – the signs and emblems of God's wrath being poured out on His enemies.

However, these are not the judgment itself, but warnings of impending disaster to awaken the consciences of men, that they may yet flee to Christ while there is time. It was Noah pleading with his neighbors, the prophets pleading with the Israelites, and Christians pleading with the lost. *A Christian's Gospel labors on this earth won't end, until he or she is not on this earth.*

Questions for your consideration:

1. What evidence do you have that your light and works visibly "shine before men"?
2. What are you doing to warn the lost to flee to Christ before Judgment Day?
3. How are you being a watchman *within* the church, warning *believers* of sin and error?

Chapters 12-14 – Seven Years of Tribulation

Christ vs. the Dragon

Section Introduction

Chapter 12 begins the fourth of seven cycles; but it also begins the second half of a major division in the Book of Revelation (see the outline on page 4).

The FIRST GROUP (chaps. 1-11) portrayed the struggle between believers and unbelievers. The world attacks the Church but the Church is avenged, protected, and victorious.

This SECOND GROUP (chaps. 12-22) indicates that this struggle on earth has a much deeper background. It is actually the outward manifestation of the devil's attack upon the Man-child. The dragon attacks the Christ. Repulsed, he directs all his fury against the Church.

The central theme of the book is continued: the victory of Christ and of His Church over the dragon and his helpers. So the shift is from the earthly realm which we see, to the hidden realm in the heavenlies which we do not see. Daniel had this distinction explained to him when he was visited by the angel Gabriel (Daniel chapters 8 and 9).

Dan 9:21-23 Yes, while I *was* speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. ²² And he informed *me*, and talked with me, and said, "O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell *you*, for you *are* greatly beloved; therefore consider the matter, and understand the vision."

So too, here in Revelation the events of the past concerning Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection, and the current contest between the world and the Church, are put in the context of a larger struggle taking place "behind the scenes." The persons and events are couched in symbolic language, **signs**, to illustrate that these are physical manifestations of what is taking place in the spiritual realm.

Chapter 12.1-6 – Three signs: the woman, the child, and the dragon

(12.1) Now a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a garland of twelve stars.

This is Mary, but *she represents the Church* as well. When Joseph had a dream as a young child, the sun and moon represented his father and mother who bowed down to him. Joseph would preserve God's covenant people. And therefore the sun and moon here represent spiritual Israel, which is the Church universal – the woman is clothed with them – the sun above and the moon below – Christ above and His Bride below. The twelve stars on her head confirm this, representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

(12.2) Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain to give birth.

Again, here is Mary giving birth to the Christ child. But in giving birth to him, she is giving birth to the Church, of which Christ is the head (Eph 1.22), and we are his members (Eph 5.30). He is the Groom, and we are His Bride (Rev 5.32). This is *literal* in an earthly sense, but *representative* in a heavenly or spiritual sense.

(12.3-4) And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a great, fiery red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems on his heads. ⁴ His tail drew a third of the stars of heaven and threw them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was ready to give birth, to devour her Child as soon as it was born.

The phrase "third of the stars of heaven" was used in Rev 8.12 to describe God's wrath. So this isn't an indication of Satan's power, but the mark of Satan's punishment. He was cast down, drawing a third of the stars with him (i.e., fallen angels). He stands before the woman, waiting to devour her child. In the physical realm, this was King Herod, agent of Satan, who slew all the children age 2 and under, in an attempt to kill the Christ child. There was weeping in Ramah, and she could not be comforted (Mat 2.14-18).

(12.5) She bore a male Child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And her Child was caught up to God and His throne. **Only Christ fits this description.**

Psa 2.6-9, "Yet I have set My King On My holy hill of Zion." I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me, 'You *are* My Son, Today I have begotten You. ⁸ Ask of Me, and I will give *You* The nations *for* Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."

Act 1:8-9 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.

Heb 8:1 Now *this is* the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, ² a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man.

(12.6) Then the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there one thousand two hundred and sixty days (**the 42 months in Rev 11.2**).

Because this is the section of Revelation pointing to the heavenly reality, and not the earthly reality, this is not referring to Mary and Joseph fleeing to Egypt until Herod died (Mat 2.19). Rather, it represents the persecution of the Church for 42 months, fed and nourished with the gospel by faithful ministers of the word, represented by the two witnesses in sackcloth (Rev 11.2).

And for the same reason, this is not referring to Stephen being martyred in 33 AD (Act 8.1). Yes, a great persecution broke out and the church was scattered into "the desert" – that is, away from Jerusalem. But this refers to the corresponding heavenly battle.

Chapter 12. 7-12 – The Fall of Satan

What happened at Jerusalem, is also happening in heaven. "Michael and his angels fought with the dragon..." and the dragon did not prevail. In other words, the death of Christ had produced its intended effect. "Unless a seed falls to the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain." (Joh 12.24) In the death of Christ, the seed of the gospel is scattered on the ground, The NT Church is birthed, and it has

begun to grow and produce its grain. Satan could not stop it by stopping Christ on the cross. He was defeated by the cross, and "cast down."

Jesus foresaw this when the seventy, who had been sent out two by two, returned from their journey, successful, gratified, and praising God. Jesus' earthly ministry lasted 42 months, or 3 ½ years, and the cross came at the mid-week in Daniel's vision.

Daniel 9:27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering.

So there are 42 months of Christ's ministry to confirm the New Covenant in his blood, and then 42 months to establish his kingdom on earth following His ascension. The cross at Calvary sits in the middle of the week (a "week" equals 7 years, 360 days each).

Luk 10:18 And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.

Jesus saw the whole week that was prophesied to Daniel, before and after the cross. The death of Stephen, and the subsequent persecution of the church, even the scattering of the saints, did not indicate Satan's victory, but were actually the signs of his defeat!

(12.11) "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." The initial sign of victory in John 12.24, during the 42 months in which the covenant was confirmed, was fulfilled in reality during the 42 months following Christ's ascension. At the end of it, Stephen was martyred.

(12.12) "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! [meaning the elect] Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! [meaning the reprobate] For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time."

Chapter 12.13-17 – The Rage of the Dragon

(12.13-14) Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male *Child*.¹⁴ But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

The Church is delivered by the hand of God, from the malicious intent of Satan to kill it.

Exo 19:4-6⁴ 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. ⁵ 'Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. ⁶ 'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'

The time, times, and half a time here, is that same 42 months, or 3 ½ years. The Church has been preserved during that time, not destroyed. The accuser of the saints has been thrown down, and he is enraged. Once it has been birthed, however, the Church is not kept from Satan's rage. **His time is short** (v.12), because there will come a point at which he will be bound for a thousand years. Until then, he is relentless in his attacks against the woman and her child – the Church and its offspring – by persecution and lies.

(12.15-17) So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood.¹⁶ But the earth helped the woman, and the

earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth.¹⁷ And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring (**the Church**), who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

In earthly terms, Satan's persecution of the Church continued until Christianity was legalized in 313 AD under the Roman Emperor Constantine. In 361, the Church was made the official religion of Rome. John Wycliffe, with many other reformers and Puritans, felt that Satan was bound at that point. And until his binding, only a "short time" remained for the Dragon to act. In apocalyptic language, a "flood" of persecutions would flow from his mouth, until the "earth" – the earthly kingdom of Rome? – swallowed the flood – that is, put an end to them, for a thousand years – a period we call *the Church Age*.

HISTORICAL EVENTS: there were ten general persecutions of the Church,¹ 64-305:

First General Persecution Under Nero, AD 64. Nero was the royal arsonist of Rome who blamed the catastrophe on the Christians.

Second Persecution Under Domitian AD 85. This was the most brutal of the persecutions.

Third Persecution Under Trajan AD 108.

Fourth Persecution Under Marcus Aurelius AD 163.

Fifth General Persecution Under Commodus, Pertinax, and Julianus AD 200.

Sixth Persecution Under Maximus and Gordian A.D.235.

Seventh Persecution Under Decius and Gallus AD 249.

Eighth Persecution Under Valerian (by influence of an Egyptian magician named Macrianus) AD 257. The church had grown so phenomenally by this time that the heathen temples were all but deserted.

Ninth Persecution Under Aurelian and Diocletian (through his co-ruler Maximian) AD 270.

Tenth Persecution Under Diocletian and Galerius AD 303-305.

Caution: one of the temptations, and *snares*, in trying to interpret this book, is to assign to the symbols, some specific historical figure or event. In this second half of Revelation, looking at the heavenly truths that these signs and symbols point to, it is less clear than the first half, and harder to understand. It's pointing to times that have not yet come for the churches it was sent to. We know it was written to seven representative churches, with a message *for them* to understand, not *for us* to understand. By the same token, there are clear principles that the Spirit provides, that have helped, and will continue to help, the Church in every age, as we come to terms with adversity and persecution from without, and corruption and sloth within. Rather than try to fit external historical events and personalities to the text, we're going to examine the text in a much broader and more general way – trying to distill *principles* and *patterns* from the whole, putting many of the details aside. Hopefully that will make this study more useful, and less controversial.

¹ These persecutions are traditional, as recorded by Eusebius, and summarized in Foxes' *Book of Martyrs*.

The Two Beasts: of the Sea and of the Earth

Chapter 13.1-10 – The Beast Rising out of the Sea

(13.1-4) Then I stood on the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast rising up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and on his horns ten crowns, and on his heads a blasphemous name. ² Now the beast which I saw was like a leopard, his feet were like *the feet of* a bear, and his mouth like the mouth of a lion. ***The dragon gave him his power, his throne, and great authority.*** ³ And I saw one of his heads as if it had been mortally wounded, and his deadly wound was healed. [Don't think this opposition will ever end or die]. And all the world marveled and *followed* the **beast.** ⁴ So they *worshiped* the **dragon** who gave authority to the beast; and they *worshiped* the **beast**, saying, "Who *is* like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?"

This beast is distinguished from the Dragon, even though in Rev 12.3, the dragon also had seven heads and ten horns. But it had seven crowns on its *heads*, not ten on its *horns*. The reference to the leopard, lion, and bear, is **like** three of the beasts that Daniel saw. Each generation or age has its unique beast(s); but they all fit a pattern, and act alike.

Dan 7:2 Daniel declared, "I saw in my vision by night, and behold, the four winds of heaven were stirring up the great sea. ³ And four great beasts came up out of the sea, different from one another. ⁴ The first was like a **LION** and had eagles' wings. Then as I looked its wings were plucked off, and it was lifted up from the ground and made to stand on two feet like a man, and the mind of a man was given to it. ⁵ And behold, another beast, a second one, like a **BEAR**. It was raised up on one side. It had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth; and it was told, 'Arise, devour much flesh.'

Dan 7:6-7 "After this I looked, and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it. ⁷ "After this I saw in the night visions, and behold, a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It *was* different from all the beasts that *were* before it, and it had ten horns.

In Rev 17.9, we'll see that the seven heads of the **dragon** are seven mountains on which "the woman" is seated. She is "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations." Rome sits on seven hills, but so does Jerusalem. Even so, this suggests that the Roman Empire is the great dragon, and the city of Rome, is referred to as Babylon. This beast that arises out of the sea, then, is similar to Rome or maybe it's under Roman dominion, but it isn't Rome. The pattern is that of a *primary opponent*, and its *agents*.

In these images, a horn symbolizes power or authority. So there are ten powerful seats in this allied nation arising out of the sea. It may not be allied with Rome, but like Rome, it is an enemy of the church. It is under Satan's direction, and it will attack "the woman and her children." In a sense, it acts as an agent of Satan — as his *hand*, and *spokesman*:

(13.5-8) And he was *given* a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies, and he was *given* authority to continue for forty-two months. ⁶ Then he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme His name, His tabernacle, and those who dwell in heaven. ⁷ It was **granted** to

him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.⁸ All who dwell on the earth will worship him, *whose names have not been written in the BOOK OF LIFE of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world*.

Here we see that there is a concerted effort to destroy the Church – that the one with the primary motive to destroy it, has enlisted the aid of another, and has authorized that accomplice to speak against God and His people, and to oppose the truth they profess. What we're seeing laid out here, is a pattern that Satan will use time and again, in every generation of the Church Age. It is never one place, one ruler, one nation that opposes the Church. They act together in their attacks, with Satan directing and authorizing it.

