

THE BOOK OF REVELATION

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THE BOOK OF REVELATION PART 1

INTRODUCTION

I must admit from the outset that this study was given to me many years ago, but I can't remember who originally put it together and wrote it. I found it very helpful and in many ways, the simplicity of the way the Book is approached made it so easy to understand. I've adapted it slightly, but the main thrust of the study is the same as when I received it.

The Book of Revelation was most likely written about A.D. 95-96 during the reign of the Roman Caesar Domitian, the Revelation was recorded by John, **Revelation 1:1**, while in exile, **Revelation 1:9**, to prepare the saints in Asia for the enormous persecutions they would soon have to face.

It was written at a time when the faith of Christians was put to the ultimate test, as they were forced to deny their faith in the Lord and worship Caesar or face torture and death.

It informed them that although some would die physically, the cause for which they died would ultimately emerge victoriously, and the kingdom of God would indeed endure.

When it comes to the Book of Revelation, there's no doubt that it's probably one of the most spoken about, and in many people's minds, one of the most intriguing books of the Bible and yet at the same time it's one of the most misused and most abused books in the Scriptures.

Over the years many people have come to the Book of Revelation with ideas that God never intended for Revelation to convey and as a result of this, the book has become a launching pad for these types of ideas.

Many people have used Revelation to 'prove' such things as past wars or future events, some say they have even found such things in Revelation as submarines and aircraft! But that isn't what God intended the Book of Revelation to be about.

There's also no doubt that the Book of Revelation has been abused over the years, in the sense that it has become a rich ground for many false prophecies.

Sometimes those prophecies are things that people look back on in human history and say, 'See, the Book of Revelation prophesied that!'

And of course, we get the other extreme where some claim that those prophecies are events that supposedly will occur in the future. For example, one advertisement suggested, 'if you would like to find out about Armageddon, as well as Nostradamus and his prophecies concerning the years 2009-2012, look in the Book of Revelation.'

These types of things have nothing to do with the purpose for which the Book of Revelation was written in the first century, and they surely aren't an application for us today either, but there are lessons to be learned. We must keep in mind that God gave the Book of Revelation to first-century Christians who were suffering greatly.

He intended it to be an encouragement to them so that they would 'keep on keeping on' and never give up. He wanted them to know

that if they would do that, then in the end they would be victorious.

Placing the Book of Revelation in its proper category within the New Testament helps us understand its purpose. For example, the books of Matthew through John were written to tell us about the life of Christ, Who He is, how He lived, and how He died for each one of us.

The Book of Acts tells us how to become a Christian. Once we learn about Jesus, Acts then tells us how to become a member of the body of Christ, a follower of Christ.

Romans through Jude tell us how, on a daily basis, to live for Jesus, as well as what God expects of us once we have become Christians, members of the body of Christ.

Revelation, the grand ending to the New Testament, tells us how to die faithfully as children of God. Within it, we learn about Jesus, and we learn how to become a Christian. We learn how to live, and we learn how to die faithfully as a member of the Lord's body.

Now please know it's not my intention to go through the Book of Revelation verse by verse, but we will obviously go through some of the main texts and later we will go through chapter by chapter.

What I think would be useful is to:

1. Offer some main points that will help us go to the book and understand what some of the main images and ideas are.
2. Show you that the book is a very practical book, it doesn't have to be a mystery.

THE BOOK CAN BE UNDERSTOOD

Let's begin with some basic aids by discussing some main points that appear in the Book of Revelation. For example, the Book of Revelation tells us that it can and must be understood.

Contrary to what some people claim today, we can understand this book, in the very first chapter, from the very beginning we are told that God says that we not only can understand the book, but we must understand this book, **Revelation 1:3**.

The idea of being 'blessed' has to do with divine happiness, in other words, there are divine benefits promised to the person who reads, understands, and obeys the things written in the Book of Revelation.

WHY?

For first-century Christians, the time of their death wasn't very far off. The same principle, by application, applies to us today, if we want to receive God's divine blessings, and if we want to know how to deal with, face, and overcome tribulation in our lives, then we need to read and understand the Book of Revelation.

We must remember that God isn't trying to confuse us, He didn't give us the Book of Revelation to merely get our interest or give us a launching pad for things that He never intended to be included in the book. It's a book that, when kept in context can be read and understood and it promises a divine blessing to us when we do that.

Throughout Scripture, blessings are promised to those who read it, **Matthew 5:6**. The psalmist shows us the benefit of following God's Word as we deal with sin, **Psalms 119:9 / Psalm 119:11**.

We must understand that if we read God's Word and obey it, we can keep ourselves from sin and if we hunger and thirst after righteousness, we will be filled. The Bible truly is a blessing for each of us as it lights the direction our lives should go, **Psalm 119:105**.

Just as these passages teach, we will find a divine blessing in the Book of Revelation when we come to the book with the mindset that we can read and understand what the book is saying. To understand the Book of Revelation, we need to understand some of the main thoughts, and especially some of the main verses.

In **Revelation 11** for example we find a great summary statement regarding what the Book of Revelation is all about, **Revelation 11:15**.

HOW DOES THAT SUM UP THE MESSAGE OF THE BOOK OF REVELATION?

Christians were living during the time of the Roman Empire, it was a wicked and ungodly empire that wasn't favourable to Christianity. The Romans were trying to stamp out Christianity.

Throughout the Book of Revelation, God tells Christians, 'If you will hang on, refuse to give up, and remain faithful unto death', **Revelation 2:10**, you can be assured that Christ and His kingdom, the church, **Matthew 16:19**, are going to be victorious over all world governments.'

If we remain faithful to Christ, no matter what happens, even if we lose our lives, we will still be victorious. That's the main idea in the Book of Revelation.

We mustn't let any ideology change us, rather, we must remain true to God and His kingdom, no matter what, if we do, we will be the winner in the end. We must understand that God still rules in the kingdoms of men, **Daniel 4:25-26**.

VICTORIOUS OR OVERCOME

One of the main words in the Book of Revelation is the word 'victorious,' or as other translations have it, 'overcome.' This word is used about eleven times in the Book of Revelation.

For example, in **Revelation 3**, to the seven churches of Asia, Jesus said, 'To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.' **Revelation 3:21**.

In essence, when Jesus uses the word 'victorious,' He's saying that if we overcome, if we refuse to give up, if we persevere, and if we endure, then we can come over and live with Him. This is one of the biggest encouragements that the Book of Revelation has for each child of God.

Here's how this is practical, yes, the book was written to first-century Christians to tell them not to give up, but Christians still suffer today. The Bible promises us that, 'everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.' **2 Timothy 3:12**

We may well suffer, but the Book of Revelation tells us that if we overcome, if we are victorious, if we never give up, if we never bow down, and if we never allow our tribulations and troubles to overcome us, but instead we overcome them, then we can come over and live with Jesus in the heavenly realm.

THE QUESTION

There's an important question in the Book of Revelation, which occurs in **Revelation 6**. Christians are suffering, and it appears as if the Roman Empire will be the reigning world power.

As you can imagine, Christians are wondering and asking, 'God, we have held true to you; we have not given up; how long will we have to endure this?'

The key question from those who were being sacrificed at Rome's altar was simply this. Christians wanted to know, how long will this continue to go on? **Revelation 6:10**. God, aren't you going to avenge us? And what is God's answer?

The Christians are desperate to know when all this suffering will end, but God gives them white robes and tells them to wait a little while longer and promises them that He will exercise vengeance on the ungodly when the time is right, **Revelation 6:11**.

The lesson here is so powerful, Christians are robed in white, as a symbol of purity before God, and God tells them not to give up because He will repay those who are wicked, God is the One Who will take care of the ungodly. This, then, is an encouragement to be faithful and not to give up.

Part of understanding the Book of Revelation is understanding the main thoughts. The Book is like a drama or a vision unfolding on the scene. If we're going to understand it, we must understand some of the main characters and some of the main thoughts. If we're unfamiliar with those things, then we may end up approaching the Book of Revelation in a rather dismissive manner.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MAIN POINTS?

I would like us to look at seven main points, which I believe will help us approach the Book of Revelation and be ready to understand it.

1. The first point is that Revelation is written in symbols.

It's a book that tells us it is symbolic and figurative. It's not to be taken in a literal, word for word fashion. For example, notice what John wrote in the very first verse.

'The revelation from Jesus Christ, which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John.' Revelation 1:1

The words 'made it known' is the word, 'signified' this tells us that this is a symbolic book. God is going to put in place for Christians certain images.

A DRAGON

For instance, in the Book of Revelation we see a dragon, think about that image. A dragon is one of the most mythical beasts in all of human history and literature.

It can never be tamed, it wreaks havoc on the countryside, it's powerful, and it's something to be feared. That is the image of the dragon. But is God speaking of a literal dragon? No. That's not what God is trying to get across.

A SEA BEAST

We also see a sea beast, people who live near oceans have heard rumours about a 'great beast' that lives in the ocean. It can sink any ship, and no sailor could ever pierce it with a harpoon, that was a fearful image.

RIDERS ON HORSES AND A TEMPLE

We also see riders on horses and a picture of a temple. All of these are images that aren't to be taken literally. Instead, they're presented to make an impression upon the mind that will last and that has a singular idea, like the dragon, which is a powerful beast that's to be feared, yet that also can be overcome with God's help.

We know that Revelation is a symbolic book because in **Revelation 1:1**, God said that these things were to be 'signified,' and the word signified means 'to be shown by signs.' God said to John, 'I am going to give you this revelation, which I will present to you in signs.'

Here's why a lot of people don't understand the Book of Revelation. When people come to Matthew through Jude, they read those books literally and rightly so because the text demands that in most places.

They then come to the Book of Revelation with the Matthew through Jude mindset that wants to look at the book literally and that sees a

literal dragon and a literal beast with seven heads and ten horns, and they get confused.

The Book of Revelation is a different type of literature that's filled with apocalyptic language which is a language in which God, through signs and symbols showed His power and gave His message to Christians, **Revelation 1:1**.

Revelation itself is from the word 'apocalypsis', the word means 'an unveiling.' God unveils for Christians on a grand stage in figurative language, certain images that they, not people in the world, would understand so that they could know His message.

This type of writing, apocalyptic language, was designed specifically to reveal God's message to some while veiling it to others. Christians would understand about the temple, they would understand about the city foursquare, and the twelve tribes or the 144,000. They had a clear understanding of those things.

But when a Roman government leader read it, he would think it was simply something fantastical or interesting but not a direct threat to the Roman Empire. So, the book revealed the message to those who were familiar with its symbols and language, while hiding it from those who weren't.

Many of the images were simply reminders to those who were descendants of the Israelites in the Old Testament. Much of the imagery in the Book of Revelation takes us back to a time in the Old Testament, a time in history with

which first-century Christians would have been familiar. Not all of the book, but much of it, takes us back to Old Testament history which Christians would have understood.

NUMBERS

Part of understanding this first point has to do with the fact that some of the symbols are given as numbers. Numbers play a very important part in the Book of Revelation, and if we fail to understand the significance of the numbers, then we will miss out on much of what the book is saying.

THE NUMBER 3

For example, the number 3 is important in the Book of Revelation, where it's used several times. Throughout Bible history, the number 3 always has represented God. Think about it, you have 1. the Father 2. the Son; and 3. the Holy Spirit, the Godhead. Three is a 'divine number' that represents the Godhead Himself.

THE NUMBER 4

Then we see the number 4, which represents the Earth or physical things, as opposed to being spiritual. There are four directions, north, south, east, and west. There are four elements, earth, fire, wind, and water. The number 4 often represents earthly things.

THE NUMBER 7

Then we come to the number 7. When you combine the things represented by the numbers 3 and 4, you get the number 7 which always represents perfection. There are 7 days in a week, there are 7 churches discussed in the Book of Revelation. These are things that are complete or that represent a totality.

THE NUMBER 6

Then there is the number 6, which is one less than 7. If 7 is perfection, then 6 falls short of perfection, which will help us when we come to the number 666.

If 7 is perfection, and if 6 is one less than 7 or imperfection, then what would 666 be? It would be complete and utter imperfection, that is all the number 666 is trying to get across to us.

THE NUMBER 12

The number 12 often was a number that represented humanity. There were 12 tribes, there were 12 apostles, representing humanity or people.

THE NUMBER 1,000

The number 1,000 represented an indefinite time period. We see 1,000 years, 1,000 years of tribulation, or 1,000 years during which Satan was going to reign.

Those aren't literal thousand years but should be viewed as indefinite time periods that one day will come to an end and will not last forever.

Thus, part of understanding the symbols in Revelation has to do with understanding what some of the numbers mean.

The first point is that Revelation is a book that is written in symbols and that it mustn't be approached as a word for word, literal discussion because the text is symbolic.

2. The second point is that Revelation was written about things that would 'soon take place.'

If we can understand this, it will help us get a good grasp of the Book of Revelation.

When God gave this revelation to first-century Christians, it was about things that were going to happen during their lifetimes. This is where so many people get off track regarding the Book of Revelation. The book isn't about the year 2025, it's not about what happened during the medieval times. Revelation isn't about what is going to happen 10,000 years down the road.

We must look at the book and understand that it was written for first-century Christians about things that would 'soon take place,' **Revelation 1:1**, because 'the time was near', **Revelation 1:3**.

Did you know that the book closes on this same tone? **Revelation 22:6**. The dragon, the sea beast, the land beast, the riders on horses, all of those images were not of future events for us but were things that were going to happen during the lives of the Christians who read about them.

Too many people approach the Book of Revelation with an eye toward the present. In reality, we need to read the book with first-century glasses. W. B. West wrote a commentary entitled 'Revelation through First Century Glasses'.

We will be a step ahead in studying the Book of Revelation if we approach the book with the understanding that the things that are discussed within it were about to happen shortly to first-century Christians.

Revelation isn't dealing with Hitler, Social Security numbers, Saddam Hussein, or world wars. Revelation, by application, tells us that God will take care of us just like He took care of those Christians who were enduring tribulation during the first century.

During the tribulation, His kingdom will always out rule and out reign all others. The book was written for first-century Christians to help them overcome the persecution they were facing they would be 'victorious'. The symbols were things they understood and represented things that happened during their lifetimes.

Not only is Revelation 'symbolic', and not only was it written about things that would 'soon take place', but

3. The third point shows us that the book was written to comfort persecuted Christians, **Revelation 1:3**.

The idea of ‘blessed’ carries with it the concept of being comforted, helped, or benefited. That blessing was offered to the Christians who read the Book of Revelation, who understood it, and who obeyed it.

Christians during the time of the Roman Empire, i.e., during the writing of the Book of Revelation were suffering greatly at the hand of the Romans.

History records that some of the Roman rulers like Domitian were so evil and so ungodly that if they found you openly worshipping Christ and claiming to be a Christian, they would take you from your home in front of your family, kill you, soak your body inflammable liquid, place you on a cross in the Emperor’s garden, and light you on fire to be used as a human candle.

Some were even taken from their homes and, as a type of sport, were thrown to lions in the arena for people to watch. That is the kind of suffering that was occurring.

If you were a Christian, you weren’t a ‘halfway Christian’ because you knew that you might die for Christ. The Book of Revelation is written to encourage and comfort Christians who were suffering beyond anything we might be able to imagine today. The point is that God knows our sufferings, and He cares and if we will endure to the end, then we will win the battle.

God said that those who die in the Lord are ‘blessed’, **Revelation 14:13**. God knows and cares and even if a person dies, comfort is available because in God’s sight there’s a great blessing waiting for that person, **Romans 8:18**.

There is a passage in **1 Corinthians 10** that’s a commentary on the Book of Revelation, **1 Corinthians 10:13**. This is the idea behind the Book of Revelation, God isn’t going to allow us to be tempted beyond what we can endure. We need to remember that God is faithful, and He will make a way of escape so that we can endure.

Christians needed to know that their escape may have been only through death, but they got out of their persecution, and God took care of them in the midst of that.

These first three points begin to give us an understanding of what Revelation is all about. This book is one of the most powerful pieces of inspired writing that we as Christians possess.

We will help ourselves immensely if we open the Book of Revelation with the idea that God wants to help us. The message is clear, God loves His children so much that He will help them and will offer them aid, He knows and cares when we are suffering.

If anything, this initial lesson ought to impress upon our minds how we need to be faithful children of God so that we can receive God’s comfort and blessing.

There’s nothing more important in all the world, especially in the times during which we are living when there is so much ungodliness, sin, and persecution for Christians to live faithfully before the Lord today.

The Book of Revelation tells us how we desperately need to be children of God.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION PART 2

INTRODUCTION

We have just discussed the first three main points, Revelation 1:1 / Revelation 1:3.

1. Revelation is a symbolic book.
2. It was written about things that were ‘soon to take place.’
3. Revelation was written to encourage or comfort Christians in the first century.

In this part of our lesson, we will be identifying some of the main characters in the book, the time frame, and where those events would be occurring.

4. Point number four is that Revelation identifies the dragon and the two beasts.

Like in any vision, to fully understand it, we must understand who the main characters are. Some of the characters in this book are ‘the dragon’ and the ‘two beasts’. Who are these characters, and who or what do they represent?

THE DRAGON

Let us remember again that this is a figurative or symbolic book. God showed or signified to John and the saint’s many things that were figurative, and that weren’t meant to be taken literally because they were symbols. So, who or what is the dragon, and what does the dragon represent?

I want to direct your attention to Revelation 12 so that you can notice where the dragon is clearly identified as none other than Satan, the devil himself.

In Revelation 12:9, the dragon is identified very clearly, he is the devil, Satan who ‘leads the whole world astray.’

In John 8:44 Jesus identified the devil as a liar and a murderer from the beginning. Revelation 12:9 identifies the dragon as Satan, which is a big help to our understanding of the Book of Revelation.

Toward the end of the book, the dragon also is identified. Look at Revelation 20. In Revelation 20:2, we see God binding Satan, the dragon for a thousand years.

When we come to the Book of Revelation, let’s understand that the dragon, a mythical creature that throughout human history in literature has wreaked havoc represents the devil, which is the most fearful adversary mankind has.

I am reminded of 1 Peter 5 where we are told that the devil is ‘like a roaring lion, seeking those whom he may devour.’ 1 Peter 5:8.

THE SEA AND LAND BEAST

In point number four we learn not only who the dragon is, but also who ‘the sea beast’ and the ‘land beast’ are. These powerful figures represent someone or something during the time of the first century. Let’s take a moment to identify from the Scriptures some characteristics that accompany the sea beast so that we can understand who or what this is.

THE SEA BEAST REPRESENTS ROME AND HER RULERS

In [Revelation 13:1-10](#) we see some of the characteristics of the sea beast.

These texts tell us that the sea beast has been given its power by the dragon, [Revelation 13:2](#) / [Revelation 13:4](#). So, the sea beast is a tool or a pawn in the hand of Satan. It's under Satan's control, and as such is a wicked and ungodly figure. Whoever or whatever this beast is, it's being ruled by 'the god of this world', [2 Corinthians 4:4](#), Satan himself. In [Revelation 13:4](#) we notice that people worship the beast. Whatever this beast was, during the first-century people were worshipping it. History tells us that the rulers or Caesars of Rome often were viewed as gods.

That's how they viewed themselves. And the annals of history clearly show that the people worshipped Roman emperors as gods. Thus, we see that the sea beast receives its power from Satan and that people worshipped the beast.

[Revelation 13:8](#) tells us something interesting about those who don't worship the beast. Only those whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life didn't worship the beast.

So, who is it, who isn't worshipping the beast? It's the Christians because those whose names were written in the Lamb's Book of Life were the ones who weren't worshipping the beast.

In [Revelation 17:9-12](#) we see the seven heads of the beast as representative of seven hills and seven kings. What would people in the first century naturally have thought when they read something like that? Rome always has been known as 'the city set on seven hills.'

It also had seven major kings or Caesars. What is the sea beast? It's none other than Rome and her rulers. The sea beast wasn't a figure that would show up 2,000 years down the road. It wasn't something about which God was prophesying that had to do with us today.

Christians would have understood this, the sea beast was under the control of Satan, and was none other than Rome and her rulers.

In [Revelation 13:7](#) we see another characteristic of the sea beast, its identified as a persecutor of the saints and as a dominant world power. Who persecuted Christians? Rome did. Who was the dominant world power during the first century? Rome and her rulers, the Caesars.

[Revelation 13](#) gives us adequate information to know that the sea beast is representative of Rome. When we see the sea beast under the control of the dragon, we can know that it's speaking of Rome and her rulers, all of which would have been easily recognised by first-century Christians.

THE LAND BEAST REPRESENTS THE PEOPLE UNDER THE POWER OF THE ROMAN GOVERNMENT

But what about the second beast, the land beast? [Revelation 13:11-18](#) identifies the land beast.

[Revelation 13:12](#) says that the land beast exercises the authority of the first beast. It's as if the land beast works under the sea beast, which has given the land beast its authority.

We also see that the land beast causes the people to make an image of, and worship, the sea beast. The land beast has authority and goes around enforcing the worship of the sea beast.

In [Revelation 13:13-14](#), we see that the land beast, through trickery and other things that were not real, makes people think that the sea beast is a god.

Remember that people viewed Roman emperors as gods. It was the land beast's job to make sure that people looked up to the emperors as gods. In [Revelation 13:14](#) we learn that the land beast causes people to make images of the sea beast.

Archaeology has shown us that the Romans made busts or images of their gods which then were placed on pedestals so that people could worship them on a regular basis. It was the land beast's job to see to it that people made such images and worshipped the sea beast.

[Revelation 13:15](#) tells us that the land beast would even put people to death if they did not worship the sea beast.

Thus, the land beast is representative of some type of militia, a group of people who went around forcing people to worship the sea beast and punishing them if they refused to do so.

[Revelation 13:17-17](#) identifies some people who worshipped the sea beast, and who were known by marks on their hands and foreheads. This mark signified that a person's allegiance was to the sea beast.

It was the land beast's job to be sure that the mark was clearly seen and known. The land beast is identified as a false prophet, [Revelation 13:13](#).

WHO IS THIS LAND BEAST?

The sea beast is Rome and her rulers, and if it's the job of the second beast to go around and force people to worship the sea beast and to set up images of the sea beast, then the second beast is representative of a type of militia, government officials, or army that went around and caused people to worship the sea beast.

The dragon is Satan and in the hand of the dragon is the sea beast, Rome and her rulers that are causing Christians to suffer. The land beast represents people under the power of the Roman government who were going around and trying to force Christians to give their allegiance to Satan by worshipping the sea beast. Understanding this helps us understand much of what the Book of Revelation is about.

5. Point number five identifies the harlot in Babylon.

THE HARLOT REPRESENTS ROME

If we're going to understand who the dragon is, we also must understand who the harlot and Babylon are. These two figures are mentioned in [Revelation 17](#) and [18](#). The harlot is none other than the city of Rome itself.

Let me list some facts for you that will help you see that the harlot is Rome.

[Revelation 17:18](#) says that the harlot is a great city. During the time of the Book of Revelation, there was no city greater than the city of Rome. Millions of people lived there, and it was a powerful world force.

[Revelation 17:2](#) says that the harlot had committed adultery with the kings of the Earth. Who was making foreign alliances and bringing foreign nations under her power? It was Rome.

In [Revelation 17:3](#) we also are told that the harlot rode on the back of the beast. Because Rome and her rulers were the beast, she is the one who is riding on the back of the beast.

[Revelation 17:4](#) says that she lives a luxurious life. Rome, its senate, and its elite inhabitants lived one of the most luxurious lives you could ever imagine.

Revelation 17:6 says that the harlot was drunk with the blood of Christians. During the time of the first century, Rome was the main persecutor of Christians, the Romans were putting Christians to death. Some were being thrown to the lions. Anyone caught worshipping as a child of God was put to death.

WHO IS THIS HARLOT?

Revelation 17 identifies a city that fits the description of none other than Rome itself.

BABYLON REPRESENTS ROME AND HER GOVERNMENT

But what about Babylon? Who or what is Babylon? Revelation 18 tells us about Babylon, taking our minds back to the image of Babylon in the Old Testament, which depicted Babylon as a great world power that conquered God's people. Although Babylon of the Old Testament wasn't a righteous force, God used it for His purposes.