And yet we are promised, and *commanded*, that those who do not worship the beast, have their names written in the BOOK OF LIFE, which belongs to the Lamb. The NKJ has "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." In other translations, our names are "written in the BOOK OF LIFE before the foundation of the world." That second translation would agree with **Eph 1:4** "just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world." Either way, this *Redemptive Plan* was put into motion at the beginning, and that's our comfort and assurance – it's our motive to persevere against all threats and opposition. We were sealed in Christ before it all began; and therefore nothing can change or thwart God's election of us, or steal our reward of eternal life. It's a past historical event, a done deal, a *fait accompli*. But that's not all that has been pre-determined in this warfare. God's sovereignty extends to *all* things that happen to us, as we stand firm in Christ.

(13.9-10) If anyone has an ear, let him hear: If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. ***Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints.***

Chapter 13.11-18 – The Beast Rising out of the Earth

(13.11-14) Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth, and he had two horns like a lamb and *spoke like a dragon*.¹² And he exercises all the authority of the first beast in his presence, and **causes** the earth and those who dwell in it to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed.¹³ He performs **GREAT SIGNS**, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men.¹⁴ And he **DECEIVES** those who dwell on the earth **by those signs** which he was granted to do in the sight of the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived.

If the first beast was the hands and mouth of Satan, this beast is the *priest* of Satan, or the *mind* of Satan. He's the deceiver who causes men to worship the first beast, by great signs and wonders. He's the one who convinces or coerces them to make an idol of the first beast, and to worship the beast through that idol. Like the Pied Piper, he leads them into the service of Satan's agent. This too is a pattern, a *modus operandi* of Satan. There's always a sidekick, to deflect attention away from the danger of the beast, and to direct attention toward submission to the beast. Germany didn't operate alone, but had Italy and Japan – under two powerful leaders – aid and abet our enemy. It was *satanic*.

(13.15-17) He was granted *power* to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.¹⁶ He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark

on their right hand or on their foreheads,¹⁷ and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

This second beast, which is OF the earth, worldly in all its ways, gives breath and life to the **image** of the beast. As the deceiver, he makes the inanimate idol appear to be animate and to have power. The idol is the one that issues the command to execute those who will not bow down to worship it, as Christ refused to bow down to worship Satan, and was slain. And the means of speaking, what gives breath and life to the idol, is economic power so that society cannot escape it. The first beast is *political*; this one is *economic*. It may be indirect, but it is no less powerful. It drives the people into the jaws and paws of the first beast, for relief – for "salvation" – instead of fleeing to Christ.

The thing to note here is that "mark of the beast" on the hand or forehead. It's an allusion to the custom among the Romans of imprinting marks (brands or tattoos) on their servants and soldiers, so it would be known to whom they belonged; slaves had them on their foreheads, and soldiers on their hands. We Christians have been set free from bondage to sin, and from forced servitude. We are "free slaves" to righteousness, and we are not to put ourselves in bondage by worshipping any man, or anything else, in this world. We are owned by Christ alone, and bear His mark alone.

(13.18) Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number *is* 666.

Much has been made of this number, whether it was Nero's name numerically portrayed, or the name of some future antichrist. But for our purposes, we'll take God's word at face value. "It's the number of a man." And it's the number of a man as distinct from the number of an angel, or of a god. In other words, whenever this sort of man rises up in opposition to the Church, remember that he's just a man. He's not almighty; he's not undefeatable; he's just as weak, and feeble, and corrupt, as any other man. The Dragon may stand behind him, and grant him earthly authority and power, but he's no match for Christ – who defeated the Dragon on the cross, and who has all authority in heaven and on earth. Our King is a *mighty* king, and *all* things are being placed under Him. This man, this antichrist, will be placed under Christ's feet, just as every other enemy has been. We have nothing to fear from a man, and death has no sting for us.

At this point, it needs to be clear that when Scripture was written, it foretold actual historical events, with actual historical people. They all arose, and passed away. But each was a deposit, pledge, or foretaste, of events and people that would arise in subsequent generations. Each generation points to events and personalities in its own time, and sees them as fulfilling such prophecies. *They're not wrong*. But these are interim fulfillments, temporal judgments, momentary afflictions, exemplifying Christ's return in Judgment at the End of Days, which none living or dead shall escape – for *all* must give an account. Terms like *plague*, *locusts*, *famine*, and *chariots*, are often representative, not *literal*.

When we apply the principles of John's *Revelation*, we're not looking for specific current events, personalities, or conditions in our time. We're looking for *patterns* that fit what we see in the *Revelation*. We can't always be on high alert, even though Christ will

return unexpectedly. And yet there are times that call for *heightened awareness*. When we see the pattern, we should make preparations, and take appropriate precautions.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse ride in every generation, with increasing intensity. Believers are *sealed* in every generation. God grants *martyrdom* to every generation. And therefore, God's *judgment* falls upon every generation. More Christian martyrs died in the 20th century, than in all previous centuries combined. Democide is "the murder of any person or people by their government, including *genocide*, *politicide*, and *mass murder*." *Since 1900*, more than **262 million** people have died by democide: increasing intensity.

When we begin looking for literal fulfilments, and specific individuals or nations, we can miss the pattern, and find ourselves unprepared to withstand the onslaught. We're caught unawares, unarmed, and unarmored. We must learn to recognize the *patterns*.

Chapter 14 – The Grapes of Wrath

(14.1-3) Then I looked, and behold, a **Lamb** standing on **Mount Zion**, and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand, having His Father's name written on their foreheads. ² And I heard a voice from heaven, like the *voice of many waters*, and like the voice of loud thunder. And I heard the sound of harpists playing their **harps**. ³ They sang as it were a **new song** before the throne, before the four living creatures, and the elders; and *no one could learn that song* except the hundred and forty-four thousand who were **redeemed** from the earth.

This is the same number that was sealed from the tribes of Israel (Rev 7.4). But in 7.9, we saw there was a multitude "which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, clothed with white robes." This suggests that just as that number was a subset of the elect from physical Israel (the *full number* mentioned in Rom 11.25), this is a subset of all the elect who would become martyrs.

Obviously Christ is the Lamb of God (Joh 1.29), and Mount Zion represents the heavenly kingdom or City of God (Psa 2.6-7; 46.4), where God dwells (Psa 74.2; Isa 8.18). But the allusion is not so much to the *place*, as to the *Judgment* which is decreed from there. It points to the Triumph of the Church, despite (or in response to) its persecution.

Isa 24:21-23 It shall come to pass in that day *That* the LORD will punish on high the host of exalted ones, And on the earth the kings of the earth. ²² They will be gathered together, As prisoners are gathered in the pit, And will be shut up in the prison; After many days they will be **punished**. ²³ Then the moon will be disgraced And the sun ashamed; For the LORD of hosts **will reign On Mount Zion** and in Jerusalem And before His elders, gloriously.

Some of these images are found elsewhere in Scripture, such as Ezekiel's description of the throne, the appearance of a man, and the rainbow around the throne.

Eze 1:22-24 The likeness of the firmament above the heads of the living creatures *was* like the color of an awesome crystal, stretched out over their heads. ²³ And under the firmament their wings *spread out* straight, one toward another. Each one had two which covered one side, and each one had two which covered the other side of the body. ²⁴ When they went, I heard the noise of their wings, **like the noise of many waters, like the voice of the Almighty**, a tumult like the noise of an army;

Eze 1:26-28 And above the firmament over their heads *was* the **likeness of a throne**, in appearance like a sapphire stone; on the likeness of the throne *was* a likeness with the **appearance of a man** high above it. ²⁷ Also from the appearance of His waist and upward I saw, as it were, the color of amber with the appearance of fire all around within it; and from the appearance of His waist and downward I saw, as it were, the appearance of fire with brightness all around. ²⁸ Like the appearance of a **RAINBOW** in a cloud on a rainy day, so *was* the appearance of the brightness all around it. This *was* the appearance of **the likeness of the glory of the LORD**.

Eze 43:2 And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. **His voice was like the sound of many waters**; and the **earth** shone with His glory.

And then comes the new song, which only these 144,000 could **learn**. So there was something that they endured or experienced, which **taught** them the new song.

Psa 33:2-5² Praise the LORD with the harp; Make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. ³ Sing to Him a new song; Play skillfully with a shout of joy. ⁴ For the word of the LORD *is* right, And all His work *is done* in truth. ⁵ He loves righteousness and justice; The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD.

Whatever it is that qualifies them to learn this song, it involves the Word of the Lord, and *His work done in truth*, that manifests the goodness of the Lord throughout the earth. So who are these "special" believers? What have they done in faith, that makes them sing? Whatever it was, they were **redeemed** – and maybe that's what causes them to sing. It's not the objective redemption that all believers have, but it's *standing* on that redemption, even to the point of death, clothed in Christ (Gal 3.27). As in **Rev 2.10-11**, they have been tested and proven true, "faithful until death", and so they have received the crown of life.

(14.4,5) These are the ones who were not defiled with women, for they are virgins. These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. These were redeemed from *among* men, *being firstfruits* to God and to the Lamb. ⁵ And in their mouth was found no deceit, [just as no deceit is found in the mouth of Christ, 1Pet 2.22] for they are without fault before the throne of God.

They followed the Lamb "wherever he goes" – even to Calvary (Mat 16.25). They are perfected in Christ, and cleansed by the blood – not only Christ's blood, but they have been baptized with the baptism of Christ, and they drank the same cup (Mar 10.38-39). The **CUP**, and the **WINEPRESS** to come, represent not only God's wrath executed on His Son, but the Son's willingness to drink it as the means of our salvation. We too must be willing to drink it, as a testimony to His salvation, and as the price of being faithful to Him – even to the point of death (Rev 2.10), and as a statement of our confidence in the life to come, because of Him. And Christ is the firstfruit of this, to ensure our holiness in it.

Rom 11:16 For if the **firstfruit** is holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches.

Christ is the firstfruit of those risen from the dead (1Cor 15.20).

1Co 15:22-23 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the **firstfruits**, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming.

And being "birthed" in Christ, we are *new creatures*,^{2Co 5.17} and thus firstfruits ourselves, of all the elect who still to come in each generation. So we have the elect of the first century who were firstfruits; and there have been firstfruits in each generation: offerings to God.

Jas 1:18 Of His own will He brought us forth by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of **firstfruits** of His creatures.

Exo 23:19 "The first of the firstfruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

They belong to our High Priest:

Deu 18:3 "And this shall be the priest's due from the people, from those who offer a sacrifice, whether *it is* bull or sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach. ⁴ The firstfruits of your grain and your new wine and your oil, and the first of the fleece of your sheep, you shall give him.

The references to the Church are unmistakable here; and it is the Present church as well as the Church of prior and future times. The references to Christ as High Priest, Mediator, and King are likewise unmistakable here: ever-present and ever-working in and among His people, in the world, which every generation of believers *experiences* and *trusts*. And because the Spirit of Christ has been ushered in, and deserves to be glorified in His people, there is an *eternal* royal COMMANDMENT, a royal DECREE, and a royal WARNING, given by **three angels** in sequence:

(14.6-10) Then I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to **preach** to those who dwell on the earth – *to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people* – ⁷ saying with a loud voice, "*Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come*; and **worship** Him who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water."

⁸ And another angel followed, saying, "BABYLON is fallen, **is fallen**, that great city, because she has made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

The dragon has been fatally wounded, and its current agent in the world is fallen – in this case "Babylon." It's a **representative city**, just like the seven representative churches. It's wherever the current SIN CAPITAL of the world is located – the seat of authority in the world, which opposes Christ. And it "is fallen." **God's judgment on it is pronounced**; it cannot withstand Christ's kingdom, or His army on the march. The earthly gates of this city are the gates of hell (Mat 16.18), and its days are numbered. Rome fell; Constantinople fell; kings and nations have fallen generation upon generation. No earthly king, army, or nation, can long reign on the earth, once it opposes Christ and His people. And therefore, a **gospel warning** is issued:

⁹ Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives *his* mark on his forehead or on his hand, ¹⁰ "he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation.

He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.

This warning is proclaimed to ALL, including the church. The Holy Roman Empire was worshipped by the Church – and it was ruled by the Church. The Reformation was the overthrowing of an earthly empire, headed by Antichrist in the guise of a pope ("papa"). "Call no one on earth your father, for only one is your Father, who is in heaven," Mat 23.9). Its seat of power was fixed in Rome, that "great harlot who sits on many waters" (Rev 17.1), at Babylon (figuratively). It persecuted the True Church by Inquisition, from the 13th through the 17th centuries – four hundred years of bondage in a modern Egypt. But the one who shed the blood of Christ's servants, is avenged by God (Rev 19.2), and that empire falls with a mighty crash before the sword of the Gospel – and it must endure the weight and torment of eternal damnation, as every generation of evil-doers must:

(14.11) "The smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, whoever worships the beast and his image, and receives the mark of his name."

The image of the beast is whatever idol – whatever created god – is being worshipped by those who will not worship God in Christ alone. It can be anything of this world that is set above or in place of the Only God. It can be ill-gotten wealth, self-worship, fame in the eyes of others, technology that builds a modern tower of Babel, physical pleasure and comfort, blood-lust, or a host of other idols. "The mark of His name" is like a tattoo of the beast's ownership of those held in bondage to him, of the allegiance that is pledged to him, of its effects: the open sores and disease of servitude to that which brings eternal death. It is the mark of Cain, of Sin, and of enslavement, whatever form that may take.

Now comes the contrast with those who are loyal members of Christ, the true Church:

(14.12,13) Here is the patience [*steadfastness*] of the saints; here *are* those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. ¹³ Then I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* the dead who die in the Lord from now on.'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

This is the *promise* of God for His children, and the *requirements* of being His children:

- (1) steadfastness in the face of opposition (Mat 16.24-25)
- (2) obedience to the commandments of God (Joh 15.9-10)
- (3) enduring faith in Jesus, evidenced by the faith OF Jesus (Mat 10.25)

Those who remain steadfast and obedient and faithful to the end, will be blessed. They'll "die in the Lord." And therefore they may rest in their *labors*, and their *works* will follow them. But "faith without works is dead." (Jas 2.20) We must not be *foolish* about this. But those who remain so, will see the Lord. "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Mat 5.8). Three more angels now appear from the throne room of heaven, where Christ sits high and lifted up. It is the Harvest of Sin, to press ***The Grapes of Wrath***:

(14.14-16) Then I looked, and behold, a white cloud, and on the cloud sat *One* like the Son of Man, having on His head a golden crown, and in *His* hand a sharp sickle.

¹⁵ And ANOTHER ANGEL came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him who sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle and reap, for the time has come for You to reap, for the harvest of the earth is ripe." ¹⁶ So He who sat on the cloud thrust in His sickle on the earth, and the earth was reaped.

(14.17) Then ANOTHER ANGEL came out of the temple which is in heaven, he *also having a sharp sickle*. [He is the physical manifestation of Christ at work in the world.]

And now the decree of **temporal judgment** is cried out:

(14.18-20) And ANOTHER ANGEL came out from the altar, who had *power over fire* (Rev 16.8) and he cried with a loud cry to him who had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth, for her grapes are fully ripe." ¹⁹ So the angel thrust his sickle into the earth and gathered the vine of the earth, and threw *it* into the great **winepress of the wrath of God**. ²⁰ And the winepress was trampled *outside the city* (Heb 13.12), and **blood** came out of the winepress (Gen 49.11), up to the horses' bridles, for one thousand six hundred furlongs.

Six hundred furlongs is 200 miles, showing the depth and breadth of what was required to atone for our sins; and this atonement is sufficient to cover ALL of Israel, which is said to be 200 miles square.

Isa 63:3 "I have trodden the **WINEPRESS** *alone*, And from the peoples no one was with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes.

There is a harvest of the elect to life, and of the reprobate to condemnation (Joh 5.29). The blood of Christ has been offered, and it will be avenged.

Questions for your consideration:

1. What evidences do you see in the world, that satan is openly attacking the Church?
2. How can you help and encourage churches that are suffering persecution? (2Cor 4.8-10; 12.10; 1The 2.14-16; 2The 1.4-5; 2Tim 3.12). That is, how can you join with them?
3. What gifts, tools, and weapons has God given us to combat satan? How are you making use of them, or how could you make better use of them? (1Cor 12.7; 2Cor 10.4; Eph 4.11-20; Eph. 6)

Chapters 15-16 - Seven Bowls

"In the history of the world, a definite and ever-recurring order of events is clearly evident. Through the preaching of the Word, applied to the heart by the Holy Spirit, churches are established. Again and again this happens. They are light bearers – lampstands – in the midst of a world that lies in darkness. They are blessed with the constant spiritual presence of Christ (chapters 1-3).

"Again and again God's people are persecuted by the world. They are subjected to many trials and afflictions (chapters 4-7).

"Again and again the judgments of God are visited upon the persecuting world. These judgments, again and again, fail to move men to repentance (chapters 8-11).

"Again and again this conflict between the Church and the world points to a deeper, more fundamental warfare between Christ and Satan, between the 'seed of the woman' and 'the dragon' (chapters 12-14).

"The question which now arises is what happens whenever, *in history*, the trumpets of judgment, the initial plagues, fail to result in penitence and conversion? Does God permit such impenitence, such hardness of heart, to go unpunished until the final judgment of the last day? Must we conceive of God's wrath as being completely pent up until the second coming, until the vintage described in chap. 14?" (*Conquerors*, p. 157).

The answer in brief is this: the initial and partial manifestation of God's anger in earthly judgments, is followed by the final effusion of wrath. It is **final**, though not **complete**, until Judgment Day. In other words, when we don't respond to the initial "pledge" of God's wrath, we unleash the final and increasing fulfillment of it – like rising flood waters that spill over a dam, sweeping away everything in their path; or like a consuming **PLAGUE** that has no mercy, and offers no more opportunity for repentance. They are "*sinner in the hands of an angry God*; they may have crossed the deadline between God's patience and His wrath."¹

There's a connection between the trumpets of chapters 8-11, and the bowls of chapters 15 and 16. TRUMPETS **warn**; BOWLS are **poured out**. And both apply to the same period of time – to the same people who have received the mark of the beast. In this fifth vision, we see the same forces of evil: the dragon, the beast coming up out of the sea, and also the beast coming up out of the earth. This applies to and spans the entire era between Christ's first and second coming. In the reformed tradition, it is the *Church Age* or Millennium, and this view is known as *amillennialism*, implying it's not a literal millennium. John Wycliffe, Morningstar of the Reformation, believed it is indeed a literal millennium: it began at Christ's ascension and ended a thousand years later, at which point Satan was loosed. The Church became corrupted in both doctrine and practice, and the pope is the Anti-Christ. So, with all other reformed theologians, Wycliffe would say that we're in the end times today. Christ can return in judgment at any moment, and we must be ready.

¹ **Exo 10:27** But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he would not let them go. **Mat 12:32** "Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man, it will be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit, it will not be forgiven him, either in this age or in the age to come. **Rom 1:24** Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves; **1Joh 5:16** If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin *which does not lead* to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not *leading* to death. There is sin *leading* to death. I do not say that he should pray about that.

The Bride must be prepared for her Groom, presenting herself to Him a glorious church, without spot or blemish (Eph 5.27, 2Pet 3.14), her members having no deceit in their mouths, for they are blameless before the throne of God (Rev 14.5). How then is cleansing to take place? In the fires of purification, in trials and tribulations, purging their dross.

Pro 25:4 "Take away the dross from silver, And it will go to the silversmith *for* jewelry."

Isa 1:24-28²⁴ Therefore the Lord says, The LORD of hosts, the Mighty One of Israel, "Ah, I will rid Myself of My adversaries, And take vengeance on My enemies. ²⁵ I will turn My hand against you, And thoroughly purge away your dross, And take away all your alloy. ²⁶ I will restore your judges as at the first, And your counselors as at the beginning. Afterward you shall be called the City of Righteousness, the Faithful City." ²⁷ Zion shall be redeemed with justice, And her penitents with righteousness. ²⁸ The destruction of transgressors and of sinners *shall be* together, And those who forsake the LORD shall be consumed.

Chapter 15 – the Victors' Song

(15.1) Then I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven *last* PLAGUES, for in them the wrath of God is *complete*.

These seven plagues are contained in seven bowls, and they're going to be poured on the earth – on those who remain impenitent. Remember, we're looking behind the curtain, in the heavenly realms, not at the earthly realms. We're looking at what is happening spiritually and not physically, even though there are always physical manifestations of these heavenly events.

(15.2-4) And I saw *something* like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and **those who have the victory** over the beast, over his image and over his mark *and* over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God. They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying:

"Great and marvelous *are* Your works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true *are* Your ways, O King of the saints! Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For *You* alone *are* holy. For all nations shall come and worship before You, For Your judgments have been manifested."

This is a scene of heavenly worship, in which the victory song is being sung with voice and harp – as with Moses' Song after crossing the Red Sea, learned by the people of God as they were delivered from death. That turbulent sea which extinguished Pharaoh's army in the fires of God's judgment, is glassy and peaceful for those who belong to Him.

Exo 15:1-2 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea! The LORD is my strength and song, And He has become my salvation; He is my God, and I will praise Him; My father's God, and I will exalt Him.

In Rev 4.6, a glassy sea lay before the throne, representing the seat of Justice.

Psa 89:14 Righteousness and justice *are* the foundation of Your throne; Mercy and truth go before Your face.

The sea of glass shows that there will be an end to earthly things, the termination of the "first heaven and earth" (Rev 21.1). And there are seven perspectives of this termination.

The bowls in chapter 16, give progressively more detail of this cosmic conflagration. We caught a glimpse of it in the sixth seal (Rev 6.12-17), and in the seventh trumpet (Rev 11.15-18). This is why Revelation is not to be read as though chronological.

(15.5-6) After these things I looked, and behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. ⁶ And out of the temple came the seven angels having the seven plagues, clothed in pure bright linen, and having their chests girded with golden bands.

There is no interruption or transition between worshipping God for the deliverance of His people from death – having found sanctuary in the heavenly temple of the tabernacle – and the ensuing plagues that will purge the earth of its defilement. God's mercy towards His children will not abate His wrath against His enemies. Each and every human is personally responsible for his or her actions. Whether young or old, they will be held accountable to God's Justice. *There is either **mercy in Christ**, or there is **justice apart from Christ**.* The temporal judgments that were given as a warning to flee to Christ before it's too late, have been ignored and even scoffed at, as in the days of Noah.

Mat 24:38-39 "For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ "and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

Dan 9:13-14 As it is written in the Law of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before the LORD our God, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth. ¹⁴ Therefore the LORD has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for the LORD our God is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice."

The tabernacle is the place that houses the Covenant Promise of God, to preserve His people in Christ. This is where refuge is to be found, and here alone.

(15.7-8) Then one of the four living creatures gave to the seven angels seven golden bowls full of the wrath of God who lives forever and ever. ⁸ The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God and from His power, and no one was able to enter the temple till the seven plagues of the seven angels were completed.

The four living creatures were described in chapter 4, "around the throne" and "full of eyes in front and in back." They serve God, worship God, and cry day and night, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come." (Rev 4.8) This is the time of his coming again, in judgment. The plagues are no longer withheld, but given out. The doors to the temple that had been opened in verse 5, are now closed until the judgment is complete. The smoke of God's sanctifying presence will not allow anyone to enter any longer, in order to find refuge in Christ. Instead they will be "cast into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth," Mat 22.12.

Seven angels now stand ready to pour out bowls full of plagues. The wrath of God will now be exercised, bringing destruction to the sin-filled earth, and to all who call it home – to those who love the world more than they love God (1Joh 2.15).

Chapter 16 – The Last Woes

(16.1) Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, "Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth."

There is an escalation of punishment, for an escalation in men's rebellion. Again, it comes first in the warnings which are intended to turn men from their sin. But if they will not turn, God will exercise His wrath upon them fully and increasingly:

Lev 26:14-24 But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, ¹⁵ and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, ... ¹⁸ then I will punish you seven times more for your sins... ²³ 'And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, ²⁴ then ...I will punish you yet seven times for your sins.

There has been no turning, no repentance, no shame, and no remorse; so the command has been given to pour out God's wrath upon the earth, even to its destruction.