But who is Babylon mentioned in Revelation 18? Babylon mentioned as a great city, Revelation 18:16 / Revelation 18:21.

Revelation 18:3 and Revelation 18:9 both say that Babylon commits fornication with those of the world. This is much like the harlot who was committing fornication and living in ungodliness.

Revelation 18:16 says that Babylon dresses and lives luxuriously, which is quite similar to what is said of the harlot. Babylon also is seen as having killed Christians, Revelation 18:24.

Babylon is a synonym for Rome, Revelation 17:5. If the harlot is Rome and if Babylon the Great is the mother of harlots, then that is a picture of Rome and her government. The harlot is Rome, Babylon the Great is Rome, which is the evil world force that is causing so much harm to Christians.

6. The sixth point identifies the period of 1,260 days. 42 months, or time, times, and half a time, three and a half years, Revelation 11:2.

This is important because this is the period of time in which the Book of Revelation was written.

Forty-two months is 1,260 days or three and a half years. Revelation 11-13 is a climactic scene of persecution and the beginning of victory. The two witnesses or prophets who represent the church, are killed.

In Revelation 12 we see a great battle where we see Christ and Christians as victorious. But what is the time period of that? It is 1,260 days or 42 months, Revelation 11:3.

Now when the two witnesses finish their testimony, something else will happen. The beast will attack and kill God's people, Revelation 11:7. A woman flees to the wilderness where God would take care of her for 1,260 days. Revelation 12:6. A woman was given two wings so she could go the place where God would take care of her and keep her safe, Revelation 12:14.

We have three and a half years, 42 months, or 1,260 days. Notice how all of this comes together, Revelation 13:5-7. The beast is Rome and her rulers, and the time period is 42 months.

This is essential to an understanding of the Book of Revelation because the writing of the book was taking place during an intense period of persecution of Christians by the Roman government and her militia.

This persecution was relatively short-lived in duration. And it was for this exact period of intense persecution that the Book of Revelation was written.

If we can understand when this was occurring, and we can, and if we can understand that it was a time of persecution by Rome and her government, then we can have a better understanding of when the Book of Revelation was written and for whom it was written.

7. The seventh point is that the Book of Revelation discusses a spiritual, not a physical, kingdom, [Revelation 1:6](#).

The kingdom is present, and we are a kingdom of priests, it's not a future event, [Mark 9:1](#). In [Revelation 1](#) we learn that John and other Christians were currently in the kingdom, [Revelation 1:9](#).

To understand the Book of Revelation and how God's kingdom will reign and rule over all other kingdoms, we must understand that this isn't a physical kingdom being discussed. We aren't talking about people in a militia conquering other nations. That isn't how God's kingdom is going to reign.

Remember what Jesus said to Pilate? 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.' [John 18:36](#)

The Book of Revelation is about God, Christ, and His kingdom being victorious over all other kingdoms and especially, so far as first-century Christians were concerned, the Roman Empire.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

Now, let's tie these things together to see how all of this, fits together. We have identified the main adversaries in the Book of Revelation. The dragon is Satan, the sea beast is Rome and her rulers, and the land beast is those in Rome who enforce worship of the sea beast. Those are the main adversaries in this book.

We also understand where these activities are taking place. They are occurring where Babylon the Great and the harlot are located, and we know that these two represent Rome.

We also understand the time frame, which is three and a half years, since three is the perfect number, and since there is a half after it, then we know that this isn't something that will last forever. These events were happening during the reign of the beast, Rome.

Look at what we have learned as we have examined these points. We've learned who was doing the persecution, we've learned where the persecution was taking place and we've learned the time period. All of this will help us in our attempts to understand the Book of Revelation.

Do not forget that the Book of Revelation is very practical. I haven't presented these main points just, so we can gain more knowledge about the Book of Revelation in general. Rather, I want to show that this book is a very practical book. Look at some of the lessons we have seen as we have examined the main points.

LESSONS LEARNED

1. We can know that God knows, and cares deeply about, our suffering.

In Revelation 6 we see Christians crying out to God. Those Christians were told to wait a while because God would punish those who were harming them, Revelation 6:10-11.

So, from this book, we learn that God knows, and cares about, our suffering. How that can help us on a daily level to know that we're not alone, that God loves us, and that He cares deeply for us! Hebrews 4:15 / 1 Peter 5:7. God even cares for us enough that He provides us with the things of this life, Matthew 6:33.

We are told that if we seek first the kingdom of God and its righteousness, things such as food, shelter, and clothing will be provided for us, Psalms 37:25.

God will take care of righteous people. We need to understand that the Book of Revelation contains some very practical lessons. When we struggle, have trials, face tribulation, or have things come into our lives that bring us great trouble, there is a God in Heaven Who knows about our suffering, cares for us, and wants to help.

2. We also learn that Satan, our adversary, is powerful and needs to be feared.

He isn't someone with whom we should flirt or play, Satan is a fearful adversary, but we can win over Satan, Hebrews 2:14. This tells us that Jesus, through death, overcame him who had the power of death, the devil.

Yes, Satan is to be feared, He is 'the serpent of old', Genesis 3 and the 'roaring lion', 1 Peter 5:8. He even can present himself as 'an angel of light', 2 Corinthians 11:14. He definitely is to be feared.

And yes, Satan can work in human history through human governments to cause Christians to undergo persecution in order to try to cause them to be lost. But if Christians remain faithful, they will always be victorious over the devil, Revelation 12:11.

3. Another wonderful lesson that we can learn from the Book of Revelation is that persecution can have great spiritual value, Revelation 2:10.

Jesus said of certain Christians in Revelation 2:10 that they would have to endure persecution for a period of time, but if they would be faithful 'even unto death,' then He would give them 'the crown of life.' Through their persecution, these people learned great spiritual lessons and were forced to think about what was really important.

That same lesson is true for us today as well. When we face trials or tribulations, or when things happen to us that are difficult, we can gain spiritual wisdom and insight as we allow such things to be of benefit to us. True, we don't often think about it like that. But that is what Scripture teaches, James 1:2-4.

Our trials can help us and can have real spiritual value, it's as though we are being tested in the fire. Impurities that we do not need in our lives will be seen, and we can be refined by those tests. Paul said in Acts 14:22 that 'We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God.'

Trials and tribulations help us see what really matters. In 2 Timothy 3:12, we are told that 'and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.'

I hope that these main points will give you a better insight into the Book of Revelation by helping us understand to whom it was written, why it was written, and that its main application is that we must never give up regardless of what happens to us in this life. We must be faithful to God, and in the end, we will have the hope of eternal life.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION PART 3

INTRODUCTION

We've just looked at seven main points that can help us understand this great book. Now we're going to go chapter by chapter and hit the main thoughts in order to weave everything together to see God's overall message to Christians in the first century and His message of encouragement for us in the twenty-first century today, [Revelation 2:10](#). Let me encourage you to carefully read through each chapter first before you read the comments on each chapter.

REVELATION 1

In [Revelation 1](#) Christians are immediately impressed with the image of Christ, the One Who is in control. Remember that this was during times of great persecution. Rome was persecuting Christians, some were being dragged off. People like Domitian were in control. Thus, Christians are reminded of the image of Jesus in Revelation 1 that Jesus is still 'KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS', [Revelation 19:16](#). During times of persecution, we must look to Christ for help.

'Among the lampstands was someone like a son of man, dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. The hair on his head was white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and coming out of his mouth was a sharp, double-edged sword. His face was like the sun shining in all its brilliance.' Revelation 1:13-16

Here we see this image of Jesus that presents His holiness, power, radiance, and the Word of God that came out of His mouth. The impression we receive from this image is that Jesus is alive, well, and in control, which means that during persecution we must look to Christ.

There's a practical lesson here for Christians then as well as for us today. When we face difficulties, when we struggle, and when things don't always go the way they ought to in life, we need to go to Jesus first for help.

Too many times we look to self-help books, doctors, psychiatrists, and so on. There's nothing necessarily wrong with that, but the first place we ought to be looking for help is Jesus Christ, [Hebrews 12:1-2](#). If we want real help in times of trouble, we must look to the Lord. He is able to help those who are in need of help, [Hebrews 2:17-18](#). Revelation begins on a positive note, Jesus is alive and well and can help us. Thus, we must look to Him in times of trouble.

REVELATION 2-3

[Revelation 2-3](#) probably are the chapters that have been studied the most by people who have examined the Book of Revelation. Paul had spent three years in Ephesus and during that time 'all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks,' [Acts 19:10](#).

All seven churches may have had their start during this time frame. They're now facing a severe crisis, there was widespread persecution of Christians.

Persecution came in the form of Judaisers, pagans and the Roman government. At the close of each letter, a special blessing is pronounced on those who overcome the persecutions.

Let's simply notice that Jesus says this to these congregations, He knows what's going on in His church, and we need to let Him be the Head of the church.

Jesus rebukes five of the congregations, Ephesus, [Revelation 2:1-7](#), Pergamum, [Revelation 2:12-17](#), Thyatira, [Revelation 2:18-29](#), Sardis, [Revelation 3:1-6](#), Laodicea, [Revelation 3:14-22](#) and only two are not rebuked. The church in Smyrna, [Revelation 2:8-11](#), isn't condemned and the church in Philadelphia isn't rebuked, [Revelation 3:7-13](#).

Five out of the seven are rebuked for things they are not doing or for things that they should not be doing. Either they were doing something wrong, or they were lacking in some area.

During times of persecution, we mustn't forget that Jesus is still the Head of the church and that we're responsible as a member of that church for how we live our lives. [Revelation 3:21](#) reveals the encouragement that Jesus offers saints who live faithfully, [2 Corinthians 13:5](#).

In [Revelation 1](#) we see Jesus standing in the midst of the seven churches and when we get to [Revelation 2](#), we find Jesus walking around the seven churches.

Instead of the church giving its own evaluation on how things are going, Jesus is going to give His own evaluation as to how they are really doing.

THE CHURCH IN EPHEBUS

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write:” [Revelation 2:1](#)

Jesus Himself is the author of this letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesus was a large important city on the west coast of Asia Minor where the apostle Paul founded a church. And there were a number of factors which contributed to the importance of Ephesus.

The first factor was economics, Ephesus was the most favourable seaport in the province of Asia and the most important trade centre west of Tarsus. Another factor was size, Ephesus was the largest city in the province, having a population of perhaps 300,000 people.

A third factor was culture, Ephesus contained a theatre that seated an estimated 25,000 people. The fourth, and perhaps most significant, reason for the importance of Ephesus was religion.

The Temple of Artemis or Diana, at Ephesus ranked as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. If you were around in Biblical times and thought of Ephesus, your mind would automatically think about the city where you would find the ‘temple of Diana.’

In [Acts 19](#) we find in Ephesus, a silversmith by the name of Demetrius who made a living out of idol making, and he was causing all sorts of trouble for Paul and the other disciples.

And we have recorded in [Acts 19:27](#) that Diana was loved and worshipped by people from all over the world. The original temple of Diana crumbled into the dust many centuries ago but when it was rebuilt, it became one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

And it was to this temple that Alexander the Great came too. He wanted his name carved on one of the 127 pillars and so he offered all the riches of his eastern campaign for the privilege, but the city fathers turned down the offer.

And so even the mightiest mortal on earth of the time, couldn't even buy the privilege to have his name on a pillar in the temple of a god. No wonder years later the apostle Paul would write to the Ephesian church and tell them in [Ephesians 2:19-22](#) that they were the temple, not of any old god but of Almighty God Himself.

The history of Christianity at Ephesus began around A.D. 50, perhaps as a result of the efforts of Priscilla and Aquila as we read in [Acts 18:18](#). Paul came to Ephesus in about A.D. 52, establishing the church and stayed there for at least three years as [Acts 20:31](#) tells us.

And it was during that time that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians and was faced with many opportunities to share the Gospel but also faced many problems as [Acts 18:23-41](#) tells us.

We also know that it was in Ephesus that Paul baptised believers who apparently came to know the Gospel through disciples of John the Baptist, [Acts 19:1-5](#), and he opposed the strong influence of magic, [Acts 19:11-20](#).

But by the time that John penned these words in [Revelation 2:1-7](#), the church at Ephesus was busy working for the Lord but had no sincere love for Him. They had all the church programs but had no passion.

They were a busy church with great statistics, but they were a church that was drifting away from their heartfelt devotion to Christ. Ephesus was a busy church with high spiritual standards, the work had been difficult, but they had not collapsed.

Looking from the outside, in every way this church is what we would call a successful church. And from the outside people would look in and think that this is a church that deeply loves their God. Christ is more concerned about what we do with Him, rather what we do for Him.

And so, to everyone else this was a greatly successful church but to Christ who is now walking amongst them, this church is in the process of falling.

“These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands.” Revelation 2:1

Notice how it begins, it is addressed to the angel of the church but in verse 7 it is addressed to the ‘churches’. John is either telling us that churches have guardian angels who have some sort of spiritual responsibility for a church, or he is simply showing us that the angel is the personification of the church. We won’t dwell on that for the moment.

John reminds them straight away that ‘Jesus holds the seven stars in His right hand’, which is figurative language which means, the life or death of the church resides within Jesus, [Ephesians 1:22-23](#).

Remember that Ephesus was a great city for debating, everyone loved to debate with anyone about life and religion. And so, both Paul and John are both saying that Christ is the absolute authority, there is no room for debating here.

There is no room for debating the facts about what Jesus is about to say to this church.

“I know your deeds, your hard work, and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.” Revelation 2:2-3

Notice how Jesus begins to deal with their reputation, he begins by talking about all the things which are right with this church. They had a lot going for them and the Lord lets them know that He has seen all the good they are doing in His Name.

1. He commends their service and says ‘I know your deeds’.

Jesus recognises that this church over the years since it was planted has accomplished many great things for the glory of God. They have been working hard and Jesus has seen their efforts.

This was no Sunday morning only church, they were actively serving the Lord wherever and whenever they could, using their own expenses and personally sacrificing all they could for the glory of God.

They had their benevolence programmes and youth programmes and they persevered. In other words, despite all the opposition they were receiving, they continued to work.

The people in Ephesus did not appreciate these Christians or their zeal for the Lord and they opposed them publicly and physically, [Acts 18-20](#).

But these Christians endured the opposition and the persecution, and they continued to serve the Lord faithfully in spite of everything thrown against them. And so not only does He commend their service.

2. He also commends their separation.

There are times when the church needs to stand for truth. These Ephesian Christians were quick to defend the truth, in so many ways. John tells us in verse 6, that they rejected the works of the Nicolaitans.

Who are those guys?

Well, the Nicolaitans are identified by Irenaeus and Hippolytus, two early church fathers, as a sect which grew out of Nicolas who are mentioned in [Acts 6:5](#). They were the ones who apostatised from Christ.

But however, they originated, they were known as perverts, with low morals, a sect that were loose thinking and practiced loose living. And thankfully the Ephesians couldn't bear them.

The Ephesians also exposed deceivers who claimed to be apostles. All in all, we would say that they were morally and doctrinally approved.

The Ephesians dealt with their opposition quickly and stood for what they knew was right. And despite all the opposition and all the trials that come from being followers of the Christ they have hung in there and didn't grow tired from it all.

And so outwardly the church at Ephesus looks great, the Ephesian Christians think that everything is going well, and they are doing everything they are supposed to be doing.

And people on the outside and possibly even other churches of the Lord are looking at the Ephesian church and thinking, 'wow, I wish we were more like that church'.

And they wish that, until the reality check comes from Jesus. After offering this church some words of commendation, Jesus now gives them some words of condemnation.

“Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first.” Revelation 2:4

There is nothing like bursting your spiritual bubble, is there? You can't help but almost hear the disappointment in the words of Jesus. Jesus says, that while they look good on the surface, there are problems in the heart that must be dealt with.

And notice how Jesus wants them to know that this is a personal matter. It seems that Jesus is grieved by the problems He sees in this church. Jesus looks at these people whom He loves and for whom He died and tells them that they simply do not love Him like they used to.

The church of Ephesus was active in the Lord's work, but they were serving out of a sense of duty and not out of a fervent love for Him. They had become like Martha who laboured, but not out of love, [Luke 10:38-42](#) / [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#).

The Ephesian's first love was Jesus Himself and His church but because they were so obsessed in being doctrinal pure, they were actually departing from loving Jesus and His brotherhood in the process. It is also possible that the Ephesian church had forsaken their first love in terms of their eagerness and joy, [Jeremiah 2:2](#).

Remember that Jesus has not come to hurt the Ephesian church, He has come to help them. He offers words of commendation, words of condemnation, and now He is going to speak a word of correction. He's going to tell them how they can fix that which is wrong in their congregation.

“Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.” Revelation 2:5

There are lots of things we have to remember in this life but here Jesus says remember or ‘consider how far you have fallen’. Here is a church which was flying high in their own eyes, but Jesus says remember how far you have fallen.

He wants them to remember that moment when they first came to know Him. He wants them to reflect on what He did for them. He wants them to recall all the excitement and emotion of those early days with Him.

He wants them to look back to a time when their love for Him motivated everything they did. He wants them to recognize that although they thought they were flying, they had actually fallen.

If we don't love Jesus and His people like we did before, the cure is repentance. Change your mind about it and let that change of mind result in a change of conduct. The word ‘repent’ is the Greek word ‘metanoeo’ and it means ‘a change of mind that leads to a change of action’.

But what exactly is it they have to repent of? Well, it's quite simple. Jesus says they need to repent of our coldness and fall in back in love with Him all over again.

Notice that repentance leads to action, the Ephesian church were to do the things they first did. In other words, their good deeds were to be motivated by love again.

Remember that Jesus saw all their good deeds, but they were serving without love. But now He says I want you to continue in those good deeds but with the motivation of love behind them.

He says to the church in Ephesus, if they don't repent, then ‘He will come and remove their lampstand’. He's not talking about the second coming here, because His coming totally depends on whether or not they will repent.

In other words, if they do repent, He won't come and remove their lampstand but if they don't repent, He will come and remove their lampstand. If the congregation at Ephesus doesn't remember, repent, and do something about it, then destruction will come upon them.

Ignatius, who was one of the apostolic church fathers said that ‘the church in Ephesus must have listened to and obeyed Jesus words for a while anyway’.

But where is the church in Ephesus now? There's no church there now and there hasn't been for a long time. We can only imagine what goes through the minds of all those visitors who have been to Ephesus today.

They would say, ‘Let's go to Ephesus, you know that place where Christians used to meet.’ And as they walk around the place, they stumble across a baptistry which is all dried up and covered in leaves, what a sad picture that is, isn't it?

Jesus visited Ephesus and removed the church, the candlestick, it's gone, [Matthew 23:27](#).

“But you have this in your favour: You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” Revelation 2:6

Jesus says He hates the practices of the Nicolaitans just like the Ephesians do. In other words, love the sinner but hate the sin, hate the deeds but love the people.

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.” Revelation 2:7

We are victors in Christ whether we live or die. We are victors in Christ when we remain faithful in good times and hard times. And our reward for our faithfulness is the right to eat of the tree of life in heaven.

John tells us that the tree of life answers to the water of life, [Revelation 22:1-3](#). It is the food and the river and the drink of the saints. The tree of life stands for spiritual sustenance, it is the ‘food’ of the righteous.

It reminds us of the events in the garden when man had unbroken fellowship with God. So, whether by life or death, here or hereafter, the victorious Christian is secure.

THE CHURCH IN SMYRNA

“To the angel of the church in Smyrna write.” Revelation 2:8

We know what the church in Ephesus was like and how it started but concerning the church in Smyrna we know absolutely nothing about its beginnings.

In all probability the church in Smyrna was established around 55-56 A.D. after or during Paul’s third missionary journey. It was possibly Paul who established this church, but it would seem more likely to be established by some of his students from the school as [Acts 19:8-10](#) tells us.

And so, because we don’t know anything about its beginnings, we need to take some lessons from its present state.

This city, which was famous for its loyalty and faithfulness, became the host of a church commended by the Lord for the same faithfulness. We find people with convictions even before they became Christians.

The city of Smyrna, was called the ‘Glory of Asia.’ It was proud Smyrna, deeply religious Smyrna, heathen Smyrna. Smyrna, the centre of Caesar worship and the leading city of empire worship for many years.

Smyrna built a shrine to ‘Roma’ as early as 195 B.C. and as the Republic spread, the worship of Rome became more widespread.

According to the historian, Balsdon, in July 44, 4 months after the assassination of Julius Caesar, ‘an unexpected comet appeared in the sky. It was a prodigy, accepted by the people as evidence that Julius Caesar was now in heaven, a god, Divus Julius’.

And since the spirit of the empire was reflected in the leaders, it was easy enough for people to begin to believe the supreme leaders were the embodiment of the spirit of the empire.

The emperors began to be viewed with awe and one Roman writer tells us, ‘from the time of Augustus a new form of Roman cult makes its appearance, the worship of the emperor.’

He goes on to say that in the east, ‘the line drawn between God and man was not too distinctly drawn’.

It wasn’t this way in Rome, the Romans were too stubborn for such nonsense. When Augustus accepted the name, there immediately sprang up a cult around him.

Herod the Great, for example, built a temple and shrine to him but no emperor, however, was consecrated to godhood until after his death.

And as time went by, a priesthood was formed to serve in the emperor worship and in the process of time, it became necessary that the citizens or subjects showed their loyalty to the state by the worship of the emperor. And so, Smyrna won a contest, a contest to see who would erect a shrine to the deified Tiberius.

The Christians lived in a heathen town which embodied not only the eastern gods but the gods of Rome. The Roman gods were of the more dangerous kind, their servants could bring down punishment upon the heads of the Christians for not submitting to those gods.

But Smyrna also has Jews, lots of them, hostile and vocal Jews, Jews of the sort who would take the lead in the execution of Polycarp. Not faithful Jews but the sort who lived in the days of Antiochus 4th Epiphanes, the kind that didn't worship God, but worshipped survival.

The city of Smyrna was about 35 miles from Ephesus, and it was a city of about 100,000 people in John's day. It was called the 'crown city' because it was surrounded by hills that resembled a crown.

It possessed a safe harbour where ships from all over the world came to buy and sell goods. Several things made this a special city in its day, for example the production of myrrh. The substance came from a shrub like tree, when the leaves were crushed a very fragrant odour came from them.

Myrrh was used as a fragrance by the living and an embalming agent for the dead. And if you remember, myrrh is mentioned in association with the life and ministry of the Lord, [Matthew 2:11](#) / [Mark 15:23](#) / [John 19:39](#). The word 'myrrh' means bitter and so it came to be associated with suffering and death.

And so straight away we can see that Smyrna was a planned city, a free city, and a beautiful, wealthy pagan city.

“These are the words of him who is the First and the Last, who died and came to life again.” Revelation 2:8

The leading god of Smyrna was 'Dionysus,' who was the god of wine. Smyrna was famous for its vines, each year the death and resurrection of 'Dionysus' was acted out in public plays. But the Christians knew the difference between myth and solid, indisputable historical fact.

Jesus identifies Himself as 'the first and the last' and we should be familiar with that title because it's a name which was applied to God in the Old Testament, [Isaiah 44:6](#). And so straight away John reminds these Christians and says, 'come what will, Christ is with us.'

Smyrna, who claimed to be first of the world, John assures the saints there, that Christ is first and last, and there is no competition, and so there is no room for human pride.

Now those words 'who died and came to life again' should read 'became dead and came back to life again'. So, what is John talking about? He's talking about the resurrection of Jesus.

He saying the risen Christ is He who experienced death, and who passed into death, through death and out of death, and who came to life again in the triumphant event of the resurrection overcoming death, and who is alive forever more.

Jesus experienced the very worst in which life had to offer but He has conquered the worst that life can do. He experienced death so that we don't need to be afraid of it anymore, [1 Corinthians 15:55](#).

And it's because of this that only Jesus can demand such loyalty from His followers and be able to reward those who are loyal to Him.

The church in Smyrna was a crushed congregation.