The plague of boils:

(16.2) So the **FIRST** went and poured out his bowl upon the earth, and a foul and loathsome sore came upon the men who had the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. (**Rev 13.15**)

Notice the exemption for believers. Only those with the mark of the beast, and those who worshipped it, were struck by this plague. Yet we all know that physical diseases are as likely to afflict the elect as the reprobate. What then are "foul and loathsome sores"? It could also be translated "evil and depraved ulcers." These are physical manifestations of evil behavior, and not merely evidences of a disease. Worshipping the beast *causes* them; and so they are reaped by those who sow such seeds of evil; it is a harvest commensurate with what has been sown. This corresponds to the plague of boils in Egypt (Exo 9.8-11), when God distinguished between the Egyptians and the Israelites.

The plague of blood:

(16.3) Then the **SECOND** angel poured out his bowl **ON THE SEA**, and it became blood as of a dead *man*; and every living creature in the sea died.

The life is in the blood (Lev 17.11), and God gave the blood of Christ to make atonement for His people, to give them life by that blood. But for those who don't belong to Christ, their blood is on their own heads for rejecting his atonement (Act 18.6). The **SEA** stands for the whole scope of the kingdom of darkness – all that live in that sea of darkness shall die in their sins (Joh 8.21). No life of sin and darkness shall remain (2Cor 6.14), for light and darkness, righteousness and sin, are mutually exclusive:

Jer 51:36 Therefore thus says the LORD: "Behold, I will plead your cause and take vengeance for you. I will dry up her **SEA** and make her **FOUNTAIN** dry, and Babylon shall become a heap of ruins, the haunt of jackals, a horror and a hissing, without inhabitant.

All the tributaries of that sea, and all the rivers and springs that feed it, will be turned to blood. The martyrs will be finally avenged (Rev 6.10), and none can say it is unjust:

(16.4-7) Then the **THIRD** angel poured out his bowl **ON THE RIVERS AND SPRINGS** of water, and they became blood. ⁵ And I heard the angel of the waters saying: "You are righteous, O Lord, The One who is and who was and who is to be, Because You have judged these things. ⁶ *For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, And You have given them blood to drink.* For it is their just due." ⁷ And I heard another from the altar saying, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous *are* Your judgments."

The plague of fire:

(16.8-9) Then the **FOURTH** angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and power was given to him to scorch men with fire. ⁹ And men were scorched with great heat, and they blasphemed the name of God who has power over these plagues; and *they did not repent and give Him glory.*

In the midst of the flames, the reprobate curse God for His justice, deny their own guilt, and refuse to repent. This is the state of the lost: they are not innocent, nor passive in their enmity towards God. They relish their sin, and hate God, even as they fall into the hands of an angry God, the One who has power to throw them into hell (Luk 12.5). There is no fear of God before their eyes (Rom 3.16-18). And so the Lord will rain down brimstone and fire on them out of heaven, as He did at Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19.24).

The plague of darkness:

(16.10-11) Then the **FIFTH** angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and his kingdom became **full** of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues because of the pain. ¹¹ *They blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and did not repent of their deeds.*

Satan's ability to masquerade as an Angel of Light will become impossible. Whatever good might have mixed with evil, whatever actions might have masked the underlying evil, will be ended. The darkness of his kingdom will be evident to all – there will be no light, no common grace of God, no benefit to be had from the presence of the saints on earth, and no sanctifying influence. The two kingdoms will be finally and forever separated from one another. At conversion, saints are transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Son. At Judgment, the kingdom of darkness will be sealed and destroyed.

And again, even in the moment of their destruction, despite their pains and sores, they will not repent of their deeds. Their knee may bow, and their tongue confess that Jesus is Lord (Isa 45.23; Rom 14.11; Phi 2.11) – but their hearts remain far from God (Isa 29.13). Unless they repent, they will all likewise perish (Luk 13.3-5; Rev 2.22).

The plague of drought:

(16.12) Then the **SIXTH** angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up, so that the way of the kings from the east might be prepared.

Isa 44:24-28 Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, And He who formed you from the womb: "I *am* the LORD, who makes all *things*, Who stretches out the heavens all alone, Who spreads abroad the earth by Myself; ²⁵ Who frustrates the signs of the babblers, And drives diviners mad; Who turns wise men backward, And makes their

knowledge foolishness; ... ²⁷ Who says to the deep, 'Be dry! And I will dry up your rivers'; ²⁸ who says of Cyrus, 'He is my shepherd, and he shall fulfill all my purpose';

In 538 B.C., in the scene recorded in Daniel five, King Belshazzar and his subjects were drunk with wine, while Cyrus and his army were not far away. The Babylonians put their trust in the security of their walls, and in the impassable river that protected them. Upstream, Cyrus' troops began to dig a channel to divert the Euphrates River so it no longer flowed through Babylon! As soon as the water subsided, Cyrus' troops walked in the original river bed, entering from opposite sides of the city, conquering it.

This is what verse 12 refers to. Whatever safety we think we have against God's wrath, and however drunk and indifferent we may be to the threat at our doorstep, God's vengeance will not be thwarted. He'll overcome every defense we have, putting an end to our revelry.

(16.13-14) And I saw three unclean spirits like **FROGS** coming out of the mouth of the **dragon**, out of the mouth of the **beast**, and out of the mouth of the **false prophet**. ¹⁴ For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, *which* go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

As Isaiah prophesied in the passage above (44.25), God will make fools of false prophets and diviners, frustrate the signs of babblers, and make "wise men" spin. Judgment is upon them all. They will battle God Almighty this day, and shall not stand against Him.

(16.15) "Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."

This is a direct summons to the elders of the Church to keep watch. "The day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night." (1Th 5.2; 2Pet 3.10; Mat 24.42)

Mat 24:44-46 "Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. ⁴⁵ "Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his master made ruler over his household, to give them food in due season? ⁴⁶ "Blessed is that servant whom his master, when he comes, will find so doing.

The one who "keeps his garments," attends carefully to them – that he might be found without spot or blemish (1Tim 6.14; 2Pet 3.14), "blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor 1.8).

(16.16) And they gathered them together to the place called in Hebrew, **ARMAGEDDON**.

In Greek, this name refers to the *Plains of Esdraelon at Megiddo*. All those earthly kings and their armies, those who are at war with God, will be gathered together in one place to fight to the death against God – to be judged by the Righteous One, under penalty of death. In 67 AD, the Seventh Legion of Rome under General Vespasian, landed at Armageddon to engage the Israeli army. Israel had declared its independence from Rome, and raised its flag of nationhood. By 70 AD, the Israeli army had been destroyed, as well as the temple. That was the warning to repent, yet to occur when Revelation was written. It foretold in ghastly detail what awaits those who oppose God in His righteous wrath, on that final day.

The plague of thunder, lightning, and earthquake:

(16.17-18) Then the SEVENTH angel poured out his bowl into the AIR, and a loud voice came out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, "It is done!" ¹⁸ And there were noises and thunderings and lightnings; and there was a great earthquake, such a mighty and great earthquake as had not occurred since men were on the earth.

Satan is "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience" (Eph 2.2), the ruler of the world who has no hold on Christ. (Joh 14.30) It is on this kingdom of the air, that the last bowl is poured out, tearing apart his stronghold symbolized as *Babylon*. The same signs given at the death of Christ, which led to eternal life, are now given at the demise of Satan's rule. "The gates of hell shall not prevail against My church." (Mat 16.18) This is the promise of victory we are given: that no army arrayed against us – against *God* – shall stand. "We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us." (Rom 8.37) But the danger is as much from *within* the Church, as *without*.

Jer 49:18 "As in the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighbors," says the LORD, "No one shall remain there, Nor shall a son of man dwell in it."

The sunder of Babylon:

(16.19-21) Now "the great city" was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon was remembered before God, to give her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of His wrath. ²⁰ Then every island fled away, and the mountains were not found. ²¹ And great hail from heaven fell upon men, *each hailstone* about the weight of a talent. Men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, since that plague was exceedingly great.

"The Great City" was in Rev 11.8, "And their dead bodies *will lie* in the street of the Great City which ***spiritually*** is called *Sodom* and *Egypt*, where also our Lord was crucified." That's Jerusalem. *How can that be?* This great city is the seat of earthly power which acts as a prison, holding the non-elect in bondage to sin. Just as *spiritual* Jerusalem represents the Church, this earthly city called *Sodom* and *Egypt* represents the dominion of evil. They exist side by side. The reformers believed earthly Jerusalem was the Roman church. *It will be split in three.* The three frogs will be severed from one another: the evil spirits of the dragon, beast, and false prophet. For a house divided against itself cannot stand (Mk 3.25). Ezekiel refers to such a division as a prequel to judgment:

Eze 5:2 A third part you shall burn in the fire in the midst of the city, when the days of the siege are completed. And a third part you shall take and strike with the sword all around the city. And a third part you shall scatter to the wind, and I will unsheathe the sword after them.

God will purge His Church, and deliver her from the grip of Satan in the last days, after Satan has been released. He will again seek to destroy Mary's children by infiltrating the Church – by sowing tares among the wheat to produce a crop of *false prophets*, wolves in sheep's clothing (Mat 7.15), to deceive the saints if that were possible (Mat 24.24).

Isa 28:17-18 Also I will make justice the measuring line, And righteousness the plummet; The hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, And the waters will overflow the

hiding place. ¹⁸ Your covenant with death will be annulled, And your agreement with Sheol will not stand; When the overflowing scourge passes through, Then you will be trampled down by it.

And even then, these reprobate and false prophets will blaspheme God for their judgment, being without shame before Him. God will have no pity, for they *deserve* perdition.

Jer 6:15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the LORD.

Questions for your consideration:

1. What distinguishes the elect from the reprobate, the saved from the lost? What things are evident in your Church, of shamelessness, stubbornness, and rejection of authority?
2. How are God's pledges of judgment increasing in the world, as man's rebellion increases?
3. In proclaiming the Gospel, should you emphasize *justice*, or *mercy*? When is that necessary?

Chapters 17-19 - The Fall of the Dragon's Allies

I. THE JUDGMENT OF BABYLON

1. *The Woman and the Beast (17.1-6)*

One of the angels who had one of the seven bowls (15.1, 7), now talks with John, as a way of encouraging him, and offers to show him the judgment of "the great harlot who sits on many waters." John is "carried away in the Spirit" and taken into the wilderness. There he saw a woman sitting on "a scarlet beast" full of blasphemous names, with seven heads and ten horns – the empire or kingdom of the world. It's a *representative* of the dragon, having the same description we find in Rev 12.3. As for the woman, a name is on her forehead: "Babylon the great, mother of prostitutes and of earth's abominations."

Rev 17:4 The woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and adorned with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand *a golden cup* full of abominations and the filthiness of her fornication.

But who is this "Babylon"? It's clearly an earthly city, filled with debauchery, arrogance, and pleasure-seekers. The golden cup represents that which offers something precious, but which contains poison – like the fruit in the Garden. It's designed to be attractive: to turn believers from God to worldly lusts. But could this Babylon possibly represent the Church at some point? And if it does, then *which* church? There is a *faithful* church, likewise represented by a woman, the one who gave birth to the Church, in Christ:

Rev 12:1-2 And a great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was pregnant and was crying out in birth pains and the agony of giving birth... She gave birth to a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to his throne... – [that is, Jesus Christ.]

But the woman here in chapter 17 is a **harlot**, *unfaithful* – one who sells her favors and who blasphemes the name of God by her conduct and unlawful lusts. It's clear that *this* Babylon is Rome. But is it secular Rome – meaning the Roman Empire? Or is it the *Church* at Rome – which one day will become the Holy Roman Empire – an *apostate* Church? The corrections and warnings in the first chapters of Revelation are given to seven representative churches, intended to keep them on the straight and narrow, and not to fall into the broad way which leads to apostasy and destruction.

The great horror intimated here, is that *the visible Church* may become this harlot: a *false* church, a *brazen* church, an *idolatrous* church, an *agent* of the Dragon, Satan. And one day it will seek to devour the children of the Woman clothed with the sun. The visible Church must remain chaste and faithful while her Groom is away. She must not be enticed by the temptations of worldly dominion. She must not give herself to another. This is the command of Christ to His Bride: to remain true to Him, even unto death.

In 330 AD, in another age, Constantine moved the capital from Rome to Constantinople. When the Roman Empire fell in 476 AD, the Church was ruled from the east until the western seat at Rome was again established under Gregory the Great in 590 AD. But in rising from the ashes, that visible Church adopted many worldly practices; and it acquired a lust for earthly power. It began its descent into heresy, and then into outright apostasy.

John may be pointing to secular Rome, but God may be pointing to a future apostate Church at Rome. The reformers took the second interpretation, calling the pope the Antichrist. As with other prophetic literature, it is both. Initially it identifies persecution of the Church by the Roman Empire. *But that doesn't explain the use of the term "harlot."* It might apply to those in the church of the first century who sold out to Rome to save their lives. But this harlot has a **name**, and she sits **atop** the beast, which is a position of earthly power. It would not have applied to weak Christians who denied Christ out of fear.

The term "harlot" is applied repeatedly in Scripture to *unfaithful Israel*. We saw this at the end of chapter 14 (p. 39) in Isaiah's warning. The Church would become what Isaiah warned against. *But God remains faithful: He will purify His Church*. Yet in the meantime, there is Samaria and there is Jerusalem, both harlots (read Ezekiel 23).

Isa 1:21-26 *How the faithful city has become a harlot!* It was full of justice; Righteousness lodged in it, But now murderers... Afterward you shall be called the city of righteousness, **the faithful city.**"

Jer 3:6 The LORD said also to me in the days of Josiah the king: "Have you seen what backsliding Israel has done? She has gone up on every high mountain and under every green tree, and there *played the harlot*."

Eze 16:14-15 "Your fame went out among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through My splendor which I had bestowed on you," says the Lord GOD. ¹⁵ "But you trusted in your own beauty, *played the harlot* because of your fame, and poured out your harlotry on everyone passing by who *would have it*."

Hos 4:12 My people ask counsel from their wooden *idols*, And their staff informs them. For *the spirit of harlotry* has caused *them* to stray, And they have *played the harlot* against their God.

1Cor 6:15 Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make *them* members of a harlot? Certainly not!

For our purposes, it is sufficient to consider the Harlot of Babylon, as the seat of power for all those who oppose the *true* Church of God, whether within the Church, or without. They all sit atop the beast "in the wilderness," doing its bidding. There is no doubt, no ambiguity, as to what this harlot has been doing in verse 6. She is "drunk with the blood of the martyrs." She is *killing* the saints. John is shocked by this – the word "marvel" doesn't adequately convey his revulsion and dismay.

Babylon represents the mother of all seductresses: those who allure, tempt, seduce, and draw people away from God, for momentary pleasures and rewards; those who lead others to their destruction. But they themselves will be destroyed by God. **Justice is coming!**

2. The Beast's End is Revealed

(17.7-18) But the angel said to me, "Why did you marvel? I will tell you the mystery of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns. ⁸ "The beast that you saw was, and is not, and will ascend out of the bottomless pit and go to perdition.

And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the BOOK OF LIFE from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

⁹ "Here *is* the mind which has wisdom: The seven heads are seven mountains on which the woman sits. ¹⁰ "There are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, *and* the other has not yet come. And when he comes, he must continue a short time. ¹¹ "And the beast that was, and is not, is himself also the eighth, and is of the seven, and is going to perdition. ¹² "The ten horns which you saw are ten kings who have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast. ¹³ "These are of one mind, and they will give their power and authority to the beast. ¹⁴ "These will make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, for He is Lord of lords and King of kings; and those *who are* with Him *are* called, 'chosen,' and 'faithful.'"

The angel is curious why John is shocked by this. So he reveals the mystery. The "beast" you saw, *once was*. It had another form, like Assyria, or Persia – though it's *not now*, for those empires have fallen, and been replaced by others. But one day it will *ascend* out of that pit, and go to its destruction. Its appearance and its end will shock those who don't belong to Christ, whose names are NOT written in the BOOK OF LIFE. They have worshipped this god, which isn't God; and this will become blatantly obvious to them. The one they've placed their faith and hope in, is merely a *creature* with temporary and limited power. Its domain *will* come to an end; for its domain must die with it; and it *will* surely die. Its form may change with the times; its visibility may be greater or lesser at times. But all such creatures rise up and then inevitably die.

The seven mountains on which this woman sits, are the seven hills of Rome. The seven heads are those earthly emperors who have sat on its earthly throne for a little while. Five have come, one is sitting, and one is yet to come... shortly before *something* happens – something that is not stated here. I would suggest it's the destruction of the temple at Jerusalem, but opinions vary. There are ten provincial kings who served under these seven heads, from whom they received their authority briefly (one hour). They have one mind, and yield their power and authority to the beast – that is, they *serve* the beast. It's problematic trying to assign particular historical figures or empires to these signs. Where would you start? These are *signs* or representative images, *not* historical entities. There are seven in all – even the eighth one is said to be the *seventh* (17.11). In prophetic terms, *seven* indicates "the full number" – however many there may be. Let's leave it at that.

And what are they engaged in? War! Specifically, *war against the Lamb*, who is Christ. And Christ is present with, and the head of His church. Therefore, in warring against the Church, they war against Christ – and He *shall* overcome them. Why? Because He is Lord of all such lords, and King of all earthly kings. And those in the church are "with Him." They are called "chosen" and "faithful." This is distinct from that faithless harlot.

(17.15-18) Then he said to me, "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues. ¹⁶ "And the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. ¹⁷ "For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸ "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

In verse 1, we were told that the harlot "sits on many waters." While this could refer to seas or lakes or aqueducts, as we see in the earthly city of Rome, the angel explains that these "waters" are different. Yes, they're fluid and constantly shifting, but they are not geographic; they're cultural. "The waters which you saw, where the harlot sits, are peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues." There is an interesting prediction: these ten kings hate and will rebel against the harlot, strip her bare, eat her flesh, and burn her.

Eze 16:37-41 "Surely, therefore, I will gather all your lovers with whom you took pleasure, all those you loved, *and* all those you hated; I will gather them from all around against you... ³⁹ "I will also give you into their hand, and they shall throw down your shrines and break down your high places. They shall also strip you of your clothes, take your beautiful jewelry, and leave you naked and bare... ⁴¹ "They shall burn your houses with fire, and execute judgments on you in the sight of many women; and I will make you *cease playing the harlot*, and you shall no longer hire lovers.

(17.17-18) "For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose, to be of one mind, and to give their kingdom to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled. ¹⁸ "And the woman whom you saw is that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth."

How will this come about? **God** will put it in their hearts, to fulfill **His** purpose, to be of one mind about all this, and to give their kingdom to the beast (that is, to strip it from the harlot and give it to the beast), "until the words of God are fulfilled." The woman is "that great city which reigns over the kings of the earth." She is Rome, and all which that great city *represents*. There is a Rome in each generation; and in each generation it is torn down and burned; in each generation, the kings of the earth (those in various positions of power and influence) surrender their "kingdom" to the beast – the ruler of the air by proxy, working in the sons of disobedience (Eph 2.2). Yet God is never out of control; and His Church is never forgotten or ignored. None of this or anything else that will take place, is occurring outside the will of God. Take *solace* in that; and be *encouraged* by it. God **still** reigns, and He will *not* be thwarted.

3. The Fall of Babylon (18.1-24)

Another angel came down from heaven to proclaim the demise of this incarnation of Babylon. "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great! She has become a dwelling place for demons, a haunt for every unclean spirit..." She had seduced the nations, who descended with her into depravity and debauchery, from which "the merchants" or purveyors of sin, have grown rich – pimps to the prostitute, living off "the power of her luxurious living." He specifically names shipmasters, seafarers, tradesmen, musicians – and *craftsmen*: those who excluded Christians from their craft guilds, and relegated them to poverty.

(18.4) But "a voice from heaven" now summons the elect, to leave that city behind. "Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues;" This is a constant command of God to "come out from among them." It was the warning to Israel when it crossed the Jordan to enter the Promised Land – that they not participate with the locals, lest the land vomit them out as it had done the people before them (Lev 18.28). See Isa 52.11; 2Cor 6.17. "Do not touch what is unclean," for God will burn it up with fire.

(18.14) "The fruit for which your soul longed has gone from you, and all your delicacies and your splendors are lost to you, never to be found again!"

The only ones who will mourn the demise of Babylon, are those who served and profited from it, worshipped it, crying "Who is like the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" **(13.4)**. They mock Moses' exaltation of God: "Who is like You, O LORD among the gods?" (Exo 15.11) But for the people of God, there is rejoicing at Babylon's destruction,

(18.20) "for God has given judgment *for you, against her!*" God has judged between them. It's not a coincidence that she has fallen. It's not "good fortune" or "what goes around comes around." This is God's intentional judgment and destruction of those who would destroy His people, those whom God is jealous for. He **will** avenge their deaths: count on it.

Rev 6:10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

The answer? On that *Day of the Lord*, which is surely coming. There is no doubt that this is the answer to Rev 6.10, because it is declared of Babylon:

(18:24) And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints, and of all who have been slain on earth."

This is the *final judgment* before the Wedding Feast – the earth has been swept clean for the entrance of the Wedding party. Is that going to happen at a single point in time? Or is that what has been happening since the advent of Christ? Is each generation judged in real time, on an ongoing basis? Or is all of history leading toward a single and ultimate end? Can **both** of these be true? Are there many temporal judgments that point to the final Judgment which will take place on a single day in time?

We explored this in chapters 11 and 13. What we don't want to conclude is that there will be *no* final Judgment at all – that there are *only* temporal judgments. That would be unbiblical, and for one simple reason: **Christ is returning**; and *on that day*, all the dead will rise, to account for the life they lived. Scripture is perfectly clear about it:

Dan 12:2 And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, Some to everlasting life, Some to shame *and* everlasting contempt.

Mat 25:31-41 "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. ³² "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides *his* sheep from the goats. ³³ "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.

³⁴ "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... ⁴¹ "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Joh 5:26-29 "For as the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son to have life in Himself, ²⁷ "and has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man. ²⁸ "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ "and come forth-- those who have done good, to

the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.

II. REJOICINGS IN HEAVEN

1. *The Celebration of God's Righteous Judgment*

(19.1-3) After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, "Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power *belong* to the Lord our God! ² "For true and righteous *are* His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants *shed* by her." ³ *Again* they said, "Alleluia! Her smoke rises up forever and ever!" (also Isa 34.10)

John Gill writes, "It looks as if Rome, like another Sodom and Gomorrah, would sink into a sulphurous burning lake, and continue so: respect is had to the everlasting punishment of antichrist and his followers in hell, and to the everlasting burnings that will follow Rome's temporal destruction, which was an example and symbol of the vengeance of eternal fire."

2. *Our Calling to the Feast*

(19.5-9) "Praise our God, all you His servants and those who fear Him, both small and great!" ⁶ And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings **(14.2)**, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! ⁷ "Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."

⁸ And to her it was *granted* to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ Then he said to me, "Write: 'Blessed *are* those who are called [*Gr. kaleo, to call by name*] to the marriage supper of the Lamb!'" And he said to me, "These are the true sayings of God."

The "many waters" we now know are those "peoples, multitudes, nations, and tongues" that have been freed from the reign of the beast, by Jesus Christ. They are now part of the Bride; and it has been granted to them *and us*, to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, not only because of Christ's righteousness imputed to us, but because of *our righteous acts on earth*. These we have done in the service of Christ, as described in Mat 25.35 *ff*. Our labors have not gone unnoticed by God, nor unrewarded by Christ, to whom all glory, laud, and honor is due: for we can do nothing fruitful apart from Christ (Joh 15.5).

(19:10) And I fell at his feet to worship him. But he said to me, "See *that you do not do that!* I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren who have the testimony of Jesus. Worship God! For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy."

This angel, or "messenger," is said to be one of John's brothers in the faith, a fellow servant who is now like an angel in heaven (Mat 22.30). He too has the testimony of Jesus. And therefore it is *God* that is to be worshipped! Why? "For the *testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.*" JOHN GILL explains it this way: "The testimony of Jesus, or the Gospel which John and his brethren had, is the very spirit, life, and soul of the prophecy of this book; for as all the prophets bore witness to Christ, so does the Spirit of

God in this. Or the testimony which they had and bore to Christ, was equal to the spirit of prophecy with which this angel was endowed. So that he and they were on an equal footing. He was no more a proper object of divine and religious adoration than they were."

3. *The Glorious Victor*

(19.11-13) Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes *were* like a flame of fire, and on His head *were* many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. ¹³ He *was* clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and *His name is called The Word of God.*

This is the only place in Scripture where this phrase, "Word of God," is applied to Christ. John alludes to it when he says, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God." But this *title* is here assigned to the risen Christ, who shall judge the nations according to the Word of God – for all judgment has been given to him.