“I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will

put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor's crown." Revelation 2:9-10

It does not always pay to be a Christian, but it is better after you die. When times are hard and you become poor, be faithful. Why? James says that God has a currency which are eternal riches, and so be faithful when poverty strikes, [James 2:5](#).

Paul says, don't worry when times get hard for the Lord knows who are His, [2 Timothy 2:19-21](#).

The Lord knows each and every one of us intimately and He knows everything He needs to know about the church in Smyrna. He knows they are facing persecution; He knows they are facing poverty.

Think about this in practical terms, because they were Christians, they were denied jobs because of their relationship with Jesus Christ. And Jesus knows this, and He knows that they faced the prospect of being sent to prison.

And if all that wasn't trouble enough, he tells them that was even more trouble ahead. But despite all the tribulation, thanks be to God, Smyrna was a consistent church.

"I know your afflictions and your poverty—yet you are rich! I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan." Revelation 2:9

Don't underestimate that word 'afflictions' here. He's not saying that being a Christian in Smyrna was a headache, He's not saying it's an inconvenience. He's saying because you're Christians, you're under all sorts of pressure, grinding, crushing pressure.

Remember the Roman Emperor Domitian was ruling at this time, so they were experiencing the crushing load of the Romans forces trying to destroy Christianity.

Don't underestimate that word 'poverty' either, this is not just being poor, it means they were absolutely destitution. In other words, they were poor and unable to help themselves.

They were poor perhaps, because they were from a poorer class to begin with, but most likely because of robbery, job rejection, and business boycott as forms of persecution.

But despite the already existing pressure from the Roman worship, the slander of the Jews, and their extreme poverty, these lovely people were faithful.

Jesus says to these faithful Christians in Smyrna, you guys aren't poor, you are all 'tycoons.' You guys are filthy rich. In other words, what these Christians lacked in the world, God would make up for them in heaven.

Should we be intimidated by others when they have a go at us for being Christians? Jesus says, 'I know about the slander of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan'.

Notice that word 'say'. 'They 'say', they are Jews'. These guys wouldn't have recognised Abraham if he had appeared wearing a name badge.

This very same Jesus had spoken to an audience of Jews and if you remember, He recognised their racial status but denied their relationship with Abraham, [John 8:57-59](#).

The Lord doesn't only know you and me intimately, he also knows everyone else intimately too. My point is that these people were proud to be Jews, they were proud of their synagogues and all the while Jesus says that they were a synagogue and the Devil dwelt in them.

Notice that this church had a positive testimony, the Lord didn't have a rebuke for this church like He did with many of the others. And so not only did they have a positive testimony they also had a very powerful testimony.

How do we know that? Simply because in spite of all the wickedness, which was going on around them, and in spite of all the affliction that they were put through, they remained faithful.

And so, because of this they received comfort from Jesus Himself, Jesus comes to them as ‘The first and the Last, He that was dead and is alive,’ [Revelation 2:8](#). He is reminding them ‘He knows’ what they are facing because He has faced tribulation and suffering as well.

Notice the word ‘slander’, it should be the word ‘blasphemy’ which is used. The word ‘blasphemy’ is the Greek word, ‘blasphemia’ which means, reviling, but here it is used not primarily to direct blasphemy against God but reviling against believers. In other words, Satan is tempting the saints to blaspheme in the name of Christ.

Although there is no rebuke for this church, there certainly are a few words of caution.

“Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.” [Revelation 2:10](#)

Satan was doing the tempting but God at the same time is proving, testing, and trying them. Why? Jesus doesn’t want them to lack anything, we must accept that difficulties come for a reason. They come to help us grow and become mature as Christians, [James 1:2-4](#).

Jesus says that God will let His people suffer, [2 Timothy 3:12](#), but it’s not all doom and gloom because Jesus reminds us that He has overcome the world, [John 16:33](#).

They were about to feel the pressure increasing, they were about to join the long list, the long, glorious list of those who were imprisoned for righteousness sake.

They were about to be tested for ‘ten days’, now this is not literal, this is the Hebrew way of saying for a short time. Daniel, for example, was tested and thrown into the lion’s den for 10 days, [Daniel 1:12-16](#). Jacob was tested by Laban 10 times, [Genesis 31:7](#).

It’s not hard to see then the origin of ‘testing, and you will suffer persecution for ten days.’ By the time we get to the New Testament, it had become the expression for a period of trial by hardship.

Jesus knows His people and those who are not His and this would include the devil himself. He tells them that, ‘the devil will put some of you in prison.’ He tells them that not too long from now some of you, not all of you but some of you will be put in prison.

Now if that isn’t frightening enough, under Domitian if you were getting put in prison that meant that you were going there just before being put to death. And so, Jesus cautions them and says don’t be afraid, but faithful, even to the point of death.

In other words, don’t worry about if they kill you, because you will be at home. When times are really tough, nothing can separate us from the love of God, persecution can’t and death can’t, [Romans 8:34-39](#).

Jesus is looking for total, lifelong commitment to Him in faith and with such faithfulness secures the ‘crown of life.’ [James 1:12](#). The crown was among the Romans and Greeks a symbol of victory and reward.

The crown or wreath worn by the victors in the Olympic Games was made of leaves of the wild olive, in the Pythian Games, the crown was made of laurel.

In the Nemean Games, it was made of parsley and in the Isthmian Games, it was made of pine. The Romans bestowed the ‘civic crown’ on anyone who saved the life of a citizen, and it was made of the leaves of the oak.

But these crowns died because they were made of leaves and things. This crown, the crown which Jesus gives lasts, why? Because it is made of life, [1 Peter 5:4](#).

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. The one who is victorious will not be hurt at all by the second death”. Revelation 2:11

Remember despite the fact that this letter and the others are written to a specific church, it applies equally to the other churches and in fact to all the churches.

The expression ‘second death’ is found three other times in the book of Revelation, [Revelation 20:6](#) / [Revelation 20:14](#) / [Revelation 21:8](#).

J.H. Thayer defined the ‘second death’ as ‘the miserable state of the wicked dead in hell’.

This condition is characterised as the second death because it follows physical death. It is designated as death because it is the terminal separation from the Lord, [Matthew 25:41](#) / [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#).

What is the second death? The second death is the ultimate and eternal separation from God. In other words, Jesus is saying to these faithful Christians in Smyrna and to us today that it’s so much better to die the first death in faithfulness to Christ than to die that second death.

Think about it, Jesus says because He is alive after death, so it will be with the Christian, we can escape hell if we remain faithful. Jesus says, I know about all the afflictions and poverty we experience, which are only temporary, He says, nothing will separate us from Him.

In fact, Jesus says the faithful lose nothing but gain everything worth gaining, and that is Jesus Himself, [Philippians 1:21](#).

THE CHURCH IN PERGAMUM

“To the angel of the church in Pergamum.” Revelation 2:12

Pergamum was the capital of the Roman Province of Asia, a royal city, the grandest city of its time, it was the cultural city of Asia. When we think of Pergamum we think about the University of Asia Minor, with its huge and famous library.

Its library of over 200,000 parchment rolls was surpassed only by Alexandria and we know that parchment was actually invented here.

They gloried in their knowledge and culture; it was a city of fashion. It was one of the great religious centres in the eastern world, it was the centre of emperor worship.

Being the Roman capital of Asia and centre of emperor worship explains the reason for much of the persecution and death of Christians during its time. Because it was located inland and on a rocky hill this prevented it from becoming a commercial centre.

And so there it sat, like a throne, on top of a hill, surveying the valley around it, it was a throne indeed. But who sat on that throne? Well Rome did. Pergamum was the seat of state religion, it was where the original Augustan Temple was built. But who else sat on the throne? Zeus did. One of the most famous altars in the world was there at Pergamum.

Up on a ledge jutting out from the hillside, 800 feet up, sat the huge altar with smoke ascended endlessly from the sacrifices offered there.

Barclay says, ‘No one could fail to see it,’ since ‘it would look like nothing so much as a great seat or throne’.

Who else sat on that throne? Asklepios did. Asclepius, the god of healing, was here. Thousands of sick people from near and far would visit the temple site. ‘Asklepios the Saviour’ was on the tongue of eager worshipers day after day.

Just like the church in Smyrna, we know nothing of its beginning but from [Acts 19:10](#) we can say that it was probably Paul or some of his students who established the church there.

And so just like we did with the church in Smyrna, the lessons we are going to learn are not found in its beginnings but rather in its present state, or condition as we find it written here in Revelation.

“These are the words of him who has the sharp, double-edged sword.” Revelation 2:12

Notice that Jesus is the One who has the ‘doubled-edged sword.’ It’s not the sword of the Spirit, as we usually understand it to mean, it’s not the word of God like Paul uses it in [Ephesians 6:17](#).

This is the Greek word ‘rhomphaia’ and it means a weapon of war and judgement, and we see it being used in [Revelation 19:11-16](#). It is the sign of authority, and if you possessed this sword that meant you had the right to use it.

The Romans carried a short broad-sword, and it had a distinct curved sabre-type blade. When the Romans were given governing powers, they were given power to inflict capital punishment, this was called ‘the right of the sword.’

But who then had the power of life and death? Asklepios their god of healing? Who was supposed to be able to raise the dead or kill the living? Zeus, the supreme god of the Grecian world? No! Was it the Romans? The Romans, [John 19:10-11](#).

The Roman governors were divided into two classes, those who had the right to the sword and those who did not. In other words, Rome had the power of life over death, others didn’t.

Here Jesus says that He has the right of the sword, He has the power of life and death, and He has the power to judge and the power to carry it out.

Which again reminds us that we should never be afraid of anyone who tries to persecute us for being Christians, but we should always be afraid of the One who made it possible for us to become Christians in the first place, [Matthew 10:28](#).

Jesus knows this church as He does the others, He knows each of us individually and He knows what’s happening in His church. But what does He know about the church in Pergamum?

“I know where you live—where Satan has his throne. Yet you remain true to my name. You did not renounce your faith in me, not even in the days of Antipas, my faithful witness, who was put to death in your city—where Satan lives.” Revelation 2:13

Jesus knows where you and I live, He knows our address’ and postcode, [Acts 10:5-6](#). The Christians at Pergamum had a permanent earthly dwelling, and it should be encouraging for us to know that the Lord knows our address, even to the street.

And although the Christians were very active in Pergamum, Satan was very active too. And if learn anything from this, it’s simply this, it is possible for Christians to be Christians where Satan is strongest.

Jesus knows where everyone lives but He also knows where Satan lives, Pergamum is where Satan’s throne is. In other words, this was a church in difficulty because this is where Satan was politically active.

That word, ‘throne,’ is the Greek word ‘thronos’ which basically means a seat for a royal king who has power. In other words, anyone who sat on the throne holds dominion or exercises authority.

The idea is that this is a city where Satan rules, or the city ruled by Satan, and he is influencing everything within it. We can see that Satan influenced everything because there was pagan worship, the worship of Asclepius, the god of healing and medicine, emperor worship, and the persecution of Christians.

But despite all the persecution and evil which was happening around them they remain true to Jesus. And sometimes that faithfulness to Jesus meant death.

We don't know anything about this person named Antipas, but we do know that he was faithful even in death. History says nothing about him, but legend says that he was roasted to death, but he was never ashamed to die a Christian.

He witnessed for Christ at Pergamum, and he died for the cause. And won't it be wonderful when we die that we will have the eternal pleasure of fellowship with this unknown hero.

And so, this church who were caught up in a whole world of different religions, persecuted time and time again held on to their faith, they stayed true to the name of Jesus, [Acts 4:12](#) / [Acts 5:41](#) / [Matthew 10:2](#).

These Christians were like you and I, they were baptised in the Name of Jesus, into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, [Matthew 28:19-20](#).

In other words, our journey begun in the Name of Jesus, we became Jesus' possessions and just like these Christians, we too should never give up what belongs to Jesus and that is our souls.

The Christians in Pergamum hung on in there despite the temptations, despite the persecution. And so, after the Lord makes them aware of the things that were right, He then brings to their attention the things that were not right.

“But, I have a few things against you: There are some among you who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin so that they ate food sacrificed to idols and committed sexual immorality.”
Revelation 2:14

One of the saddest words in the English language is the word 'but' and we use it all the time, don't we? I love you 'but!' I loved the meal 'but!' I enjoyed the worship 'but!' Jesus says I know where you live and I know the temptations and persecution you are facing and I'm so proud of you for hanging on in there, 'but!'

Jesus is practicing what He preached, [Matthew 18:15](#), and He is being honest with them, He is being gentle with them, like we should be when someone is involved in something they shouldn't be.

Jesus says there were some in the church that were trying to teach others to sin. They were encouraging others to eat sacrificed meat and encouraging others to commit fornication.

There were some that held the teaching of Balaam but let me ask you, why should Jesus reprimand the church because 'some' hold this teaching? Well simply because there must have been some kind of unlawful silence by the church in regard to the matter, there must have been a lack of discipline.

Paul rebukes the Corinthians for not disciplining the ungodly man in their congregation, [1 Corinthians 5:1-13](#), but this congregation weren't obviously rebuking anyone for holding on to this teaching.

But what is the teaching of Balaam? Remember Balaam wasn't wrong in everything, he wanted to die the death of the righteous. He knew, by the word of God, what Israel would do to Moab and the rest. But he also loved gain and he urged on idolatry mingled with fornication.

You see Balaamism was a compromise of morals and for people in this city to eat things sacrificed to idols meant to engage in the feasting and various other wicked things of the wicked idolatrous temples, including fornication.

In other words, the teaching or the doctrine of Balaam was a perversion of the Christian doctrine of liberty, Galatians 5:13. Peter talks about the way of Balaam in 2 Peter 2:10-15.

He says the way of Balaam is really the way of covetousness and refers to anyone who hires themselves out to do religious work merely for personal gain. It's the selling of our spiritual gifts for personal gain out of covetousness.

Jude tells us the error of Balaam in Jude 11. Balaam thought that he could get God to curse His people and bypass His covenant promises because of their evil.

Seeing their evil, Balaam supposed that a righteous God must curse Israel, but he was blind to God's faithfulness to His promises. And so, since Balaam found out he could not curse Israel, he realized he could cause them to corrupt themselves by getting them to marry the beautiful women of Moab, Numbers 25:1-3.

Picture the scene, these women came into the camp of Israel and catch the eyes of the men of Israel. They invited them to their sacrifices full of immorality and idolatry and before you know it, the men are eating at the tables of false gods, sleeping in the beds of pagan women, and bowing themselves down to worthless idols.

But how did this happen? Yes, it did, Numbers 31:13-16. In other words, Balaam was first person to introduce the doctrine of 'once saved always saved'.

Jesus says the church in Pergamum were tolerant of compromise and they had become compromisers. Balaam taught to go out among those who practice idolatry and get along, in other words, he wanted God's people to compromise for practical reasons.

We need to understand that coming out of idolatry often causes problems. A great part of social life was the idol feasts, and so because of this many Christians often lost their jobs, trade, friends, and family. And so, to a degree we can see why they may want to compromise.

You can imagine that these teachers were encouraging some Christians to attend some feasts, just eat a little meat, and just burn a little incense. Trying to convince others that owning an idol is nothing, after all a man must live and feed his family.

You can imagine them, asking vulnerable Christians, how can we defeat Satan unless we know what Satan is doing? And before you know what's happening, they became tolerant of evil, idols and fornication.

The teaching of Balaam wasn't the only false teaching, which was happening in Pergamum, they also had the problem as the church in Ephesus had with 'some that hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans.'

“Likewise, you also have those who hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans”. Revelation 2:15

Remember what Revelation 2:6 says, “You hate the practices of the Nicolaitans, which I also hate.” Do you see the difference? What had only been the practices in the church at Ephesus has now become doctrine in the church in Pergamum.

It never ceases to amaze me how quickly a tradition or a practice becomes doctrine. We don't know what the doctrine of the Nicolaitans was, so we must take into consideration the background context.

In the context of Revelation 2:6, we see in Ephesus, that they came from within the church, they were bad people who were trying to improve and modernise Christians.

In the context of Revelation 2:15, we see in Pergamum, we can see that they were proud, and they were trying to get Christians to conform to worldly standards, adjusting their Christianity to the world, advocating loose living.

In the context of Thyatira in Revelation 2:20, we see similar teaching, where they say evil is good and Christians need to know the deep things of Satan.

Do you see the real problem Jesus has with this doctrine? He says, there are more serious problems that He sees, through the Nicolaitans, the world was changing the church, instead of the church changing the world.

The church was not aware of the dangers and the results of their actions and compromising attitude. And so, Jesus says to them, you are tolerant in three areas.

1. They are tolerant of the teachings of Balaam, in other words they were practicing compromise, they were practicing 'once saved always saved'.
2. He tells them they are tolerant of the teaching of the Nicolaitans, in other words they were the compromising in the practice of evil itself.
3. And finally they were tolerant of a lack of disciplinary action, they should have dealt with the false teaching quickly and properly.

“Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.”
Revelation 2:16

The call to repentance did not come to the false teachers but to the church and Jesus tells this church to repent of its worldly ways. In other words, there were some changes which had to be made, they had to change their attitude and become intolerant of compromise. They had to change their conduct because of their acceptance of their wrong way of life.

And please don't tell me that Jesus never gets mad, because He does. He's not talking about the final coming of Christ, He's talking about coming in judgment against these ungodly sects.

Remember that Jesus says that He has 'the right to the sword,' He has the power and authority to exercise judgement. And so, what He is saying is, that the church needs to make some changes too or else they too will suffer in that coming.

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it”. Revelation 2:17

Jesus says, are you listening? Do you hear and understand what's He's saying? He's said, repent, listen carefully, remain faithful and die faithfully, and he says if you do these things, you will be victorious and you will be given some of the hidden manna.

Now what is this hidden manna? Well, the first mention of manna is found in Exodus 16:4 where we find manna was the food God provided to the Israelites when they wandered for forty years in the desert.

What else do we know about it? According to Exodus 16:31 we know “It was white like coriander seed and tasted like wafers made with honey.”

And if you remember according to Exodus 16:31-32 God wanted some manna saved and preserved for future generations to remind them of the Lord's covenant of faithfulness and so Moses placed a portion of manna in the Ark of the Covenant.

Somewhere between the time Moses first placed it in the Ark and the dedication of the Solomon's Temple, the manna disappeared along with Aaron's rod, 1 Kings 8:9.

So where did the manna go? Did God or an angel remove it and take it back to heaven? We simply don't know; however, some Jewish legends claim that Jeremiah hid it before the Babylonian captivity and that it would remain there until the Messiah showed up.

But that's one question we don't have the answer to, but we do have the answer to this question. Who is this manna? The manna is Jesus Himself who claimed to be the true manna, the real manna which came out of heaven. John 6:31-65.

Paul says that Christians were sustained by an invisible source, hidden manna, Colossians 3:1-4. What manna was to the Israelites, Jesus was to the Christians and much more.

The saints were already feeding on that hidden manna of course, but the promise assures them of continued sustenance from Jesus, whatever the course of events.

Jesus says that these Christians couldn't partake of the heathen feasts, but they could feed on something better. In other words, if you have to give up earthly pleasures, heavenly joys will be yours.

What else were the Christians in Pergamum promised if they repent, listen carefully, remain faithful and die faithfully? Jesus says they will be given a 'white stone with a new name written on it.'

The colour white symbolises innocence, and so Jesus recognises their innocence, it stands for purity, justice, nobility, victory, and joy. In Biblical times white stones were given to people who were tried and acquitted. They were given to a slave freed with citizenship.

They were given to an athlete overcoming opposition. They were given to warriors coming back victorious. They were given to clients as being worthy of the privilege of sharing freely in their masters abundance.

All these declare what Christians have and what they will receive if we remain faithful. Then there was the white stone that friends shared with each other which guaranteed a warm reception anytime and anyplace they met.

Jesus says it will have a "new name written on it and known only to the one who receives it". The idea behind a new name indicates a new relation, new hopes, and triumphs and only the owner of the stone would know the name written on the stone.

In the Bible a name was very important, you can see this in the many places where the name spoke of the events surrounding the birth of a child.

You can see it in the many cases where names were changed to indicate a change in circumstances of status of the one re-named. For example, Abram becomes Abraham, Jacob becomes Israel. Simon becomes Peter etc.

A 'new name' means a new relationship or status into which the child of God entered by virtue of some new experience with his Master. But it was 'his' name and nobody else would know it. It was his trial, and it was his experience with God, it was his victory.

In other words, it's personal to the individual Christian.

The Lord knows where we are and what we are doing. Antipas was the example for the Christians in Pergamum, and he is still our example today, and he certainly thought it was all worth it.

Jesus says He wants faithfulness from every Christian and that's because it will only be the faithful who will be rewarded, Matthew 25:23.

THE CHURCH IN THYATIRA

"To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:" Revelation 2:18

Jesus writes to the church in Thyatira.

Thyatira was a town long recognized as a garrison town and it was the gateway to the important areas of Asia Minor. It had no real religious significance, but it was a town of trade unions of every kind, and we know that Acts 16:14 tells us that Lydia, the seller of purple garments lived there.

Metal work flourished there, especially working with bronze. We know nothing about how church was established but it is possible like some of the other churches, that Paul or some of his students according to Acts 19:10 may have established the church there. It may also be possible that Lydia went back home to establish the church.

The town of Thyatira lay in the mouth of a long valley, which connected the valleys of Hermus and the Cuicua River. Today there is still a railway that runs down the valley. And because of the great roads of the trade routes from Syria to Pergamum, it would have had some sort of strategic importance.

There must have been some sort of settlement there because in 290 BC its name emerged in history, and it was discovered as a military centre.

If Thyatira fell, Pergamum lay open to attack. There was no hill to erect a lookout point, and this resulted in a town being fated to fight, be knocked down and built up again.

It was a great commercial centre because of its road and the valley brought trade from all over the world, and it was most famous for its wool trade, and the dyeing industry.

Purple dye was very expensive, and it came from a little shellfish called a Murex. The dye was extracted from the throat. The Roman writer Pliny said that 1lb of purple dye cost around £100 and so Lydia must have been a wealthy woman, dealing in one of the costliest substances of the ancient world.

Thyatira was the centre for temples of Artemis and Appollo, but they were not especially famous. It's interesting that though this was the smallest of the churches addressed in the book of Revelation, it's the longest letter written.

“These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.”
Revelation 2:18

Straight away Jesus introduces Himself as the Son of God which means that He is the Saving One. He describes Himself as One who has eyes like blazing fire which means that He is the searching One. He says He has feet like burnished bronze which is symbolic of judgment.

“I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.” Revelation 2:19

Like we have seen in all the letters we've looked at so far and like we will see in the letters to come, He knows what's going on in each church.

Here is a congregation who were very active in doing good. Here is a congregation that are very loving in seeking one another's highest good.

Here is a congregation who had confidence in their faith and were motivated by their faith. Here is a congregation who are very active in their service for the Lord and each other.

They were very good in areas of benevolence; they took care of the poor and needy among themselves and around them. They were a very patient church, even in the midst of trials and sufferings. And they were a church which were doing more now than they ever have.

They were making progress as a church, individually they were growing in Christ and non-Christians would certainly know they were Christians.

Jesus acknowledges that says, there's a problem, 'you're too patient, and you're too gently in love with certain people.'

"Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols." Revelation 2:20

Jesus says your patience and love have led you to become tolerant of this woman called Jezebel. Jezebel followed a similar line to that of the Nicolaitans and the Balaamites like we saw in the earlier letters.

And we can imagine some Christians saying, 'what's wrong with being a part of a trade union and attending the feasts which offered sacrifices unto the gods?' It's harmless they would declare, especially as Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10, when you know that an idol is nothing.

So, who is this, Jezebel? Well, there are three possibilities.

1. She is called that woman Jezebel and in Greek her name means wife although we can't be sure.

Some people believe that she was the wife of one of the elders, and that she was a productive source of trouble, undoing all the work her husband did.

2. It has also been suggested that she is to be identified with the famous Oracle called the Sambathe. It is possible that Sambathe may have been a Jewess.

It was said that she was a Jewess that tried to destroy the Christians.

3. Some believe it was Lydia, who found Christianity clashing with her business.

She wanted the church to compromise and attend some heathen festivals.

The original Jezebel was the daughter of the King of Sidon and Ahab, the king of Israel, had taken her for his wife, 1 Kings 16:3. Her sin was that she brought her own gods to Israel, namely Baal and Astarte.

The problem here was that Jezebel was seducing the Christians from the worship of the true God, and taught them to eat things offered to idols and commit fornication just as her predecessor had corrupted Israel.

In other words, whoever this lying woman was, she is making the church suffer. Jesus is telling us if we are too patient with people and too loving of people because we don't want to upset them, then a congregation can die of compromises.

Now is it possible to be too patient with someone? Is it possible to be too loving to someone? If you take a moment to read 2 John, and if you read between the lines, especially 2 John 10-11, you will read about an elect lady who was so kind and so gentle and so loving that she had to be warned against welcoming false teachers into her home.

And so it is possible to be too patient and too loving. And concerning Jezebel, Jesus' patience, and love for her is running out.

"I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling". Revelation 2:21

Jesus says He has given Jezebel time to repent but she isn't willing too. She obviously claimed to be one of God's people, after all she calls herself a prophet. But she is actively involved in sexual immorality and won't repent, 2 Corinthians 7:10.

Jezebel refuses to repent and because of her unwillingness to do so, Jesus goes on to declare her sentence.

“So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. I will strike her children dead.” Revelation 2:22

Jesus says I will cast Jezebel ‘on a bed of suffering’ which figuratively speaking means she will be inflicted with disease. Remembering that she is practicing sexual immorality, the chances are this might be some kind of sexually transmitted disease, but again we don’t know for sure.

Jesus also says that he ‘will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely’. In other words anyone who is participating with Jezebel in her sexual immoral living will also suffer the consequences with her.

And if they don’t stop participating in Jezebel’s ways, they will die spiritually for eternity. But why? Why did Jesus want to discipline them? Well, to put it simply, the Lord was going to make an example of them to teach others what happens when truth is compromised and sin is tolerated.

“Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds”. Revelation 2:23

Notice what Jesus says here, he’s not disciplining them just for the church in Thyatira’s benefit but for all the churches benefits. The One with the eyes like fire, fire like a furnace, fire like in the forge used by the metal workers of Thyatira.

Jesus with such eyes sees all. The searing look burns its way through all the appearance. It lights up the dark places and it sees down into the very heart.

We can deceive many people and even ourselves at times, but we cannot fool or deceive God, Galatians 6:8-9. God knows our mind’s innermost thoughts and feelings and He knows our heart’s desires.

The Lord who knows all things, was going to make an example of those who are participating with Jezebel’s sexual immorality, to teach other churches what happens when truth is compromised and sin is tolerated.

The church in Thyatira were tolerating this false prophet called Jezebel. She was a false teacher who was encouraging the members of this church to commit fornication which would ultimately lead them away from Christ.

Whoever she was, she was working from within the church. She was teaching immorality as a practice of Christianity, teaching it was okay to eat meat offered to idols.

Remember that for many people being a Christian involved the exclusion from many social activities, economic opportunities, possibly even buying meats, and family ties.

She was likely teaching that when you become a Christian you don’t need to give up all these things because God would not expect you too.

She would teach that fornication was okay because it was practiced in idolatrous worship. And so by her attitude and life she was teaching rebellion against God’s will, by her active campaign to convert others to her will.

False teachers don’t come in with a sign on their heads, saying, ‘I’m a false teacher!’ They take their time, they make close friendships within a congregation and slowly but surely begin to preach and teach their own ideologies, 2 Peter 2:1-2.

Jesus has dealt with Jezebel and dealt with those who are involved in her practises, but what about those who aren’t involved and remain true to Jesus?

“Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan’s so-called deep secrets, ‘I will not impose any other burden on you, except to hold on to what you have until I come.’”
Revelation 2:24-25

To the faithful saints in Thyatira, the faithful saints who don't learn or even listen to her teaching. To the faithful who don't learn or listen to her teaching on Satan's so called deep secrets. To the saints who had not delved into her wickedness, Jesus says, 'Hold on until I come.'

To you and me those words may not mean much, but to the citizens of Thyatira they carried some weight. When this city was being threatened from an attack, they would have to try and hold-off the enemy until the city of Pergamum was ready.

Thyatira was a weak city but it had to make the best of it. And so Jesus says to these weak saints, try and live courageously until He comes.

Our God knows all things and He sees all things, 1 Corinthians 2:9-10, and when Jesus writes to the church in Thyatira, He sees His followers and understands what's happening within that church.

And so because He sees and knows each of them individually, He knows that the faithful need some sort of reassurance concerning their destiny.

“To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— that one ‘will rule them with an iron sceptre and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my Father.” Revelation 2:26-27

To those who are victorious and continues to do His will until death, he will give authority over the nations. The authority Jesus offers the overcomer is the authority that He had already received of His Father.

But what kind of authority is this? When is this kind of authority going to be given? We are already enjoying this authority. As Christians we are fellow heirs with Christ right now, Romans 8:17.

Paul says the world and all things are already belong to the Christian right now, 1 Corinthians 3:21-23. John says that the prayers of the saints affect the world and cause God to send judgments on it, Revelation 8:3-5.

The very fact that Paul and Peter urge us to pray for kings and all that are in authority proves the prayers of the saints affect world leaders.

We have already received that authority because we are at present reigning with Christ and we use it all the time in our prayers to God, Romans 5:17. In other words we not only share in Christ' sufferings but we also share in Christ's judgment.

When Jesus is talking about ruling them with an iron sceptre, we need to understand that every time the words rule with an iron sceptre are mentioned they always mean shepherd. The rod of iron is said by some to be a staff with an iron top since this was often the weapon of a shepherd.

Notice that the weapon is not a sword, that's because the metal workers in Thyatira would quickly grasp the meaning of the word iron. And the potters would quickly grasp the meaning of the broken pieces of pottery.

But Jesus is not through comforting the faithful.

“I will also give that one the morning star”. Revelation 2:28

What comes to you mind when you think of the morning star? You may be forgiven for thinking that the morning star is the guarantee that the night will end. If I were to say to you all, I pray we all receive the morning star, what would you think?

You may think this is a little strange but actually it isn't as strange as you think. Jesus is the morning star, that's what He calls Himself, Revelation 22:16.

Peter says the day star arises in our hearts, and so floods us with light, 2 Peter 1:19. Don't misunderstand me here, this promise doesn't mean we don't already have Jesus because we do.

John is speaking in terms of having a new appreciation of Jesus. Paul speaks of the Galatians needing Christ to be formed in them again, Galatians 4:19. Some of the Galatians had gone from Christ but many had not. It was as if they had to come to know Jesus all over again.

The faithful Christians in Thyatira had the morning star and faithfulness unto victory would see them gaining a deeper and more intimate relationship with their Saviour.

This would be true if they were faithful until they saw the upcoming threat pass and it would also be true if they died in their faithfulness.

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches”. Revelation 2:29

We have to listen carefully to everything which is being taught in our assemblies. Yes, we may be a living, loving, steadfast, working church, but we need to be careful that, that isn't only on the surface.

The Lord is concerned with the heart, and He tells us, if we are faithful, and do what we need to do and hold fast, then because of our faithfulness, victory will be ours.

If we continue to make Christ our own, He will help us fall in love with Him all over again. If we continue to follow His way and do what He says, we will enjoy eternal life with Him. The only burden Jesus puts on us, is to be faithful which is no real burden at all.

THE CHURCH IN SARDIS

“To the angel of the church in Sardis write.” Revelation 3:1

Sardis was the capital city of Lydia, and it was founded about 1200 BC. The city itself was located fifteen hundred feet up in the air on a ledge of rock jutting out of the side of a mountain.

There was one narrow road leading into the city, the other sides of the plateau were just steep cliffs which made the city very safe and nearly impenetrable by invading armies.

Gold and silver coins were first minted there, and it was famous for the industries that operated there. Carpet, wool, and dyed cloth were their primary products, and it is said that the art of dyeing material was invented at Sardis.

The fall of Sardis began when the people of the city became complacent in their wealth, their power and their city's apparent invincibility.

The city was proud of its past and it was proud of its reputation, but its reputation was all it had left. For all intents and purposes, the city of Sardis was dead, even while it lived.

Sardis today is a wilderness of ruins and thorns, where the only habitations are a few huts of the Yurok nomads.

We know nothing at all about how the church in Sardis started, and as we go through Jesus' letter to the church in Sardis you will find He has no words of commendation for them, but He does have some words of condemnation and counsel.

“These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.” Revelation 3:1

John begins by reminding us that Jesus is the One ‘who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars’. What does that mean? Well, the good news is we don’t need to speculate because the best interpretation of the Bible is the Bible itself.

John tells us that ‘seven spirits’ are equated with ‘seven eyes,’ [Revelation 2:20](#) / [Revelation 5:6](#). This clearly means that Jesus has all-seeing power and also implies He has all-wisdom.

The number ‘seven’ would of course indicate ‘fullness’ or ‘completeness’ but it may also be used to speak of the total knowledge concerning the ‘seven’ churches. In other words, as we have seen in all the other letters, Jesus sees all and understands everything.

And this isn’t anything new, a way back in the days of Zechariah we find the same idea, [Zechariah 3:9](#) / [Zechariah 4:10](#). It looked to some as though the temple which had begun its building work about 16 years previously would never be completed.

And so, God assembles the people and has a top stone set before Zerubbabel according to [Zechariah 4:7](#) and He then swears that Zerubbabel, who started it, would finish it.

Engraved on the stone are seven eyes. But whose eyes are they? God’s eyes. God is challenging the people to look at this top stone, they couldn’t see the completion of the temple, but God’s eyes could see the completion, because He was greater in knowledge and wisdom.

His eyes could see all the obstacles which needed to be removed, the things which must be taken care of, for the job to be finished, [2 Chronicles 16:9](#).

The ‘seven spirits’ which are equivalent to the ‘seven eyes’ speak of the total wisdom and insight which comes from the Spirit. Remember that each letter ends with the words, “Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

In other words, no matter what appearances might say, Jesus knows and sees the reality.

Jesus says, He knows every individual and every congregation as they really were. In fact, Jesus tells the church in Sardis that, “I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead.”

This was a church which worked and much like we do today, they probably broke bread every first day of the week and contributed of their means. Jesus says to the church in Sardis, you have the reputation of being alive, but the fact is you are actually dead. The church in Sardis outwardly looked great but inwardly they were rotting away.

We know that the city of Sardis was ‘alive’ during times of strife and war, but it couldn’t live with peace. The church in Sardis had not been at war with Rome, it wasn’t having any trouble with the prominent group of Cybellian worshippers which lived there.

There are no records of slanderous Jews attacking the church. In her peace she seems to have drifted into a coma and then on into death.

This congregation was living on its past reputation without any present achievements. They used to be heavily involved in mission work, but they are doing nothing, except glorying in the past.

Jesus isn’t so concerned about the things they used to do as a church, but He is very concerned about the things they are doing or not doing today as a church. We can’t live on the past and the church can’t live on her past reputation.

“Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have found your deeds unfinished in the sight of my God. Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, and repent. I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.” [Revelation 3:2-3](#)

Here is a church that started lots of things but finished none, here is a church that promises so much, but delivers so little. In other words, they were great starters but terrible finishers.

The church in Sardis had no excuse for not completing what they started out to do. They weren't under attack from within or from outside of the church. There's no indication that there were people arguing over the Deity of Jesus, there's no indication of legalism.

In other words, they were just lazy, and they were content with a second-hand faith, 2 Timothy 3:5. Jesus says the church in Sardis stood for nothing and had fallen from everything.

They were not dying but they were dead as a church, some individuals were still alive but, on their way, to dying as we will see in a moment.

Being ungrateful, was somewhat characteristic of a Sardinian and the citizens of that city had changed the church into having the same character.

Some of the Christians were in the world but sadly of the world. They had developed an attitude of laziness and just didn't care anymore for themselves or those around them.

They simply didn't care for their own Christian life, Romans 13:11. They simply didn't stand firm in the faith, 1 Corinthians 16:13. They simply didn't resist the devil and flee from him, 1 Peter 5:8. They simply didn't watch and wait, 1 Thessalonians 5:6.

They were barely alive and ready to die but they were spiritually dead. And so, each member had to repent in their hearts and show that repentance in their attitude by actually finishing the things they had started.

Because if they don't wake up and repent then there would be consequences, He would come like a thief in the night. We all know that most thieves work at night and they never come at a time when we expect them too.

As Christians we should be familiar with the words of Jesus here as this illustration of 'a thief in the night' is used a lot throughout the New Testament, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4.

There were some Christians in the Sardis church who were faithful and that's who Jesus going to address next.

"Yet you have a few people in Sardis who have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy. The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out the name of that person from the book of life, but will acknowledge that name before my Father and his angels". Revelation 3:4-5

Notice that Jesus makes the distinction between the individual Christian and the congregation. They had become an ungrateful church and they had forgotten all that God had done for them, Hebrews 2:1.

The church did start to drift away because they didn't pay attention to what they had heard but there were a few Christians who remained firm and they were the ones, who didn't soil their clothes. In other words, they didn't allow no-one or nothing to kill the strength and blessings of being a Christian.

It is possible for a Christian to live among sinners and not be affected by their evil. Jesus says that the faithful in Sardis 'will walk with Him', this is an allusion to Enoch, Genesis 5:22-24.

In other words, Enoch lived during that time of evil before the flood where no one listened to or trusted God, but he did. He was surrounded by evil, but he continued to stay close to God.

Jesus says to the faithful in Sardis, despite all the evil influences around them, despite all the un-Christ-like behaviour among some of their own members.

The faithful few in Sardis will walk faithfully with God and they have remained true to their faith which was reflected not only in their talk but also their walk. And they are so worthy, not because they earned that worthiness but because their conduct reflected their Christian faith.

Notice also they are dressed in white, the colour white in this text represents purity and victory in the presence of God, [Revelation 7:9](#). This text is symbolic of the Feast of Tabernacles which was the most joyful of all Jewish feasts. It followed the harvest of the crops and the ingathering of the grapes, and it followed the great Day of Atonement when the sins of the nation were removed. And at that one moment, they were pure and victorious in God's eyes, being right with God again, what a wonderful day that must have been.

Look how personal this is? Jesus knows each of them intimately, even to the point of knowing their names. In this world we're nothing more than a national insurance number or a reference number.

But Jesus, He knows my name and He knows your name and He says, He would be proud to name His faithful ones, as His own before the Father and His angels.

People can wear and use the Name of Jesus for all sorts of reasons, but they still might not be known to Jesus. The ones who are known to Jesus, are the ones who do the will of the Father, [Matthew 7:21-23](#).

Jesus didn't ask the faithful in Sardis to get up and move, He encouraged them to stay. Paul says, the stronger brethren are supposed to bear the burdens of the weaker brethren, not move away, [Romans 14:1](#).

Even if the congregation is being exposed to false teaching, what are the faithful supposed to do? Get up and leave? Paul says it is the evil leaven which is to be removed, not the leavening influence of the faithful few which is to be removed, [1 Corinthians 5:6-7](#).

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:6

Are we listening? Are we awake and walking with Jesus victoriously in all purity? Jesus knows our ways and thoughts. Jesus is very much alive and if any church claims to belong to Him, then they too need to ensure that they stay alive.

THE CHURCH IN PHILADELPHIA

“To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write.” Revelation 3:7

As we go through this letter written by Jesus to the church in Philadelphia, we will see that the church is praised by Jesus, not for its numerical strength, but for its faithfulness even though it's weak.

The word, 'Philadelphia' is the Greek word for 'one who loves his brother'. The city was named for Attalus II, whose love for his brother Eumenes earned him the name Philadelphos. The city itself was situated at the border of Misia, Lydia and Phrygia but not a garrison city.

It was located on the Cogamus River about 105 miles from Smyrna and it was founded with the deliberate intention of being a missionary city of Greek culture and language to Lydia and Phrygia and had a successful missionary spirit.

Its rich and fertile volcanic soil made it a grape growing and wine making centre and it was subject to frequent earthquakes and daily tremors.

It was a city with many names for gratitude, for example, 'New Caesarea' which means 'city of Caesar'. They named it 'New Caesarea' out of gratitude for Tiberius who restored the city after the earthquake of 17 AD.

And another example is ‘Vespasian Philadelphia’, or ‘Flavia Philadelphia’. The people understood what it meant to receive a new name, as it was in relation to the emperor who was reigning at the time.

Philadelphia became and remained a wealthy city and an important trade centre as the coastal cities declined. And it grew in a spirit of persistence against overwhelming odds, and it had many magnificent temples and other public buildings.

Like we’ve seen with most of these letters, we have no record of how the church was established or by whom. Of the seven letters to the seven churches found here in Revelation only two didn’t receive any sort of correction or rebuke.

One was the church in Smyrna, and the other is this church, the church in Philadelphia. While the letter to the church in Smyrna is a challenge for them to remain faithful unto death, this letter is filled with compliments and praise.

The other five letters all contained words of complaint and correction, but this church receives nothing but praise from the Lord.

And as we go through this letter, we become quickly aware that this is a church that the Lord is using for His glory.

“These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.” Revelation 3:7

There is no doubt that Jesus has His Jewish enemies on His mind when He writes this letter as He says, ‘He is holy, and He is true’. The Jews claimed themselves to be a holy nation, they were set apart for holy service to God.

But as we know from reading through the Bible, we can clearly see that the claim had only an appearance but no substance. But Jesus was the sanctified One and His claim had substance, [Hebrews 4:15](#).

The word ‘true’ means, ‘genuine, the substantial reality.’ Sometimes the Bible uses the illustration of a shadow, and it is always associated with the Jewish religion, [Colossians 2:16-17](#). Jesus truly is the Holy One in every sense of the word, and He is also the real deal.

Notice what Jesus is holding, He is ‘holding the key of David.’ And what are keys used for? Opening and closing things. That’s why He says, “what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open.”

To most people, this is no big deal but to the Jew, this was a rebuke. Because this is about holding the key of power and authority and Jesus says, ‘He has this power and authority’.

But what authority is He talking about? Some people like to believe He’s referring to the authority over the treasury, which I will explain in a moment. But the authority here under consideration is a whole lot more than a city treasurer.

In [Isaiah 22:15-25](#) we read in verse 15 that Shebna was treasurer and governor. And when we read on, we saw that his authority was to be taken from him and given to someone else, [Isaiah 22:20-22](#).

Is there any doubt in your mind that [Revelation 3:7](#) alludes to [Isaiah 22:22](#)? Eliakim was to be put over the ‘house of David,’ [Isaiah 9:6-7](#). And in [Isaiah 36:3](#) we read of the removed Shebna as being a scribe and Eliakim as being ‘over the household.’ He basically represented the city against the invader.

The key was the symbol of power and authority and not only does Jesus have the key, but He also has the power of using the key, [Matthew 28:18-19](#). In other words, Jesus holds the key to life and death, [Revelation 1:18](#), and some Jews couldn’t or wouldn’t accept that.

Or to put the point across more simply, Jesus in claiming to be the promised Messiah also claims the right of inclusion and exclusion. He had let the Philadelphians in, He had opened the door and not all the Jews under heaven could close it.

No matter how hard they tried, all their slandering or mockery made no difference. The open door is the door to blessing but notice that Jesus is also a shutter of doors. To enter the presence of God meant going through Jesus and there is no other way, [John 14:6](#).

There can be no entrance into the presence and blessing of God except through Jesus. And so, despite all their slandering, the door to blessing was closed against the Jews.

Despite all their cries of, ‘we’re decedents of Abraham’! Despite all their ritual keeping, despite all their claims to history, their law and their prophets, the door was firmly shut, [Luke 11:52](#).

The door of blessings was shut by the One who has the key of the house of David.

“I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.” Revelation 3:8

Time and time again we have seen that Jesus knows everything, [Proverbs 15:3](#). And Jesus sees and knows everything which is happening in this world. The open door here is a door of service and notice that they haven’t provided it, but God has.

The idea is that of access or ability to enter the kingdom of God eternal or to take advantage of opportunities. The opportunity is provided by the Lord but we as Christians must take advantage of it, [Colossians 4:2-3](#).

An open door could be a large opportunity to share the Gospel with hundreds of people or even a nation. But an open door can also come in the form of a simple chat with a workmate or a friend. Or by chatting with someone on the bus or in a queue in a shop.

God can open a door by helping others out in times in trouble, or by providing food for those who really need it. Because according to our text, when God opens a door no one can shut it.

This means that no external power, no resources, and no excessive wealth, no military forces, or even heavenly bodies can shut what Jesus opens.

Jesus has the power and authority, and He says to the church in Philadelphia, “I know that you have little strength.” In other words, they were weak in influence and had no political sway.

Many scholars believe that this was speaking about the size of this church, a small church with limited resources and few workers. But what they probably saw as weakness, the Lord saw as strength, [Romans 8:31-32](#).

The Lord saw their little strength but said, I am going to bless you with open doors because “you have kept my word and have not denied my name.”

Remember this part of the country was prone to earthquakes and so they are going to have opportunities to do mission work not only in their own area but to the regions beyond because of their faithfulness.

And so, this church is going to be greatly blessed but there are others who won’t be blessed.

“I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you.” Revelation 3:9

Even today that there are many Jews who need to know about their spiritual state. They are lost, undone, Christ-less and therefore priest-less and so in effect they are hopeless, because apart from Jesus there is no hope.

The real Jew is a physical descendant of Abraham through Jacob who has given his life to Christ. If he hasn’t done that, he is no Jew, and that’s not me saying that it’s the apostle Paul, [Romans 2:28-29](#) / [Romans 9:6-7](#). They can claim to be Jews all they want but if they haven’t given their lives to Jesus, they are not real Jews.

And it's to these Jews that Jesus says, "I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you." We don't know of what kind of people the Philadelphian church was made up of.

If they were Gentiles then the 'insult' here is of the plainest kind which must have made the Jews howl when they heard it, [Isaiah 60:14](#).

Jesus in this same letter says he will write on them 'the name of the city of my God.' His favoured ones will be 'called' the 'city of God.' The Philadelphians will know the joy of having the Isaiah passage fulfilled in them and they will be called the city of God.

The 'Holy One' who is also the 'True One,' will cause these lying arrogant haters of the Gentiles to bow down before them. And then these Jewish Gentiles haters will know that God loved the church there.

In other words, there was in store for the Philadelphians a day of justification. A day when the Jews would be humiliated. And this was going to be the church's assurance that in the coming hour of trial that they would be kept.

"Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." Revelation 3:10-11

To understand what Jesus means here we need to go back in time to a time when the emperor Domitian was ruling. Because when Domitian came on the scene, persecution began and so anyone who refused to worship the emperor became enemies of the state.

Christians came under the terrible pressure of Rome for about two and a half centuries until the Edict of Toleration under Galerius. The Jews too had their troubles with Rome, for it was Hadrian who urged the termination of circumcision and aimed at building a shrine to Jupiter on the site of Jerusalem.

This rebellion of the Jews in 132 A.D. under Bar Kosheba was perhaps the bloodiest of the Jewish battles with Rome. The historian Dio Cassius reports that over 580,000 of the Jews died, in the war. In the early stages prior to the revolt, the Christians were suffering greatly at the hands of the Romans.

But just how was Jesus going to keep them from the hour of trial? Does this mean that the church was not going to suffer?

Not at all, that's why He tells them to, "Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown." In [Ezekiel 9:1-8](#) we are told the righteous would be kept from the hand of the destroyer but the 'keeping' didn't mean they would be saved from physical suffering or death. In [Ezekiel 21:3-4](#) we read of the same judgment as taking away the righteous as well as the wicked.

The point is they were preserved all the way through it and so they came 'out of' it. In other words, Jesus keeping them from the hour, is keeping them from what the hour could produce.

So, what could that hour of trial produce? Apostasy, falling away. In other words, Jesus would safely see them through their time of trouble, but the Jews had no such promise.