(19.14-16) And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. ¹⁵ *Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations.* And He Himself will rule them with a *rod of iron.* He Himself treads *the winepress* of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. ¹⁶ And He has on *His* robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (*also 1Tim 6.15*)

These are images again drawn from the Old Testament, from the prophets and Psalms.

Isa 49:1-2 The LORD has called Me from the womb; From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name. ² And He has made My mouth like a **sharp sword**; In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, And made Me a polished shaft; In His quiver He has hidden Me."

Isa 63:2-4 Why *is* Your apparel red, And Your garments like one who treads in the **winepress**? ³ "I have trodden the winepress alone, And from the peoples no one *was* with Me. For I have trodden them in My anger, And trampled them in My fury; Their blood is sprinkled upon My garments, And I have stained all My robes. ⁴ For the day of vengeance *is* in My heart, And the year of My redeemed has come.

Psa 2:8-1-12 Ask of Me, and I will give *You* The nations *for* Your inheritance, And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession. ⁹ You shall break them with a **rod of iron**; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel."

¹⁰ Now therefore, be wise, O kings; Be instructed, you judges of the earth. ¹¹ Serve the LORD with fear, And rejoice with trembling. ¹² **Kiss the Son**, lest He be angry, And you perish *in* the way, When His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

But in 19.15, this sharp sword, which is the word of God (Heb 4.12), is used to "strike the nations." This Judgment Day, in which Christ rides as the victor on a white horse, is the result of God's Gospel word being proclaimed to the nations. They have been *struck* with it, either to conversion by believing it, or to condemnation by rejecting it.

Joh 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."

And now, having been judged according to that word, God's vengeance is exacted by the Judge of all the world. The blood on his robes is not *his* blood, spilled in redeeming the elect; rather, it is the blood of those for whom his blood did *not* atone. And so their blood is on their own heads – for payment is required at his hand.

Eze 33:4 then whoever hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, if the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be on his *own* head.

At the Judgment their blood will stain Christ's priestly robes – not to remove their sins, but to pay for them. They were slain by the sword of the Word, unto damnation.

4. The Scavengers (19.17-21)

Here is a gruesome depiction of the birds of the air picking clean the bones of the slain. But it's a necessary statement about the lost – about vessels that were made for common use, created for dishonor and destruction (Joh 17.12; Rom 9.21; 2Tim 2.20). They are not to be lamented or mourned, even though we would join them, if not for the grace of God. They are food for the worms, and for the birds. Nothing more. They have *chosen* to oppose and to war against Christ for supremacy, as if they had the right and title to do so. They do not. **But He does.** All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Him. And it extends to all those who ride with him into the fray.

(19:17-18) Then I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather together for the supper of the great God, ¹⁸ "that you may eat the flesh of kings, the flesh of captains, the flesh of mighty men, the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them, and the flesh of all *people*, free and slave, both small and great."

This is a portent of the outcome of the great battle that is about to take place. The result is inevitable, which is meant to comfort us. There's no doubt as to who will win – nor as to who is on the *righteous* side, and who is on the *unrighteous* side. The Church is arrayed on the field of battle, with Christ their head at the front, sword in His mouth.

(19:19-21) And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. ²⁰ Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. ²¹ And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.

It's interesting that before the battle even begins, before the Sword of the Lord has yet to strike a blow, the beast was captured, along with its false prophet. It doesn't say how. But they were dealt with by God, *before* Christ dealt with those who carried the beast's mark, and worshipped his image. God first removed the power and authority of the beast, and the deception of the false prophet. This left their army powerless and blind – leaderless and vulnerable.

^{ESV} **Jer 50:46** At the sound of the capture of Babylon, the earth shall tremble and her cry shall be heard among the nations."

Whether the final battle, or an interim battle, the strategy is the same — and the outcome will be the same as well. Remember that Satan asked God to remove His hedge from around Job, that Satan might strike him (Job 1.10). It seems that we should pray that the beast and his false prophet be "captured" (Gr. *piazo*, laid hold of, arrested) that we might strike his army. It's the same as asking that Satan be bound, that we might set the captives free with the Gospel truth; or that their minds might be enlightened so as to receive and believe the truth. For only if God's grace acts in this way, will they be freed. But even if they aren't freed, God's word is like a sledge hammer that breaks apart rocks (Jer 23.29), and tears down strongholds (2Cor 10.4).¹ God's words will not return to Him without accomplishing the purposes for which he sent them (Isa 55.11): whether leading to eternal life for those who hear, or eternal death for those who will not heed.

Joh 3:36 "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God **abides** on him." (*it remains*)

Only the Dragon – Satan himself – remains to be dealt with...

Questions for your consideration:

1. Where is "Babylon" located in your country? What most characterizes or describes it?
2. What is the true Church doing to oppose satan and his followers, and to dethrone "the harlot" from her position of power, whether inside or outside the Church? How are you avoiding the seductions of the harlot, and warning other believers of her wiles?
3. How should you pray, as this battle is being fought in the heavenly realms?

¹ **2Co 10:4-5** ^{NIV} The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to **demolish** strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we **take captive** every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

Chapters 20-22 – Victory Through Christ

THE THOUSAND YEARS (20.1-6) (the Millennium)

While the previous sections in John's Revelation are filled with symbolism, and difficult at times to imagine or grasp what God is pointing to, nothing that we have seen so far has provoked such debate as the "thousand years" in chapter 20. And the first source of debate, the point of disagreement, is *when* does the thousand years begin? A second debate focuses on the Great Tribulation: *when* does it begin, and is it distinct from the "ordinary" tribulations we've seen? A third debate is *when* the Church will be "raptured" — that is, will it endure the Great Tribulation, or escape it? A fourth debate is, *when* the reign of Christ will begin: is it a heavenly reign or an earthly reign?

2Tim 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

1The 2:19 For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?

All other imagery, as we've seen, has been drawn from, and expands upon, the imagery of other prophets, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. And that imagery has revealed some aspect either of the coming Messiah, or of the coming Judgment.

I will suggest that these thousand years cover the span *between the two*. They constitute an era or age of immense duration, during which the Church is active in the world. It's the Age of the CHURCH MILITANT. Based on everything we've seen so far — the imagery, the application, the struggle of the Church, the opposition of the world, the purpose of God in having John write down what he has seen, commanding him to tell it to the churches — **all** of this points to the CHURCH AGE, beginning with the effusion and empowerment of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Act 2), spreading the Gospel, and enlarging the Kingdom of the Son, all of which will continue until His return.

That's why this book is a book for *all the seasons* of the Church, from the beginning to the end — for Christ is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and end of *all things*. John's Revelation isn't a separate prophecy, or a different revelation. It's a **summation** and **fulfillment** of all the prophecies of Scripture, directed to the person and offices of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, our ever-present Prophet, Priest, and King. It's an *explanation, expansion, and exposition* of Moses' Prayer in **PSALM 90**, where we are told that a thousand years to God, are like a "watch in the night." Peter tells us,

2Pe 3:8 But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

For us, the body of Christ — the Bride that awaits her Groom — we must wait patiently until all has been prepared for His arrival. And He is **preparing** His Bride, through trial and persecution, so that she may be presented to Him without spot or blemish on that day (Eph 5.27; Rev 21.2). John's Revelation is all about those preparations. It will take a thousand years of cleansing and adornment. It's passing by in the twinkling of an eye. Are we *willing*, as members individually and as a body corporately, to be cleansed and purified, tested and proven, in the fires of adversity? Are we *willing* to endure it, and to persevere through it, that He may be proclaimed and glorified?

The Binding of Satan

(20.1-3) Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. ² And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a THOUSAND YEARS, ³ and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not DECEIVE the nations any longer, until the THOUSAND YEARS were ended. *After that* he must be released for a little while.

Satan is not an equal and opposite god, as pagans would have their dark gods. He is a fallen angel, under judgment; and God's holy angel is more than a match to seize and bind him until the appointed time. Satan has been bound for a thousand years – limited in his power and domain. During that time, the Church has grown and prospered, and exerted influence in the world for good, and at times, for evil. Some, like Wyclif, were convinced that Satan has been released; others believe he is still bound.

From what we've read so far in Revelation, it seems clear that when Satan is free, he hunts down and kills the children of the woman of the sun, at will – unrestrained. But when he is bound, the children are free to live in liberty. This doesn't mean that no Christians die for their faith when he is bound, nor that massive numbers of Christians die for their faith when he is released – but those are certainly valid indicators of whether Satan is able to pursue the saints at will. Hence we have an ongoing debate. But how do we weigh the evidence that we see? And what *are* the signs to look for?

In one sense, *it doesn't matter*, because our duties and responsibilities under the Great Commission don't change. There are days and times appointed by God, described in the Revelation, that nonetheless remain hidden in God's will. We're only accountable for what God has revealed, not what He keeps hidden.

Act 1:7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority."

Seeking to divine God's will, or to make ourselves privy to what God has kept to Himself, is sinful. But what God *has* revealed is sufficient to live by in godliness. And what He reveals to us here is marvelous: that *we were chosen to reign with Christ*.

The Reign of the Saints

(20.4-6) Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a THOUSAND YEARS. ⁵ The rest of the dead did not come to life until the THOUSAND YEARS were *ended*. This is the first resurrection. ⁶ Blessed and holy is the one who shares in the first resurrection! Over such the SECOND DEATH has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a THOUSAND YEARS.

To take this to mean that **only** the *martyrs* "came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years," would not be correct; they are "**also**" seen. And "the rest of dead," are those who are *not* in Christ; so they will *not* reign with Him. Instead, they stay in their graves for a thousand years, until the resurrection of their bodies at the Judgment. This reign with Christ, is therefore in heaven and not on earth. There they are "priests of God and of Christ," verse 6. *Their* resurrection is called "the **first** resurrection." Now, a

second resurrection is never directly mentioned in Scripture; but it's clear that those who reign with Christ, reign *at their resurrection*. And the rest of the dead remain in the grave until that reign is done. None of those who reign with Christ will be hurt at all by the "second death," which is the lake of fire (**20.8**). We touched on this issue back in chapter 2, verse 11. The debate as to whether the thousand years is *now*, or *after* Christ's return, is driven by a misperception of *what* the first resurrection is, *who* is included in it, and *where* this reign with Christ takes place. It is a *heavenly* reign. And those who remain alive in the body, live under that present reign of Christ, and with Him are those who have fallen asleep, and will return with Him (1Cor 15.20; 1The 4.14):

- 1) The thousand year reign occurs where the thrones are, in heaven (1.4; 3.21; 4.2)
- 2) The thousand year reign occurs where the disembodied souls of the martyrs exist. "And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus." There's no mention of a resurrection of their bodies in verse 4.
- 3) The thousand year reign occurs where Jesus lives: "and they lived and reigned with Christ..." that is, in heaven, where the Lamb opened the scroll (5.6,7); where Christ was "caught up to God" (12.5). "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea!" (12:12) ¹

This is given as an encouragement to the churches, whose believers are being jailed and martyred. Their tormentors may have the upper hand for the moment, but they *shall* reign with Christ over their enemies, at the very moment of their physical death.

What does this reign look like?

- 1) It is ***judging*** with Christ. These ransomed souls sit with Christ in His throne (3.21); stand with Him on Mt. Zion (14.1); sing before His throne (14.3; 15.3); and shall "see His face" (22.4, etc.).
- 2) It is ***living*** with Christ: "they lived and reigned" (7.9 ff).
- 3) It is the ***sharing*** of royal glory with Christ – they appear with Him in glory (Col 3.4); having suffered with Him, they are glorified with Him (Rom 8.17); obtaining His glory (2The 2.14); sharing the glory that is revealed (1Pet 5.1).
- 4) It is "the first resurrection," which is "the translation of the soul from this sinful earth to God's holy heaven. It is followed at Christ's second coming by the second resurrection when the body, too, will be glorified." ²

Between the Grave and Judgment

We need to take time to understand what theologians call the INTERMEDIATE STATE. The question is, what happens between the time we die, and the resurrection of the dead at the Judgment? We say that the body goes into the grave – the resting place of the dead. It's called *sheol* in Hebrew, or *hades* in Greek. But the soul goes immediately to be with Christ. That's based on Jesus' statement to the robber on the cross, that "this very day you will be with me in paradise." (Luk 23.43) The robber was *not* a martyr, so there's no distinction in verses 4 and 5 between martyrs and other believers. The resting place for the dead is distinct from **hell**, which is called *gehenna* in Hebrew, or *tartarus* in Greek,

¹ See *Conquerors*, pp. 191-192.