"The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name." Revelation 3:12

Philadelphia was known as 'Little Athens' for it was full of idols and idol temples. It would not have been the first time that the worshipers of the idols had felt the ground shake and the pillars crack and tumble, due to the earthquakes. At such a time there would be only one thing to do and that is run.

But God's temple cannot crumble whatever happens in the physical realm. The pillars in that temple are mature Christians, solid, stable, and immovable, [Galatians 2:9](#). Christians like James, Peter and John, Christians who stand firm are the overcomers. When Jesus says, "Never again will they leave it," he's saying that the saints would never have occasion to run out for fear.

We don't know whether the church in Philadelphia was made up of Jewish Christians or Gentile Christians or both but there is a lot of Jewish symbolism in these last few verses. In [Isaiah 56:3-8](#) we find an amazing piece of Scripture. If the church is Gentile we have Isaiah speaking of the foreigners who have said, in [Isaiah 56:3](#) "The LORD will surely exclude me from his people."

Also in [Isaiah 56:3](#) there is a reference to the eunuchs who were a despised group, and they have the same reservations believing they will not be acceptable to God.

But in [Isaiah 56:5](#) we are told the foreigners and eunuchs are not to worry for, "to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will endure forever."

In [Isaiah 56:7](#) Isaiah says, "These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer, for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations".

In other words, if the congregation is Gentile or predominately so, we have the Scriptural assurance for them. If the congregation is Jewish or predominately so, we have comfort for them. So, whoever they are, the scorned, the weak, they all have the son of David behind them.

This is an open door for both Jew and Gentile. The door is open for both the Jews and Gentiles to receive the eternal blessings and promises from God, [John 10:16](#).

And it's to the Christian who doesn't fall away when persecution comes that Jesus says, "I will also write the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem."

Remember the Jerusalem of Judea had long since ceased to be the 'city of God.' And it was there where they plainly examined and cruelly rejected their God.

But there's another Zion and this Zion had as its foundation, and His name is Jesus the Christ, [Isaiah 28:16](#).

This was the 'new' Jerusalem, the 'stones' of which were members of the 'new' covenant. Notice where this new Jerusalem comes from, it comes 'down out of heaven' and that's very significant. This tells us of its divine origin, this is a city, made without hands, whose builder and maker is God.

While the beast-like kingdoms of [Daniel 7](#) rise out of the water or the earth, the Messianic kingdom is set forth in the Son of Man who rides in the heavens. What a wonderful picture that is, isn't it?

But Jesus isn't finished yet, the 'new' name of Jesus would be written on them. Remember this is referring to endorsement, being identified with, [Matthew 10:32](#). In other words Jesus would own the overcomer as His own.

But what is this new name? It is 'Lord.' Paul says this will have to be confessed, one way or another, [Philippians 2:9-11](#). And the day is coming when everyone born or dead, every demon in hell is going have to confess that Jesus is Lord.

And so, Jesus says to all Christians, whether your alive or dying, whether you're in peace or at war, whether you are rich or in poverty. If you remain faithful to Him, you will be unashamedly owned by Jesus.

"Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches." Revelation 3:13

Are we listening? May we always listen and pay close attention to what the Spirit is teaching us today. May we always keep our eyes open for those precious doors which God opens for us to share the Gospel with others.

May we never give up or think about falling away when hard times come. May we never forget the place and authority of Jesus. And may we never give God the opportunity to disown us because we have disowned Him.

Remember, when He finishes with those same words to all the seven churches, He is actually teaching the same lesson to all the churches so that they too will pay close attention to what He says.

THE CHURCH IN LAODICEA

“To the angel of the church in Laodicea write.” Revelation 3:14

Out of all the churches written to in Revelation 2-3, I think it’s sad that the church in Laodicea has been the most studied and preached.

The church that made famous the shocking saying of Jesus, ‘I will spew you out of my mouth!’ The town itself lay around 43 miles southeast of Philadelphia and the Laodiceans were a rich community.

They were famous for glossy black woollen garments and for their famous eye-powder. This powder was exported all over the world in tablet form. It was then ground into powder and used to relieve eye complaints. Phrygia was one of the areas in Asia Minor where eye diseases were rampant.

The city is located in the Lycus River Valley together with Hierapolis and Colossae. This valley is a natural route of travel from east to west. The city was founded by the Seleucid king Antiochus II and named for his wife Laodice about 260 BC.

It has a famous aqueduct and the water that was piped to Laodicea was rich with calcium which over time would cause the pipes to clog. The engineers designed the aqueduct with vents covered with stones that could be removed periodically for cleaning.

There were also many stadiums, one which is still preserved today. This one at Laodicea was built by Nicostratus and dedicated to Vespasian in AD 79 according to an inscription found in it.

The stadium is circular at both ends and the total complex was 900 feet long. Used primarily for running races, the length of the track was fixed at 600 feet.

This church was planted and received the Gospel not from the apostle Paul but from his helper Epaphras during the time Paul was in Ephesus, Colossians 4:12-13.

“These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God’s creation.” Revelation 3:14

Jesus begins by describing Himself as the ‘Amen’ and usually when we think of the word, Amen we automatically think it means ‘so be it.’

But here it doesn’t mean that, in describing Himself as the ‘Amen’ Jesus is saying that He is the firm One, the definite One. In other words, Jesus is the One who is steady and unchangeable in all His purposes and promises.

He also says, ‘He is the faithful and true witness.’ As we go through this letter you will soon see there was nothing distinctive about the Laodiceans. They had no ‘witness’ and they were not faithful to the testimony they had concerning Jesus.

They really stood for nothing, they weren’t concerned with heresy, and they weren’t concerned about being heretics. After all to become a heretic takes energy, and they didn’t have any energy.

Jesus says, He is the faithful and true witness, whose testimony of God, to men, ought to be received and fully believed. But Jesus also has another testimony and that is the testimony of men to God and that too will be fully believed because Jesus is the true witness.

Notice what else Jesus describes Himself as, He says, He is “the ruler of God’s creation.” Now the KJV uses the words, ‘The beginning of the creation of God’ which can be very misleading.

The word ‘beginning’ here doesn’t mean that Jesus was the first thing created as some people like to believe. It means Jesus is the ‘cause’ or ‘source’ of the creation of God, Hebrews 1:1-2.

Jesus is reminding the rich, self-reliant church in Laodicea where all the blessings come from. Every human being is blessed by God, Matthew 5:45.

The main problem in the church in Laodicea, it was their church, not the Lord’s. Jesus immediately identifies their problem and it was a problem of possession. It was their church and they did as they pleased, and they never considered the will of the Lord.

Jesus says, He is the steady, unchangeable One, He is the One who is faithful and is the true witness. He is the One who is the source of all blessings and it’s His church, not ours.

“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” Revelation 3:15-16

Once again, we’re reminded that Jesus sees and knows everything that every Christian is doing or not doing and He sees the congregation as a whole. He says, you Christians in Laodicea are ‘neither cold nor hot but lukewarm’.

They were lukewarm, which doesn’t mean they were going from cold to hot but they were actually going from hot to cold. The hot springs of Laodicea were not really hot but comfortably warm so it was good for having a bath in but horrible to drink.

But let me ask you, did Jesus want them to become cold? Would He really rather have had them cold as to lukewarm? Well, that’s what He said and maybe He said it that way simply to stress the horror of their position.

And what was the horror of their position? They were neither hot nor cold. In their present state they couldn’t claim they hadn’t known, they couldn’t claim that they have never been moved.

In that way, it would have been better for them never to have been moved than having been moved to become moderate, 2 Peter 2:21. To these lukewarm Christians Jesus says, you are neither cold nor hot but lukewarm and because of that, I’m going to reject you, I’m about to spit you out of my mouth.

In other words here is a church which had lost their passion for the things of the Lord. They had become indifferent and apathetic. They had reached a place where they were going through the motions, but they were unmoved by the things of the Lord. They didn’t care too much about the cross of Jesus, they weren’t really interested in what the Word of God meant.

They didn’t really care about the condition of the lost people around them. These Christians were not burning hot with passion for Jesus, neither were they totally dead and cold, they were somewhere in between.

“You say, ‘I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.’ But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.” Revelation 3:17

Someone said, ‘Let your words be few and sweet. It’s better this way when you come to eating them.’

God always hears what we say, and He has this tremendous memory. The trouble with us is, we have such large mouths and so little worth the saying. Without Jesus, we can do nothing, John 15:5.

The church in Laodicea is guilty of the ‘atheism of the pound’. Now what do I mean by that? I mean, in comes the pounds and out goes God. This is a church that thought it could buy its way to congregational success, Psalm 50:12. The Laodiceans say, ‘they are rich’ and ‘we need nothing.’ Jesus tells them they are, ‘wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.’

Can you imagine how you would have felt if Jesus had written these words to you? The truth is we all hate to see ourselves for how we really are. Jesus says to this church, ‘You are not rich, you are totally poor’. He says, ‘You are not blessed, you are wretched’ which means afflicted. ‘Pitiful is what you are’, Jesus says.

All their wonderful medicine for which they were famous for, to help eye complaints can’t help them, they are blind. Their beautiful black, shiny garments which covered the bodies of so many, even in foreign lands, can’t hide their own embarrassing nakedness.

These are strong words, and we need to remember that how we see ourselves may not be how God sees us.

“I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see”. Revelation 3:18

The town of Laodicea had a banking centre but sadly its vaults didn’t hold the gold of God. Their gold was the type of perishable gold which Peter describes in 1 Peter 1:18. And yes their black garments covered the body but as we know, God’s white garments covered the soul.

And so Jesus sees and looks at the heart, 1 Samuel 16:7, and He tells them that their famous eye medicine can’t deal with real eyes, the eyes where you can see the real you.

“Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent.” Revelation 3:19

We know that discipline is needed spiritually as much as it is needed physically, Hebrews 12:4-13. We know that God wants to mould us and help us to look more and more like His Son Jesus.

But we need to understand that discipline is not something God does to us but discipline is something which God does for us. If God did that for Jesus, and for our benefit, Hebrews 5:7-8 don’t we want God to have His way with us to help us grow in obedience to Him?

Our problem is that we want to get out of the trial too early, we want it over and done with. But God is working in us, and because He loves us, He is trying to produce perseverance in our lives, He is trying to help us become mature where we lack nothing, James 1:2-4.

And when discipline comes our way, it may be because we’re heading off in the wrong direction and we may need to think seriously about it and turn towards God again.

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me”. Revelation 3:20

If you’ve already been immersed into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins but your slowly drifting drifted away, why don’t you come home again? This passage of Scripture was written with people like you in mind, why don’t you let Jesus back in?

Now there are some who teach what they call the ‘sinners prayer’ and the Scripture they use to support this idea is this very verse.

Now there is a great variation when it comes to the ‘sinner’s prayer’, but most say something like this, ‘Jesus, I now realize I have sinned against you. Please forgive me of my sin. Please come into my life and change my heart. I want you to be my Saviour. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.’

Let me ask you, who is Jesus speaking to in [Revelation 3:20](#)? He's not speaking to non-Christians but He's speaking to people who have already become Christians. There's not one teaching anywhere in the Bible about saying a prayer to become a Christian.

Jesus in an effort to get back into His church, is standing knocking at the door. And He says, 'If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me'.

Do you see how our relationship with Jesus is so personal? Fellowship together, eating with one another. Jesus will knock and He will wait, but He will not break down the door. It must be opened by you and that's because Jesus won't enter anyone where He is not invited.

Notice that although Jesus is speaking to the whole church, He actually addresses them individually, He doesn't say, 'if everyone' but 'if anyone.' Now why is that important?

Well simply because as a church, we can drift away, but it only takes one Christian to invite Jesus back into their lives again to get the church moving in the right direction again.

“To the one who is victorious, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat down with my Father on his throne.” Revelation 3:21

Isn't God a graceful God? Isn't God a patient God? He's about to spit them out of His mouth because of their lukewarm attitude and their self-sufficiency but! But He says, if they repent and change their attitude towards their Lord Jesus then He will bless them richly.

This church seemed to be absolutely overrun and overcome with luke-warmness and self-confidence. And yet it was possible by the rebukes and warnings of Christ that they might be inspired with fresh zeal and vigour, and might come off conquerors in their spiritual warfare.

Think about it, God is a God who wants to forgive. And if they repent, then all their former faults will be forgiven, and they will have a great reward.

And what is that reward? 'They shall sit down with me on my throne, as I also overcame, and have sat down with my Father on his throne'.

We know that Christ Himself had met with His own temptations and conflicts. And we know that He overcame them all, and was more than a conqueror. And we also know that Christ's reward was to be seated in glory with the Father on His throne.

Jesus is saying that those who are conformed to Christ in His trials and victories shall be conformed to Him in His glory. And He says they shall sit down with him on His throne, on His throne of judgment, on His throne of glory to all eternity.

Isn't that worth changing your attitude for? Isn't it comforting to know that God really does want to reward us for our faithfulness?

“Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” Revelation 3:22

Are we listening? Have we listened to what the Holy Spirit has been saying to us through all of these letters?

All seven letters have closed with a demand for our attention. They are written for all the churches, in all ages and in all parts of the world, [1 Peter 4:17](#).

May we strive to always do what is right in the eyes of the Lord and may we also be ready and willing to repent as individuals or as a congregation. The rewards for faithfulness are just too great to lose out on loved ones.

SUMMARY OF THE SEVEN CHURCHES

In a general sense, the problems that existed in the seven churches of Asia are the same kind of problems experienced by congregations today.

We would do well to carefully study these seven churches and learn from their mistakes. These churches were in a state of crisis, some were strong, and some were about to be overcome, they needed encouragement.

Revelation is a symbolic presentation of the church in conflict with Jewish, pagan and Roman persecuting powers. It promises victory if they will overcome, it's up to them to diligently fight the battle. If they will put forth the effort to overcome Satan and his angels, then Christ will help them in their battles.

During times of persecution, we must not forget that Jesus is still the Head of the church and that we are responsible as a member of that church for how we live our lives.

We must look at ourselves and examine ourselves to see if we are living in the faith, especially in times of persecution. But at all times we must make sure that we're right with God and that we're living as we ought to live, realising that if we live faithfully, then we can overcome and live with God.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION PART 4

INTRODUCTION

REVELATION 4

Revelation 4 presents us with a great throne room scene and offers one main idea. God is on the throne and is in control. Every time it looked like Domitian was ruling the known world while putting Christians to death amidst great persecution, Christians needed to remember that God is on His throne. He is in control, and we need to trust Him and let Him have His way with us in this life.

From the very beginning, Revelation is filled with imagery, many are very puzzling and difficult to decipher. Yet, with all their difficulties we can still get the overall meaning.

Beginning with chapter four we now launch out into a great sea of symbols, we're now about to get a glimpse of the Omnipotent throne of God Almighty.

This throne-room scene surely would have been an encouragement to Christians in the first century so that they would know that the God of Heaven was still in control, **Daniel 5:21**.

God was talking to Nebuchadnezzar, who was going through some hard things but had learned an important lesson. We're told that Nebuchadnezzar went through those difficult times 'until he acknowledged that the Most High God is sovereign over all kingdoms on earth.'

That's the message of **Revelation 4**. Domitian isn't in control, the Roman government isn't in control, and God still rules in the kingdoms of men and sets over them whom He wishes.

We need to be encouraged by knowing that God is in Heaven and that He is in control. His will ultimately will be accomplished, so we must be faithful to Him and no one else.

REVELATION 5

Revelation 5 introduces us to the Lamb, 'Who was slain before the foundation of the world'. **Revelation 13:8**. John has a scroll that no one can seem to open, but the Lamb then comes and opens the scroll in order to unleash the wrath of God. Christians, as a result, cry out, 'Worthy is the Lamb!' **Revelation 5:12**.

WHO IS THIS LAMB?

John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching and says, 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.' **John 1:29**.

Christians were being persecuted, they wanted to know if God is in control, who will help us overcome the great world power that is Rome?

The Lamb takes the scroll and unleashes the vengeance of God. Who is the Lamb? It's Jesus Christ, who is able to offer help during times of persecution.

'In a loud voice they were saying: 'Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honour and glory and praise!' **Revelation 5:12**

The Lamb is pictured as the One Who is worthy to receive our honour. We aren't to pay honour to Domitian. The Lamb is going to unleash God's vengeance, and He's the One Who is worthy of our honour or glory.

Our lives must be about giving Jesus, the Son of God, the glory and honour He deserves. In fact, that's what our lives are all about, **Isaiah 43:7 / 1 Corinthians 10:31**.

Revelation 5 tells us that the Lamb is worthy, He's able to unleash God's vengeance, and we must give Him the glory and honour that He deserves. It's through Jesus that the devil, the beast, and Rome itself will be defeated because of Jesus' actions.

Jesus, through death, overcame that 'he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil.' **Hebrews 2:14**.

REVELATION 6

In **Revelation 6** we find six seals that are going to be broken, seals that are directly related to the scroll. The seals represent God's vengeance, God's wrath will be unleashed against Rome and her ungodly government. God is in control, and He will deal with those who are punishing His saints.

The saints asked God how much longer He would allow this to go on and He told them to wait a little while longer because it was all going to work out, **Revelation 6:1-11**.

We see the hand of Christ opening the sealed book held in God's right hand. Only Christ is qualified to open the seals. As the first seal is broken there is the noise of thunder signifying an ominous announcement.

One of the four beasts says, 'come and see.' Thus, John is about to see the mystery contained within the scroll. He will see what is going to happen to the churches in their great struggle with the persecuting powers.

THE SEALS

FIRST SEAL. A WHITE HORSE. JESUS THE CONQUEROR

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

Before Solomon's time, no horses were permitted in the armies of Israel. The horse was looked upon as a noble animal and a very valuable animal to man. This first horse is a white horse.

A white horse was ridden by a conqueror returning from battle, his troops would march behind him followed by those who had been captured to serve as slaves.

WHO WAS THE RIDER?

Since Revelation is about victory in Jesus it would seem it could easily apply to Christ. We can be assured the church would be victorious over the persecutors. **Revelation 19:11 / Romans 8:37**.

SECOND SEAL. A RED HORSE REPRESENTS WAR

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

Red would seem to stand for bloodshed, the rider of this horse would wage war, shedding blood, against the enemies of Christ and His church. He has the power to overcome Satan and the nations he controls, all enemies of the church.

He also carried a great sword with him. This is probably the idea of conquest, it can also signify destruction. The bloodthirsty enemies of the church cannot overcome the church as they may think.

THIRD SEAL. A BLACK HORSE REPRESENTS FAMINE AND ECONOMIC HARDSHIP

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

This is a colour of distress and calamity, it’s a picture of the grim, dread calamity of famine. The balances were scales to measure out food indicating the scarcity of food in the land. The rider is told not to hurt the oil and wine, everything else would be scarce except these two commodities.

WHY?

This is difficult, oil and wine weren’t necessities of life, they would be looked upon as luxuries. Could the meaning be that while the necessities of life were scarce luxuries would be abundant?

Oil and wine were also used as medicine. Could this mean the binding up of the hurts of the suffering Christians? We can only guess at best about this symbol.

FOURTH SEAL. A PALE HORSE REPRESENTS DEATH

‘When the Lamb opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth living creature say, ‘Come!’ I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth.’ Revelation 6:7-8

This would indicate death since the name of the rider was death. Hunger follows a famine and this, in turn, leads to mass starvation. Under such circumstances, pestilence, and ravishing diseases, usually follow.

They can destroy more than a war. Thus, this horse and rider represent pestilence. Hades followed the rider, Hades is the region of the dead.

Thus, we have a picture of the grim reapers of death and Hades claiming those struck down with diseases, Ezekiel 14:12-23.

FIFTH SEAL. THE MARTYRED SAINTS

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

and they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.’ Revelation 6:9-11

The symbolism now changes, up to this point we have observed the means of judgment, and now we will begin to see the reason for the judgment.

The slain under the altar are the martyred saints, these are the ones who have suffered in the tribulation of losing their lives. **Revelation 1:2 / Revelation 12:17 / Revelation 14:12 / Revelation 19:10.** They cry out, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’

The altar symbolises the sacrificial nature of their death, they were sacrificed upon the altar of the Cause of Christ. They cry out for retribution against the persecutors. The ‘earth’ would be the place where these persecutors existed.

Each one is given a white robe, symbolical of victory and purity, **Revelation 3:4 / Revelation 19:8,** and they are told to be patient for God’s retribution, **Isaiah 33:1 / Daniel 11:36 / Daniel 11:45.**

THE SIXTH SEAL. THE WRATH OF THE LAMB

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

This seal depicts judgment in answer to the plea of the souls under the altar. The sun, the moon the stars are all judgment talk, **Isaiah 34:4-6 / Jeremiah 4:23-25.**

This judgment will on the Roman persecuting power as indicated in verse 14, ‘Every mountain and island were moved out of their places.’

This seems to encompass the known Roman world. The kings and great men of verse 15 would fit the Roman authorities who spread out over the Roman Empire. They look for somewhere to hide, **Isaiah 2:10-11 / Isaiah 2:19-22.** In **Revelation 6:10** the saints asked God how much longer He would allow this to go on. He told them to be faithful a little while longer because it was all going to work out. Notice what is said in **Revelation 6:17** ‘For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’

This is picturing Rome and the coming destruction that was going to take place. People cried out, ‘God’s wrath is coming; how can we stand it?’

Even Rome realised that God was in control. These seals, representing acts of vengeance on God’s part, showed Rome that she was not in control. God was! And they desperately needed to submit to His will and obey the teaching of Christ.

REVELATION 7

In **Revelation 7,** we’re introduced to the 144,000, but who are they?

144,000

The number twelve represents God's people. In the Old Testament, there were twelve patriarchs, and thus the twelve tribes of Israel constituted God's nation, and in the New Testament, the twelve apostles were the ambassadors of Christ.

The number ten came to mean completeness. When multiplied by itself three times, in other words, 10 times 10, times 10, the number becomes 1000 and signifies complete fullness.

144,000 is a multiple of the number representing fullness, and the number representing God's people, in other words, 12 times 12 equals 144. Multiply these together and 144,000 is reached, signifying the full number of God's people or the total number of God's faithful servants.

It never ceases to amaze me how some people are so inconsistent when it comes to interpreting the Scriptures. We've all met these sincere people who want nothing more to convince us that Christians can't go to heaven where God dwells because that space is for the elite, it's for the 144,000 but we can possess second best, heaven on Earth and remain here on Planet Earth after it has had its fiery cleansing process.

When it comes to the Book of Revelation, we have to remember that it's highly figurative and highly symbolic and when we come to understand what John wrote we need to be consistent with what is literal and what is figurative, otherwise, we end up with all kinds of wonderful ideas.

'After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth to prevent any wind from blowing on the land or on the sea or on any tree. Then I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.' Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel. From the tribe of Judah 12,000 were sealed, from the tribe of Reuben 12,000, from the tribe of Gad 12,000, from the tribe of Asher 12,000, from the tribe of Naphtali 12,000, from the tribe of Manasseh 12,000, from the tribe of Simeon 12,000, from the tribe of Levi 12,000, from the tribe of Issachar 12,000, from the tribe of Zebulun 12,000, from the tribe of Joseph 12,000, from the tribe of Benjamin 12,000.' Revelation 7:1-8

Now if the number 144,000 is literal, then we must conclude that its composition must also be literal, which means the number is composed of 12,000 Jews from each tribe mentioned, and none from Dan, **Judges 18:14-31**.

If the tribes of **Revelation 7** are to be literally taken, then that would mean that not one person from the tribe of Ephraim or Dan will enter heaven, because they're not included in this list.

And if we take this literally that would mean that the Old Testament heroes like Joshua, who was from the tribe of Ephraim, and Samson, who was from the tribe of Dan, won't be in heaven.

Notice also that even though, 'tribe of Joseph', is mentioned, we know that Joseph wasn't a tribe in the literal sense, which again helps us see that the whole context is figurative.

The number was sealed, indicating God's protection of all His people on earth, the great multitude had white robes, indicating victorious saints in the keeping of God, **Revelation 7:4 / Revelation 7:9**.

THE GREAT MULTITUDE

‘After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands.’ Revelation 7:9

John later will identify the great multitude as in heaven, not on earth, **Revelation 19:1** and if **Revelation 19:1** is to be taken literally, then those who believe it’s only the 144,000 who will be in heaven, must exclude the ‘great multitude, which no one could count’ from heaven.

Those who argue for a literal translation have a get-out clause for this, which is to create yet another group of people, they say this group represents the ‘earthly class.’

They tell us that only the 144,000 will be in heaven and everyone else will be on earth, but notice what the text actually says, this multitude was described as ‘standing before the throne’, and where is the throne, it’s in heaven, **Revelation 1:4 / Revelation 4:2-10**.

‘They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence.’ Revelation 7:15

Again, we read these saints were ‘before the throne’ and were serving God in ‘His temple’. Read also **Revelation 11:19**.

The 144,000 are mentioned again in **Revelation 14:1-5** and again, the number is grouped with several other prominent symbols. Notice the following, there is the ‘Lamb,’ which is a figure representing Christ, **John 1:29 / Revelation 5:6**. There is Mount Zion, a symbol of divine government, **Isaiah 2:2-4**. There is the number 144,000, suggestive of the heavenly complement of God’s people, in other words, no one will be missing who is supposed to be there. And then we have the saints who are depicted as ‘virgins,’ which descriptive emphasises their purity, **2 Corinthians 11:2**. And so, once again, when we read these passages we must be consistent with our interpretation, if we’re going to say that the 144,000, is a literal number, then to be consistent, we should also argue that a literal Lamb was literally standing on literal Mount Zion with a group of literal men who had never been intimate with literal women, hence, were literal virgins!

If this whole thing was to be taken literally this is what we would end up with. Only men will be in heaven, hence, Deborah, Naomi, Mary, Dorcas, and women of like faith are without that hope.

Only unmarried men who are virgins will gain heaven. This would exclude Abraham, Moses, Peter, and a host of other Bible characters. Surely, we can see how crazy this could get!

WHO ARE THE 144,000?

The 144,000 of **Revelation 7** and **Revelation 14** are to be identified with ‘the great multitude’, they are the same group viewed from different standpoints and they all signify the entire body of the redeemed.

This group represents a body of people who were ‘purchased’ from among men. The only purchase price ultimately available for human salvation is that of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Make no mistake about it, there’s not a person alive or who has ever lived will go on to live on planet Earth because when Christ returns the Earth will be totally and utterly destroyed, **Matthew 24:35 / 2 Peter 3:10 / Revelation 21:1**. Wherever we look at the 144,000 we must remember that John is using figurative language, and the Bible plainly teaches that there’s ultimately one hope, **Ephesians 4:4**, and that hope is reserved in heaven for the faithful, **1 Peter 1:3-5**. The Scriptures teach nothing about an earth class and a heaven class in eternity.

Also in **Revelation 7**, we find a scene where God's people are being sealed. God is unleashing His wrath upon the ungodly Roman government, but Christians are going to be sealed and safe. They will be taken care of because God knows those who are faithful to Him.

An important principle that we can learn from this has to do with the fact that during times of ungodliness, or at times when the world is immoral, as it is in our day today, we can be sure that God knows those who are faithfully serving Him, will be taken care of.

'Then one of the elders asked me, 'These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?' I answered, 'Sir, you know.' And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.' Revelation 7:13-14

These are the ones who served God and who worshipped Him. Christians were suffering, and many would wonder, why did God allow these things to happen?

One of the elders asks, 'Who are these redeemed people?' John says, 'You know. They are the ones who came out of the tribulation and who had their robes washed in the blood of the Lamb.'

If we're going to endure and be victorious, we must be faithful to God! We must make sure that we're one of God's children and that we're living as we ought to live. We must be sure that our robes have been 'washed in the blood of the Lamb.'

HOW DOES THAT TAKE PLACE?

If our robes are going to be washed in the blood of the Lamb, that means we must obey God's teaching regarding the plan of salvation.

We come into contact the blood of Christ when we are baptised in order to wash our sins away in the blood of the Lamb, **Acts 22:16**.

That is where we come into contact with Jesus' blood. These Christians in Revelation had endured, and they were the ones who would be victorious, not Rome!

REVELATION 8

In **Revelation 8** we see four trumpets that are sounding out God's vengeance upon Rome, and that will defeat her and bring her down. One trumpet makes a sound.

THE SEVENTH SEAL

'When he opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven for about half an hour. And I saw the seven angels who stand before God, and seven trumpets were given to them.' Revelation 8:1-2

The symbolism of this chapter is indeed very difficult for us to understand. The first six seals have been opened in succession. With the opening of the seventh seal, there is suddenly dead silence in heaven for the space of about one-

half hour before its ominous mystery is revealed. It seems to be a silence of suspense, the hosts of heaven are silent, waiting to see what will come next.

It seems to express a fearful expectation or the calm before the storm is unleashed. These 30 minutes could seem like an eternity, **Revelation 10:3 / 1 John 2:18**. Seven angels with seven trumpets now appear. We recall the seven angels of the seven churches, they appear before God, **Exodus 25:17-22**.

ARE THESE THE SAME ANGELS?

It appears they are the same angels. They are given trumpets. Trumpets were used to summon or announce something important, **Numbers 10**. God is ready to speak.

“Another angel, who had a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense to offer, with the prayers of all God’s people, on the golden altar in front of the throne. The smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand. Then the angel took the censer, filled it with fire from the altar, and hurled it on the earth; and there came peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake.” **Revelation 8:3-5**

Here we see a throne-room scene again. Amid trumpets that are unleashing God’s wrath, the saints’ prayers go up before the throne of God as sweet-smelling incense.

One powerful lesson we can learn from this is that during times of trouble and tribulation, God is no further away than the avenue of prayer.

God is willing and able to help, but we must have the faith to pray and ask Him for that help. We learn here the importance of prayer in the Christian’s life at all times, but especially during times of trouble, **James 5:16 / 1 Thessalonians 5:17**.

We must never stop praying, and we must realise the value and importance of prayer, **Luke 18:1**. Christians’ prayers rise up to God as a sweet-smelling savour and during times of trouble, we must approach God, **Hebrews 4:16**.

The altar is the ‘golden altar’ of incense which stood in the tabernacle sitting above the cherubim on the ark, **Exodus 25:17-22**. the incense is associated with the prayers of the saints, **Psalm 141:2 / Luke 1:10**.

Notice that smoke from the incense and the prayers of the saints go up together to God at the same time, they are acceptable to God.

Another altar is mentioned but it’s not clear if this is the same altar mentioned earlier. Some commentators suggest that this may be the brazen altar for burnt offerings from which the coals were taken for the incense offering, **Ezekiel 9:1-2**.

The contents of the censer were hurled down to earth, **Ezekiel 10**. In answer to those earlier prayers, we find coming judgment. The thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning and an earthquake, all speak of coming judgment, **Revelation 6:9-11**. God’s message is clear, if you hurt my people, you will suffer the consequences.

THE TRUMPETS

THE FIRST TRUMPET

‘The first angel sounded his trumpet, and there came hail and fire mixed with blood, and it was hurled down on the earth. A third of the earth was burned up, a third of the trees were burned up, and all the green grass was burned up.’
Revelation 8:7

This trumpet is for the purpose of getting their attention. Hail, fire, and blood are symbolic of devastation and woe which seem to affect the earth. **Exodus 7-11**.

It also seems that a certain area of the earth is the place of the persecuting powers. This signifies vengeance, God’s warning is clear. If you harm my people, you will answer to Me. Jesus once said that the prayers of saints can move mountains.

THE SECOND TRUMPET

‘The second angel sounded his trumpet, and something like a huge mountain, all ablaze, was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea turned into blood, a third of the living creatures in the sea died, and a third of the ships were destroyed.’ Revelation 8:8-9

A great mountain burning may signify a great power or nation, **Zechariah 4:7 / Amos 4:13**. This is the power of Rome. A third of the sea turned to blood, **Exodus 7:20-21**.

Later, the Roman emperor is symbolised as ‘the beast of the sea’ and is presented as coming up ‘out of the sea’ thus, this trumpet signifies mighty Rome.

In time, the mighty military power of the Roman Empire would be destroyed. Daniel lists Rome as the last of the great empires, **Daniel 2:40-43 / Daniel 7:7**.

THE THIRD TRUMPET

‘The third angel sounded his trumpet, and a great star, blazing like a torch, fell from the sky on a third of the rivers and on the springs of water—the name of the star is Wormwood. A third of the waters turned bitter, and many people died from the waters that had become bitter.’ Revelation 8:10-11

The falling star as in **Matthew 24:29 / Revelation 6:13**, represents divine punishment. Isaiah’s description of the fall of Babylonian rulers has the same imagery, **Isaiah 13:10-11**.

The falling star into the rivers and fountains of water signified the drying up of their powers. The waters become like wormwood and caused many to die. Wormwood is a bitter plant thus destruction would be bitter, **Jeremiah 23:15**.

THE FOURTH TRUMPET

‘The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night. As I watched, I heard an eagle that was flying in mid-air call out in a loud voice: ‘Woe! Woe! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth, because of the trumpet blasts about to be sounded by the other three angels!’ Revelation 8:12-13

Each of the four trumpets damage some part of the natural world. The object is to get sinners to repent. Here a third part of the sun, moon and stars are smitten thus leaving darkness. **Isaiah 34:4-5 / Joel 2:10.**

Darkness, doom and distress, would come over the Roman empire. The angel crying ‘woe, woe, woe’ to the inhabitants of the earth signals that even worse things are yet to come. These first four trumpets have signalled great calamity, but the three remaining trumpets will signal even worse things.

REVELATION 9

Revelation 9 shows us that God will deal with Rome in several ways. Rome’s government will decay from the inside and there’s also going to be an external invasion. God promised that Rome would be punished, and the government would begin decaying from the inside.

THE FIFTH TRUMPET

‘The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down on the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth. They were told not to harm the grass of the earth or any plant or tree, but only those people who did not have the seal of God on their foreheads. They were not allowed to kill them but only to torture them for five months. And the agony they suffered was like that of the sting of a scorpion when it strikes. During those days people will seek death but will not find it; they will long to die, but death will elude them. The locusts looked like horses prepared for battle. On their heads, they wore something like crowns of gold, and their faces resembled human faces. Their hair was like women’s hair, and their teeth were like lions’ teeth. They had breastplates like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was like the thundering of many horses and chariots rushing into battle. They had tails with stingers, like scorpions, and in their tails, they had power to torment people for five months. They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek is Apollyon (that is, Destroyer). The first woe is past; two other woes are yet to come.’
Revelation 9:1-12

A star denotes a ruler and heaven his dominion the falling symbolises a dethroning. This is said of a Babylonian ruler in **Isaiah 14:2.**

This star being an agent of the Devil is given the ‘key’ to the abyss of Satan to unloose the woes already announced by the angel of **Revelation 8:13 / 2 Corinthians 4:4 / Revelation 9:11 / Ephesians 2:2.**

When the bottomless pit is opened there was unleashed a great pollution of smoke so dense that the sun cannot shine through it as the air is smoggy, it was darkness.

This would seem to symbolise complete corruption or pollution of the land, **Exodus 10:21-23.** Out of this horrible smoke came locusts, locusts were a scourge to the land and were dreaded.

They invade an area like an army, **Exodus 10:14-17.** This is further amplification of the woe pronounced upon the earth by the angel. These locusts have the power of scorpions.

Thus, the distress which was to come upon the land is personified as being poisonous and able to kill. In **Revelation 9:3** the locusts are commanded not to ‘harm the grass of the earth, any green thing, nor any tree.’

Thus, Christians would be spared. **Ezekiel 9 / Exodus 8:22 / Exodus**

9:4 / Exodus 9:6 / Exodus 9:26 / Exodus 10:23 / Exodus 11:7. This tells that Rome was going to be taken over.

The victims of these woes were not to be killed immediately but tormented for five months. This torment was to be like a scorpion's sting.

These locusts were shaped like horses prepared for battle. On their heads were crowns like gold and their faces were like men, this would symbolise a great army.

The locusts are further described as having hair like women and teeth like those of a lion. The breastplates of iron depict the invader's armour. They come in chariots also. This army has the power to inflict great horror.

They have a king over them whose name in Hebrew was 'Abaddon' meaning destroyer and in Greek 'Apollyon' which means the same. This king was the angel of the bottomless, this is Satan himself.

John now tells us that of the three woes announced by the flying angel, one is now past and two are yet to come.

The apocalyptic descriptions in this and the preceding verses are the same kinds of imagery Joel employs to describe the invasion of Jerusalem about 600 B.C. by Nebuchadnezzar.

THE SIXTH TRUMPET

'The sixth angel sounded his trumpet, and I heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. It said to the sixth angel who had the trumpet, 'Release the four angels who are bound at the great river Euphrates.' And the four angels who had been kept ready for this very hour and day and month and year were released to kill a third of mankind. The number of the mounted troops was twice ten thousand times ten thousand. I heard their number. The horses and riders I saw in my vision looked like this: Their breastplates were fiery red, dark blue, and yellow as sulphur. The heads of the horses resembled the heads of lions, and out of their mouths came fire, smoke and sulphur. A third of mankind was killed by the three plagues of fire, smoke and sulphur that came out of their mouths. The power of the horses was in their mouths and in their tails; for their tails were like snakes, having heads with which they inflict injury. The rest of mankind who were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.' Revelation 9:13-21

Notice John heard a voice coming from the four horns of the golden altar that is before God. This is the same altar where the prayers from the saints came from up to God, **Revelation 8:3-5**.

As this trumpet is sounded four angels, are loosed from the Euphrates River, which was symbolic of military might, **Isaiah 8:7-8**.

The symbolism of this section is also parallel to Joel's vision of horsemen and chariots going into battle. These four angels may be the same four mentioned in chapter 7 as 'holding the four winds of the earth.'

With the sealing of the 144,000, the suspension period is now lifted. The Euphrates River had served as a boundary line for Old Testament Israel. These angels had been held at the boundary line but are now released, thus destruction of the land is now turned loose.

The preparation of an hour, day, month and year doesn't seem clear. It could denote the time of suspension while the Romans were preparing for invasion. We have a picture of an overwhelming military power poised to kill.

The tormenting locusts were to hurt men, while the armies of the Euphrates were to kill men, **Habakkuk 1:5-17**. One was probably famine and pestilence while the second was bloodshed.

The judgments in the seven trumpets seem to be divided into three woes. This would explain why each directive is applied to 'a three woes,' and would explain why each directive is applied to 'a third part.'

In **Revelation 6:8** a ‘fourth part of the earth’ is involved. However, there were four judgments in this chapter. The division of parts is made proportionate with the pronouncements of judgments or woes.

John heard several such magnitudes to make human resistance impossible, **Ezekiel 38-39**. An impressive description is given of the army. An awesome description is given of the doom that was to the Roman Empire.

Similar descriptions of the 600 B.C. Babylonian invasions are given in **Joel 2:2-4** and **Jeremiah 25:9-11**. The ‘rest of the men’ were the survivors of the second woe. The answer may be found in the Judaizers and false teachers living in other parts of the world. They shall not escape God’s final judgment.

History tells us that that happened. Also, Rome was invaded, and outside forces came and overtook Rome, eventually bringing punishment upon her. Although Rome looked like she would be victorious, God promised that she would decay from the inside and be invaded in order to be punished.

HOW DOES ALL OF THAT APPLY?

Look at **Revelation 9**, where we’re taught that we must stay true to God and always be sure that our lives are right, **Revelation 9:20-21**.

These things were happening and should have been recognised as signs to bring the people of Rome back to God. Yet they didn’t repent of their works. God loves all people and ‘wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth,’ **1 Timothy 2:4**.

‘The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance,’ **2 Peter 3:9**.

The Bible makes it clear that God is patient toward us, and isn’t willing that anyone should perish, but wants everyone to come to repentance.

Did God want the souls in Rome who were opposing Christianity to be lost and go to Hell? Absolutely not! The Romans should have seen their destruction as the power of God. They should have seen the internal decay and external invasions as God’s power and assigned that they needed to get their lives right.

They needed to make sure that they were worshiping the God of Heaven, not idols of silver and gold that couldn’t see, talk, or hear. Yet, unfortunately, they didn’t repent of their works. It’s so important for us today to realise that we must, at all times, examine ourselves to make sure that we’re right with God, **Luke 13:3**.

How serious it is for us to take the time that we have here and now very seriously so that we will use it to honour God and make sure our lives are right before Him.

The people of Rome were lost because they refused to change their ways. God doesn’t want people to be lost but because He is a just judge, He will punish those who do ungodly things.

THE BOOK OF REVELATION PART 5

INTRODUCTION

REVELATION 10

Revelation 10 shows us a scene in which John is given a book by an angel, who tells him to eat the book, which represents some of the things that will be happening to the Roman government, and some of the things that will be happening to Christians.

‘So, I went to the angel and asked him to give me the little scroll. He said to me, ‘Take it and eat it. It will turn your stomach sour, but ‘in your mouth it will be as sweet as honey.’ Revelation 10:9

In some ways, the book was good news yet was bad news in other ways. It was sweet in John’s mouth but would be bitter in his stomach.

The sweetness represented the good news, which was that God was going to take vengeance upon Rome as ungodly people were punished. But the bitterness was that Christians would have to continue to endure and be faithful to God because there would be more persecution yet to come. Ezekiel 3:14.

The assurances of victory and reward were sweet, yet, the anticipation of the sufferings and trials they would be called upon to pass through was indeed bitter. Psalms 19:10 / Psalms 119:103.

In this life, we have never been promised by God that life would be full of roses without any thorns along the way.

We have been promised that there will be trouble and that we will experience trials, 2 Timothy 3:12 / Acts 14:22.

In this life, as we face struggles, that is the bitterness, the hard part, but we must realise that there is sweetness, in the sense that if we endure and remain faithful to God, we can overcome, be faithful to God, and live with Jesus. Jesus said in Revelation 2:10 that ‘if we will be faithful unto death, then God will give us a crown of life’.

How we must make sure today that amid our troubles, we refuse to ‘throw in the towel.’ We mustn’t let our troubles drag us down, instead, we must realise that God is faithful and when temptation comes, He will help us through them so that we can endure such temptations in this life, 1 Corinthians 10:13.

REVELATION 11

In Revelation 11 we see God’s two witnesses, the prophets of God. They are sent out to proclaim His message, but they are killed. The people didn’t want to hear what the prophets had to say, so they put them to death. Their bodies lay in the street, and it looked like Christ and Christianity had been stamped out.

But notice what happens! Amid this scene, these two witnesses are resurrected and begin to preach again. God sent a message, but the people of Rome didn’t want to hear it.

Rome, therefore, persecuted Christians, to the point where it appeared as if Christianity would be stamped out. It may have looked like Christ and Christianity were ‘lying in the street, dead,’ but God and His cause would rise up and be victorious.

THE 1,260 DAYS OR 42 MONTHS REPRESENTS A PERIOD OF TIME FOR PERSECUTION BUT GOD’S CARE

‘And I will appoint my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.’ Revelation 11:3

Here are some of the passages in which the phrase appears.

It’s the period the ‘little horn’ Domitian, persecutes the saints, [Daniel 7:25](#). It’s the period of the holy city being trodden underfoot, [Revelation 11:2](#).

It’s the period during which the witnesses prophecy, [Revelation 11:3](#). It’s the period the woman is nourished in the wilderness, [Revelation 12:6](#) / [Revelation 12:14](#). It’s the period of the beast’s authority, [Revelation 13:5](#).

THE TWO WITNESSES

‘They are ‘the two olive trees’ and the two lampstands, and ‘they stand before the Lord of the earth.’ Revelation 11:4

The two witnesses in Zechariah are Zerubbabel of the royal line and the priest, Joshua son of Jozadak, [Zechariah 4:11-13](#), but here in [Revelation 11](#), we see God’s two witnesses who are prophets of God, who represent the church.

BUT WHY TWO?

Two witnesses carry more authority. Jewish law recognised that the truth or validity of someone’s claims had to be established by two or three witnesses, [Deuteronomy 19:15](#) / [John 5:31](#) / [Matthew 18:16](#) / [1 Timothy 5:19](#). God’s two witnesses are sent out to proclaim His message, but they are killed.

‘Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them and overpower and kill them. Their bodies will lie in the public square of the great city—which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt—where also their Lord was crucified.’ Revelation 11:7-8

The people didn’t want to hear what the prophets had to say, so they put them to death. Their bodies lay in the street, and it looked like Christ and Christianity had been stamped out. But notice what happens.

‘But after the three and a half days the breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them.’ Revelation 11:11

Amid this scene, these two witnesses are resurrected and begin to preach again. God sent a message, but the people of Rome didn’t want to hear it. Rome, therefore, persecuted Christians, to the point where it appeared as if Christianity would be stamped out.

It may have looked like Christ and Christianity were ‘lying in the street, dead,’ but God and His cause would rise up and be victorious.

On the heels of that message, we find which may well be the most important verse in the Book of Revelation.

‘The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever.’ Revelation 11:15

After the witnesses were resurrected, Christianity was infused with new life. Rome had been defeated, God was victorious, and Christians were the winners in the end.

No matter how bad things may get or how immoral our world may become, we must realise that God is still in control and that it's the kingdom of Christ that will be victorious over all other kingdoms.

Rome didn't win, Great Britain isn't going to win, and no country in the world will be victorious over God. Christ and His kingdom will outlast and outlive all other kingdoms and will be victorious. What is the message of these first eleven chapters? It's simply this,

CHRIST IS IN CONTROL

We need to look at ourselves to see if we're living as we ought to be living. If there are changes that need to be made, either individual or congregational, then we need to make those changes so that God will be happy with us.

We need to realise that Jesus is the only way for us to escape the ungodliness, immorality, and corruption around us, and ultimately the punishment that God is going to unleash on an ungodly world.

We must realise that God will punish those who don't live according to His will. There is a day coming when God will judge every person on Earth. Those who have done evil are going to be punished and those who have been righteous will be exalted.

After reading the Book of Revelation, and after seeing what happened to the Roman government, the message is simply this, why would anyone ever want to be against God and His Cause? Instead, we need to realise the importance of obeying God and of being a member of His kingdom.

INTRODUCTION

'They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.' Revelation 12:11

We're now going to examine [Revelation 12](#) through [Revelation 22](#) of the book, and we will be looking at the main idea or theme of each chapter so that we see how these items tie into the overall message of God offering Christians help and encouragement during times of persecution by the Roman government.

REVELATION 12

In chapter 12 we're presented with images of the dragon, the woman, and the child. Before he can do harm to her the child is caught up into heaven. The woman flees into the wilderness to a place prepared for her for 1,260 days.

A war develops between Michael and his angels and the dragon and his angels, Satan is defeated and has lost his power to use government to persecute. The dragon now begins to pursue the woman. She is given two wings of an eagle, so she might escape. Now angered even more he turns against the church.

'The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.' Revelation 12:9

This tells us that the dragon is none other than the devil himself. But who is the woman? And who is the child that the dragon is trying to consume?

‘She gave birth to a son, a male child, who ‘will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre.’ Revelation 12:5

We learn in [Revelation 12](#) that the child is one who will rule all nations with a rod of iron, [Revelation 19:15](#). This harks back to [Psalm 2](#) where we find a prophecy about Jesus reigning as King of kings and Lord of lords, [Psalm 2:9](#).

BUT WHO IS THE WOMAN?

It’s the woman who gives birth to the child, she represents the people of God, Israel. It’s not Mary as nowhere in the Scriptures does it refer to Christians as the children of Mary.

‘She gave birth to a son, a male child, who ‘will rule all the nations with an iron sceptre.’ Revelation 12:5

Most Bible scholars believe that this woman is representative of Old Testament Israel, that is, the faithful remnant of Israel from which the seed, Christ came, which would later include Christians, [Genesis 3:15](#).

In [Genesis 3:15](#) it was promised that the seed of the woman would deal a death blow to Satan. In Revelation, it’s the seed of a woman who defeats the dragon. It was Israel’s faithful remnant that prepared the way for Jesus, the child, the Son of God, to come.