² *Ibid.*, p. 192.

as in 2Pet 2.4. Except for this one instance in 2Peter, the New Testament uses "gee'ena" for hell in Greek. It's a transliteration of the Hebrew *gehenna*, done to avoid all the misconceptions that might otherwise be imported into the faith from Greek mythology.

Some confusion arises from the parable of *Lazarus and the Rich Man*, which we find in Luke 16.19-31. There we see a man tortured in the flames, crying out to Abraham across an impassable gulf, to send the poor man to warn his brothers to repent. You may recall from the OVERVIEW of this course, that **parables** are not to be used to interpret prophetic or apocalyptic literature. *Parables are not literal*; they are *not metaphors* or allegories. Some things are the same in them, and some things are different, than the one main truth that the parable is intended to convey. The one main truth of that parable is that we must repent before we die, believing what Christ has said. Otherwise we might conclude that unbelievers go immediately to hell instead of lying in their graves, awaiting the resurrection of their bodies at Christ's return – as if a physical resurrection were not necessary before Judgment. So we need to put that parable aside when it comes to interpreting this passage from Revelation. Scripture is very clear that there will indeed be a physical resurrection of our bodies from the grave, some to eternal bliss, and some to eternal torment (Joh 5.29):

Eze 37:5-6 "Thus says the Lord GOD to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. ⁶ I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD."

1Cor 15:12-14, 20-23 ^{NIV} But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. ²² For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. ²³ But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, ***when he comes***, those who belong to him.

Our *conclusion* must be this: there's a resurrection of the believer's ***soul***, which goes to be with Christ immediately, to reign with Him in the heavenlies. But there's also a resurrection of the ***physical body*** at Christ's return. Our bodies will be transformed in the twinkling of an eye (1Cor 15.51-53), into the glorified body that will live eternally and physically with Christ. For ***He*** himself is reigning in his physical body today – the same body that ascended into the heavens, as described in Acts 1.1-9.

The Final Conflict

(20.7-10) And *when the THOUSAND YEARS are ended*, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, ¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the **lake of fire** and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

This fulfills God's promise to Eve in the Garden (Gen 3.15), and the pledge of Christ on the cross, that He would bruise or *crush* the head of the serpent. He's no longer the infant Herod sought to kill, no longer a sacrificial Lamb going silently to the cross. He's our Champion, a divine Warrior and anointed King, mounted on a white horse, ruling the nations with a rod of iron (**19.11, 15**). (*Triumph*, p. 269) It is Christ at work in the world, and in the heavenlies – through His people, the true Church, in the Church Age.

We misstep when we try to assign times, places, nations, and persons to the images in apocalyptic literature. In the same way that the seven churches at the start of Revelation are *representative churches*, these nations – Gog and Magog – are *representative nations*. As we've seen all along, Revelation describes to us identifiable *patterns*, **types** of things to look for in the earthly realm, so that we understand what's going on in the heavenly realm. And then we'll know how to respond appropriately, according to God's direction. We'll be transformed by the renewing of our minds, in order to *prove* God's good, pleasing, and perfect will (Rom 12.2) – and *disprove* Satan's deceit (**20.3**).

What we know, is that every persecution of the Church is terrible in its time. But a time is coming when we'll see the culmination of Satan's opposition to the Church. There has never been and will never be a worse time (Mat 24.14-31). The terrible destruction of the temple at Jerusalem in 70 AD, was just a portent of the intense persecution of the Church at the end of the ages. Jesus in Matthew 24 was not speaking just of the temple, and of the Judgment of the *Jews*, but also of the Last Day, the Judgment of the *world*. It's the pattern of God's judgment from temporal to eternal, and from incidental to final.

The term "Gog and Magog" is found in Ezekiel chapters 38-39. At the time (593-571 BC), it referred to Antiochus Epiphanes IV of the Seleucid empire. Christ alludes to it in Matthew 24.15 as he mentions "the abomination that desecrates." Magog was located in northern Syria, on the other side of the Tigris; it extended into Asia Minor. Gog was the prince of Magog, i.e., Syria. Antiochus' attack on Israel was the final oppression under the old dispensation. It was unexpected, quick and devastating. Christ's mention of it hundreds of years later, makes it a *type*, and establishes the *pattern* to watch for.

Gog and Magog, like the harlot and the beast, represent the agents of Satan marshalled against the Church, in the final battle before Christ returns. Satan has been long bound, but he *will* be released, and the Church is in his sights – hapless prey in the sight of a wolf. This is "*the battle*" (**16.14**). In (**19.19**) it says the armies of the beast "gathered together to *make war* against Him who sat on the horse and against His army." But the word used for *battle* and for *war*, and again for *battle* in (**20.8**), is the same Greek word, *polemos*. Therefore, all three places refer to the same battle, the *final* battle, rather than an ongoing war in which this is just one more battle.

The saints are surrounded, outnumbered and isolated. But God's fire rains down from heaven as it did at Sodom and Gomorrah, and the enemy is consumed. The dragon of old, the devil, is thrown into the lake of fire, along with his beast and false prophet. **The war is over**: the kingdom of darkness is dismantled and destroyed.

The Great White Throne

(**20.11-14**) Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and **books were opened**. Then *another book* was opened,

which is the BOOK OF LIFE.¹ And the dead were judged by what was written in the **books**, according to what they had done.¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done.¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the **lake of fire**. This is the **SECOND DEATH**: the lake of fire.

Earth and sky fled away, not because they were destroyed, but because what was corrupt was made new. Creation itself, in bondage to corruption by the sin of men – the earth whose ground had been cursed for Adam's sake, yearns for deliverance and restoration (Gen 3.17; Rom 8.21). With man's renewal will come the renewal of creation.

Two books are opened: those containing the works of men by which they shall be judged according to the Law; and the Book of Life, containing a list of those who live by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone – not by works. Having come to Christ for salvation, they are no longer under the condemnation of the Law (Rom 8.1).

Death and Hades will be no more – fear of death will not rule over men, as it has not ruled over believers, even while they were alive on earth. But when Christ comes again, physical death will be no more, and hell will be impossible. Will sin still be possible in the absence of sin's penalty? The short answer is no. But why not?

1Jo 3:2-6 Beloved, now we are children of God; and *it has not yet been revealed what we shall be*, but we know that *when He is revealed, we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is.³ And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.⁴ Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.⁵ And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and *in Him there is no sin*.⁶ Whoever abides in Him does not sin. Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him.

How can that be? How can we freely obey God, if there's no possibility of *not* obeying? How can we be said to love God freely, if we are not free to do otherwise? Is that not a *forced* love, which is no love at all? Hmmm. How can we explain that from Scripture?

When Adam sinned, a change took place in him and his progeny, that was irreversible apart from Christ. Sin entered the world, and death with it (Rom 5.12). And when we come to Christ, another irreversible change takes place in us:

Joh 10:28-29 "And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand.

At conversion we are each given the Spirit of God, "the Promise" (Act 2.33; Gal 3.14); we are cleansed of guilt and shame, freed from the penalty of sin. We become adopted children of God (Joh 1.12), with all its attendant rights and privileges (Eph 1.5). But at that point, *still being in the world*, a war erupts within us, between our sinful flesh which seeks to satisfy itself at all costs, even by sinning; and the Spirit who dwells in us, who is grieved by our sinning (Rom 7.23; 8.4-10; Gal 5.17; Eph 4.30). That's our "natural" condition in this world: wrestling with sin on a daily basis. Hence we take up our cross daily, and die to self (Luk 9.23).

¹ Also, Rev 3.5; 13.8; 17.8.

But when Christ comes again, and we rise from the grave, our flesh will be glorified. The taint and corruption and proclivity of the flesh to sin, is washed away – *that war* will be over too. We will have the Holy Spirit within, and holy flesh without: the flesh without corruption, weakness, rebellion, doubt, or fear – without any resulting sin, and therefore without any need for suffering or tears (**21.4**). Christ came to set us free from Adam's fallen state in the Garden, and from our fallen flesh – we'll be forever free to perfectly love, serve, and obey God, by abiding in Christ faithfully, forever.

Resurrection to Life, or Death

(20.15) And if anyone's name was *not found written in the BOOK OF LIFE*, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Joh 5:28-29 "An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice ²⁹ and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

Here in chapter 20, *that hour has come*: the tombs have emptied, the sheep and the goats have been separated, and all that remains is life or death everlasting. There are those whose names were written in the BOOK OF LIFE before the foundations of the earth (Eph 1.4), given to Christ for redemption on the cross. At the appointed time, Christ appeared to redeem His people. And at the appointed time, Christ *will* appear again – just as surely as his first appearing – to take His people to Himself, into life eternal. But for the rest, whose names are not in that Book – whose names have been blotted out from that life, only destruction awaits. The lake of fire is reserved for them, just as it is reserved for Satan and his angels (Jude 1.6).

Deu 29:18-20 ^{ESV} Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, ¹⁹ one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike. ²⁰ The LORD will not be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and his jealousy will smoke against that man, and the curses written in this book will settle upon him, and the LORD will **blot out his name** from under heaven.

2Pet 2:4,9-13 ^{CSB} For if God didn't spare the angels who sinned but threw them down into Tartarus [i.e., hell] and delivered them to be kept in chains of darkness until judgment... ⁹ then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, ¹⁰ especially those who follow the polluting desires of the flesh and despise authority. Bold, arrogant people! They do not tremble when they blaspheme the glorious ones; ¹¹ however, angels, who are greater in might and power, do not bring a slanderous charge against them before the Lord. ¹² But these people, like irrational animals – creatures of instinct **born to be caught and destroyed** – speak blasphemies about things they don't understand, and in their destruction they too will be destroyed, ¹³ suffering harm as the payment for unrighteousness.

2Pet 3:7 ^{NKJ} But the heavens and the earth *which* are now preserved by the same word, are **reserved for fire** until the day of judgment and perdition¹ of ungodly men.

¹ Perdition: Gr. *apoleia* (Strong's 684) - perishing, utter destruction.

Here is the point at which we fall on our knees in abject humility, knowing that there is nothing we have done to distinguish ourselves from those who are condemned. But God alone, by His grace, out of His unbounded love for us, has bestowed the ultimate gift of life everlasting, *in His presence* – unashamed any longer, unabashed in His sight, for the sake of Christ alone, to whom be all glory, laud, and honor.

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

(21.1-4) Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, *the dwelling place [the tabernacle] of God is with man*. He will dwell [tabernacle] with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. ⁴ He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, *for the former things have passed away*."

It's clear that the holy city, new Jerusalem, is the CHURCH. It's "prepared as a bride adorned for her husband." This is an echo from **(3.12)**. Christ described himself as the Groom to his disciples on several occasions (Mat 9.15; 25.1 f.; Joh 3.29); this would make them the Bride, though he never said so directly.

For the church on earth, the central point is that this new Jerusalem will descend as a *holy city*; And this Bride will have been prepared for Christ: chaste, pure, and adorned. And then comes a voice from the throne **(16.17)**, commanding John (and us) to behold this heavenly tabernacle as a dwelling place of God, for He dwells in it *with us*. Are we that holy city, that chaste and adorned bride, that tabernacle fit for God to dwell in?

1Cor 3:16 Don't you know that you are the temple of God and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? [the "you" is plural]

1Cor 6:19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? [the "you" is plural]

We believers together, not just individually, comprise the temple of God where He dwells in and among us. The tabernacle is a tent, and it's portable; it isn't meant to stay in one place, for all believers to come and gather at. It travels with us, and so does God.

But this heavenly Church has been changed from above; behold, all things have become new – "the former things have passed away" – just as it happened to us at our rebirth from above (Joh 3.3). The Church, like us, and like the creation, yearns to be renewed – yearns that the tares be pulled up by God's angels – yearns that the robe of Christ which covers her may be white as snow, washed in His blood as we are washed in His blood individually. Here we see that the salvation and life of the believer is intimately tied to the salvation and life of the Church. We are not alone in Christ, nor are we independent in Christ. We together are *one* in Christ (Gal 3.28). The Bride is only as chaste and adorned, as we are chaste and adorned individually.