It was prophesied in [2 Samuel 7](#) that someone from the seed of David would rule and reign forever over God’s kingdom, [2 Samuel 7:12-14](#).

We learn from [Luke 1](#) that this was Jesus. ‘He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.’ [Luke 1:32-33](#)

Thus, it would be out of the faithful remnant of Old Testament Israel, those through whom God was working His purpose, that Jesus would come, [Matthew 5:17-20](#).

Jesus said that He didn’t come to destroy the Law, but instead to fulfil it. He said that not a single jot or tittle would pass away until everything had been fulfilled. So, Jesus, having been viewed through prophecy in the Old Testament, had finally arrived and it was through Him that the devil would be defeated, [1 John 3:8](#).

The lesson for us is that if we’re children of God, we can defeat the devil and be a part of God’s eternal scheme to save humankind. We can have access to the blood of Christ, which can cleanse us of our sins.

But how do we, through Jesus, overcome the devil? How can we defeat the devil in our lives today? One of the most practical verses in the Book of Revelation is found in [Revelation 12](#), which presents a three-fold way for us to overcome Satan.

‘They (first-century Christians) triumphed over him (the devil) by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.’ Revelation 12:11

These Christians overcame the devil through Jesus’ sacrifice, Scripture, and their own self-sacrifice. They overcame Satan by the blood of the Lamb. What was it that defeated the devil, the one who seemed to have the power of death? [Hebrews 2:14](#).

Jesus, through death, conquered him who had the power of death, who is the devil. Jesus’ sacrifice, ‘the blood of the Lamb’, was the sacrifice that provided the death blow that had been promised in [Genesis 3:15](#). But these first-century Christians also overcame by the word of their testimony, which is what we have today recorded in Scripture.

It's God's inspired Word and it's in the Word of God today that we find the power of salvation, Romans 1:16. The Word of God is living and powerful, Hebrews 4:12.

James said in James 1:21 that we should 'humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.' Peter said that we are born again by the Word of God, 1 Peter 1:23-25.

Thus, first-century Christians overcame the devil through the sacrifice of Jesus when He died on the cross in obedience to His Father's will. They overcame the devil through Scripture and they overcame the devil through self-sacrifice. Even if we recognise the importance of the sacrifice of Jesus, obey the Gospel, and become Christians, if we fail to make self-sacrifice a part of our lives, we will not be saved, 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

Our lives as children of God must belong to Christ, and we must be willing to sacrifice ourselves for God, Romans 12:1 / Luke 9:23.

Jesus said that if we desire to come after Him, then we must deny ourselves, take up our cross daily, and follow Him. We overcome the devil through the sacrifice of Jesus, by obedience to the Scriptures, and by living a life of self-sacrifice.

REVELATION 13

In Revelation 13 John introduces us to the sea beast, which we identified earlier as Rome and her rulers. He also introduces us to the land beast, which represents the militia who set up images of Rome's emperors and who enforced emperor worship.

THE NUMBER 666, THE IMPERFECTION AND SINFULNESS OF MAN

We now come to a number that has become so popular in our day and age that it deserves to be discussed here, 666.

'This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.' Revelation 13:18

If the number seven represents that which is complete, perfect, and whole, the number six falls one short of seven. Does 666 represent some type of 'hidden meaning' that requires us to use algebra and trigonometry to uncover some kind of 'magical calculation'? No. That isn't what God is saying.

The number six is one less than seven. If seven is perfection, then since six is one less than seven it represents imperfection. And look at how it is multiplied in 666, imperfection, imperfection, imperfection! That's the idea.

The Roman Empire was the embodiment of human imperfection and human sinfulness. The number 666 isn't some literal number on some literal human's head. Nor is it a Social Security number, as some have suggested in the past.

It simply represents the imperfection and sinfulness of man, especially those who were enforcing emperor worship. Without God in our lives, we cannot have salvation and if we look to men for our salvation, our salvation will be imperfect. Thus, 666 is a sign of utter and complete imperfection of man and his sinfulness outside of Jesus, especially in light of the identity of the sea beast and the land beast, which was enforcing emperor worship.

THE MARK OF THE BEAST

When it comes to the subject of the ‘mark of the beast’ in [Revelation 13](#), it never ceases to amaze me the many different theories there are on what this mark actually is.

Does it really speak about people being ‘microchipped’ in the future?

Does it really speak about ‘bar codes’ being tattooed on people’s heads and hands in the future?

I don’t have to remind you that the Book of Revelation is highly figurative, and we must also keep in mind, it was written to the seven churches of Asia Minor, [Revelation 2-3](#), to prepare the saints in Asia for the enormous persecutions they would soon have to face, not thousands of years later, [Revelation 1:1](#) / [Revelation 1:3](#) / [Revelation 22:6](#) / [Revelation 22:10](#).

It was written at a time when the faith of Christians was put to the ultimate test, as they were forced to deny their faith in the Lord and worship Caesar or face torture and death.

‘The second beast was given power to give breath to the image of the first beast, so that the image could speak and cause all who refused to worship the image to be killed. It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark, which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man. That number is 666.’ Revelation 13:15-18

To understand what this ‘mark’ is we need to go back into the history of Rome. Rome had ordered that all citizens give both political and religious allegiance to Rome and her government. All citizens had to submit to the Roman laws along with the Roman religious laws, this was a demonstration of loyalty to Rome.

The ‘mark’ refers to those who would direct worship toward Rome, [Revelation 14:9](#) / [Revelation 20:4](#). The mark, or identification, was both psychological, that’s what the mark is on their ‘foreheads’ refers to, and the mark was also physical, that what the mark on their ‘hands’ refers to.

Make no mistake about it, Domitian wanted total allegiance given to him and he wanted the very minds of people, the ‘forehead mark’, along with an outward recognition, the ‘hand mark’, that people were allegiant to him.

Remember if people weren’t willing to openly declare that Caesar is lord, then they would be put to death! Those who gave in to Rome were given this identifying mark, either on their right hand or on their forehead, because with this mark, came privileges.

Those who had the mark could buy and sell goods, in other words, they could prosper. On the other hand, those who didn’t give into Rome and her laws and religious laws weren’t able to buy or sell any goods, this is the reason why they would suffer. They could not buy or sell clothes, they couldn’t buy or sell food, everything they needed to live was going to be refused to them because they didn’t have this mark.

When Domitian was ruler, anyone who worshipped the emperor needed to ask for a certificate, but it was only after receiving this certificate, that were they allowed to buy and sell and take part in any Roman activity, this was a way of becoming a Roman citizen.

IS IT A LITERAL MARK?

Many believe that the ‘mark’ is a literal, physical mark on the bodies of unbelievers, but when we contrast this ‘mark’ with the ‘seal’ which is on the forehead of believers, we soon discover it isn’t literal, [Revelation 7:3](#) / [Revelation 9:4](#) / [Revelation 14:1](#) / [Revelation 22:4](#).

I don’t know about you, but I’ve never seen a Christian with a literal, physical seal, with the names of Jesus and the Father tattooed on their foreheads.

Remember this is figurative language and here John is describing those who have been born again and redeemed by Christ’s blood. In other words, the seal is describing ownership, those who belong to Christ and the Father, those who are faithful to Him.

By way of contrast, the false prophet who causes everyone who isn’t a Christian to have the ‘mark of the beast’ written on their forehead, simply means that this ‘mark’ was a sign that they belong to the beast and are loyal to him.

The devil always tried to do what God does and so, this ‘mark’ on their foreheads or their right hand is simply the devil’s way of imitating the seal of God on God’s people.

If you have the name of Jesus and God the Father written on your forehead, it simply means that they own you, that you belong to them, that you are loyal to the Lord God Almighty. But if you have ‘the mark of the beast’, [Revelation 13:17](#), written on your forehead, it signifies that he owns you, that you belong to him, that you are loyal to the devil. Since the seal or name on the believer is obviously invisible, symbolizing the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, ‘[Acts 2:38-39](#) / [Ephesians 1:13](#), it seems certain that the mark of the beast is likewise a symbolic way of describing the loyalty of his followers and his ownership of them.

CONCLUSION

We must always be careful when we’re trying to understand any text of the Bible, especially those texts which are very figurative in nature. If we’re not careful we can come to all kinds of conclusions and sadly, many people do.

When we remember that the things John wrote about in Revelation were ‘soon to take place’, [Revelation 1:1](#) / [Revelation 1:3](#) / [Revelation 22:6](#) / [Revelation 22:10](#), we can know for sure that John when he speaks of this ‘mark’, isn’t speaking about ‘microchip implants, tattoos or bar codes’, something which going to happen in the future. He was writing to Christians about things that were going to happen to them.

The important point in all of this is simply to ask ourselves this question, do you have a ‘mark’ that identifies and signifies your loyalty to the devil? Or do you have a ‘seal’ that identifies your loyalty to Christ? [Ephesians 1:13](#) / [Ephesians 4:30](#).

REVELATION 14

THE NUMBER 144,000, THE REDEEMED OF ALL THE AGES WHO HAVE OBEYED GOD AND WHO ARE LIVING FAITHFUL TO HIM

In Revelation 14 we find 144,000. While the number 666 probably is the most-popular number today in the Book of Revelation, then the number 144,000 probably is the second most popular number.

Have you ever had someone come to your door and ask you, 'are you sure you're part of the 144,000'? as if the 144,000 is a literal number of which we must be a part because this is the number of people whom God will literally save. That's not what is being stated here.

Notice something interesting about the 144,000. If this is a literal number, then let's take other such things in Revelation literally, too.

Revelation 7:4 says that these were Jews only. Revelation 14:4 says that they 'had not been defiled by women', thus, they were male virgins. Therefore, those who are part of the 144,000 are: (a) Jews; (b) males; and (c) virgins.

How many people are going to buy into such a concept today? We must recognise that such passages aren't speaking literally, the 144,000 isn't literal. And when Revelation speaks of 'Jews who had not been defiled by women', it's speaking of purity. The number 144,000 isn't to be taken literally.

The number 12 represents humanity. If you take 12 and multiply it by 12, you get 144,000, meaning simply a large number of those members of humanity who had been redeemed. This number simply represents those members of humanity who had decided to obey God's will and become Christians.

It's not saying that if you aren't a part of a literal 144,000 people, then you will miss out on Heaven. It's simply speaking of the redeemed of all the ages who have obeyed God and who are living faithfully to Him.

Now I would like you to notice a very encouraging verse, which is found in Revelation 14, to Christians who were suffering, and to those who had seen family members die for the cause of Christ.

'Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.' Revelation 14:13

The redeemed needed to know that if they died for the cause of Christ, they still would be blessed. Death wasn't the worst thing that could happen. Did you know that you cannot get to Heaven without dying first? Death is a marvellous thing for the child of God. If we're living faithfully as a Christian, death isn't a bad thing, death is a wonderful thing.

The Scriptures don't promote a black, cold, dreary view of death like some in this world do. Death is viewed as wonderful. This is how God views death, Psalm 116:15.

When one of His children dies, and that person has lived faithfully, even though that person may have died at the hands of an evil Roman government, it is a blessing for that person.

'Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.' Revelation 14:13

Death is a wonderful thing for the child of God, Philippians 1:21, who has lived faithfully because that person has had his sins washed away, and therefore has the promise that if he walked in the light, he will remain in fellowship with God. He also has the promise of eternal life, Matthew 25:46 / 1 John 2:25.

'Then I heard a voice from heaven say, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Yes,' says the Spirit, 'they will rest from their labour, for their deeds will follow them.' Revelation 14:13

This passage in Revelation is encouraging and practical for us today, too but we must be faithful unto death, and then God will give us the crown of life.

REVELATION 15

In Revelation 15 we are introduced to the song of Moses and the Lamb. John sees seven angels, their actions are a recapitulation of the seven seals and seven trumpets. They are singing the song of Moses, a song of triumph and they also are singing the song of the Lamb. These songs contain thanks, victory and praise.

Following these songs, they come out of the heavenly temple with seven plagues. The description given of their clothing is very significant indicating unlimited power to execute judgment. The four beasts are the same as in Revelation 5. One of these gives the angels seven golden vials of God's wrath.

THE SONG OF MOSES AND THE LAMB

'They sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: 'Great and marvellous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.' Revelation 15:3-4

Here we see an event serving as an introduction to the bowls of judgment which show that the wrath of God is being poured out on the ungodly. Before that, the saints are rejoicing, and the song of Moses brings to our minds Exodus 15.

The people had escaped from Egyptian bondage, they were under horrible tyranny under Pharaoh, who was a hard taskmaster. God delivered them through ten plagues, and they walked across the Red Sea on dry land. The Egyptian army was crushed by the waters of the Red Sea, and the Israelites cried out victoriously because they had been delivered from great tribulation and trouble. God's people had been able to overcome and end up triumphant, so, they sang the song of Moses, Exodus 15:1-18.

But in Revelation, the people aren't merely singing the song of Moses, instead, they are singing the song of Moses and the Lamb. Just like Moses led God's people out of Egyptian bondage to the Promised Land, the Lamb is able to lead Christians out of trials and tribulations resulting from the Roman government so that those Christians could be victorious and be able to sing the song of Moses and the Lamb.

This, then, was another sign of how, if Christians would trust in God, He would lead them to victory. Here we find great comfort given to these first-century Christians.

REVELATION 16

Revelation 16 presents the seven bowls of judgment where God is seen as pouring out His judgment upon the Roman Empire as punishment for its sin against Christians. This chapter records what he's pouring out of the bowls which contained God's wrath. They are similar to the plagues that came upon Egypt.

We have envisioned the same events here that are symbolised in the seven seals and the seven trumpets but with more intensity. As the bowls are poured out an angel acknowledges that God is just in his execution of judgment.

In short Revelation 16 describes how God, through natural means, punished Rome for its sins.

THE FIRST BOWL OF WRATH

‘Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, ‘Go, pour out the seven bowls of God’s wrath on the earth.’ The first angel went and poured out his bowl on the land, and ugly, festering sores broke out on the people who had the mark of the beast and worshiped its image.’ Revelation 16:1-2

The first bowl of wrath was poured out upon the earth, in other words, it was poured out upon the Roman Empire, it affected only those who bore the mark of the beast and worshipped Domitian.

This plague paralleled the boil plague of Egypt in the days of Moses and caused grievous sores to come upon those who bowed to worship the emperor.

THE SECOND BOWL OF WRATH

‘The second angel poured out his bowl on the sea, and it turned into blood like that of a dead person, and every living thing in the sea died.’ Revelation 16:3

Immediately following the first plague, the second bowl of wrath was emptied out upon the sea. The imagery paralleled the plague of Egypt where the Nile was turned to blood. This isn’t to be taken literally, as God promised to protect the Christians who made their livelihood by the sea from His wrath.

What was intended here was to illustrate that God would use the natural calamities of the sea to orchestrate, in part, the downfall of Rome. Keep in mind that a significant portion of Rome’s power lay in its trade expansion through conquering territories. Major trade routes to the east were achieved by sea travel. Closing these would seriously cripple Rome’s ability to pursue trade in this and other directions.

THE THIRD BOWL OF WRATH

‘The third angel poured out his bowl on the rivers and springs of water, and they became blood. Then I heard the angel in charge of the waters say: ‘You are just in these judgments, O Holy One, you who are and who were; for they have shed the blood of your holy people and your prophets, and you have given them blood to drink as they deserve.’

And I heard the altar respond: ‘Yes, Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments.’ Revelation 16:4-7

The third bowl of wrath was poured out on the freshwater. During this event, a voice was heard that proclaimed God’s righteousness in this act. The Roman Empire slaughtered so many Christians that they literally made their blood flow like water. It could be said that they drank the blood of the Christians.

This bowl of wrath surely gave comfort to the Christians who had seen their blood spilt mercilessly. God is assuring the Christians that the Roman Empire will drink the blood they shed. God’s final words of judgment to Edom speak similarly of them suffering equally for what they had inflicted, [Obadiah 15-16](#).

THE FOURTH BOWL OF WRATH

‘The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and the sun was allowed to scorch people with fire. They were seared by the intense heat and they cursed the name of God, who had control over these plagues, but they refused to repent and glorify him.’ Revelation 16:8-9

The fourth bowl of wrath was emptied out upon the sun which then sent out scorching rays to burn the wicked. Those upon whom the rays fell were so hardened in their hearts that they refused to see this as an act of divine retribution and added blasphemy to their already sin-cursed lives.

John gives credit to God for having power over the plagues that were coming. The Christians to who this was written were here told that God is in charge of what’s going on.

Of significance also is the wording, ‘they refused to repent and glorify him’. This reveals that the oppressors were given the chance to repent. This should bring great comfort to those who believe they have gone too far and can never repent and come back to God.

Even after all the horrible things done to the Christians, the people of the Roman Empire still were given an opportunity to avoid God’s eternal wrath which is far more severe and lasting than His wrath executed on earth.

We can see God’s long-suffering and patience at work here in His efforts to reach those who worshipped under the beast and to present them with every opportunity to avoid His eternal wrath.

This calls to mind God’s reluctance to destroy Nineveh when He sent Jonah to preach to them in hopes of converting them from their evil ways. But, ‘they refused to repent and glorify him’.

The subjects of the beast, Rome, had so taken in his spirit and absorbed his characteristics that instead of repenting and turning to God, they rebelled against God’s efforts to turn them, hardened their hearts just like Pharaoh and rebelled against His efforts to soften them.

Even the scorching heat of God’s wrath unleashed with the sun could not mellow their rebellious hearts, rather it hardened them. The fourth bowl completes the first section of plagues involving earth, sea, waters and the sun.

THE FIFTH BOWL OF WRATH

‘The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in agony and cursed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, but they refused to repent of what they had done.’ Revelation 16:10-11

And now we see the fifth bowl of wrath being poured out on the throne of the beast, Domitian, and his entire kingdom is darkened. This imagery is reflective of [Psalms 69:23-24](#).

Beginning at the throne, the kingdom is darkened so that the eyes of the leaders lose their ability to see how their kingdom needs to be managed. They are turning a blind eye to the priorities of managing a worldwide empire and turning them instead to the inner pleasures of wicked debauchery. They feel secure in their power, so they become blind to the needs of the empire. The Roman Empire is by no means the only power on earth that came to demise because of this.

The Romans who are faithful to the Empire and its emperor worship see it happening, they are in anguish over it, yet in their stubborn pride, they continue to refuse to accept that this internally evil system of government cannot possibly be worthy of their worship so ‘they refused to repent of what they had done,’ rather choosing to blame and blaspheme the one to whom they should have turned, [Romans 1:21-25](#).

THE SIXTH BOWL OF WRATH

‘The sixth angel poured out his bowl on the great river Euphrates, and its water was dried up to prepare the way for the kings from the East.’ Revelation 16:12

The sixth bowl of wrath was said to be poured out directly on the Euphrates River causing it to dry up. The Euphrates River formed the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire. Beyond the river was the Parthian nation which had been in rebellion against the empire throughout its existence.

The ancient city of Babylon was finally destroyed in 539 B.C. when the Persians diverted the Euphrates River and entered the city underneath its protective walls, [Jeremiah 50:38](#) / [Jeremiah 51:36](#). That historical event formed the imagery that the Christians used to identify the overthrow of God’s enemies.

Again, this imagery is used to conceal the real meaning from the Roman authorities. The drying up of the Euphrates signified to the oppressed Christians that the Roman Empire was now vulnerable to external invasion by the Parthian kings. The external invasion did indeed occur, after which, the mighty Roman Empire was reduced to a declining world power.

THE SEVENTH BOWL OF WRATH

‘The seventh angel poured out his bowl into the air, and out of the temple came a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘It is done!’ Then there came flashes of lightning, rumblings, peals of thunder and a severe earthquake. No earthquake like it has ever occurred since mankind has been on earth, so tremendous was the quake. The great city split into three parts, and the cities of the nations collapsed. God remembered Babylon the Great and gave her the cup filled with the wine of the fury of his wrath. Every island fled away, and the mountains could not be found. From the sky huge hailstones, each weighing about a hundred pounds, fell on people. And they cursed God on account of the plague of hail, because the plague was so terrible.’ Revelation 16:17-21

The seventh bowl poured out upon the air symbolises the complete retribution of God through the use of natural elements, earth, water, fire, the sun and air. The previous natural disturbances were not as severe as the ones after the outpouring of the seventh bowl.

There can be no doubt that there is a great deal of figurative language used here and so it would be in that God is describing the downfall of the Roman Empire and must protect the Christians from added persecutions by concealing the real message from the Roman authorities.

A clue to the figurative significance of the outpouring of the final bowl of wrath on the air may be found in [Ephesians 2:2](#).

The prince of the powers of the air spoken of by Paul is undoubtedly Satan. In view of the gathering forces for the upcoming battle of Har-Megedon mentioned earlier, it’s reasonable to conclude that the final bowl of wrath will be poured out directly on the ‘ruler of the kingdom of the air’, or the powers of Satan.

The fifth bowl was poured out on the throne of the beast, the sixth bowl opened the way for invasion from hostile countries followed by a gathering of forces by the allies of Satan to his evil cause, followed then by the outpouring of God’s wrath upon the entire sphere of Satan’s operation. Air would be an appropriate symbol representing the prevailing influence surrounding the Roman Empire.

Thus, the course of the Empire which was evil to the core, characterised by lives of trespass and sin, ruled by Satan, prince of the powers of the air, who controlled his subjects by a spirit of rebellion and disobedience to God, is now going to be brought under divine judgment.

With the pouring of the seventh bowl, the Christians are again reminded that the forces of evil cannot win the battle. With the outpouring of this last bowl of wrath, we are told that thunder and lightning from heaven and an earthquake unlike any other, shakes the earth, all of which are manifestations of divine retribution.

The city of Rome is divided into three parts, the number three is the divine number, which symbolises God's involvement in the overthrow of the city. When this final action is finished, God's wrath on the beast and the false prophet is complete.

The seven bowls of wrath represented three things that historian Edward Gibbons attributed to the ultimate fall of the Imperial Roman Empire: 1. Natural calamity. 2. Internal rottenness, and 3. External invasion. All three of these were works of God that ultimately caused the doom of the Roman Empire.

It did no good for Rome to rally help from other nations, for God would destroy Rome regardless of any help Satan may recruit. The vision of the bowls of wrath were designed to set forth the assurance of ultimate triumph of righteousness over any and all evil that may be hurled at it.

The message to the Christians of the day was that God is ruling and they must persevere and keep themselves in righteousness and in so doing they will achieve the ultimate victory. The message for us is the same, God cares for us and as long as we live in righteousness we too can triumph over any evil which can be hurled at us.

ARMAGEDDON

Also, in Revelation 16 we see a great battle occurring, the battle of Armageddon. Today we hear so much about Armageddon and how it is some type of future battle in which God and His saints will war against the ungodly, eventually, be victorious, and then reign for a thousand years in a utopian state here on Earth.

But at this point, let us remember some of the key points we discussed previously. Revelation is a symbolic book, a real battle isn't being depicted in this symbolic book. Remember, too, that the book speaks of things that will 'soon take place', Revelation 1:1. These were things that were 'near', Revelation 1:3.

Whatever battle is going to occur would take place during the time period of the people who were reading the Book of Revelation.

'Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.' Revelation 16:16

In any time of international unrest, uncertainty or conflict, there have been those who have raised the age-old spectre of 'Armageddon'. Not so very long ago the word frequently appeared in the literature of the Watchtower magazine of the self-styled 'Jehovah's Witnesses' as they attempted to arrest people's attention and scare them into professing some sort of religious belief.

Furthermore, the very word 'Armageddon' has become something of a byword; a synonym used to describe any cataclysmic event, whether real or imaginary.

But what do the scriptures really tell us about ‘Armageddon’? Does the word, indeed, warn us of a mighty battle that will bring our world to an end? Does ‘Armageddon’ really relate to a conflict, either literal or figurative, in the 16th chapter of the Revelation where the word occurs?

The explanations and theories which have been proposed in attempts to explain ‘Armageddon’ are like the demons in the demoniac of Gadara, their name is ‘Legion’. Some expositors have boldly claimed that it represents ‘the last great conflict between East and West’. Others explain it as ‘the great universal conflict before the return of Christ’. And others describe it as the conflict involving ‘all the nations against the church’.