1Cor 12:21 And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you."

And it is God to whom we owe our thanksgiving, for giving us in marriage to Christ our Head, to whom we owe our fidelity – for he washed us clean:

Eze 16:8-14 "When I passed by you again and looked upon you, indeed your time *was* the time of love; so I spread My wing over you and covered your nakedness. Yes, I swore an oath to you and entered into a covenant with you, and you became Mine," says the Lord GOD. ⁹ "Then I washed you in water; yes, I thoroughly washed off your blood, and I anointed you with oil. ¹⁰ "I clothed you in embroidered cloth and gave you sandals of badger skin; I clothed you with fine linen and covered you with silk. ¹¹ "I adorned you with ornaments, put bracelets on your wrists, and a chain on your neck. ¹² "And I put a jewel in your nose, earrings in your ears, and a beautiful crown on your head. ¹³ "Thus you were **adorned** with gold and silver, and your clothing *was of* fine linen, silk, and embroidered cloth.

Are we prepared for Him and for the Wedding Feast? Have we been faithful to Him? Are we arrayed in His finery and jewels, or have we donned our own adornment, and trusted in our own beauty, and played the harlot because of our fame? (Eze 16.15) Did we take God's gold and silver which He gave to us, and made idols of it for ourselves? (Eze 16.17) This Bride – His fiancé – needs to be chaperoned if she is to be chaste until That Day. And that will take far more than looking only after ourselves – we need to look after one another, so that we may appear together with Him in glory. We are still in the world, but one day we shall be that holy city descending out of heaven.

Joh 17:10-11 "And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. ¹¹ "Now I am no longer in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to You. Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as *We are*. "

Joh 17:17-20 "Sanctify (purify) them by Your truth. Your word is truth. ¹⁸ "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ "And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth. ²⁰ "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word;"

TWO ETERNAL DESTINATIONS

(21.5,6) And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." Also he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." ⁶ And he said to me, "**It is done!** (Joh 19.30) I am the Alpha and the Omega (1.8; 21.6; 22.13), the beginning and the end (Isa 44.6; Eze 37:25-28). To the thirsty I will give from the spring of the water of life (Joh 4.14) *without payment*. (Isa 55.1)

(21.7) DESTINATION 1: ⁷ *The one who conquers* will have this heritage, and I will be his God and he will be my son. (2.7,11,17,26; 3.5,12,21) – [unhurt by the 2nd death (2.11).]

(21.8) DESTINATION 2: ⁸ But as for *the cowardly*, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars,¹ their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, **which is the second death**."

¹ **1Co 6:9-10** ^{ESV} Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

The Bride: the New Jerusalem

(21.9) Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, "Come, *I will show you the Bride*, the wife of the Lamb." ¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. ¹² It had a great, high wall, with *twelve gates*, and at the gates *twelve angels*, and on the gates the names of the *twelve tribes* of the sons of Israel were inscribed – ¹³ on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. ¹⁴ And the wall of the city had *twelve foundations*, and on them were the *twelve names* of the *twelve apostles* of the Lamb.

(21.15-21) Measuring the Holy City

What we take away from all the "twelves" and all the gemstones, is that the Holy City is a perfect cube, 12x12x12, encompassing those from every tribe, nation, and tongue, who have been chosen, called, justified, and glorified (Rom 8.30) – "not one has been lost" (Joh 18.9) – the full number of the elect shall be brought into His storehouse, "but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." (Luk 3.17) The measure is full.

The View from Within

(21.22-26) ²² And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. ²³ And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴ By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, ²⁵ and its gates will never be shut by day – and there will be no night there. ²⁶ They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.

Who May Enter

²⁷ But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life. (Eze 44.6-9)

Not all who wish it may enter into the presence of God, not without being consumed. "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." (Exo 33:20) "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He *is* like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap." (Mal 3:2) We must be *prepared* to see Him face to face, and be *washed* if we are to stand in His presence. We must be clothed in righteousness (Psa 17.15), and not in filthy rags (Isa 64.6).

Isa 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, My soul shall be joyful in my God; For He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, As a bridegroom decks *himself* with ornaments, And as a bride adorns *herself* with her jewels.

Psa 24:3-5 ^{NKJ} Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, Who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, Nor sworn deceitfully. ⁵ He shall receive blessing from the LORD, And righteousness from the God of his salvation.

In Christ, we are made perfectly righteous with the righteousness that comes from God (Phi 3.9). We are being prepared that we may be presented to Him holy (Eph 5.27), to His

God and our God (Joh 20.17): made perfectly acceptable in His sight (Psa 19.13-14; Rom 14.18; 1Pet 2.5). "Praise God from Whom all blessings flow..."

Chapter 22 – A Garden with the Tree of Life

(22.1-5) And he showed me a pure river of water of life (**Joh 4.14**), clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ² In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, *was* the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each *tree* yielding its fruit every month (**Psa 1.3**). The leaves of the tree *were* for the healing of the nations (**Eze 47.12**). ³ And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. ⁴ They shall see His face (**1Cor 13.12**), and His name *shall be* on their foreheads (**14.1**). ⁵ There shall be no night there (**21.25**): They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light (**21.23**). And they shall reign forever and ever.

We're given repeated images and phrases that we've seen and heard before. The RIVER OF LIFE flowing from the temple of God (Eze 47.1), with the TREE OF LIFE accessible to us always. After Adam's fall, God stationed "mighty cherubim" at the Garden gate, with a flaming sword "to guard the way to the tree of life" (Gen 3.24). It wasn't to keep us from it, but to preserve it, until Christ had finished his work, opening up the only way back. His work being finished, the Garden gate swings wide open for all who belong to Him.

Eze 47:6-9 ^{NLT} He asked me, "Have you been watching, son of man?" Then he led me back along the riverbank. ⁷ When I returned, I was surprised by the sight of many trees growing on both sides of the river. ⁸ Then he said to me, "This river flows east through the desert into the valley of the Dead Sea. The waters of this stream will make the salty waters of the Dead Sea fresh and pure. ⁹ There will be swarms of living things wherever the water of this river flows. Fish will abound in the Dead Sea, for its waters will become fresh. Life will flourish wherever this water flows.

Eze 47:12 ^{NLT} Fruit trees of all kinds will grow along both sides of the river. The leaves of these trees will never turn brown and fall, and there will always be fruit on their branches. There will be a new crop every month, for they are watered by the river flowing from the Temple. The fruit will be for food and the leaves for healing.

This part of the revelation is to let us know that this is the fulfillment of the promise God made through the prophet Ezekiel – it *will* come to pass, just as He said. But in the short term, for the churches who must endure till His coming, there is further encouragement:

(22.6-7) Then he said to me, "These words *are* faithful and true." And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. ⁷ "Behold, I am coming quickly! Blessed *is* he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book."

We are given glimpses of the heavenly realm, that we may hold firmly to the truth in the earthly realm. For we are momentarily caught between the two, desperate for this tent to be folded up, and to "have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2Cor 5.1) When Paul was caught up to the third heaven, he may have caught a glimpse of it, too (2Cor 12.2) – enough to never look back, but press on, "to lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me" (Phi 3.12).

And now John begins to close what he has been commanded to write down for us. He first tells us what his own reaction to all this has been, repeating what he said in chapter 19:

(22.8-9) Now I, John, saw and heard these things. And when I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who showed me these things.⁹ Then he said to me, "See *that you do not do that*. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. ***Worship God.***"

Those are our standing orders: to worship God. And we do so in spirit and in truth, in word and in deed, with thanksgiving and songs of praise, in humility with a contrite heart. And now the angel/fellow-servant gives an unusual command to John not to seal up this vision – unlike the command given to Daniel to seal it up (Dan 8.26), until the 70 weeks had passed, when the Messiah would come, a time "to bring in everlasting righteousness, ...and to anoint the Most Holy" (Dan 9.24):

(22.10-11) And he said to me, "Do not seal the words of the prophecy of this book, for the time is at hand.¹¹ "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still."

It's as if to say, the die has now been cast – all things have been set in motion according to the unalterable will of God. The Church must be made aware that nothing is about to ensue, *for* them or *against* them, that God has not and will not account for. *Rest* in that. For He is coming soon: *maranatha! Lord come!* (1Cor 16.22) He pledges Himself to us all, and calls upon us to pledge ourselves to Him in return:

(22.12-15) "And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward *is* with Me, to give to every one according to his work.¹³ "I am the Alpha and the Omega, *the* Beginning and *the* End, the First and the Last."¹⁴ **Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city**.¹⁵ But **outside** are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie.

Our justification is not conditional – salvation is not conditional – but our sanctification in this life is the demonstration of our faith in Christ, and it is carried out by God in all His people. His word and His Spirit sanctify us for the work set before us. We are a royal priesthood called of God, to serve God, in all seriousness with holiness of purpose. The work of Christ is the work of God, and of His people. We must not ignore that work, nor lack diligence in performing it, as we're gifted and grace-filled from above. A visible difference exists between those of God, and those of the devil (Joh 8.42-44). This is His summons to show our colors, to raise our banner high (Psa 60.4; Isa 11.10). And now, like a signature on a legal deposition, certifying all that has been said, we read:

(22.16-21) "I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star."¹⁷ And the **Spirit** and the **bride** say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.

¹⁸ For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book;¹⁹ and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and *from* the things which are written in this book.²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Surely I am coming quickly." Amen.

Even so, *come*, Lord Jesus!²¹ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen

Questions for your consideration:

1. How is Christ reigning in you now? (Rom 5.21; Rom 6.12; 1Cor 15.25; 2Tim 2.12; Rev 5.10)
2. During this Age of the Church, what is your greatest aspiration, comfort, and encouragement? That is, what are you most looking forward to, that enables you to endure opposition to Christ?
3. If someone were to ask what it means to be a tree planted by streams of living water, what would you answer? What does a fruitful tree look like? How does that describe you? (Mat 3.8; 7.16-20; 13.23; Joh 15.2-8; Rom 1.13; 7.4-5; 1Cor 9.7; Gal 5.22-23; Eph 5.9; Phi 1.11; Col 1.10; Heb 12.11; 13.5; Jas 3.17-18 – contrast with Jude 1.6-13)

Epilogue

We live between the already and the not-yet. The not-yet is partly known, partly unknown, and so it tempts us to anxiety, fear, and doubt. But the not-yet can also be a hopeful period of great promise, especially if we consider the promises of God. They extend beyond the times we're in, and beyond the bounds of earthly existence. They bridge our present life to our eternal life, lighting the path – highlighting the Way of Christ – from the one life to the other. In many ways, our present life in Christ, and our eternal life in Christ, are the same life. What distinguishes them is the presence of suffering and struggle. Now they are present, but the day will come when God wipes away every tear from our eyes **(7.17)** – there will be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying; no pain – "for the former things have passed away." **(21.4)** And so we *yearn* for that day. Dennis Johnson warns us that *in the interim*, we may misperceive our status and our role. I'll close with this:

"People who perceive themselves as marginalized and oppressed minorities in the midst of a hostile cultural consensus are tempted either to compromise and assimilation, or to withdrawal and isolation. When the culture aims the guns of persecution on us, we may be inclined to respond to the call to endure, by keeping our heads down, making ourselves into small, hard-to-hit targets. When its attack comes with greater subtlety and allure, we may recoil from contact with people who could be sources of infection.

"Jesus calls us in Revelation to a different response to our minority status. We must not compromise and assimilate in order to evade persecution, or curry acceptance; but neither may we withdraw into a self and self-contained ghetto. As the Lord's minority in the midst of a hostile world, the church is called to be Jesus' witnesses, fearless in engaging the culture because we are *confident* in His care for us as long as our mission on earth lasts. Christ's call to endure is not a summons to grim, teeth-gritted obstinacy, but to open-hearted, open-mouthed persistence in serving as the King's ambassadors to a foolish, needy, and undeserving world. Know that we ourselves are foolish, needy, and undeserving, we hold forth the testimony of Jesus in joy and love, for as long as God's patience waits. We know that through this witness, He gathers in every one of His own, so the whole number of his true Israel – every one of them, from every one of the earth's peoples, nations, tribes, and tongues – will stand before His throne, gladly serving Him. And we will see His face." (*Triumph*, p. 346)