But, do the Scriptures, really, speak of a mighty, literal battle in which huge armies will take to the field and fight, employing all the sophisticated weapons of modern warfare?

THE ‘REVELATION’. THE MOST FIGURATIVE BOOK IN THE BIBLE

I think we should bear in mind, whenever we read the ‘Revelation’ in which this ‘conflict’ is said to be described. It is the most figurative and symbolic Book in the Scriptures. Remember, also, that every single figure, symbol or illustration that we find in the Book, comes from elsewhere in the scriptures.

In other words, and this is of crucial importance, not one symbol, or illustration, used in the ‘Revelation’ comes from outside of the Bible itself. This means the Bible is our only source of reliable information, and that to understand the term ‘Armageddon’ it is essential to begin in the Old Testament scriptures for guidance and enlightenment.

A BRIEF HISTORY

Before we do this, let us notice one more vital fact; namely, that the chapter already referred to, Revelation 16, contains the one and the only reference to ‘Armageddon’ found in the entire Bible. Revelation 16:14 is described as ‘the war of the great day of God, the Almighty’, and in Revelation 16:16, this day is given the name ‘Armageddon’. So, Armageddon is God’s Day! And this is hinted at again in Revelation 19:19-21, where it is described in terms that remind us of Ezekiel 39:19.

‘AR’, OR ‘HAR’ MAGEDDON?

Please look closely at the actual word. The first two letters, ‘Ar’, mean ‘city’, so ‘Armageddon’ indicates the ‘City’ of Megiddo. When the word begins with ‘Har’, because ‘har’ means ‘hill’, ‘Harmageddon’ describes the ‘Hill’ on which the city of Megiddo was built.

And, when these two words are used symbolically, they remind us of the fact that, just as there are, in world history, names of physical locations that tell dramatic stories; cities such as ‘Masada’, and places such as ‘The Alamo’, ‘Waterloo’, ‘Trafalgar’, etc., the name ‘Armageddon’, reminds us of a great or special event.

About 60 miles north of Jerusalem, there is a valley about 10 miles long, stretching from the River Jordan to the Coast and enclosed by mountains at one end. This valley has several names. It's called the 'Plain of Jezreel', but Bible maps will also use the name 'The Valley of Megiddo', the valley which is famous in the Old Testament as the site of some of the bloodiest battles in Israel's history.

Harmageddon, the Hill of Megiddo, is still there. It's the hill upon which are the ruins of 'Armageddon', the City of Megiddo, which is the ancient city that was formerly a Canaanite stronghold.

THE SIGNIFICANT OF THE 'ARMAGEDDON' AREA

A brief examination of the Old Testament will reveal how significant this place was in those days. Judges 5 tells us that it was here that Barak defeated the Canaanites, Judges 5:19.

Judges 7 records that it was here that Gideon fought against the Midianites. 2 Samuel 1 tells us that Saul and Jonathan died in this area. 2 Kings 23:29, reports that the good King Josiah also died here, when he intervened in a battle with which he really shouldn't have become involved. Here, too, King Ahaziah was killed by Jehu. In a word, the Valley of Megiddo was renowned as the location of great battles and terrible conflicts, so it came to symbolise conflict.

LOOK AT THE EVENTS DESCRIBED IN JUDGES 4

Jabin, king of the Canaanites, had oppressed Israel for 20 years, and the reason for his apparent superiority and invincibility was the fact that his army commander, Sisera, had at his disposal 900 war chariots that supported his army. And what weapons did the Israelites have? None! Not a sword, shield or spear! Judges 5:8.

This is because the Canaanites had followed the example of the Moabites before them who, having conquered the Israelites had disarmed them. They had stripped them of their weapons, a course of action that was the usual practice in those days, designed to make rebellion impossible.

In 1 Samuel 13:19, we are told that there was 'no smith in Israel'. At that time, the Philistines, who were oppressing the Israelites, didn't allow them to work in metal, because they didn't want them to be able to make weapons for themselves. Indeed, there was even a time when Israel's farmers had actually to go to the Philistines and pay to have their tools sharpened because the Philistines had obtained the secret of iron smelting.

This explains why Judges 3:16 records that Ehud 'made himself a sword', an act which, under normal circumstances, would hardly have been regarded as a startling event! And Judges 3:31, tells us that Shamgar fought the Philistines armed only with 'an ox-goad', a stick with a point on the end! It is, therefore, not surprising that, when Sisera's army attacked the Israelites, they turned and fled. So, what followed? Read Judges 4.

In the mountains, there lived a woman named Deborah, a prophetess, to whom the Israelites turned for advice. She stated plainly, 'You are not able to deal with this enemy. But God is!' For this is the day when YAHVEH will deliver Sisera into your hands. Has not YAHVEH gone up before you?'

The two armies faced each other; the mighty army of the Canaanites and the unarmed men of Israel. They met in the Valley of Megiddo, and the seemingly impossible happened! The Canaanites were defeated, not by Israel, but by God. In Judges 5 we read Deborah's song of victory, in which she makes it very clear that God Himself fought for His people, Judges 5:20.

THE DAY AND THE VICTORY IS GOD'S

Now, this is the first Bible reference to 'Megiddo', and It's a story that reveals that, when the need of His people was greatest, and His time was right, God Himself defeated their enemy, without His people lifting a finger to defend themselves.

Consequently, whenever the ancient Israelites and the Jews in later years heard the word 'Armageddon', far from striking fear into their hearts, it was a word of comfort and encouragement, just as in New Testament times, the word 'Maranatha' became a word of comfort for Christians.

'Then they gathered the kings together to the place that in Hebrew is called Armageddon.' Revelation 16:16

Therefore, when, in Revelation 16:18, where 'Harmageddon' appears again, God is telling the Christians that opposition raised against His people and His cause will meet with the same overwhelming defeat that was inflicted on Sisera. It will be God's Day and His conflict once again! God, Himself will inflict the final defeat on evil! This means that the word 'Armageddon' found only in the 16th chapter of the Revelation, has nothing to do with a mighty, literal, physical conflict, nor should Christians be afraid of the word. The reference should be seen properly as God's assurance that the victory lies with His cause and His people because His great purpose must be accomplished.

A FINAL QUESTION

How can these references to Armageddon possibly relate to a literal, great, world-conflict? Remember that the Valley of Megiddo is very small in a very small country. I suggest, therefore, that common sense should tell us that the idea of a literal battle, involving modern armies with modern weapons, fighting in a real geographical location such as the Valley of Megiddo, is nothing short of ridiculous.

The scene is symbolic, and it declares that, although the church may experience difficult times as she faces persecution and false doctrine, her final victory is guaranteed. Not because she becomes numerically or politically or financially strong, or strong in any other conceivable way, but because this is God's War and God's Victory. If you know this, you will realise that, whatever the future holds in store for the world, the Church has nothing to fear, because her future is secure.

REVELATION 17

We're introduced to the woman described as a great prostitute, the great city of Rome, Revelation 17:1-3. In the vision, the angel removes John from where he was and takes him into a wilderness where he sees 'a woman.' The question immediately arises, is this the same woman previously mentioned?

A closer examination of her characteristics reveals that she is bedecked with those items signifying royalty, Revelation 17:4. The woman in view here is representative of none other than the Roman emperor himself.

THE BEAST

Notice the beast was ‘was covered with blasphemous names’, this would be a reference to the names the beast called himself. Domitian, during his reign, issued his decrees as ‘Lord God Domitianus’ and such. Therefore, it would have been unmistakable in the minds of the first readers of John’s letter that he was referring to the emperor.

‘The dragon stood on the shore of the sea. And I saw a beast coming out of the sea. It had ten horns and seven heads, with ten crowns on its horns, and on each head a blasphemous name.’ Revelation 13:1

It obviously refers to the emperors of the Roman Empire, [Revelation 13:1](#) / [Revelation 17:3](#) / [Revelation 17:9-10](#).

THE SEVEN HEADS

‘This calls for a mind with wisdom. The seven heads are seven hills on which the woman sits. They are also seven kings. Five have fallen, one is, the other has not yet come; but when he does come, he must remain for only a little while. The beast who once was, and now is not, is an eighth king. He belongs to the seven and is going to his destruction.’ Revelation 17:9-11

The seven heads of the beast were seven heads of the Roman empire. Rome ruled her empire through a government system made up of several geographic territories called provinces. Each province fell under the control of a provincial governor. The governors of these provinces were completely at the whim of the Emperor and could serve from 1 to 5 years. There were about 28 imperial provinces at the height of the empire. All of these provinces were subject to Roman rule.

THE TEN HORNS

‘The ten horns you saw are ten kings who have not yet received a kingdom, but who for one hour will receive authority as kings along with the beast. And it performed great signs, even causing fire to come down from heaven to the earth in full view of the people.’ Revelation 17:12

The kings of the provinces will ultimately turn against Rome. One of Rome’s greatest fears was insurrection and turmoil in the provinces. History records that is precisely what happened to the Roman Empire. She was defeated from within by her own subjects.

In [Revelation 17](#) we also turn our attention to the King of kings and Lord of lords, Who will overcome.

‘They will wage war against the Lamb, but the Lamb will triumph over them because he is Lord of lords and King of kings—and with him will be his called, chosen and faithful followers.’ Revelation 17:14

The battle was over before it even started. God and His people would be victorious. Christ is the One Who is leading the army. He is the Captain of the Lord’s army, [Hebrews 10:9-10](#).

We have the perfect spiritual armour, [Ephesians 6:10-12](#). We have been promised that we will be victorious, [Hebrews 2:14](#) / [1 Corinthians 15:51](#).

Christ always leads us in triumph, the Bible tells us and so, here it’s no surprise that the Lamb, Jesus, and those who follow Him will overcome Rome and her government and will arise out of persecution victorious.

‘The beast and the ten horns you saw will hate the prostitute. They will bring her to ruin and leave her naked; they will eat her flesh and burn her with fire.’ Revelation 17:16

The Roman Empire as a republic was organised as a provincial government. Each province was ruled by a governor appointed by the Emperor. There were many more than just ten provinces in the Roman Empire, and there weren’t exactly seven emperors at the time of John’s letter.

A figurative view of the imagery would be that the beast had 7, perfect, heads and 10, complete, horns, authority. Domitian claimed in his early years as emperor to be Nero returned so it was a common superstition among the people of the time that Domitian was thought to be Nero either returned or reincarnated. Daniel prophecies of a great beast in [Daniel 7:23](#).

The beast of Daniel is the same as the beast of Revelation. This is an unmistakable reference to the Roman Empire. No other empire fitting this description devoured the whole earth. Daniel goes on to say that out of this fourth kingdom will arise one who will ‘speak against the Most High and oppress his holy people and try to change the set times and the laws. The holy people will be delivered into his hands for a time, times and half a time.’ [Daniel 7:25](#). This can be no other person but an emperor of the fourth kingdom, the beast of Daniel, the beast of Revelation. No other imagery would come to mind in the imaginations of the first readers of Revelation.

THE DOWNFALL OF ROME

Such great significance has been attached to Rome as the centre of the persecuting power toward Christianity in the latter half of the first century, that three chapters of the Revelation are given to portray her downfall. [Revelation 17](#) appears to be intent on identifying Rome as the recipient of God’s judgment and portraying just how evil an adversary she is to the saints.

WHAT IS THE MESSAGE FOR US TODAY?

When we face tribulation, and when evil opposes Christianity, whether it is an evil government, atheism, humanism, or post-modernism, Christ and the faithful will always win the battle. The battle has already been won. If we make sure that we are on God’s side, we will overcome. Why? It’s because Jesus is Lord of all lords and King of all kings. There is no one greater than the Lord Himself.

No one can match His majesty, His power, or His ability to lead us to Heaven. No one can even compare to Jesus, the Captain of the Lord’s army. Yes, we will be victorious, but we must be sure that we are among the faithful who are God’s chosen.

REVELATION 18

THE FALL OF BABYLON. ROME

In Revelation 18 we are introduced to the fall of Babylon. Earlier in our study, we identified some characteristics of Babylon and the great harlot. Both, because of their characteristics, represented Rome. Christians no doubt were wondering, what is God going to do to Rome?

God had already told them to wait a while because He would reap vengeance upon Rome. That vengeance was seen in the seven bowls discussed in the book. God had promised that His vengeance would come.

Now, God explains that Rome will fall, Christianity will live and rule forever, but Rome and its government will not.

‘Terrified at her torment, they will stand far off and cry: ‘Woe! Woe to you, great city, you mighty city of Babylon! In one hour, your doom has come!’ Revelation 18:10

This represents the power of God and the completion of His promises. People didn’t even want to get close to what they were seeing because things were so bad. They were saying that at last, the great city had fallen. Look at the swiftness involved in God’s power as it destroyed Rome.

History records that Rome was destroyed and that its evil ways came to an end. God’s kingdom, the church, however, is still reigning today. This is a powerful tribute to the Word of God, to the Book of Revelation, and to Jesus Christ.

Just as God promised, Rome was destroyed, but look at the Lord’s church today, it flourishes and grows. The Word of God, we learn from Acts 12:25, grew and multiplied but Rome has long been forgotten. Meanwhile, the Lord’s church is still ruling and reigning in the hearts and lives of men and women today, Luke 17:20-21.

The lesson, then, is that we must make sure that we’re a part of the most important kingdom of all, the kingdom of Christ. It’s not a kingdom that has a physical location or that is composed of physical things. Rather, it is a spiritual rule and reigns in the hearts and lives of men and women.

In Revelation 19-22, the battle is over, and God explains what will happen to the enemies of Christianity and the redeemed.

REVELATION 19

In Revelation 19 we learn that Satan will be defeated. We learn that Jesus is identified as King of kings and Lord of lords. He is victorious, and the dragon is defeated. Rome is thrown down and Christ is exalted. And Christians, we see, will live and reign forever. Look at this great tribute to the power of the Lord.

‘On his robe and on his thigh, he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.’ Revelation 19:16

Jesus is the One Who is the Conqueror, He is victorious.

REVELATION 20

In Revelation 20 we see the scene of Satan’s binding and eventual release, which shows us that God has control over Satan. Today, Satan still tempts people, but God has control over Satan. Who bound Satan and released him? God did that because He has power over Satan.

Jesus said in [Mark 3:20-30](#) that a powerful man had control over His own house. On that occasion, Jesus was able to cast demons out of a man, which showed that because he could cast out demons that were under Satan's control, He was greater than Satan.

THE 1000 YEARS

‘And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time. I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God. They 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 a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison.’ Revelation 20:1-7

THE NUMBER 1000 REPRESENTS COMPLETENESS OR FULLNESS

These are the only verses in Scripture that mention a thousand-year reign but from them have come countless ideas to suggest a future thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth. The number 1000 was symbolic of completeness or fullness, and so in this passage signifies a complete or full period of time.

And notice what the text doesn't say. [Revelation 20](#) doesn't mention, 1. The second coming of Christ.

2. A bodily resurrection.

3. A reign on earth.

4. The literal throne of David.

5. Jerusalem or Palestine.

6. Us instead of they who lived and reigned.

7. Christ on earth.

Does this passage, especially [Revelation 20:4-6](#), teach the establishment of an earthly kingdom and a thousand-year reign of Christ with the saints?

Notice first that the thousand years of this passage correspond with the thousand years that Satan is bound in the bottomless pit of [Revelation 20:2-3](#).

The number 1000 symbolises completeness or fullness and refers to the complete period of time Satan is bound.

However long that is, Christ's reign is the same period of time. But who reigns with Christ? [Revelation 20:4](#). These martyrs lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. Neither the return of Christ to the earth, the establishment of an earthly kingdom or His reign on earth with His disciples for a literal thousand years is in this verse.

GOG AND MAGOG

‘When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—and to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.’ Revelation 20:7-8

Here again, we are carried back to the Old Testament, where the reference to these two names is found in Ezekiel 38:2-3. ‘Gog’ is said to be the ruler, and ‘Magog’ his kingdom and, as we might expect, there has been a great deal of speculation as to the meaning of these two names, as people have attempted to identify a particular individual and a particular nation.

However, they aren’t identified for us by the prophet Ezekiel himself, he merely predicted that a nation would come ‘from afar’ to fight against Israel.

But, the thing to notice is that the prophet said that God would destroy this enemy, without any fighting on Israel’s part, and the outcome would be that the Nations would see His glory. Perhaps it helps us to understand this passage if we know that the word ‘Gog’ is an ancient Sumerian word ‘Gug’, which means ‘darkness’. Therefore, ‘Gog’ is the Prince of Darkness, and ‘Magog’ is his kingdom, the Kingdom of Darkness.

Is further identification really necessary?

Here, then, in Revelation 20, we see that, once again, a piece of Old Testament history involving God’s ancient people, is used to bring comfort to the church of the New Testament.

The important and very significant fact which should always be remembered is that this persecution by ‘Gog and Magog’ predicted in the prophecy of Ezekiel, represents the last persecution of God’s ancient people in Old Testament times. When the names re-appear in the New Testament, in the ‘Book of the Revelation’, they are used to predict the end of the persecution of the church and the defeat of Satan, the prince of darkness, and those who serve him.

In Revelation 20 we also see a great judgment scene, God’s judgment has been released upon Rome.

‘And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.’

Revelation 20:12-15

The message is that God was going to bring judgment upon Rome. Thus, Christians had to make sure that their lives were right with God. There was going to come a time when everyone, great or small would be judged by God, and would have to give an account before God for how they had lived their lives.

The practical application of this for us today is that during times of tribulation and trial, even if we lose our lives, we must be ready to stand before the judgment seat of God. We must be sure that our names are written in the Book of Life because we have lived as we ought to live in faithful obedience to God and because our deeds in this life allow us to stand justified before God.

REVELATION 21

In Revelation 21 we find a glorious picture of the church and of Heaven.

‘Then I saw ‘a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.’ Revelation 21:1

NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH

There are many theories about the phrase, new heaven and earth but probably the most common one is that the phrase means that the present Earth is going to undergo some kind of renovation, some kind of cleaning process using fire so that it becomes like it was in the beginning when God created it and so, it will become our new heaven. This theory doesn’t correspond with what the Scriptures actually teach.

Notice the following Scriptures. This present earth is to pass away, Matthew 24:35 / Hebrews 1:10-12 / 2 Peter 3:10-12.

OUR ETERNAL DWELLING PLACE IS HEAVEN

‘Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you.’ 1 Peter 1:3-4

CONTEXT! CONTEXT! CONTEXT!

When it comes to understanding any Scripture, we must always keep the text in its context and so with this in mind, let’s go to the Scriptures where we first find the phrase, ‘new heavens and a new earth’, Isaiah 65:17.

The apostle Peter declared by inspiration that all the Old Testament prophecies pertaining to Christ are fulfilled in the present age, Acts 3:19-26, which is the last days, Acts 2:16-17, or last age, 1 Corinthians 10:11, that is the age when God speaks through His Son, Hebrews 1:1-2.

Now some people object to these truths by pointing to Isaiah’s prophecy of ‘new heavens and a new earth’ and argue that these prophecies haven’t been fulfilled. So, I guess we need to ask the question, what is this ‘new heavens and a new earth’? Has this prophecy of Isaiah been fulfilled or not?

I want you to notice that Isaiah twice foretold ‘new heavens and a new earth’. Isaiah 65:17 / Isaiah 66:22, the apostle Peter did so too, 2 Peter 3:13, and so did the apostle John, Revelation 21:1. But what do they mean when they use this phrase?

Let’s take a moment to go through each one whilst keeping each one in its context.

‘See, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind.’ Isaiah 65:17

The apostle Paul quotes Isaiah 65:1-2, the beginning of the context, and applies them to the present age, Romans 10:20-21. Notice how Isaiah’s prophecy ends.

‘They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,’ says the LORD.’ Isaiah 65:25

The words, ‘my holy mountain’ are a clue that identifies the time and nature of the fulfilment. The prophecy of the Lord’s ‘holy mountain’ relates to the first coming of Christ, [Isaiah 11:1-2](#) / [Isaiah 11:9](#) / [Isaiah 61:1-2](#) / [Luke 4:16-21](#) and is a figurative term for the rule of Christ in His church, His kingdom, [Isaiah 2:1-4](#) / [Hebrews 12:22-23](#) / [Hebrews 12:28](#). And the nature of this kingdom is spiritual rather than material, [John 18:36](#) / [Romans 14:17](#). In other words, ‘the new heavens and new earth’ of [Isaiah 65:17](#) is the present divine order under the rule of Christ and the spiritual dwelling place for the people of God, the church.

‘As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me,’ declares the LORD, ‘so will your name and descendants endure.’ Isaiah 66:22

In this chapter Isaiah refers to this same ‘new heavens and the new earth’. The context here is a prophecy of Christ coming into the world and establishing His church, [Isaiah 66:7-9](#) / [Micah 5:2-3](#) / [Revelation 12:1-11](#).

In other words, [Isaiah 66:22](#) is a continuation of the promise of [Isaiah 65:17](#) and likewise relates to the present rule of Christ over His kingdom, the church.

‘But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, where righteousness dwells.’ 2 Peter 3:13

Now this passage is in a totally different context, here Peter is warning against scoffers who deny that Christ will come again, [2 Peter 3:1-4](#). And so, he assures us that the promise of the Lord’s return will be fulfilled, [2 Peter 3:5-9](#), at which time ‘the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.’ [2 Peter 3:10](#).

But notice there is nothing in the passage or even the context for that matter which indicates Peter is speaking figuratively, therefore we should take the warning literally. This present universe is destined for sudden, fiery, divine destruction.

This shouldn’t worry the Christians because Peter says, ‘we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells’, [2 Peter 3:13](#).

In other words, in harmony with the meaning of the phrase ‘new heavens and a new earth,’ we await a new order of things and a new dwelling place. This is a home in heaven, [1 Peter 1:3-5](#), in which we will have glorious, immortal, spiritual bodies like that of the Lord Jesus Christ, [1 Corinthians 15:35-58](#) / [1 John 3:2](#).

‘Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth,’ for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea.’ Revelation 21:1

John likewise saw in a vision this new order of things after the return of the Lord in which the death, sickness, pain, suffering, and sorrow of this present age shall have passed away and God once more dwells with His people and this for all eternity.

‘I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’ He who was seated on the throne said, ‘I am making everything new!’ Then he said, ‘Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.’ Revelation 21:2-5

CONCLUSION

Common sense tells us that if the Christian is promised ‘heaven’ which is our final dwelling place, and yet we’re also promised a ‘new heavens and a new earth,’ common sense tells us that the new heavens and earth represent the same state as heaven.

All the Old Testament prophecies concerning Christ, most of which were both figurative and spiritual, are indeed fulfilled in the New Testament age. The ‘new heavens and a new earth’ of Isaiah are the rule of Christ over His spiritual kingdom, His church.

So, what does the phrase mean in the New Testament? It simply means, its symbolic of heaven itself, nothing more, nothing less. There are yet ‘new heavens and a new earth’ in store for Christians at the Lord’s return, it will be a wonderful home in heaven where everlasting joy awaits. No wonder John writes, ‘Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.’ Revelation 22:20.

To suffering Christians, John said, ‘hang in there, because Heaven will be worth it all!’ That’s a message we need to hear today as well. No matter what it costs, and no matter what we may have to give up, even if we have to die for the cause of Christ, Heaven, where there will be no more sorrow, death, crying, tears, or pain, will truly be worth it all.

REVELATION 22

Jesus closes the Book of Revelation by instructing us not to add to or take away from its message.

‘I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this scroll: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this scroll. And if anyone takes words away from this scroll of prophecy, God will take away from that person any share in the tree of life and in the Holy City, which are described in this scroll.’
Revelation 22:18-19

God said, ‘Do not add to or take away from anything you read because it is correct just the way it is.’ That’s the overriding message about all of Scripture, Proverbs 30:6.

The message of the Book of Revelation is simply this, Jesus wins! To be true to God and His kingdom, which will rule and reign over all kingdoms. If we remain faithful unto death, the Lord will give us a crown of life. May God bless us as we strive amidst trouble and tribulation to be faithful to Jesus.